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# THE SUBJECTIVITY ARGUMENT: AN A PRIORI ARGUMENT FOR THE INCARNATION

**Joshua Sijuwade**

*London School of Theology, UK*
*Correspondence email address: joshua.sijuwade@lst.ac.uk*

**ABSTRACT:** This article focuses on providing a new a priori argument for the veracity of the doctrine of the Incarnation. This new argument, called the *Subjectivity Argument*, will be formulated in light of the concept of "omnisubjectivity," as proposed by Linda Zagzebski, and an "emotion," as conceptualised by the "somatic feeling theory," posited by Jesse Prinz. Doing this will provide a specific argument that provides strong grounds for affirming the necessity of the Incarnation, without, however, being subject to the primary objections that can be raised against other a priori arguments for the Incarnation in the contemporary literature.

**KEYWORDS**: **o**mnisubjectivity; incarnation; a priori; empathy; emotion

## Introduction

According to Richard Swinburne (1994; 2003; 2008), there are three cogent *a priori* reasons in support of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation – which teaches that God the Son, the second person of the Trinity, became a human being as the person of Jesus of Nazareth. More specifically, according to Swinburne, if there is a God, defined, at a minimum, as an essentially bodiless person who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, perfectly free, and perfectly good, and if we are situated in a world of sin and suffering, we have three *a priori* reasons for expecting that this God would "become incarnate" (and "provide an atonement"), which can be stated succinctly as follows:

(1) (A Priori) God would inevitably, as an act of essence, seek to become incarnate in order to share in human suffering, provide a means of atonement and theological and moral instruction.

In Swinburne's thought, God would seek to become incarnate in order to dispense an obligation to share in human suffering, to provide a reparational sacrifice that can be utilised by humans to make an atonement and to provide theological and moral instruction by living a perfect human life. Swinburne takes each of these reasons to be, at a minimum, an "equal best action." However, intuitively, he believes that the first action is indeed a "unique best action" and the second and the third actions might plausibly be so as well. An action is a unique best action if it is an overriding action – which is an action that is "sensible" (i.e. acting on good judgment), "appropriate" (i.e. right for a particular situation), and "reasonable/rational" (i.e. in accord with reason) (Swinburne, 1994). That is, taking all reasons into account, it is better to perform the action than not to perform it, due to there being no other action that has these specific features (i.e., no other action that is as sensible, appropriate, rational/reasonable to do). Thus, by an action having these specific features, God would be inclined to perform the action, if he is unimpeded by non-rational forces to choose to perform a less good action (Swinburne, 1994). However, as God is essentially perfectly free, he would not be so impeded, and as he is also essentially omniscient, he will know the moral truth value of an action, resulting in him inevitably performing a unique best action if there is one (and perform no bad actions). Hence, any action that is a unique best action will be inevitably performed by God – in other words, this action would be an *act of essence* (i.e. an action necessarily stemming from the essence (or nature) of God.

Thus, taking the three reasons together as one action, Swinburne believes that there is strong reason to believe that if there is a God, as a unique best action, he will become incarnate in order to identify with our suffering and for at least one of the other two reasons. One can ask, however, an important question: why did God, due to human sin and suffering, choose to address these issues by performing the action of becoming incarnate rather than any other action? Plausibly, the answer would be that each of these actions is a unique best action and thus would require God to inevitably perform them. However, it seems to be the case that it is, in fact, the *action* of addressing human sin and suffering, which are indeed unique best actions, and not necessarily the *way* God addresses them through an incarnation. That is, it could be the case that it is a unique best action for God to share in human suffering by experiencing this suffering in a non-incarnated state (through, for example, his "omnisubjectivity").[1] Which would enable God to subjectively experience the suffering that he allows humans to endure, even without having become incarnate. Secondly, it could also be the case that it is a unique best action for God to deal with human sin, and provide theological and moral instruction, by providing a means for an atonement and a life that is morally exemplary by sending another individual to do these things rather than him becoming

[1] More on the nature of omnisubjectivity in the next section.

incarnate. As it stands, these alternative ways of addressing human sin and suffering are as equally plausible as the way favoured by Swinburne and thus should be at least be taken to be equally best actions alongside that of God becoming incarnate. However, as Swinburne (2003, p. 34) himself writes, when actions are as equally good as each other, "one must be $1/n$." And where there are an infinite number of incompatible good acts, each less good than some other one – which could be the case in our situation where there are countless ways in which God could have, in fact, dealt with human sin and suffering – it will be, as Swinburne (2003, p. 34) further writes "equally probable that he will do anyone such act, and so the probability that he will do a particular one will be infinitesimally small." If these three reasons, do not, *contra* Swinburne, render the action of becoming incarnate as a unique best action but simply as an equal best action amongst an infinite set of other possible actions, then one has not been provided with good reason to believe *a priori* that God would indeed become incarnate. Though the pushback from Swinburne on this point would plausibly be that the actions of God, in a non-incarnated state, sharing in human suffering and him having sent someone to address the issues presented by human sinning, are not, in fact, unique best actions, or even equal best actions. As, according to Swinburne, for the first issue, the obligation to share in human suffering cannot be dispensed secretively as he writes, "the sharing needs to be not entirely incognito. The parent needs not merely to share the child's suffering, but to show him that he is doing so" (Swinburne, 2003, p. 45). Furthermore, for the second issue, God's rights, according to Swinburne (2003, pp. 42, 48), are restricted by the manner in which he deals with human sin, as, analogously, just as a military officer shouldn't order a subordinate to undertake a life-threatening act that he could do himself, God too should not permit or command another to perform tasks that are central to his divine responsibilities. Thus, according to Swinburne (2003), God would not have the right to ask any other individual to perform the actions of dealing with human sin and thus must himself do this by becoming incarnate. However, a further obvious question here: for the first issue, why could God not simply tell us that he has (and is) sharing with human suffering through his omnisubjectivity? And thus, the obligation – and the need for it having been fulfilled by God – would be made available to humans. Furthermore, for the second issue, one could also ask why God does not have the right to deal with human sin in the way that he pleases. As, plausibly, taking Swinburne's analogy as the basis of his argument against the above suggestion, the general would clearly lack the right to do this due to the fact that, though he (or she) has the authoritative position of being a general, he (or she) also fulfils the more basic role of being a soldier which would be a role that they equally share with their fellow subordinate comrades. Thus, there is an expectation that the general would be required to perform the function of a soldier in the same manner that their subordinates would if the situation calls for it. The general would not have the right to dispense with the obligations that are binding on his (or her) role as a soldier. However, would the same right be binding on two individuals who do not fulfil the same role and thus have a clear and distinct

authoritative status distinction, such as a King and his subjects? In this case, the existence of rights and duties binding the King to perform the same actions as his subjects are indeed more blurred. Moreover, it is also plausible that the King would actually have the right to command his subjects to perform an action that he himself could do. Thus, given this, and the fact that the distinction between God and human beings is clearly more akin to the latter example than the former, Swinburne's analogy does not seem to provide much reason in support of it not being an equal best action for God to instruct another individual to address human sin. Thus, unless further reason can be given in support of the action of becoming incarnate, and that action alone, being a unique best action, which would result in all other actions being less than the best, we are still left in a situation of not having been provided with any reasons to privilege the action of becoming incarnate as one which God would use to address the problem of human sin and suffering.

One must thus look elsewhere for some other *a priori* reasons or arguments in support of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In doing this, however, one does not have to make a wholesale rejection of Swinburne's argument; rather, one can still utilise certain strands of Swinburne's thought – specifically that of his conception of the "nature of God" – and place them within a different theoretical structure, which will provide the needed *a priori* reasons in favour of the doctrine of the Incarnation. In proceeding forward to achieve this end, we can take the following *a priori* reason to be a potential candidate in support of the doctrine of the Incarnation:[2]

(2) (A Priori*) On the basis of the nature of God, specifically his omniscience and omnipresence, God will necessarily be incarnate in order to possess the property of omnisubjectivity.

This *a priori* reason – which, when further unpacked in detail, we can refer to as the *Subjectivity Argument* – centred on the position that the divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence, which are essential attributes of God, entail the further divine attribute of omnisubjectivity. Thus, given this, God must necessarily possess the latter attribute. However, to be omnisubjective is to be able to totally empathise with other conscious entities – which would include taking on their emotions (i.e., possessing a copy of that emotion) – God must possess a body in order to have these emotions, based on the fact that emotions are "perceptions of bodily changes" – and thus God must have a body in order to perceive the changes to it, and thus have the emotion that is identical to that perceived change. Hence, God must be "embodied" (i.e., have a body), which is to say that he would be necessarily, as an act of essence, be (or

[2] Throughout the rest of the article, when the term "God" is used, it should be understood as "a divine person" (so the argument is focused on establishing the fact that if there is a divine person that exists, then this divine person must be incarnate).

become) "incarnate."[3] Hence, omniscience and omnipresence entail omnisubjective, and omnisubjectivity, in turn, entails Incarnation. And thus, in short, if there is a God, that is, if there is an omnipotent entity who is thus also omniscient and omnipresent, then he must be incarnate. Off of this informal presentation of the Subjectivity Argument, we can now present it more formally through the following syllogism (that is predicated upon the logic of modus ponens):[4]

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (3) | (Subjectivity Argument) | (i) Necessarily, if God exemplifies omniscience and omnipresence, then he must exemplify omnisubjectivity.<br>(ii) Necessarily, if God exemplifies omnisubjectivity, then he must be incarnate.<br>(iii) Necessarily, God exemplifies omniscience and omnipresence.<br>(iv) Therefore, necessarily, God exemplifies omnisubjectivity.<br>(v) Therefore, necessarily, God is incarnate. |

Premise (iii) of this argument is an analytic truth based upon entailments that are derivable from the definition of God that is assumed in this argument. God is defined in this argument as an entity that has a *maximally consistent set of great-making attributes* – and, by his specific possession of this set of attributes, God is *extensively and intensively superior to all other entities*. More specifically, the attributes that God

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[3] Throughout the rest of this article, I will be using the terminology "being (becoming) incarnate" to express the notion or act of God being embodied/having (taking on) a body.

[4] Stated formally as such:

1. $\Box(\forall x)(x = g \land Ox \land Px \rightarrow \Box Sx)$
2. $\Box(\forall x)(x = g \land Sx \rightarrow \Box Ix)$
3. $\Box(Og \land Pg)$
4. $\therefore \Box Sg$
5. $\therefore \Box Ig$

Where: g = God O = exemplifies omniscience P = exemplifies omnipresence S = exemplifies omnisubjectivity I = is incarnate.

The argument offered in this article can be seen as distinct yet complementary to Adam Green's (2017) investigation of omnisubjectivty's relationship to the Incarnation. Moreover, even though Zagzbeski (2023, p. 165), who introduced the attribute of the omnisubjectivity into the literature, does not herself believe that this attribute entails an Incarnation, the hope is that the defense of an identification of an entailment between omnisubjectivity and incarnation in this article can indeed be convincing to those who are inclined against affirming the reality of it.

possesses are rightly conceived of as "great-making attributes" – where a great-making attribute is one that contributes tothe overall greatness of its possessor. A great-making attribute is thus an intrinsic attribute that improves (and thus in no way diminishes) the greatness of its possessor. In other words, a great-making attribute is whatever attribute that is intrinsically better for one to possess than not – which would (plausibly) be that of the attributes of power, knowledge, freedom, goodness, personhood, etc. God would thus have his attributes in such a manner that he is "extensively superior" and "intensively superior" to all other existing (or possibly existing) beings. Now, a being *x* is extensively superior to some being *y*, if *x* has all the great-making attributes that *y* has, and "x has some great-making properties that *y* does not have." Whereas a being *x* is intensively superior to some being *y*, if *x* has some of the attributes that *y* has, but they are "present in *x* at a higher degree of intensity than in *y*." The extensive superiority of a being thus centres on the possession of a *wide range* of great-making attributes, and the intensive superiority of a being centres on the *degree of intensity* of each of the great-making attributes. Thus, in the case of God, this type of entity, has *all* of the compossible great-making attributes to a *maximal* degree of intensity (i.e. each of the attributes is at an *intrinsic maximum*) – and, therefore, given this, God is extensively and intensively superior to any other possible being. Now, concerning the specific attributes that would be part of God's nature as an omnipotent entity, one can follow Richard Swinburne (2016), in part,[5] and adopt the following definitions for a range of these attributes:[6]

| **Attributes** | **Attributes Definition** |
|---|---|
| Omnipotence | x is omnipotent $=_{df.}$ *x* is able to cause any event E that it is logically possiblethat it could cause, and there is no E that it cannot bring about due to a lack of power. |
| Personhood | x is personal $=_{df.}$ *x* is a substance that essentially has a mental attribute (i.e. an attributein which one has privileged access to its instantiation). |
| Omniscience | *x* is omniscient $=_{df.}$ *x* has complete and accurate knowledge. |
| Omnipresence | *x* is omnipresent $=_{df.}$ *x* has an all-encompassing presence. |
| Perfect Freedom | *x* is perfectly free $=_{df.}$ *x* does not have any non-rational causal influence determining the formation of their purposes. |

[5] Some of the definitions, such as that concerning omniscience and omnipresence, are not that of Swinburne's (2016); however, they fit with the general definition of the attributes found within his work.
[6] The specific set of great-making attributes would include more than what is included here. However, for brevity's sake, we will focus on these five specific properties. Furthermore, some of the definitions of these properties are derived from the work (Swinburne, 2016).

| | |
|---|---|
| Perfect Goodness | $x$ is perfectly good $=_{df.}$ $x$ performs the best action/kind of action, if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions. |

The various other properties that are rightly predicated of God (such as omniscience, omnipresence, perfect freedom, perfect goodness, etc.) are entailed by him being an omnipotent entity – the other properties rightly predicated of God are derivable from him being omnipotence. That is, as an omnipotent entity, God is a personal entity – due to the fact that for him to exercise his omnipotence, he must be an entity that has a rich form of consciousness that enables him to perform a range of actions that are solely limited by logic. Furthermore, given his omnipotence, God would be an entity that is unlimited in knowledge, presence, freedom and goodness. That is, it follows from his omnipotence that God would, firstly, be *omniscient* – he would know of all true propositions (concerning the past and present), that they are true – as, if he is to be able to exercise his omnipotence, he would need to know the nature of the alternative actions that are dependent upon what occurred in the past and what is presently occurring. Secondly, being omnipotent and also omniscient, God would be *omnipresent* – as he would be present to, and in, all existing things through his knowledge concerning them and his power to act upon them. Thirdly, being an omnipotent entity, he would also be *perfectly free* – he would be free from any non-rational influence determining the choices that he makes – as if he is to be able to exercise his power in any logically possible way, then his power must operate without any causal limitation or hindrance. Fourthly, being omniscient and perfectly free, God would also be *perfectly good* – he will always perform the best action (or kind of action) if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions. That is, given God's omniscience, he would know the nature of each available action that he can choose from and thus would possess knowledge of whether each action is good or bad, or is better than some incompatible action. Moreover, in recognising an action as good, God would have some motivation to perform that action, and in recognising an action as being better than another action, God would have an even greater motivation to perform it. Hence, given his perfect freedom, if God is situated in a scenario in which there is the best possible action (or best kind of action) for him to perform, then God will always perform that action (or kind of action), and if there is no best action (or kind of action), then God will perform a good action and no bad actions. God would thus be perfectly good, which allows us to affirm the veracity of premise (iii). Hence, by the divine properties being defined in this specific way, a basis is provided for these properties to be entailed by the property of omnipotence – that is, they are *derivable* from God being an omnipotent entity. Hence, it is an analytic truth, based upon the definition of God – as an omnipotent entity – that he exemplifies the properties of omniscience and omnipresence, and thus, one can take premise (iii) of the *Subjectivity Argument* to be true.

The central premises that need to be investigated are thus the conditional premises (i) and (ii), as one can ask the important question of why we should affirm their

veracity? I believe that this question can be answered by, first, utilising and further explicating the notion of omnisubjectivity, and its relation to the other divine attributes of omniscience and omnipresence, as proposed by Linda Zagzebski – which will enable us to show that there is a further entailment relation from omniscience and omnipresence to that of omnisubjectivity – and thus if God exemplifies the two attributes of omniscience and omnipresence, then he must also exemplify the further attribute of omnisubjectivity. One will thus be able to affirm the veracity of premise (i). Second, this end will also be achieved by explicating the nature of the notion of an emotion, as conceived of by Jesse Prinz through the "somatic feeling theory." This will enable one to see that as emotions are best conceived of as perceptions of bodily states, then if God is to have emotions – through his omnisubjectivity enabling him to be totally empathetic with other conscious entities, then he must also be embodied – which is to say that if God exemplifies omnisubjectivity, then he must necessarily be incarnate. One will thus be able to affirm the veracity of premise (ii) Utilising and explicating the work of Zagzebski, in combination with that of Prinz, will thus provide the needed conceptual foundation for affirming the veracity of the premises and thus the conclusion that God must necessarily be incarnate.

Reaching this conclusion, however, does not establish the veracity of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation for two reasons. First, it solely establishes the fact that God needs to be incarnate in order to be omnisubjective. However, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation states that it was *God the Son*, the second person of the Trinity, who became incarnate (in the person of Jesus of Nazareth), and not just God *simpliciter*. For Christians, God *simpliciter* can be used in two ways: in reference to the Father, who is the "one God," and in reference to each of the persons, due to their possession of the "one divine nature" (which is composed of all of the previously detailed attributes of maximal greatness).[7] Focusing now on the second usage of the term "God" – which is the relevant usage for our discussion – by each of the persons of the Trinity being "divine" (possessing the one divine nature), they are each taken to be God – that is, each is an essentially bodiless person who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, perfectly free, and perfectly good. Hence, if it is required that for God (i.e., one of the divine person within the Trinity) to be omniscient and omnipresent, and thus omnisubjective, he must be incarnate, then as each of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, are God (divine), they must each be incarnate – which cannot be affirmed by a Christian, given that the Incarnation is to be restricted solely to one person: the Son. Second, this argument establishes the fact that God must *necessarily* – that is, as an *act of essence* – become incarnate, and thus, God must always have been incarnate. However, the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation posits that the Incarnation was a historical act – that is, God intervened in human history in the person of Jesus of

[7] In common teaching the "one God" is identified as the Trinity; however, this is not the traditional (i.e., conciliar) view expressed by the Christian Scriptures and Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381 CE), which identifies the "one God" as the Father *alone*.

Nazareth *at a specific time* – namely, 4 BC – and, thus prior to this, God was not an incarnate deity. Hence, if the *Subjectivity Argument* is successful, it again proves too much, as it establishes the necessary, and thus "eternal," Incarnation of God, which seems to require that God is incarnate prior to the time of the Incarnation that is posited by the doctrine of the Incarnation. We can thus take these two issues together and term them the Correspondence Issue. Thus, in restating this issue now in a more precise manner, the Correspondence Issue against the *Subjectivity Argument* states that the *Subjectivity Argument* does not correspond to the doctrine of the Incarnation – and thus cannot be used in support of it – due to, first, the doctrine identifying only the Son (Jesus of Nazareth) as incarnate, yet the need for God to be incarnate for omnisubjectivity implies that all members of the Trinity should be incarnate, which conflicts with the doctrine's specificity. Second, the argument suggests God's necessary and thus eternal Incarnation, which clashes with the doctrine that views the Incarnation as a historical event specific to Jesus around 4 BC, not an eternal state. One must thus deal with the Correspondence Issue, if the *Subjectivity Argument* is going to be able to be affirmed by a Christian who adheres to the doctrine of the Incarnation.[8] This will be done by further precisifying the notion of omnisubjectivity in light of a trinitarian and incarnation framework, which will help to fully address this issue, and thus enable one, within a Christian context, to affirm the conclusion reached by the Subjectivity Argument. One would thus have a successful a priori argument for the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Thus, the plan is as follows: in "Omnisubjectivity and the Subjectivity Argument," there will be an explication of the nature of omnisubjectivity, and its relation to the properties of omniscience and omnipresence, as conceived of by Zagzebski. It will thus be shown here that if God exemplifies omniscience and omnipresence, then he must also exemplify omnisubjectivity – due to an entailment of the latter by the former. Then, in "Emotions and the Subjectivity Argument," there will be an unpacking of the nature of the notion of emotions, as proposed by Prinz, through the somatic feeling theory, which will result in the position being reached that if God exemplifies omnisubjectivity, then God must thus be incarnate. Subsequent to this, in "Addressing the Correspondence Issue," a further precisification of the notion of omnisubjectivity will be made within a trinitarian and incarnation framework, which will show that the conclusion reached by the subjectivity argument is not subject to the Correspondence Issue, and thus one can affirm the fact of God's omnisubjectivity resulting in him, that is the Son, necessarily becoming incarnate. Then, in "Addressing Some Further Objections," a few further objections to the argument that has been formulated in the previous sections will be explicated, and certain solutions to them will be proposed.

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[8] This would thus be any "orthodox" Christian – that is, any Christian that affirms the veracity of the conciliar tradition. However, the issues raised by the Correspondence Issue would not be a problem for individuals who adhere to religions such as Mormonism that affirm the eternal embodiment of all the members of the Trinity.

Finally, after this section, there will be a concluding section ("Conclusion"), which will summarise the above results and conclude the article.

## Omnisubjectivity and the Subjectivity Argument

According to Zagzebski (2008; 2013; 2016; 2023), in addition to the traditional attributes that are usually predicated of God, such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence and perfect goodness, one should also predicate the further important attribute of omnisubjectivity, which can be stated succinctly as follows:

(4) (Omnisubjectivity) x is omnisubjective $=_{df}$. x can consciously grasp with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of every conscious being.

In Zagzebski's (2023) thought, "subjectivity" is the experience of consciousness – encompassing a vast range of states including sensory perceptions, thoughts, and feelings – from the viewpoint of the individual experiencing it; rather than as an object of analysis or empirical study. Subjectivity, according to Zagzebski (2023), is a real entity that is distinct from the realm of objective facts – as one is always in a state of subjectivity, whether awake or asleep, where one is usually conscious of something external, yet, this conscious experience is distinct from the object of that experience. Hence, if God is to truly comprehend everything, it is not sufficient for him only to understand objective facts; rather, he must also understand all aspects of subjectivity in humans. Understanding subjectivity, as Zagzebski (2023, p. 3) notes – especially in others – remains a mystery, even in the context of an omniscient being like God. The distinction between a person's first-person awareness and the third-person perspective is crucial. Linguistic analysis reveals that first-person pronouns express a subject's perspective, while third-person pronouns treat someone or something as an object. This linguistic distinction underscores the fundamental difference between experiencing oneself as a subject versus an object. This distinction challenges the idea that all knowledge can be translated into objective, third-person terms. While objective facts are a significant part of reality, they do not encompass everything, especially when it comes to subjective experiences. For example, feeling frustrated about making a mess involves more than just acknowledging the physical facts – it is about the subjective experience of frustration. Objective descriptions of subjective states do not fully convey what it is like to be in those states. This can be further emphasised, as noted by Zagzebski (2016, p. 436), through considering the famous example provided by Frank Jackson (1986). Mary, who has lived in a black-and-white world, is knowledgeable about every physical fact—that is, she is essentially omniscient within the physical realm. However, her knowledge is incomplete; upon leaving her monochrome environment and seeing colour for the first time, she discovers

something new – *what it is like* to see colours. This scenario was originally put forward by Jackson (1986) to challenge physicalism, which posits that knowing all physical facts equates to knowing everything. Yet, as Zagzebski (2016) notes, this example can be used differently. That is, while Mary's mental state changes upon seeing colour, this might not represent new knowledge or an epistemic shift. Nonetheless, this change in the mental state must be comprehensible to an omniscient God, who should discern the difference between pre- and post-colour perception. If the distinction lies in the subjective experience of seeing colour, then God must understand the nuances of Mary's colour perception and how it may differ from others. However, there's a challenge here: each person's subjectivity, like Mary's perception of red, might be unique and inseparable from their self-awareness – that is, as Zagzebski (2008, p. 237) observes, no one else can fully inhabit Mary's state since they are not Mary. If this uniqueness of conscious states is true, it creates a problem for omniscience, as no one but Mary can fully grasp her conscious experiences. This issue extends to knowledge *de se*, as philosophers argue about whether propositions involving "I" differ from those without such indexicals. For instance, knowing "I made a mess in the market" isn't identical to knowing "David Brown made a mess in the market." This distinction can be crucial for explaining personal reactions and behaviours. One could argue, as Zagzebski (2013) notes, that only the individual can fully know the proposition involving "I." Hence, if an omniscient being exists, it must recognise and understand these differences in mental states. Thus, the challenge is whether it is possible for such a being to adopt another individual's subjectivity – that is, their first-person perspective.

On a classical theistic view of God, God's knowledge is not mediated like human understanding – that is, it is direct and unmediated.[9] Now, as Zagzebski (2013) writes, our best model for understanding direct awareness of another's conscious state is empathy, where emotions transfer from one person to another. Importantly, this empathetic structure might be extendable to other psychic states, which suggests a way for omniscience to encompass a direct understanding of diverse conscious experiences. More fully, empathy, according to Zagzebski (2013), particularly in humans, is commonly defined as the process of acquiring an emotion similar to that of another individual. While the emotion felt through empathy does not necessarily have to be identical to the original emotion, it should be closely related. Importantly, however, empathy is distinct from mere emotional contagion, which is the passive spread of emotion in groups without conscious consideration of others' emotional states. In contrast, as Zagzebski (2013, p. 239) notes, empathy involves actively perceiving and responding to the emotions of others. That is, empathy is characterised by reacting to the perceived feelings of another with similar emotional responses to

[9] Though some individuals would interpret the classical theistic conception – namely, that of Aquinas' conception – concerning God's knowledge as that of "self-knowledge," I follow Zagzebski (2023, p. 70) in conceiving of it – that is, Aquinas' view – in a perceptual manner.

one's own. This implies that one should consciously recognise the emotion of another and perceive it as a reason for experiencing a similar emotion themself.[10]

For example, suppose someone named X observes a colleague, Y, who is visibly upset after receiving bad news. X might also feel upset upon seeing this. However, it only counts as empathy if X perceives Y's upset as a reason for X's own emotional upset, not just the cause. One reason X might empathise with Y could be due to a supportive or friendly relationship with Y. Experiencing emotions similar to Y can deepen their emotional bond. Alternatively, X might aim to grasp Y's feelings to better understand Y's behaviour, even if X does not have any particular fondness for Y. Empathy, in this sense, is a tool for making the emotional states of others understandable. When empathising, X thus assumes Y's perspective, as if taking on X's emotional response in a way that corresponds with Y. This process involves an "imaginative shift," as Zagzebski (2008, p. 239) describes, where the empathiser adopts the viewpoint of the other person. Empathy differs from simply imagining oneself in another's situation; it is about imagining being that person in their specific circumstances. For instance, empathising with a colleague who is struggling with the loss of a distant father involves comprehending the colleague's specific mix of sadness, frustration, and regret, rather than how one might feel if their own father, with whom they have a close and positive relationship, passed away.

Empathy, as Zagzebski (2008, p. 239) notes, thus involves a dual perspective: while empathising, a person both adopts the emotional state of another and maintains an awareness that it is a simulation – with this dual perspective suggesting that empathetic emotions are not identical to the original emotions but are rather representational. That is, they begin as imitations but are then shaped by the empathiser's own beliefs and emotions, resulting, as Zagzebski (2013) terms it – in a "congruent" emotion. Importantly, empathising with emotions, as Zagzebski (2013) also notes, necessitates having those states – *as a copy of an emotion is still an emotion*. However, a copy of a judgment or choice isn't the same as the original. One could empathise with someone's judgment without sharing it, or empathise with a choice without making it. The empathetic grief, for example, is the person's projection into her friend's experience, yet she remains aware that it is a simulation, a representation of her friend's actual emotion.

Now, in the context of divine empathy, if humans can assume the perspective of others to understand their emotions, it should also be possible, according to Zagzebski (2013), to represent any of their conscious states in a similar empathetic structure. That is, when one empathises, one acquires the emotions of others. Extending this now,

[10] For a different conceptualisation of empathy – namely, that of the "phenomenological approach" – which does not require an empathiser to share the emotional states of the individual that they are empathising with, see (Zahavi, 2014). Adopting this conception of empathy would allow one to escape the conclusion of the Subjectivity Argument; however, as we are focusing on omnisubjectivity, as traditionally conceptualised through Zagzebski's work, which utilises the conception of empathy in the main text, we can indeed ward off the challenge raised by this issue.

what can be termed as "total empathy" involves representing all aspects of another person's consciousness, including beliefs, sensations, moods, desires, choices, and emotions. More specifically, the notion of total empathy, according to Zagzebski (2013), is an expanded form of empathy that includes further conscious states. That is, total empathy is the cognitive state, as Zagzebski (2013, p. 29) notes, of empathising with every aspect of a person's conscious experience throughout their life – that is, every thought, belief, sensation, mood, desire, and decision, along with every emotion. Hence, perfect total empathy is the complete and accurate representation of all of another individual's conscious states, as Zagzebski (2013, p. 29) further notes, if X has perfect total empathy with Y, then, whenever Y is in a conscious state, C, X acquires a state that is a perfectly accurate copy of C and X is aware that her conscious state is a copy of C. If an individual has perfect total empathy for another individual in this particular way, then the former individual is able to grasp what it is like for the latter individual to be in that specific state. Yet, because the individual is in an empathetic state, their awareness of their individuality will be included in their empathetic state (Zagzebski, 2013). Furthermore, the individual would always have an awareness that their empathetic copy is a copy – that their empathetic copy of the individual's state is not the state of being that individual. Given all of this, it is thus plausible to take God (if he exists) to be a cognitively perfect being, and thus, would be a being who has total perfect empathy with all conscious beings who have ever existed (or will ever exist) (Zagzebski, 2013). In short, it is a plausible assumption to take God to be an entity that possesses the attribute of being totally empathetic – with the nature of this form of empathy being a direct acquaintance with the conscious states of all of God's creatures – a form of like direct seeing, yet without there being any physical difference between God and his creatures (Zagzebski, 2013). As a totally empathetic being, God thus lives through the conscious experience of each being who possesses consciousness. That is, as Zagzebski (2013, p. 30) notes, God knows everything you know or understand from living your life, and similarly, for every other conscious being, God knows what it is like to be you, what it is like to be your dog, and what it is like to be each and every animal that has ever lived and had conscious awareness. In other words, God experiences everything we experience by living our life – that is, God grasps it as if it were from their first-person point of view – yet, in an empathetic way, such that God does not "forget" that he is not that individual. Thus, God feels total empathy towards another individual; he shares in the total conscious experience of this individual – as if it was happening to him – without, however, him losing his own identity in this shared experience. Omnisubjectivity is thus this property which enables God to have the ability to have perfect total empathy with every conscious being – and, according to premise (i) of the *Subjectivity Argument*, it is a property that God necessarily has based upon his possession of some of his other essential properties:

(5) (Premise (i)) Necessarily, if God exemplifies omniscience and omnipresence, then he must exemplify omnisubjectivity.

That is, according to premise (i), there is an entailment of the property of omnisubjectivity from that of omniscience and omnipresence. First, for the entailment of omnisubjectivity from omniscience, one can ask the important question of how can God, a divine entity, understand what it is like to be his creatures? While God knows every objective fact about his creation, understanding the subjective experiences of consciousness is crucial. Like Mary, God cannot comprehend what it is like to see colour or experience other human sensations without having those experiences himself. This poses a challenge to the idea of God's complete understanding of his creation's conscious states. Now, some philosophers argue, as Zagzebski (2023) notes, that since knowledge pertains to propositions and God comprehends the truth value of all propositions, he is omniscient. But this doesn't address the issue of God's grasp on the subjective aspect of experiences. If God doesn't fully comprehend the conscious states of his creation as we do, then he lacks a certain cognitive perfection, as noted by Zagzebski (2023). Thus, the attribute of omnisubjectivity is crucial for God to fully grasp the experiences of his creatures. That is, an omniscient being, defined as one who knows everything (i.e., has complete and accurate knowledge), must inherently understand every conscious experience from the perspective of the individual experiencing it. This means that to be truly omniscient, such a being, God, must be omnisubjective, knowing every experience as intimately as the subject of that experience does. Hence, the concept of omniscience is fully realised only when omnisubjectivity is possessed – with an omnisubjective being comprehending each conscious state, as well as the subject in that state, does. As an omniscient being, God, in possessing omnisubjectivity – the ability to have perfect total empathy with every conscious being – would enable him to know what it is like to be you, your dog, bats, birds, fish, reptiles, and every human yet to be born, understanding everything that you know or comprehend from living your life. It is thus the possession of omnisubjectivity that enables one to understand how God, as an omniscient being, could discern the difference between Mary's conscious states before and after she leaves the black-and-white room, including the nuances of seeing red. That is, if an omniscient being possesses perfect total empathy with Mary, it would accurately represent her experience of seeing in both black and white and colour. Thus, as Zagzebski (2013) notes, God could distinguish between Mary's qualia and also between Sam's and Mary's experiences of seeing red, should there be a difference. That is, when an omnisubjective being represents Mary's state of seeing red, it sees red as if through Mary's eyes, yet is aware that this state is a replica of Mary's. If Mary is surprised upon discovering the world in colour, the omnisubjective being would perfectly represent that surprise. Similarly, if Mary chooses to touch a red object, the being would acquire a representation of that choice. Moreover, concerning the ability

to distinguish first-person and third-person knowledge of the same fact, an omniscient and thus omnisubjective being would represent both the first-person judgment and someone else's third-person judgment. This being would be able to differentiate these states without actually making the judgments, thus avoiding confusion in perspective. Hence, omnisubjectivity underscores the unique insights gained through living a conscious life, insights that cannot be reduced to mere factual knowledge. This suggests that God experiences the consciousness of every being. Therefore, God understands everything a person or any conscious being, like an animal, knows or perceives from living their life, including the nuanced experience of being that particular individual or creature. A truly omniscient being, one that is thus one that is also omnisubjective, and thus would not only know all facts but would also understand the unique mental states of all beings, experiencing what it is like to be each of them. Such a being, as Zagzebski (2013) poetically writes, would not only write your biography but could also write your autobiography.

Second, for the entailment of omnisubjectivity from omnipresence, one can ask the important question of how an immaterial being can be present at all points in space, given that omnipresence, as noted previously, signifies being everywhere. This question, although not the primary focus here, helps to clarify the entailment between these two properties. Now, St. Anselm's approach to answering this question, as noted by Zagzebski (2023, pp. 41–42), involves rejecting the notion that being present at a point in space means being extended in space or contained within it – as a chair is in a room. Rather, God, having no physical parts and not being bound by spatial-temporal laws, is wholly present in every part of the created world. This implies, as Zagzebski (2023) observes, that God's presence in spatial entities is no different from his presence in non-spatial entities. Hence, God is "everywhere" in the sense of being present in all that exists, rather than being located in every physical place. This interpretation of how a non-spatial, immaterial God can be present everywhere leads to the conclusion that God's omnipresence encompasses not only the spatial aspects of creation but also its non-spatial elements. It appears just as reasonable to believe that God is present in every non-physical aspect as in every physical space. Hence, if subjective states – such as thoughts and emotions, etc. – are located where an individual's body is, then God's omnipresence would encompass these subjective states as well. If these states are non-spatial, as Zagzebski (2023) suggests, then omnipresence still implies God's presence in these experiences – that is, God's encompassing presence results in everything being exposed to God's sight. Therefore, omnisubjectivity, the idea that God is present in, encompasses and grasps every subjective experience, seems to be a necessary aspect of omnipresence. Stating this all more fully: although St. Anselm's perspective highlights that God's presence does not mirror physical extension, it nonetheless ensures that God pervades every dimension of reality. Consequently, there is no discrete realm – be it spatial or non-spatial – that remains outside God's "all-encompassing sight." Such an omnipresence goes beyond merely "co-existing" with all things; instead, it requires a profound knowledge of every aspect of created

existence, including the subjective interiors of conscious beings. The crucial step, then, is to see how this pervasive presence logically connects to the idea that God must also comprehend the first-person perspectives of creatures. To say that God's presence is as real within subjective experience as it is within the physical world implies that all the private mental states one might label as "hidden" are, in fact, wholly accessible to God. But accessibility on that level, coupled with God's perfect cognition, leads directly to the conclusion that God's presence in those states is not merely "observational." Rather, it must allow for a total and perfect grasp of the very manner in which these subjective states present themselves to the conscious individual. One could attempt to imagine a scenario in which God is present everywhere yet lacks this intimate acquaintance with what it is like for each subject to undergo their specific mental states. However, if we attribute to God complete awareness of all that is encompassed by his omnipresence, then there is no conceptual wedge that would limit his knowledge to surface-level or third-person facts alone. Being present to every state in creation, God would ipso facto know it from the inside, precisely as it is for the creature experiencing it – otherwise his omnipresence would be fragmented by interior pockets of opacity. Thus, from the premise that God's presence takes in all subjective states, inextricably tied to his own non-physical nature and sustaining power, we arrive at the stronger claim of omnisubjectivity. If God were unable to share fully in what it is like for each creature to experience fear, joy, sorrow, or hope, that would indicate a limit on his presence in those mental or emotional spheres. Yet classical theology, and St. Anselm's reasoning in particular, deny such limitation. The upshot is that not only does God occupy no spatial location to the exclusion of any other; he also "occupies" no cognitive standpoint from which any other standpoint remains closed or hidden. Hence, one sees the entailment: by being omnipresent in every respect – physical and subjective – God necessarily grasps the contents of all minds in a fully comprehensive, intimate, and indeed first-person manner. That is precisely what is signified by omnisubjectivity. In short, if all states of being remain directly present to God, he must understand them from within, just as those beings themselves do. Such is the seamless progression from the traditional concept of omnipresence to the richer idea that God's presence everywhere necessarily implies his thorough acquaintance with the inner life of each conscious subject

Taking all of these things into account, one can thus understand that for God to be truly omniscient, he necessarily must possess omnisubjectivity. This is predicated on the understanding that omniscience is not limited to the knowledge of objective facts but extends to a deep, empathetic understanding of all subjective experiences as they are perceived by individual conscious beings. This is that, a comprehensive grasp of the universe and its inhabitants necessitates an intimate acquaintance with each conscious state, affirming that omniscience is incomplete without omnisubjectivity – that is, the former entails the latter. Furthermore, for God's omnipresence, understood as being present in every part of the universe, encompasses not only spatial dimensions but also the non-spatial realm of subjective experiences. This thus implies

that God's presence in every aspect of creation naturally includes a presence within every conscious state, thereby understanding and experiencing these states as if they were his own. Thus, omnipresence, in its fullest expression, necessitates the attribute of omnisubjectivity, making it an essential aspect of the divine nature – through, again, the former entailing the latter. Therefore, one can take it to be the case that if God is omniscient and omnipresent, then he is omnisubjective, and thus one can indeed affirm the veracity of premise (i). We can now turn our attention to an investigation of premise (ii).

## Emotions and the Subjectivity Argument

According to Prinz (2004a; 2004b; 2005; 2006), there are various ways in which an emotion can be conceived of; however, one of the most influential ways that an emotion can be conceptualised through is the "somatic feelings theory," independently proposed by William James (1884) and Carl Lange (1885), which can be stated succinctly as follows:

(6) (Emotion) x is an emotion $=_{df.}$ x is a perception of a bodily change.

For James (1884) and Lange (1885), as noted by Prinz (2005, pp. 44–45), one should focus on categorising emotions under a type of perception already familiar to most: perceptions of bodily changes. That is, emotions coincide with various disturbances in our bodies, affecting systems like the circulatory, respiratory, and musculoskeletal. More specifically, as Prinz (2004a, p. 58) writes, "In saying that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes, I mean only to say that they are states within our somatosensory systems that register changes in our bodies." And these include changes such as variations in heart rate, alterations in breathing, fluctuation in blood vessel diameters, and transformations in facial expressions. Now, common belief holds these bodily changes as consequences of emotions, but James (1884) and Lange (1885) argued the reverse: that emotions are the perceptions of these bodily changes. More specifically, as Prinz (2006, pp. 141–142) notes, emotions can be seen as states within "modality-specific" input systems – that is, they are essentially interoceptive, which means that emotions exist in the sensory systems that react to bodily changes. For example, the experience of sadness includes a range of bodily responses, such as crying. Thus, according to their view, emotions emerge, at a general level, as follows: a stimulus or thought, due to evolution or learning, is predisposed to initiate a pattern of bodily changes. Once these changes occur, they are then registered in brain systems sensitive to somatic states. The brain, as Prinz (2006, p. 142) notes, has interoceptive systems linked to the body by nerve fibres that convert physical changes into brain signals – and it is these interoceptive systems that register bodily changes as the neural bases of emotions. Thus, emotions, as Prinz notes (2006), are the perception of changes

in one's circulatory and respiratory systems, facial expressions, and bodily movements.

Defending this stance, James (1884) suggests, as noted by Prinz (2004a, pp. 4–5), a thought experiment: imagine an intense emotion and subtract from our awareness all the feelings of its characteristic bodily symptoms – one would find nothing remaining, no foundational "mind-stuff" to form the emotion, leaving only a detached state of intellectual perception. More concretely, envision an emotion, such as terror, without any bodily changes, such as spine-tingling or constrained breathing, but instead with a relaxed body. It is clear, as Prinz (2006, p. 143) notes, that the absence of bodily disturbance erases the emotion. One can thus question whether one can truly conceive of anger without the associated bodily responses such as a racing heart, flushed face, or clenched teeth, and instead with relaxed muscles, calm breathing, and a placid expression. That is, without these physical manifestations, the emotion of anger seems to evaporate, and is replaced by a cold, rational judgment. Introspection, as noted by Prinz (2004a, p. 57), implies that removing the bodily aspects from an emotion results in the absence of the emotion itself, leading to the conclusion that emotions are indeed perceptions of bodily changes. Now, although this point appears persuasive, reliance on introspection, according to Prinz (2005, p. 12), can be problematic for some critics. Thus, it is beneficial to seek additional evidence. And the somatic feeling theory appears to deliver on this by explaining several phenomena more convincingly than other theories. Consideration will be given to three sets of evidence: first, as noted by Prinz (2004b, p. 46), substantial evidence suggests that emotions can be induced by altering bodily states – through methods that include using drugs affecting the autonomic nervous system and manipulating bodily feedback through facial expressions or changes in posture or breathing, leading to corresponding emotions. Further support, as Prinz (2006, p. 143) notes, comes from neuroimaging studies, which consistently implicate structures such as the amygdala – associated with emotion induction, and the cingulate and insular cortices, involved in the emotions themselves. The amygdala links perceptions or thoughts to bodily responses, while the cingulate and insula regulate and respond to bodily changes, implicating them in interoception. The consistency of emotions correlating with activity in these brain areas supports the idea that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes. Now, some critics, as noted by Prinz (2005, p. 49), argue that only specific emotions are associated with bodily changes, suggesting that complex emotions like guilt, love, loneliness, and jealousy might not have corresponding physical states. However, against this, introspection and empirical evidence seem to support the presence of bodily bases for these emotions. As Prinz (2004b, p. 50) writes, studies consistently show activation in the same brain regions during these complex emotions as in more basic emotions, indicating a bodily foundation for *all* emotions. Other critics, as Prinz (2006) also notes, might argue that bodily perceptions are sufficient but not necessary for emotions. In response, defenders of the somatic feeling theory might either accept that some emotions are disembodied or assert that all emotions are bodily perceptions. Prinz

(2006, pp. 144–145) sees that the best way forward is affirming a qualified version of the latter assertion with two qualifications: first, emotions can be described as states or traits. For example, being afraid of heights is an emotional trait that is true even when not in a state of fear. Similarly, consider the trait of being compassionate. A person who is compassionate inherently possesses this trait, even when not actively demonstrating compassion in a given moment. Importantly, emotion traits are not bodily perceptions; however, a person can be attributed an emotion trait *only if predisposed to the corresponding state*, and emotion states are always bodily perceptions. Second, emotions sometimes seem to arise before bodily changes are perceived, and they can occur in individuals with limited capacity to perceive bodily changes due to spinal injuries. This appears to challenge the somatic feeling theory, as Prinz (2006, p. 144) notes, but there is a plausible response: emotions are states in brain systems that typically register bodily changes. These states can arise without actual bodily changes, similar to how one can imagine an object without seeing it. That is, as Prinz (2004b) writes, when encountering familiar emotional triggers, one's interoceptive systems may activate before the body reacts. The brain anticipates bodily responses, making emotions compatible with interoceptive states that either register or anticipate bodily changes. It is important to note, however, that the mere correlation of emotions with bodily changes does not conclusively prove the somatic feeling theory. This is that, to establish necessity, as Prinz (2004a, p. 57) notes, one must demonstrate that the disruption of interoceptive responses results in reduced emotional experience. Evidence on this matter, while not definitive, is suggestive. For instance, individuals with spinal injuries, who experience reduced bodily feedback, often report diminished emotional responses (Hohmann, 1966). This finding, according to Prinz (2004a, p. 57), though subject to debate, supports the notion that the level of emotional response correlates with the degree of bodily feedback. While not definitive, the evidence thus supports the idea that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes. This perspective accounts for the co-occurrence of emotions and bodily changes, the capacity of bodily changes to induce emotions, and the reduction in emotional experience with diminished bodily feedback, making it a plausible theory for understanding emotions. That is, emotions are interoceptive states that generally register bodily changes, which aligns with psychological and neuroscience research. This evidence suggests that bodily changes can cause emotions, and neuroimaging results indicate that emotions depend on brain structures registering bodily changes. Thus, emotions are likely interoceptive states, and critics of this view bear the burden of proof. One way for the critic of this position to avoid shouldering this burden would be to raise a further objection concerning the overall cogency of this theory. One objection that can be raised here, which has been raised by individuals such as Julien Deonna and Fabrice Teroni (2012) and Christine Tappolet (2023), concerns the apparent difficulty of the somatic feeling theory in adequately capturing the intentional objects of emotions. This issue is important, and needs to be addressed here, because the intentional object of an emotion is what that emotion is about or directed towards, such as a specific event,

situation, or entity that elicits the emotional response. However, according to the critics of the somatic feeling theory, this theory fails to convincingly explain how emotions are connected to their objects, which is a fundamental aspect of understanding emotional experiences. That is, the theory cannot account for the nuanced relationship between emotions and their intentional objects, thereby challenging its overall efficacy and influence.

In addressing the objection that the somatic feeling theory cannot adequately capture the intentional object of an emotion, one can first focus on Prinz's (2005, pp. 20–21) response to this issue, where one is to draw a distinction between an "emotion" and an "emotional attitude." An emotional attitude is a propositional attitude that creates a causal connection between an emotion and the representation of an object or a situation. Our minds contain many causal connections between representations of objects or situations and mental episodes that, in different contexts, might not have intentional objects. Consider, as Prinz (2005, p. 20) notes, the example of tiredness. Tiredness often does not target anything specific, but it can become targeted. For instance, I might be tired of reading a certain novel. When this is not meant metaphorically, it indicates a causal relationship between reading the novel and experiencing states of tiredness; the novel genuinely induces sleep. Similarly, I can be disgusted by the state of the world; consuming news can physically make me sick. I can also be amazed by a flower's beauty; it genuinely leaves me breathless. The situation is the same with emotions. This is that, according to Prinz (2005, p. 20), there can be causal connections between emotions and mental representations of objects or situations, and when such causal connections exist, we interpret the emotion as having the content of those representations as its intentional object. If a specific causal link forms between thinking about the government and feeling anger, we say, "I am angry at the government." If a particular causal connection links a feeling of anger to the news that the trains are not running, we say, "I am angry that the trains aren't running." This isn't just a manner of speaking. Like feelings of fatigue, sickness, or astonishment, emotions can acquire intentional objects by being causally connected to mental representations. This does not imply, as noted by Prinz (2005, p. 21), that emotions are anything but physical sensations – it merely highlights a characteristic of human psychology where feelings can possess intentional objects. Hence, emotions do not inherently have specific objects; they are not propositional attitudes. However, there exists a category of attitudes – referred to here as emotional attitudes – that are defined by causal connections between emotions and mental representations of entities. Thus, this approach deals with the objection raised against the somatic feeling theory by elucidating how emotional attitudes, distinct from mere somatic feelings, create a bridge between emotions and their intentional objects through causal connections. It thereby counters the critique by showing that emotions can indeed target specific entities or situations, aligning with the theory's capacity to account for the intentionality of emotional experiences.

A second way to deal with this objection, which was not proposed by Prinz, is by focusing on the perceptual nature of emotions within this theoretical framework. That is, it is contended here that emotions function similarly to sensory perceptions, enabling individuals to perceive values or significance within their environment. This perceptual model posits that emotions are direct, embodied responses to stimuli that bear relevance to our well-being. Consequently, emotions possess intentional objects insofar as they are about specific entities, events, or states of affairs – such as a threat in the case of fear or a loss in the case of sadness. This perspective aligns emotions with our sensory engagements with the world, thereby affirming their intentionality without necessitating abstract or detached cognitive judgments. Moreover, as noted previously, emotions are embodied appraisals. These appraisals are not mere cognitive assessments but are deeply intertwined with physiological responses, thus grounding emotions in the body's interaction with its surroundings. This embodiment ensures that emotions are inherently about something, as they arise from the body's evaluative responses to stimuli that affect our well-being. Thus, the intentional object of an emotion is captured through the lens of embodied appraisal, which integrates physiological reactions and evaluative significance, thus presenting a coherent account of how emotions are directed towards particular objects or situations. Furthermore, it is crucial to clarify the role of cognitive processes within this framework. This is that, while acknowledging that cognitive processes contribute to the emergence of emotions, it is emphasised that these are not deliberative or reflective in nature. Instead, emotions are the product of automatic appraisals that categorise stimuli according to their relevance to our well-being. Such a stance allows for a sophisticated understanding of emotions' intentionality, showing that they can be about something even without engaging in the kind of cognitive processing typical of more deliberate thoughts. This perspective thus challenges traditional views by proposing that cognitive processing in emotions is more about immediate, embodied appraisal than about reflective thought. To further substantiate this point, we can look at some illustrative examples that demonstrate how emotions, as conceptualised within this theory, indeed possess intentional objects. Fear, for instance, is not an ambiguous sensation but is explicitly about a perceived threat. Similarly, love is directed towards another person or entity, indicating a clear object of emotional response. These examples highlight how emotions inform one about our relationship with the world, thereby reinforcing the claim that emotions, through their perceptual and embodied nature, are fundamentally about specific objects or affairs. Taking all of these things into account, one can thus see that this theoretical approach addresses the challenge of explaining the intentionality of emotions, by illustrating the integral connection between emotions, cognitive processes, and physiological responses. Thus, returning back to our previous discussion, if emotions are interoceptive states, then they are perceptual states – as interoceptive systems are perceptual systems, which is thus to say that emotions are perceptions of bodily changes. And given that this position is underscored by philosophical reasoning (thought experiments) and empirical

evidence (such as neuroimaging studies and the observable effects of induced emotional states), one can indeed affirm the veracity of the somatic feeling theory and, thus, the embodied nature of emotional experiences.[11]

Yet, according to premise (ii) of the *Subjectivity Argument*, if this is the case, then for God to have an emotion, through being omnisubjective, he must himself have a body, which, in our previously introduced language, is to say that he must be "incarnate":

(7) (Premise (ii)) Necessarily, if God exemplifies omnisubjectivity, then he must be incarnate.

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Understanding why omnisubjectivity necessitates God's Incarnation involves considering the relationship between subjective experiences, empathy, and the nature of emotions as perceptions of bodily changes. Omnisubjectivity, as noted previously, is the ability to fully grasp the first-person perspective of every conscious being – this attribute goes beyond understanding objective facts; it requires a deep, empathetic connection with the subjective experiences of others, including their emotional states. However, according to the somatic feeling theory, emotions are fundamentally perceptions of bodily changes – that is, emotions are not just psychological states but are intrinsically linked to changes within the body. The challenge arises when we consider how an omnisubjective God can fully understand and empathise with these bodily-based emotional experiences. If emotions are indeed perceptions of bodily changes, then to truly comprehend and empathise with these emotions, one must experience these bodily changes. And thus, this is where the necessity for Incarnation emerges. For God to exemplify omnisubjectivity, he must not only understand emotions as abstract concepts but also experience them as humans do – as perceptions of changes within a physical body. Since human empathy, our closest parallel to omnisubjectivity, involves internalising and experiencing others' emotional states to some extent, God's perfect empathy would require a more profound, direct experience of these states. This direct experience is only possible if God has a physical form through which these bodily changes can occur and be perceived. In other words, if emotions are tied to bodily states and if understanding these emotions is essential to omnisubjectivity, then God must have the means to experience these bodily states. Incarnation provides this means. By taking on a physical form, God can experience the range of human emotions not just as a distant observer but as someone who undergoes the same physical changes that give rise to these emotions. This incarnate experience is crucial for the complete and empathetic understanding of the human condition, which is at the heart of omnisubjectivity. In restating this now through a different perspective, we can focus on the specific nature of emotions and the process of

[11] If one is not convinced by the reasons brought in favour of the somatic feeling theory – and thus is more inclined to a different theory of emotions – then one can adopt a conditional position concerning the success of the *Subjectivity Argument*, which will be that of one holding to the position that "*If* one affirms the somatic feeling theory then, here is what follows […]."

empathy. First, consider the process of empathy, particularly in the context of emotional experience. Empathy involves more than a cognitive understanding of another person's emotional state; it requires an emotional mirroring of that state. When empathising, an individual does not just recognise the emotion of another; rather, they experience a version of that emotion themselves – as captured previously by Zagzebski's (2013) point that empathising with emotions necessitates actually having those states, and that the copy of an emotion, experienced through empathy, is still an emotion in its own right. Now, taking into account the concept of omnisubjectivity, if God is omnisubjective, he comprehends every conscious experience of all beings, including their emotional states. Thus, for God to truly empathise and understand these emotions, then he must experience them as they do. Since emotions are perceptions of bodily changes, experiencing them requires a physical body. Thus, for God to acquire and truly understand the emotions of conscious beings, he must have a means of undergoing the same bodily changes that give rise to these emotions. This necessity leads to the conclusion that God must be incarnate. Consider a practical example to illustrate this point: imagine a person, let's call her Anna, feeling intense grief due to the loss of a loved one. This grief is not just a mental state; it manifests in physical symptoms such as quiet sobbing, a heavy sensation in the chest, a loss of energy, and perhaps a decreased appetite. These physical changes are integral to Anna's experience of grief – they are not just symptoms, but, as perceived changes to her body, they are components of the emotion itself. Now, if God is to fully understand and empathise with Anna's grief as an omnisubjective being, it is not enough for him to merely observe or cognitively process her emotional state. Rather, he must experience it as she does, which includes the physical sensations – bodily changes – associated with grief. However, without a physical body, God cannot experience these bodily changes and, consequently, cannot fully empathise with Anna's grief. Therefore, for God to exemplify omnisubjectivity with Anna, experiencing her grief as she does, he must have a body capable of undergoing the same physical changes that Anna experiences. Thus, under the conception of emotions as perceptions of bodily changes and that omnisubjectivity involves a deep, empathetic understanding of all aspects of subjective experience, it follows logically that God must be incarnate to fully realise omnisubjectivity. That is, without a physical body, God would be unable to experience human emotions, as these require bodily changes. Hence, Incarnation becomes necessary for God's complete empathetic understanding of the human condition, which is central to the concept of omnisubjectivity. Therefore, the conception of emotions as perceptions of bodily changes and the nature of empathy necessitates that if God is to exemplify omnisubjectivity, then he must necessarily be incarnate, and thus one can indeed affirm the veracity of premise (ii). One can retort back, however, and say that even if omnisubjectivity does necessarily entail God having a body, this alone would not establish the necessity of the Incarnation specifically. After all, as Marcel Sarot (1992) argues, God's need for embodiment could instead support panentheism, where God

permeates and transcends the physical universe. Similarly, Andrei Buckareff (2023) contends that omnisubjectivity points towards pantheism, where God and the universe are identical. The key question then becomes: Why should we conclude that omnisubjectivity necessitates the Incarnation rather than these alternative metaphysical frameworks? The answer lies in examining the specific requirements of omnisubjectivity and how they relate to different forms of divine embodiment. Whilst both panentheism and pantheism provide ways for God to be embodied, neither fully satisfies what omnisubjectivity demands. Omnisubjectivity requires not just any form of embodiment, but one that allows for genuine empathetic understanding of human emotional experiences. This understanding requires three key elements that need careful examination. First, God must have a discrete, individual body capable of undergoing specific physical changes that correspond to particular human emotions. This requirement stems from the somatic feeling theory of emotions – emotions are perceptions of bodily changes. For God to truly experience human emotions, rather than merely observe them, he must be able to undergo the specific physiological changes that constitute these emotions. A pantheistic God, being identical with the entire universe, would experience all possible bodily states simultaneously, which would preclude the discrete, focused experience of particular emotional states. Similarly, a panentheistic God, whilst transcending the universe, would still lack the capacity for particular, localised emotional experiences since his embodiment would be diffused throughout all of reality. Second, genuine empathy requires the maintenance of distinct perspectives between the empathiser and the one being empathised with. This is because empathy involves understanding another's experience whilst maintaining awareness that it is not one's own experience. In pantheism, where God is identical with all of reality, there can be no such distinction – God would not be empathising with human experiences but would simply be those experiences. There would be no separation between the divine consciousness and human consciousness necessary for genuine empathy. Panentheism faces a similar challenge, as God's pervasive presence throughout reality would make it difficult to maintain the distinction between divine and human perspectives needed for true empathetic understanding. Third, omnisubjectivity requires that God fully grasp human subjective experiences whilst maintaining divine consciousness. This means God must be able to experience human emotions as humans do whilst simultaneously maintaining his divine perspective that allows him to understand these experiences in their broader context. The Incarnation uniquely enables this by allowing God to take on a human nature whilst retaining his divine nature. In contrast, pantheism would subsume divine consciousness entirely into the totality of cosmic experience, whilst panentheism's diffuse divine presence would not allow for the focused, particular experience of human emotions required for true omnisubjectivity. The Incarnation thus uniquely fulfils these requirements by providing God with a particular human body through which to experience emotions as humans do, whilst maintaining the distinction between divine and human natures necessary for genuine empathy.

Through God's embodiment (such as is the case in the "hypostatic union" of divine and human natures in Christ), he can experience genuine human emotions through a particular body whilst maintaining the divine perspective necessary for true omnisubjective understanding. This specific metaphysical arrangement allows for both the particular, embodied experience of human emotions and the maintenance of divine consciousness needed for genuine empathy. Therefore, whilst omnisubjectivity does require divine embodiment, only the specific form of embodiment provided by the Incarnation satisfies the full requirements of divine empathetic understanding. Neither pantheism's complete identification of God with the universe nor panentheism's diffuse divine embodiment can provide the particular, focused experience of human emotions whilst maintaining the distinct divine perspective necessary for genuine empathy. This demonstrates why the Incarnation, rather than pantheism or panentheism, follows necessarily from omnisubjectivity.

So we can certainly escape this problem, yet, this argument from omnisubjectivity to a necessary incarnation faces another obvious problem. As Zagzebski (2023) and R.T. Mullins (2020) point out, omnisubjectivity is a power or ability that can be exercised. Hence, if this is an ability that need not be exercised, it is difficult to see why a necessary incarnation follows. That is, it is difficult to see why this power must be exercised at all and, thus, why an incarnation must actually take place within reality. In response to this issue, one can see that, in fact, the attribute of omnisubjectivity – God's ability to fully understand and empathise with all possible subjective experiences – requires God to have the inherent capacity for such understanding, which logically necessitates having a physical body. And, importantly, this stands even if God never actually creates beings with whom to be omnisubjective. This response thus fundamentally shifts the discussion from the active exercise of omnisubjectivity to the intrinsic capabilities required for its potential exercise. That is, it posits that for God to be truly omnisubjective, even in a latent or non-activated state, there must be a capacity for bodily experience embedded within himself. This capacity, by necessity, would thus require an incarnation – not as a response to the creation of sentient beings but as a precondition for the divine attribute of omnisubjectivity. The implication is that the incarnation is not merely an event or an action taken by God to achieve or demonstrate omnisubjectivity with created beings. Instead, it is an ontological necessity for God – a precondition for God's ability to be omnisubjective. One can thus take the incarnation to be a necessary action of God, even if his omnisubjectivity, as an ability possessed by God, is never actually exercised – as to just possess this ability, God must be embodied, and thus be incarnate.[12]

[12] This response here also deals with the potential objection that one could raise, which says that if incarnation is necessary, then God must also necessarily create in order to empathise with creatures and thus be omnisubjective. However, as again God needs to be incarnate to possess the ability to be omnisubjective, and not for him to exercise it by being empathetic with the creation that he brings about. And thus, as omnisubjectivity requires incarnation, this does not mean that it also requires a necessarily existing creation as well.

Taking all of these things into account, as premise (i)–(iii) have been shown to be true, then one can now take the conclusion of the *Subjectivity Argument*: *Therefore, God necessarily is incarnate*, as being true as well. One can thus affirm the veracity of the doctrine of the Incarnation, from an a priori standpoint, based on the success of the *Subjectivity Argument*. Or is that so, as the *Subjectivity Argument* seems to face the Correspondence Problem that was detailed previously, which stops an adherent of the doctrine of the Incarnation from affirming the result reached by the success of this argument – namely, that God necessarily must be incarnate. It will be important to focus our attention on addressing this issue now.

**Addressing the Correspondence Issue**

The Correspondence Issue, which can be raised against the *Subjectivity Argument*, provides a Christian with a reason not to affirm the conclusion of the *Subjectivity Argument*, and can be stated succinctly as follows:

(8) (Correspondence) The Subjectivity Argument implies a necessary and eternal incarnation for all members of the Trinity, which conflicts with the doctrine of the Incarnation's specific, historical incarnation of only the Son.

As noted previously, the Correspondence Issue highlights two key discrepancies between the argument's conclusion and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. The first discrepancy is that, while the argument concludes that God must be incarnate to be omnisubjective, it does not align with the Christian belief that specifically God the Son, and not the entire Trinity, became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, or as three different humans. In Christian theology, the Trinity comprises the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, each embodying God's nature but remaining distinct. The argument suggests that all three persons of the Trinity would need to be incarnate to maintain omnisubjectivity, conflicting with the doctrine's specification that only the Son underwent Incarnation. Secondly, the *Subjectivity Argument* implies that God's Incarnation is a necessary and eternal aspect of his nature, which contradicts the Christian understanding of the Incarnation as a historical event. According to Christian doctrine, the Incarnation occurred at a specific point in history, around 4 BC, with Jesus of Nazareth. This understanding frames the Incarnation as a divine intervention in human history, not as an eternal state of being for God. Therefore, the argument, by positing an essential and eternal incarnation, does not correspond with the traditional Christian view that sees the Incarnation as a temporally bounded event. Hence, the Correspondence Issue points out that the *Subjectivity Argument*, while affirming the necessity of God's Incarnation for omnisubjectivity, fails to align with the specifics of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation regarding both the identity of the

incarnate member of the Trinity and the historical nature of the Incarnation event. We can now focus on addressing these two challenges raised by the Correspondence Issue in turn.

To address the discrepancy between the necessity of God's incarnation (embodiment) for omnisubjectivity and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, which states only the Son is incarnate, we can focus on precisifying the notion of omnisubjectivity by introducing a further "form" of this property,[13] as proposed by Zagzebski (2023), and by introducing a new distinction between "direct" omnisubjectivity and "derivative" omnisubjectivity – which will, in combination, show that the argument, understood in this specific way, does not require that each of the persons of the Trinity must become incarnate, in order for them to have omnisubjectivity. According to Zagzebski (2023), omnisubjectivity can be conceived of in different forms. Previously, we explicated and assumed the primary form, which is that of the "total empathy" model; however, a secondary form of omnisubjectivity is what Zagzebski (2023, p. 70) calls the "Perceptual Model." The Perceptual Model, according to Zagzebski (2023), conceptualises God's omnisubjectivity as akin to human perception. This analogy, rooted in theological and scriptural texts, posits that God "sees" the world in a manner comparable to human sight.[14] Aquinas, according to Zagzebski (2023, p. 70), illustrates this model by likening God's timeless knowledge to a person on a mountaintop who sees the entire road below, unlike individuals on the road who see only their immediate vicinity. This analogy suggests that God perceives all time simultaneously, but it is important to note that God's "seeing" is not the same as human visual perception. In terms of omnisubjectivity, as Zagzebski (2023) notes, this model can extend to God's understanding of human thoughts and emotions – that is, it is like God sees into human minds, perceiving thoughts and feelings as if they were images on a screen or sounds from a speaker. This analogy implies that God perceives our internal states directly, much like watching a movie about our mental processes. However, the Perceptual Model, reaches its limits with the direct experience of feelings. While God might understand thoughts about emotions or pain, the actual experience of these states, such as the sensation of pain, is not something that can be perceived or overheard. Thus, God's consciousness of our feelings might be distinct from experiencing those feelings as we do. This model, therefore, while useful in conceptualising some aspects of divine knowledge and omnisubjectivity, particularly regarding thoughts and intentions, struggles with the direct, subjective experience of emotions and sensations. The inherent limitation is the perceptual distance, a fundamental separation between the knower (God) and the known (human experience), which is contradictory to the intimate understanding implied by

[13] Zagzebski (2023) introduces two other forms of omnisubjectivity: a "Panentheism" model and a "Creative Consciousness" model.

[14] However, this comparison is more metaphorical than literal, as God lacks physical sensory faculties.

omnisubjectivity.[15] Despite these issues, we can now take into account this form of omnisubjectivity together with the previously adduced version – namely, the total empathy model – and apply them within the trinitarian framework introduced above. This can be done as follows: each of the members of the Trinity is taken to be omnisubjective due to the fact that each is omniscient and omnipresent, and thus, necessarily, must be omnisubjective. However, despite each being omnisubjective, they are not all omnisubjective *in the exact same way*. That is, we can take it to be the case that the Son is omnisubjective, in a *direct* sense, in virtue of consciously grasping with perfect accuracy and completeness the first-person perspective of every conscious being. Meanwhile, the Father and the Spirit are omnisubjective, in *a derivate sense*, in virtue of seeing into the Son's mind and perceiving his thoughts and feelings. Thus, it is solely the Son who would be totally empathetic with humans and thus possess copies of each of their cognitive states, whereas the Father and Spirit would be able to perceive these states by perceiving, from an "outsider point of view" these copies located in the Son's mind.[16] Hence, the Father and the Spirit would not be empathic with humanity, but only the Son, which would result in the requirement only being for the Son to possess a body in order to have emotional states that are identifiable with the perception of bodily changes. Hence, the Son is omnisubjective in a direct sense, fully grasping the first-person perspective of every conscious being – which includes experiencing emotions as humans do, and thus requiring a physical form to truly possess these emotions and thus empathise with humanity. On the other hand, the Father and the Spirit are to be considered omnisubjective in a derivative sense. They perceive the Son's mind and, through him, understand human thoughts and feelings. This perspective allows them to access the human experience indirectly, by observing the empathetic experiences of the Son without themselves requiring Incarnation. Thus, only the Son would need to be incarnate to fully realise the empathetic aspect of omnisubjectivity. This precisified view suggests that while the Son engages in total empathy, experiencing human cognitive and emotional states directly, the Father and the Spirit engage in the form of perceptual omnisubjectivity – in that, they understand these states by observing them in the Son's mind, thus maintaining the unique role of the Son's Incarnation in Christian theology. This approach aligns with the teaching that only the Son is incarnate, as it is only he who requires a body to fully empathise with human emotions, viewed as perceptions of bodily changes. Given the potentially abstract nature of this proposal, it will be helpful to illustrate in Figure 1. the position being forwarded here (where "F" stands for the Father, "S" for the Son, "HS" for the Spirit, "H" for human cognitive states, the "black

[15] For the perceptive reader, these issues were thus why this model (and the Panentheism and Creative Consciousness models) was not put on the table at the beginning as a potential means for understanding omnisubjectivity, without, requiring that God must be incarnate – as if this model did not face these issues then one could affirm the reality of omnisubjectivity without Incarnation.

[16] This also creates room for the classical theist to continue to affirm God's (i.e., the Father's) impassibility and, yet, him still being omnisubjectivity (in a particular sense of the word).

arrows" represent direct omnisubjectivity (empathy or perceptual) and the "dashed arrows" represent indirect omnisubjectivity):

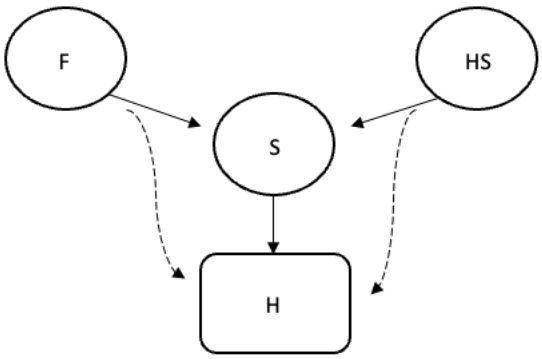


**Image 1. Direct and Indirect Omnisubjectivity**

Thus, by incorporating the dual models of omnisubjectivity – namely, the "Total Empathy Model" and the "Perceptual Model" – and differentiating between "direct" and "derivative" omnisubjectivity, this refined framework posits that only the Son, within the Trinity, is required to be incarnate for direct, empathetic engagement with human experiences. The Father and the Spirit, through derivative omnisubjectivity, perceive and understand these experiences by observing the Son's empathetic interactions, thus maintaining the unique and doctrinally consistent role of the Son's Incarnation in Christian theology. However, one could ask if the position that has been reached here ends up denying the *homoousious* of the divine persons – namely, that the persons of the Trinity are of the same nature. As one could say that only the Son has "real" omnisubjectivity, whilst the Father and Holy Spirit have a derivative or secondary omnisubjectivity. Against this, however, one can indeed double down on the fact that what is required for the homoousion of the divine persons is that they possess the same attribute – irrespective of whether it is had directly or derivatively. To illustrate this point about nature of omnisubjectivity within the Trinity and its relation to the concept of *homoousious*, consider a hypothetical example involving the concept of knowledge or vision, which can be analogously applied to understanding omnisubjectivity: Imagine three individuals who are tasked with understanding the complexity of a multifaceted gemstone. The first person (analogous to the Son) directly examines the gemstone with their own eyes, turning it in their hands and observing its colours and facets closely. The second and third individuals (analogous to the Father and Holy Spirit) do not directly handle or look at the gemstone. Instead, they are in a room with the first person and understand the gemstone's intricacies through the detailed descriptions provided by the first person. They rely on the first person's direct experience but are able to fully comprehend the nature of the gemstone through this secondary or derivative means of knowledge. In this example, all three individuals possess the attribute of understanding the gemstone, albeit through different means. The first has a direct, experiential understanding, while the second and third have an indirect, yet complete, comprehension based on the first's experience. This mirrors the

concept that within the Trinity, the Son's incarnation and direct human experience might represent a unique engagement with creation, offering omnisubjectivity through an embodied perspective. Meanwhile, the Father and the Holy Spirit, though not incarnate, share in this complete understanding of human experience through their perfect, intimate communion with the Son. This analogy helps to clarify that the essence or nature of the divine persons in the Trinity – homoousious – does not necessitate identical modes of operation or expression. Instead, what is fundamental is that all persons of the Trinity possess the same divine attribute of omnisubjectivity. The mode through which this attribute is realised or expressed (directly or derivatively) does not diminish the shared divine essence or the fullness of the attribute within each person of the Trinity. That is, the key is the possession of the attribute itself, which upholds the unity and co-substantiality (*homoousious*) of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, affirming that the Trinity encompasses the full depth of divine empathy and understanding, irrespective of the manner in which it is exercised. One can thus affirm the conclusion of the Subjectivity Argument that God is necessarily incarnate, on the basis of his omnisubjectivity, in the sense of the Son being so – without, however, having to negate the possession of (a form of) omnisubjectivity by the Father and the Son, despite them not being incarnate.

Now, to address the discrepancy between the implied eternal nature of God's incarnation (embodiment) for omnisubjectivity and the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation that views the incarnation as a specific historical event, we can focus on adopting the classical conception of God's relationship to time – that of divine timelessness,[17] which allows one to affirm the fact of the Son having always been "incarnate" – as there is no temporal sequence in the life of a timeless being (i.e. all events that occur within its life are simultaneous); yet, the effects, or the completion, of these actions can still be present, and extended through time. A way to better understand this point has been put forward by Brian Leftow (2002, p. 297), who utilises the notion of timelessness and "scattered temporal locations," which helps to clarify this point further. Specifically, as Leftow (2002) notes, earlier entities can have properties due to future events. For instance, one's belief yesterday that the next Pope will be Catholic was true based on a future event – and thus, according to Leftow (2002), it is possible to argue that God the Son was human before 4 BC due to what was set to occur at that time – that is, the Son was always human, due to the fact that the Incarnation would occur. This is justified, as noted by Leftow (2002), by considering that if the Son is human, he and his physical body (and soul) together form a whole. However, the Son, being the first part of this whole, is part of it from the beginning, similar to how the first brick laid is part of a wall. For instance, as Leftow (2002) observes, even if only one brick of a planned Memorial Wall is laid, it is still part of a wall. Hence, the Son is part of a human composite the moment he exists, even if

[17] For an explanation of how divine timelessness (immutability and impassibility) and omnisubjectivity are compatible, see (Zagzebski, 2023, pp. 90–111).

the rest of the composite is yet to come, because the builder's intent makes it so. Therefore, if God existed before 4 BC, it is valid to say that God the Son was human before 4 BC due to his future union with his human body (and soul). However, according to Leftow (2002), this does not necessarily mean the Son was incarnate before the flesh existed. As God did not take on flesh before 4 BC, and thus the event of becoming incarnate was not complete until then. Importantly, however, as Leftow (2002) notes, some events have "scattered temporal locations," like Booth's killing of Lincoln, which occurred over two points in time. Similarly, the Incarnation is a scattered event consisting of God taking on flesh and the flesh being taken on. The action of God taking on flesh is timeless, while the flesh comes to be in 4 BC, completing the event. Stating this all more fully, the assassination of Abraham Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth is an event composed of two distinct moments: the moment Booth shot Lincoln (t1) and the moment Lincoln died (t2). The act of shooting is seen as the beginning of the killing, and Lincoln's subsequent death is the completion of that act. The analogy highlights that while Booth's action of shooting was a singular act at a specific moment, the overall event of killing stretched over a period of time until Lincoln's death. It suggests that the killing wasn't a continuous event but rather a scattered event, composed of both the shooting and the eventual death of Lincoln. Thus, in applying this to the concept of the Incarnation – as Leftow (2002) does – the analogy suggests that the Incarnation can be viewed as a scattered event with two distinct but related aspects: the divine action of God taking on flesh (timeless, as God exists outside of time) and the historical moment when this flesh (in the person of Jesus) came to be in 4 BC. Just as Booth's act of shooting is part of his killing of Lincoln, God's act of taking on flesh is part of the Incarnation. The completion of this act doesn't require Booth's presence throughout the entire duration, nor does it necessitate that he undergoes an intrinsic change for the event to be completed. Similarly, the completion of the Incarnation doesn't involve a change in God's intrinsic nature; it is completed in the temporal realm with the birth of Christ in 4 BC. Thus, by embracing timelessness and scattered temporal location, one can understand that for God, there is no before or after – all moments are simultaneously present. Therefore, the state of being incarnate for God the Son is not constrained by a temporal sequence of events. This perspective thus allows for the eternal nature of the Incarnation in the divine realm, while still affirming its historical manifestation in human history. That is, it involves the timeless divine act of God taking on flesh and the historical event of this flesh becoming manifest in Jesus in 4 BC. Hence, the Incarnation – which is a result of the possession of God's omnisubjectivity – is both an eternal divine act and a specific historical event, thus aligning with the doctrine of the Incarnation. Consequently, this approach enables the affirmation of the *Subjectivity Argument*, as it acknowledges that God the Son, in his divine timelessness, has always been in a state of Incarnation, thus possessing the necessary understanding and empathy for human experiences. Simultaneously, it respects the historical specificity of the Incarnation as occurring in Jesus of Nazareth *at a specific time* – namely, 4 BC. Hence, this solution harmonises the

necessity of an eternal incarnation for the realisation of omnisubjectivity with the historical nature of the Incarnation—as the Incarnation can indeed be an eternal state, even though the completion of these actions will take place over an extended period of time.[18]

In addressing the Correspondence Issue raised against the *Subjectivity Argument*,[19] two solutions have been proposed: first, by differentiating between "direct" and "derivative" omnisubjectivity, it is argued that only the Son requires Incarnation for direct empathy with human experiences, while the Father and the Spirit understand these experiences indirectly, by observing the Son's interactions. This aligns the *Subjectivity Argument* with the Christian belief that only the Son is incarnate. Second, by embracing divine timelessness and the concept of "scattered temporal locations," as explained by Leftow (2002), allows for the understanding that the Son's state of being incarnate, which enables him to be omnisubjective (and thus totally empathetic with humanity), is eternal in the divine realm due to God's timeless nature, while its historical manifestation occurs in 4 BC with Jesus of Nazareth. This approach thus harmonises the eternal aspect of God's Incarnation with the historical nature of the Incarnation, thus allowing one to affirm the *Subjectivity Argument* while respecting doctrinal consistency. Taking all of these things into account, one can thus affirm the conclusion reached by the Subjectivity Argument – namely, that God necessarily is incarnate, without, however, having to face any issues of correspondence with the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. One can thus indeed, again, affirm the veracity

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[18] The conclusion that is reached by the *Subjectivity Argument*, particularly in the context of a pre-temporal Incarnation, dovetails intriguingly with Bruce McCormack's (2000) theological insights on Karl Barth's view on the Incarnation and election of Christ. This is that, McCormack (2000) emphasises the pre-temporal decision of God to be God-for-us in Christ. Hence, such a view posits that the incarnation is not merely a historical event but an eternal manifestation of God's nature – prior to the creation of the temporal world and the historical realisation of the Incarnation in time. Thus, we can indeed find some correspondence to the position argued here (and the adoption of Leftow's solution to our issue) in the current theological literature.

[19] One might say that the solution offered in the article to the Correspondence Problem feels complicated and *ad hoc*, as if a type of knowledge is good enough for the Father and the Holy Spirit, one would think it would be good enough for the Son as well. However, in response to this, one can indeed affirm that the solution to the Correspondence Problem is not *ad hoc* but is grounded on theological precedent in Christian Theology with regard to the distinct roles of the persons within the Trinity. This is that, traditionally, the Son's unique role as the mediator and revealer necessitates a direct form of empathy that is made available by an act of incarnation. In contrast, as the Father and the Spirit are not traditionally conceived of as having become incarnate, they are taken to engage with creation differently – in a manner that is consistent with their trinitarian roles – namely, that of overseeing and inspiring rather than mediating – and thus should not be expected to be required to possess this direct form of empathy that is made available by an incarnation. Hence, the differentiation in the way in which the persons of the Trinity are omnisubjective – namely, directly for the Son, and indirectly for the Father and the Spirit – is to be expected, given the specific direct relation to creation that the Son has through his unique role as a divine person with a human nature, and the more indirect relation to creation that the Father and the Spirit would have by solely being divine – and thus them working *through* the Son in his role as the mediating human.

of the doctrine of the Incarnation, from an a priori standpoint, based on the success of the *Subjectivity Argument*.

## Addressing Some Further Objections

Now, even though the main issues that can be raised against this argument have been addressed, it will be helpful to spell out three other important objections and their potential responses.[20]

1. *Objection*: Empathising with emotions necessitates actually having those states. However, there seem to be many emotions one cannot have if one is simultaneously experiencing one's own emotions. Can God truly feel what it's like to be afraid to die if he simultaneously knows he is the immortal God? It seems he only feels what it's like for others to be afraid to die. And if he can feel what it's like for others to be afraid to die without himself being afraid to die, it seems he can feel what it's like for others to have a body without needing to have a body himself.
   *Response*: This objection expresses the paradox of an omniscient, immortal being experiencing fear or any other inherently human emotion. Usually, to avoid this paradox, individuals adopt a classical theistic view where God is immutable and impassible, and thus, he does not experience emotions in the way humans do. However, the concept of omnisubjectivity, as detailed throughout, is a notion that enables one to affirm a classical theistic view of God without, however, having to also affirm the fact that God does not experience human emotion. That is, omnisubjectivity suggests that God understands and can recreate within himself the qualitative aspects of all subjective experiences, including fear of death, without necessarily having these experiences caused by external circumstances as humans do. This means that God's empathy involves an ability to fully "know" and "reproduce" these feelings internally – akin to a perfect actor who can embody a role fully without actually being the character. This form of empathy is profound and complete because it is not hindered by personal limitation – that is, it is the perfect re-enactment of human emotions within the divine consciousness. Thus, while God does not fear death in a human sense (due to his immortality), he comprehends this fear from the inside, experiencing it empathetically *as if he were human*. This ability is part of what makes God's compassion and empathy infinitely perfect – that is, he understands human fears and anxieties not as an observer from the outside, but as one who can internally simulate and thus truly empathise with these states.

[20] In order to not further extend the length of this article, the responses offered here to these objections will be brief, and thus will need to be further fleshed out in later work (such as that of the nature of the "Universal Body" hypothesis).

Moreover, the objection posits that if God can empathise with humans about death without fearing death himself, why could he not also understand bodily experiences without a body? This is an insightful point and pushes us to refine our understanding of divine empathy. Here, the distinction between cognitive and affective empathy becomes useful. This is that, cognitive empathy (understanding someone's emotions) might not necessitate a bodily incarnation, but *affective empathy* (feeling what another feels) could arguably require a more direct form of experiential knowledge, which physical incarnation provides. Thus, while God's omniscience and omnisubjectivity enable a profound understanding of all human experiences, the incarnation can be seen as enhancing this understanding by adding a lived, affective dimension to it. The incarnation allows God not only to know about human fears and joys as if from the inside but to experience these in a direct and embodied way, which thus enriches the divine-human empathetic connection – and, given that God is perfect (or maximally great), we would expect him to have this "enriched" form of connection, rather than a diminished one.

2. *Objection*: If God needs a body to feel others' emotions, it seems to imply that God must have many different bodies to feel the emotions specific to different bodies. There is a limited range of experiences you can have from living 30 years as a man in Israel 2000 years ago. What about experiencing menstrual cramps, being a slave in America, having a lung transplant, being a bat navigating with echolocation, etc.?
   *Response*: This objection challenges the idea of a singular incarnation capturing the full range of human experiences. To address this, we can posit the "Universal Body" hypothesis. This hypothesis proposes that God (i.e., the Son) could inhabit – in his "pre-temporal" state – a unique, multifaceted physical structure capable of experiencing every conceivable emotion through various physiological changes. That is, unlike normal earthly life forms constrained by their specific biology, this universal body would not be bound by typical biological limits. Instead, it would essentially function as a divine instrument engineered to simulate or directly experience a wide array of bodily states linked to different emotions. In spelling this out further, imagine a body equipped with adaptive physiology, which could modify its biological structures in "real-time" to replicate the necessary physical conditions for any emotional experience. For example, to understand the emotion of fear in a mouse, which involves a rapid heartbeat and heightened alertness, the Universal Body could temporarily adapt its cardiac and nervous systems to mirror these changes. Alongside this, the Universal Body might feature empathetic mirroring – where it does not undergo permanent change but can momentarily "tune in" to the physical states associated with specific emotions across different species or individuals. This advanced form of empathy would allow the body to act as a conduit that reflects or channels the physical and emotional states of other beings without undergoing the changes themselves.

Now, this Universal Body, as noted previously, represents the pre-temporal state of God's interaction with the universe – which is that of all-encompassing potential to understand and empathise with all forms of life through a direct and intimate connection with their experiences. However, when it comes to his temporal manifestation on Earth, one can posit that this universal capacity condenses into a singular form. This is that, when this universal empathetic capacity manifests on Earth, it does so through a specific, singular incarnation, such as that seen in the person of Christ. In this earthly manifestation, the Universal Body adopts a human form, living and experiencing life as a man in a particular place and time. And thus this singular manifestation allows for a focused, relatable presence that humans can interact with and understand on a personal level. That is, the singular incarnation that manifests on Earth is particularly significant because it provides a concrete expression of divine empathy and solidarity with human suffering and joy. Hence, by choosing to experience life as a human, God's universal empathy is able to become a lived reality that people can witness and connect with. This incarnation as a man allows God to engage directly with the human condition and thus share in its particular joys, sorrows, challenges, and triumphs. Hence, in this particular way, the seemingly limitless adaptability and empathy of the Universal Body are channelled through a singular human life, making divine understanding and compassion both accessible and exemplary to humanity.

3. *Objection*: Assuming that the somatic feeling theory is correct, then it still seems to be a good theory for understanding human emotions, without implying that we should think the same way about emotions in God. Humans see with eyes, speak with vocal cords, move with muscles, think with the brain, make choices with the brain, etc., without us thinking that, therefore, God must see with eyes, speak with vocal cords, etc. So why should we think that emotions in God require a body even though they require a body for humans?
   *Response*: This objection focuses on the somatic feeling theory, which is at the foundation of the argument. And thus, in response to this, if one embraces the perspective that human emotions are closely linked to our physical states, as has been posited throughout, we can extend this understanding to divine emotions in an analogical sense. For God to experience emotions as humans do, it must be the case, under the framework operative here, that God would need a similar physiological setup – that is, a body that undergoes the same changes as human bodies during emotional experiences, given the definition of what an emotion is (i.e., the perception of *bodily changes*). With vision, communication and motion, it is not *definitionally* the case that these include a body for their operation; however, for emotions, given the somatic feeling theory, emotions do require this. So, if God has emotions (based on his empathetic grasp of other cognitive beings' emotions) he must have a body – without this also being the case for his vision, communication and motion. However, perspective doesn't suggest a limitation of God's capabilities but rather emphasises God's willingness to align closely with the human condition, which thus showcases a

> profound level of divine solidarity. This thus suggests that true empathetic understanding requires experiencing emotions in the same physical and emotional context as they occur in humans. Thus, God's decision to inhabit a bodily form capable of experiencing human-like emotional responses doesn't diminish his divinity but rather highlights a deep commitment to engage with and understand his creation in the most relatable and comprehensive manner possible. Hence, just as humans use eyes to see and ears to hear, if emotions fundamentally involve bodily responses, then for God to fully understand and share these human experiences, a similar bodily existence is necessary. This analogical approach thus helps bridge the gap between the divine and the human, ultimately suggesting that the incarnation is a deliberate act to experience life as humans do, thereby enhancing God's ability to empathise with human suffering and joy *on their own terms*.

On the basis of these responses, and the overall support that has been provided for the *Subjectivity Argument*, one has good grounds for affirming the veracity of the doctrine of the Incarnation, from an a priori standpoint.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Subjectivity Argument* presents an a priori case for the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, drawing on the nature of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good. Central to this argument is the concept of omnisubjectivity and its relationship to the incarnation, which posits that God's omniscience and omnipresence require him to have a complete grasp of the cognitive experiences of all conscious entities. Hence, the *Subjectivity Argument*, supported by this concept of omnisubjectivity and the somatic feeling theory of emotions, posits that to fully empathise with human emotions, God must experience bodily changes, thus requiring an incarnate state. However, this raises the Correspondence Issue, which questions the compatibility of this argument with the specifics of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Addressing this issue involved refining the concept of omnisubjectivity by utilising a different form of omnisubjectivity – the perceptual model – and distinguishing between "direct" and "derivative" omnisubjectivity. This distinction asserts that only the Son requires Incarnation for direct empathy with human experiences, while the Father and Spirit engage in derivative empathy, thus aligning with the Christian belief of the Son's unique Incarnation. Additionally, the concept of divine timelessness reconciles the eternal nature of God's Incarnation with its historical manifestation in Jesus of Nazareth, respecting both the eternal aspect of the Incarnation in the divine realm and its historical occurrence in human history. This refined approach thus supports the doctrine of the Incarnation and allows one to affirm the conclusion of the *Subjectivity Argument* – namely, that God is necessarily incarnate – without, however, facing any issues of correspondence with the doctrine

itself. Thus, one can affirm the veracity of the doctrine of the Incarnation from an a priori standpoint.

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