ROCZNIKI FILOZOFICZNE
Tom LXXIII, numer 1 – 2025
DOI: https://doi.org/10.18290/rf25731.4

T. J. MAWSON

OMNISUBJECTIVITY AND SOME OF ITS IMPLICATIONS

1. WHY POSIT OMNISUBJECTIVITY?

In a famous passage from *The Essay*, Locke tells us that it would not

> carry any Imputation of *Falshood* to our simple *Ideas, if* by the different Structure of our Organs, it were so ordered, That *the same Object should produce in several Men's Minds different* Ideas at the same time; *v.g*. if the Idea, that a *Violet* produced in one Man's Mind by his Eyes, were the same that a *Marigold* produced in another Man's, and *vice versa*. For since this could never be known: because one Man's Mind could not pass into another Man's Body, to perceive, what Appearances were produced by those Organs; neither the *Ideas* hereby, nor the Names, would be at all confounded, or any *Falshood* be in either. For all Things, that had the Texture of a *Violet*, producing constantly the *Idea*, which he called *Blue*; and those which had the Texture of a *Marigold*, producing constantly the *Idea*, which he as constantly called *Yellow*, whatever those Appearances were in his Mind; he would be able as regularly to distinguish Things for his Use by those Appearances, and understand, and signify those distinctions, marked by the Names *Blue* and *Yellow*, as if the Appearances, or *Ideas* in his Mind, received from those two Flowers, were exactly the same, with the *Ideas* in other Men's Minds. I am nevertheless very apt to think, that the sensible *Ideas*, produced by any Object in different Men's Minds, are most commonly very near and undiscernibly alike. For which Opinion, I think, there might be many Reasons offered: but that being besides my present Business, I shall not trouble my Reader with them; but only mind

T. J. MAWSON, Edgar Jones Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy, Oxford University; correspondence address: Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, Woodstock Rd, Oxford OX2 6GG, UK; e-mail: tim.mawson@philosophy.ox.ac.uk; ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2714-4736.

> him, that the contrary Supposition, if it could be proved, is of little use, either for the Improvement of our Knowledge, or Conveniency of Life; and so we need not trouble our selves to examine it. (LOCKE 1975, 389, bk. 2, chap. 32, § 15)

There is something profoundly plausible about Locke's central claim in this passage, namely that there is something which it is subjectively like to see a particular colour. Whilst this central claim is plausible, one cannot help but be suspicious of some of the claims with which Locke surrounds it. One particular peripheral claim of Locke's is, it seems to me, particularly suspect. This is the claim that it is only the fact of its being besides his current business which prevents him from troubling his readers with a solution to the sceptical puzzle which his central claim generates. The sceptical puzzle which his central claim generates is that it appears that we can never *know* whether or not an object publicly identifiable as a particular colour, say red, is giving rise in one person to a different subjective idea from that to which it is giving rise in another. Perhaps the sensation which I have when I see an object which we both label "red" is that which, were you to have it, you would call the sensation of blue. The more one thinks about this sceptical puzzle, the more one cannot help but conclude that Locke probably did *not* possess the "many reasons" for rejecting it which he—somewhat hand-wavingly—suggests might be offered, rather as the more one thinks about it, the more one comes to think that Fermat probably did not have the proof of his last theorem which his marginalia famously claimed he had and claimed he was failing to provide only because it would not fit on the page. Although it is a relatively late addition to the treasury of sceptical puzzles to which philosophers have been contributing since antiquity, this puzzle—sometimes called "the problem of the inverted spectrum", as one might imagine an isomorphic photo-negative-like difference between two people—is one which my experience of "introducing" it to students suggests is instantly plausible to everyone coming across it for the "first" time. Indeed, I felt the need to pop scare quotation marks around 'introducing' and 'first' in that last sentence as I find that most of my students say that they have already had the same thought themselves, prior to me offering it up for their consideration: surely, they think, such a sceptical puzzle must have been a commonplace for millennia, on a par with the "How do you know you're not dreaming right now?" sceptical

puzzle. They are consequently surprised to learn that Locke is the first person who we know to have articulated it.[1]

Frank Jackson's "Mary" thought experiment drives home the conviction that Locke's central contention is right (JACKSON 1982, 127–36). Mary comes to know something new when she leaves the black and white room in which she has been brought up (having therein read what are supposed for the purposes of the thought-experiment to be scientifically complete textbooks about the objective properties of colour) and sees a red object for the first time. She comes to know what red looks like. There is something which it is subjectively like for me to experience what I refer to with phrases such as "a red patch in my visual field". Such a sensation is paradigmatically caused in me by objects which are publicly labelled as red, but it is not always so caused (one can hallucinate) and, in principle, what it is like for you to experience the colour of one of these objects which is publicly labelled as red may not be the same as what it is like for me to do so; and, importantly for the sceptical puzzle, this difference might never show up in any behaviours, including linguistic behaviours. Thus, it cannot be captured by scientific—objective—descriptions. Nevertheless, we may refer to such subjective sensations in our language and we may discuss them (so as to formulate the sceptical puzzle, for example). In short, in the standard terminology, there are qualia, 'qualia' being the name given to that which Locke referred to in this context as ideas'. (I shall use that term and also the adjective 'quali*a*tative' [note an extra 'a'] from now on.) And finally, so-called "philosophical zombies"—that is to say, creatures who are from the outside indistinguishable from the rest of us but, unlike (we suppose) the rest of us, are entirely "qualia blind", i.e. have no qualia at all (indeed they have no mental life at all)—strike most on reflection as conceptually possible.[2] And if so, the central Lockean claim is yet further

[1] Locke is often credited with discovering the problem of the inverted spectrum, though he is prefigured in part at least by Nicolas Malebranche, who writes in *The Search after Truth*: "There are some people who see certain objects yellow with one eye and as green or blue with the other. Yet if these people be supposed born one-eyed, or with two eyes disposed to see as blue what we call green, they would think they saw objects as having the same colour that we see them as having because they would always have heard called green what they would see as blue" (MALEBRANCHE 1997, 66). Perhaps the reason this puzzle was a relative latecomer to the philosophical scene is tied up with the "revolution in subjectivity" (ZAGZEBSKI 2023, 16), of which Zagzebski also speaks in her *The Two Greatest Ideas: How Our Grasp of The Universe and Our Minds Changed Everything* (2021, chaps. 2 and 3).

[2] Although it is perhaps worth noting that he too had precursors, the idea of philosophical zombies is most closely associated with David Chalmers; see e.g. CHALMERS (1996).

underwritten; it is further underwritten even as we are led to be all the more suspicious of another peripheral claim of Locke's, his airy dismissal of the matters he's raised as of little importance. On the contrary, even if it wouldn't be bad were one to fall in love with, marry, and spend the rest of one's life with someone with an inverted spectrum, it would be awful if one did this with a philosophical zombie, going through perhaps decades imagining shared feelings, intimacies, confidences and so on, none of which were really there. The fact that one could never realise one's fate does not detract from the horror, but adds to it.

Thus it is that we may say that most will think that Locke has raised for us a substantive sceptical puzzle, substantive in the sense that it is one that cannot be dissolved with moves in the Philosophy of Language. Even if we may be impressed by Wittgenstein-inspired beetle-in-the-box/private-language argument considerations (WITTGENSTEIN 1953, § 243, § 256ff., and § 293), any attempt to use such arguments against the existence of qualia, so understood, is doomed to fail because, on reflection, it is always going to seem more plausible to us that there is something which it is like to see red in the way that Locke has captured than it is that language must work a certain way. And thus, any such arguments are in the end going to be "Moorean shifted", to call into doubt the conjunction of their premises; they are not going to be taken to show that qualia do not exist. If then this sort of subjectivity is resolutely a "thing", then it is a thing that is to be known. I know what red looks like. I suppose that you know the same. I know I am not a philosophical zombie. And I suppose that you know the same of yourself. A perfect knower would thus need to know all this that we collectively know; and He would need to know that which it appears none of us know but all of us suspect, that these publicly identifiable red objects seem the same to each of us, none of us does in fact have an inverted spectrum; and that no philosophical zombies lurk amongst us. As a thesis about the property of omniscience then, omnisubjectivity, as Zagzebski defines it, seems irresistible. If we grant it, a question naturally arises: how are we to understand how God knows this aspect of what it is we are committed to thinking that He does know? Zagzebski provides three possible models in answer to this question.

2. HOW BEST TO UNDERSTAND OMNISUBJECTIVITY?

I suggest that of the models Zagzebski offers, the Empathy Model is to be preferred over the alternatives, primarily as it allows God not to depend on creation for His omnisubjectivity, which is important—crucial even—for those who think along traditional theistic lines. It allows His omniscience (incorporating omnisubjectivity then, see the previous section) to be an essential property of His and yet for Him to be free not to create anything other than Himself. It also allows for His perfect moral goodness, as perfect moral goodness requires Him to know facts about certain qualia (e.g. how pain feels) before He can be morally responsible in creating creatures who will experience these qualia. The other models Zagzebski discusses do not allow for this. I shall now briefly defend these claims.

On the Empathy Model, as it is best understood,[3] we may say the following.

In what we may call the logical if not temporal moment "prior" to creation, God knows what red seems like through imagining what red seems like. He does not imagine that He is seeing red; He does not have a red patch in His visual field or some such, as one might have if one were in the presence of something red and looking towards it or if one were having a particular sort of hallucination; imagining what red seems like is not it seeming to one that one is seeing something red. God can distinguish between what it is He is imagining as possible and what it is He is knowing as actual, just as created beings such as ourselves may do and usually do manage to do. So, "prior" to creation, God holds in His imagination an idea of what red seems like which is not itself something that seems red to Him. And the same goes for all other qualia. This constitutes His omnisubjectivity.

We have to be careful—perhaps more careful than Zagzebski sometimes is—of thinking of what it is for one to imagine what red seems like as one's having a *copy* of an experience of red in one's mind. Copies are very naturally thought of as sharing many features with those things of which they are copies; indeed, a perfect copy would be naturally thought of as sharing all its intrinsic features with the thing of which it is a perfect copy. One's imagining a red patch is not one's having a copy of a red patch in that sense of copy; indeed, it's arguably not having a copy of a red patch in

[3] My suggestions as to how it is best understood will be controversial and are certainly dependent on contestable claims a defence of which would take one well outside the parameters of the current paper.

any sense of copy. It is one's having a representation, for sure, but not a representation which is such through a copying relation as, say, a detailed scale model of a proposed building is a representation of how that building would look if completed through itself instantiating significant properties that the building would have—its relative dimensions and colours.

It is worth repeating this point, as it is easy to overlook it and thereby think that the Empathy Model generates a difficulty for the concept of God, the difficulty allegedly being that to be omnisubjective, God Himself must feel what are sometimes called "creepy" emotions, that is feelings which it is somehow (non-morally) inappropriate for Him to feel even though there is nothing morally problematic about them in themselves (e.g. sexual attraction) or that He must have feelings which it is impossible for a morally perfect being to feel (e.g. vindictive delight in the suffering of another) or for a Holy being to feel (e.g. unholiness).[4] Given that there is something that it is like to imagine a red patch, for example, it *is* an implication of God's being omnisubjective that He Himself has qualia. We could call the feel of imagined qualia the "meta qualia" for each of what we might then call the "first-order qualia" imagined. But, in these terms, it is not an implication of God's being omnisubjective that He has any first-order qualia at all. Tradition, from which we have no need to depart, tells us that in fact God experiences perfect blessedness.[5] So, supposing as I shall be that this is right, the omnisubjective God *does* Himself experience all those first-order qualia the experiencing of which could add to His blessedness (and none which would detract from it). But God's empathetic knowledge of first-order qualia ranges more widely than those of which He has experience; He knows how first-order qualia which He cannot feel do feel to those who have them. And His ideas of such first-order qualia obviously then do not depend on His feeling them. The point, to repeat it then, is that God's ideas of how such first-order qualia feel, even if themselves qualitative, are not, as Hume taught, fainter versions of impressions, i.e. copies of the feelings themselves. Recalling in one's imagination the very painful headache one had yesterday and from which one has since completely

[4] See e.g. MULLINS (2020, 1:1–18). Zagzebski's discussion of this problem begins on page 99 of her *Omnisubjectivity.*

[5] I am here ignoring certain "strong" interpretations of impassibility, which have it that God feels nothing at all; on the mainstream tradition as I am interpreting it, divine impassibility is compatible with God's feeling perfect blessedness.

recovered does not set one's recovery back a notch by being in itself a somewhat painful sensation.

We are not helped in appreciating this crucial point by the fact that, at least in English, talk of imagining can serve both for imagining as it is understood here in the Empathy Model and for imagining in the sense that allows for delusion. So, a construction such as "Last night, as I read *Pride and Prejudice*, I imagined what it must be like to be a young unmarried woman of a particular social class in the particular time and place it is set" is not suggestive of mental confusion. One is simply empathising with such a person. However, the locution "Last night, as I finished off that second bottle and started on my twentieth anecdote, I imagined I was a fascinating conversationalist" is suggestive that one was suffering from some misapprehension at the time; one was not simply empathising with someone who seemed to themselves fascinating, but seeming so to oneself. However, careful grammar can keep clear the distinction: imagining what it is like to experience x, y, z is one thing; imagining experiencing x, y, z is another. If I can imagine what it is like to see snakes coming out of the walls, that is one thing and evidence that I am normal (most people can do this); if I am imagining that there are snakes coming out of the walls, that is another thing and evidence I should seek medical help, for imagining in this sense is supposing something which is contrary to fact. God's omniscience dictates that, in the first sense, God imagines everything, and, in the second sense, He imagines nothing. In short, "there is no reason at all to think … that perfectly grasping what an experience is like in imagination is the same as having it" (ZAGZEBSKI 2023, 85).

The facts about how qualia seem are constitutive of their identity as the qualia that they are; they are not as they are due then to a creative act of God's. It's not that the quale of red could have seemed different from the way that it does seem and that God thus needed to fix it to seem as it does by some act of the will. The claim that an object publicly identifiable as red might cause in someone a quale which the rest of us (presuming we see it as red) would say, were we to become aware of it, was the quale of blue, makes sense; but the claim that the quale of red could itself be the quale of blue does not make sense. There's no logically possible world in which qualia are different. So, God can create a universe with natural laws such that certain things will cause red qualia in certain creatures in certain circumstances and others will not (and to be omniscient about the sort of world He is creating, God needs to be omnisubjective so as to know which

laws of this sort, if any, He is creating when He creates). But God cannot create the qualiatative feel of red and so on. Instead, He simply inspects the nature of qualia in His imagination, as He does, say, the nature of right-angled triangles; and, in the light of this knowledge, He decides whether or not to create things that will cause qualia, e.g. objects that will appear red to creatures with a given nature in given circumstances, just as He decides whether or not to create triangular objects, i.e. ones which will have right angles and satisfy Pythagoras' theorem.

An important implication of this model is that, on it, just as God does not depend on His experience of red to know what red seems like, so God does not depend on some creature experiencing red to know what red seems like; that would be to make His knowing how red seems dependent upon a creature's doing so and it would thus preclude His knowing what red seems like in a world which theists will wish to say is a metaphysically possible world, one where God chooses to create nothing at all. In such a creation-free world, God still has His essential properties, including then His omni-science and including then His omnisubjectivity; He knows what red seems like even in worlds in which nobody ever experiences red. And, as indicated, He needs to know this in order to know what universe it is He is creating in those worlds in which He creates universes, what creatures, if any, will have what qualiatative sensations. In Zagzebski's terms, our model needs to imply that God could be counteractually omnisubjective. The Empathy Model gives us this. The other models Zagzebski canvasses (to my mind then, perhaps rather too favourably canvasses) do not give us this. The perceptual model and the panentheistic model make God's knowledge of red possible only in worlds in which someone experiences red, so that the relevant quale is either there to be perceived by God in the mind of another or is already a part of God's mind in virtue of creatures' minds being a part of God's. That makes omnisubjectivity impossible in creation-free worlds; and so these models should be rejected on those grounds alone if we take the project of understanding omnisubjectivity to be that of understanding how the theistic God may be omnisubjective.

Finally, it seems plausible that God would need to have the knowledge which the Empathy Model describes to be morally responsible in creating sentient creatures for whom disvaluable qualia, such as pain, are possibilities. Had —*per impossibile*—God *not* known what pain feels like, "prior" to creation, He would not have been morally responsible in creating as He did, namely a universe with creatures in it who can and do in fact feel pain.

Had—*per impossibile*—He not known how pain feels, then He would not have known that He was creating creatures who could feel pain in a sense which entailed His knowing what is essential to pain, namely what it feels like. It is however plausible that in a scenario in which God thus failed of omnisubjectivity, God would have been culpably reckless in creating as He did. An analogue would be a situation in which a doctor proposes performing a given operation on someone without administering an anaesthetic, yet with no idea one way or the other as to whether or not the operation will be painful to the patient. So, it is true that "if God does not know in advance what it would be like for persons to have … experiences of … suffering, his plan for rewarding or punishing those persons lacks the crucial feature of knowing the precise outcome of alternative plans" (ZAGZEBSKI 2023, 119). But it is also true that God would lack a condition for being appropriately morally responsible—for having done His "due diligence", as it were—prior to creation as such. God needs to be like an ideally-responsible doctor, knowing exactly how bad pain is going to feel for us in all our particularities, if He is to be responsible for His choices as a foreseen (even if perhaps unintended) result of which we suffer the pains to the intensities and extents which we do suffer them. The Empathy Model can give one this. And again, the other models Zagzebski considers cannot.[6]

3. AN OBJECTION TO THIS WAY OF UNDERSTANDING OMNISUBJECTIVITY

An implication of the Empathy Model which I have drawn out and argued is broadly favourable to a traditional theistic picture is then that God can know what red seems like without Himself experiencing it; and the same for pain, and so on. This implication will be in itself *prima facie* very counterintuitive to some; indeed, I would hazard it will be *prima facie* very counterintuitive to most. So, I shall spend a moment defending the *ultima facie* plausibility of this implication in this section before moving on. To this end, I shall invite us to recall the Mary thought experiment and consider some adaptations to it, ones which I hope will show that, contrary to what one might at first think (and indeed contrary to what the original Mary thought experiment might reinforce one in thinking), it is *not*

[6] This follows so quickly from essential features of the other models that I do not think it merits argument.

conceptually necessary for one to have had an experience of red in order for one to know what red seems like.

If we remember Jackson's original version of the thought experiment, we may reflect on the fact that it is plausible that on leaving her black and white room for the first time and seeing something red, Mary comes to know something new—what red looks like to her—precisely because we suppose that anything she could have done prior to then could not have given her this knowledge. We naturally suppose that only with the relevant experience could she come to have the relevant knowledge. However, we should resist the empiricist intuition that in principle it is always true that there is "nothing in the mind that was not first in the senses". At this stage, I wish to advance two variants of the Mary thought experiment, which may embolden us to stop thinking of this, admittedly attractive, empiricist principle as a conceptual necessity.

On the first variant, we suppose that, prior to leaving the black and white room in which she has been brought up, Mary suddenly starts complaining that things in her experience are only black, white, and shades of grey; and that her life is impoverished in this regard in a way she says she can now easily and fully *imagine* it need not be, not simply *cognise* that it need not be. She tells us that she longs particularly to see something red, for red is, she tells us, her favourite colour. She starts behaving, in other words, in much the same way the rest of us might if we had been imprisoned in the black and white room and were missing the world of colour, though in her case she does not say of herself that she has ever experienced that which she is now missing. When Mary eventually leaves the room and sees a red object for the first time, she instantly recognises it as such, without any of us needing to say of the new sensation which she is having that it is a sensation of red. And the same for other colours. "They're all just as I imagined them," she says. I suggest that the best description of Mary in the scenario as described has it that she instantaneously developed knowledge of how colours seem prior to leaving her black and white room for the first time; it should be counted as knowledge even though at that stage she had not the capacity to compare that set of ideas about how colours seem with any previous experiences which she had had and had learnt to categorise as experiences of colour.[7] This first variant on the Mary thought experiment

[7] Here we might draw helpfully on Wittgenstein's famous discussion of recognising a red flower, which shows, I take it, that one may know what red looks like without comparing it to any previously held idea of how red seems in one's mind (WITTGENSTEIN 1989, 3). Similarly,

shows us then, I am suggesting, that someone might in principle know what qualia are like without having had experience of them. The second variant does the same.

On the second variant, we suppose that an exact psycho-physical simulacrum of Mary in the state that she exists immediately after she has left the room and seen a red object for the first time is created in an instant by a demon and placed in a black and white room such as in the original thought experiment. So, to this simulacrum—Doppelganger-Mary, we may call her—it appears as if she has lived for years in a black and white room from which she recently escaped, and that, after having left the room and seen, for example, a red object for the first time, she has now somehow been teleported back into it. Naturally then, she bemoans what she takes her fate; she'd only just got to see what red was like and so on; and now that has been taken away from her. Or so she thinks. In fact, Doppelganger-Mary has never before been in the room in which she now finds herself; she has never left it; and she hasn't been returned to it. Rather, she was created moments earlier in the room for the first time with a lot of false memories of a life she never led. In particular then she has never, contrary to her apparent memories, seen a red object. Doppelganger-Mary is now allowed to leave the room for the first time (she will of course think of it as her being allowed out for the second time); and she sees a red object for the first time (she will think of it as for the second time). Of this scenario, it seems we should say that she does not come to know what red seems like at the moment she in fact first sees it; that's certainly not the way it *seems* to her and how things seem to her is surely crucial. Doppelganger-Mary already knew what red seems like prior to that moment; Doppelganger-Mary's situation on seeing red for the first time in this second variant of the Mary thought experiment is not—phenomenologically, from the inside—the same as that of Mary in the original thought experiment. Doppelganger-Mary has nothing new to learn from the experience of red despite it being the case that she has never experienced red before. So, again we can see that we have reason to think that one can in principle know what red seems like without experiencing red.

A final way to support the plausibility of the implication that it is conceptually possible to know how something seems without oneself having had the relevant experience comes from a consideration of art and

I am suggesting, it is conceptually possible to recognise what red seems like without comparing it to any previous experience which one has had of red.

indeed I suggest that this shows not simply that it is conceptually possible to come to know the qualiatative feel of some experience absent having it, but that many of us do actually come to know of such things; such knowledge is a real possibility, because an actuality, for us.

Firstly, and least controversially, we can say that in reading a novel, or indeed certain other types of literature, one can come to understand what it would be like to believe a certain thing without oneself believing it. For example, I have never read *Mein Kampf*, but it seems plausible that, if I were to do so, I would find myself understanding how it would be to see the world of Hitler's time in the way that he saw it and that, sadly, many of his fellow countrymen came to see it. Although some reading *Mein Kampf* might be infected, as it were, by this worldview and themselves come to see the world in this way, it is not necessary that one be so infected; one might read *Mein Kampf* and thereby understand what it would be like to think this way without inclining any the more to think this way oneself; indeed, one might be so horrified by the worldview that one came imaginatively to understand that one became very antagonistic to it precisely for having understood it. So, whilst there is a possibility of "cognitive seepage", as we might put it, from imagining successfully what it would be like to believe x, y, z to oneself believing x, y, z, this possibility need not become an actuality. Philosophers, I suggest, are particularly forearmed against such cognitive seepage, as our day-to-day activities involve us considering the validity of arguments and, as such, positions the actual truth of which we as a matter of course treat as an irrelevance. In short, we can come to know what it would be like to believe something without ourselves believing it.

Secondly, and more controversially, I suggest the parallel thesis that our engagement with works of art enables us to come to know what it would be like to *feel* something without ourselves feeling it. That, I suggest, is in part what makes these works of art valuable. In properly engaging with such works, we do not have to take on the beliefs *or have the feelings* we come to know about (and we don't usually do so). That we can know of ourselves that we won't do so is what can prevent our engaging with art which deals with bad beliefs and feelings being imprudent or immoral. Had he appreciated this, Plato would have been less suspicious of the arts. That one often doesn't come close to feeling the feelings depicted in art is shown by the fact that I can enjoy reading a novel that is all about grief; I can find a film which is all about terrified teenagers being hunted down by a serial

killer funny; I can be bored by a play that is all about characters who are constantly overly excited; and so on. Thus, in reading *Mein Kampf*, one might come to know what it feels like to be virulently antisemitic, without oneself feeling that way; indeed, again one might be so horrified by one's imaginatively grasped understanding of the feeling that one became more disposed than ever against feeling it. Just as there need not be cognitive seepage, there need not be affective seepage. A final variant of Jackson's Mary thought experiment may be helpful in illustrating the point.

Consider Love-Starved Mary. Love-Starved Mary is brought up in an environment devoid of any loving human interaction; her material needs are met by actors who are trained to be entirely emotionally neutral as they interact with her. However, despite this lack of experience of love, she is given access to the world's art depicting love and immerses herself in it—paintings, plays, novels, movies, the lot. It seems to me that it would be quite possible for Love-Starved Mary to come know what it would be like to have someone love her in objective terms; she would realise that they would say to her things such as "I love you"; they'd hold hands with her; and so on. But she would not come to believe that anyone has ever said to her "I love you", and so on. There would be no cognitive seepage. And, as for beliefs, so for feelings. It would be quite possible for her to come to know what it would be subjectively like to love and to be loved. She would come to know what love feels like, but herself would feel no love or at least need not do so—there need be no affective seepage. We may now imagine a happy ending to the story. One of the actors who has been paid to keep her in her love-starved prison falls in love with her; breaks her out; and the two head off into the sunset, Mary recognising this actor's love for her and in turn falling in love with him. And when Mary recognises his love for her and her love for him, she is recognising behaviours and a feeling which she had previously only grasped in her imagination, from her reading. This variant shows that one might know what love feels like prior to feeling it. And it provides an analogy for how an omniscient being could in principle achieve omnisubjectivity without Himself feeling anything beyond the meta-qualia (even if we wish to keep with a traditional view that God does Himself actually feel first-order qualia, specifically those constitutive of perfect blessedness).

Having sketched the version of the omnisubjectivity thesis that I take from Zagzebski and endorse and having defended it against a possible objection to its implication (that one may know how qualia feel without

experiencing them), I wish to close by considering some implications of the view.

4. SOME IMPLICATIONS OF OMNISUBJECTIVITY

Zagzebski links subjectivity in persons to their irreplaceable value, citing Hans Urs von Balthasar and Karol Wojtyła (ZAGZEBSKI 2023, 19) in support. One could challenge the idea that personhood requires subjectivity; even if personhood precludes being a philosophical zombie, is it really conceptually impossible for there to be persons, no less irreplaceably valuable than the rest of us, who fail to have any subjectivity?

Supposing that one is of normal capacities, it may appear that one can imagine slowly losing more and more qualiatative dimensions to one's life—first one's taste; then one's sight; then one's hearing; and so on, until, in the end, one becomes entirely qualia-blind. One might with *prima facie* plausibility suggest that, at the end of this process, one would still be a person, with whatever irreplaceable value one has remaining intact despite these losses. But of course, as one seeks to imagine the endpoint of this process, one will do so with a certain degree of horror; one might imagine that one would feel increasingly and terribly isolated, lonely, diminished, etc.; but, as these feelings are qualia, so, insofar as one is thinking of them as still present, one has not really yet imagined oneself at the endpoint at all. At the endpoint, *ex hypothesi*, nothing seems any way to one, even the fact that nothing seems any way to one does not itself seem any way to one—it doesn't seem horrifying, a terrible diminishment, and so on. So, the real endpoint, where one's final vestiges of subjectivity have disappeared, is unimaginable in that sense "from the inside". Might one yet, as one transitioned to that end point, remain as a person; might one yet have a mental life, believing of oneself, for example, that one once had had qualia and remembering them in one's imagination, as on the Empathy Model? No, for to remember how red seemed to one is to have the relevant meta-quale, and of course *all* qualia have been eliminated at this endpoint. Although I am not *sure*, I thus do incline to think that, with the final elimination of any element of subjectivity, one would cease to exist as a person. Without any subjectivity, there would be no point of view from which beliefs were had, which would be for there to be no beliefs; "at best" a philosophical zombie would have replaced one.

So, God could have created a world of philosophical zombies, but then, if the argument of the previous paragraph is right, they would not have been persons. Even if the argument of the previous paragraph is not right and entirely qualia-blind persons are possibilities, it is very plausible that such persons would not have been capable of fulfilling God's purposes for persons in creation, that is, coming to love one another and Him perfectly, for love, at least in its perfect form, requires feeling love and only those capable of subjectivity can do that. There is thus scope for suggesting that Theism explains why subjectivity exists (whereas Naturalism seems destined to leave it a spandrel, at best): God would have known that persons having a capacity to feel love was necessary for His purposes in creation to be fulfilled; and so He'd not have created only philosophical zombies (or only them and the entirely qualia-blind, if we think there's a difference). He could have tolerated some such popping up as byproducts of evolution; their doing so would not have thwarted His project—they'd have just been an irrelevance to it. After all, rocks and viruses, we suppose, have no subjectivity and they have been allowed to pop up. Nevertheless, we can see areas in which philosophical zombies and the entirely qualia-blind popping up *would* have thwarted God's project; and from this there is scope for an argument from Theism to a solution to the sceptical puzzle which Locke set up for us all those years ago, or at least a temporary solution.

Given His omnisubjectivity, in creating me as He did, God knew tomatoes, for example, would characteristically seem in colour to me the way that they do seem; as I would put it, they seem red to me. Given this, whilst there's a sense in which God could have set up the laws such that tomatoes seem to you some other way (let's say they seem to you in a manner which, were I to experience it, I would call blue), and indeed He could have set matters up so that you had an entirely inverted spectrum relative to my own, we may ask on what basis could God have chosen to make for this difference between us? *Ex hypothesi*, there could be nothing in the physical microstructure of our brains, in our behaviour, and so on. Thus, He could only have done so had He without reason willed that one of us have an inverted spectrum relative to the other. Even if actions for which God has no reason are not as such impossible for a perfect being, actions *for which* there is no reason and *against which* there is reason are not possible for a perfect being; and to have set things up in this manner would be for God to have performed just such an action. The reason against setting things up this way is that it would have been deeply misleading of

Him—it would have been to generate a difference between us that was evidentially transcendent to us; that we could not discover; and yet in which we could not believe. In short, precisely because of the insurmountable nature of the sceptical puzzle the logical possibility of which subjectivity generates and which Locke discovered, God would have reason not to allow this logical possibility to be an actuality. The same goes for philosophical zombies and thus the Problem of Other Minds. God would not have allowed those of us who are not philosophical zombies (which may be all of us who are persons and have subjectivity) to mix in with those who are, for that would be deeply and importantly misleading. Were one in such a mixed group, one might fall in love with a being that one mistook to be a person; and so on. (The "mixing-in" element is crucial to this claim; a planet populated solely by philosophical zombies popping up as an evolutionary accident would seem categorizable alongside planets with simply rocks or on which the highest lifeform is viral, namely as irrelevance to, not a thwarting of, God's purposes for persons in creation.)

Notwithstanding the rosy picture just painted, on the traditional theistic picture, God allows for the free actions of people such as ourselves to be contrary to His perfect will, and thus He allows for something analogous to thwarting wherever He allows a gap between His perfect will and His permissive will and bestows on us relevant efficacious agency. And so we may legitimately wonder how God might allow for choices which *we* make to move us from a society in which none are philosophical zombies and none have inverted spectra to one in which this no longer holds true. It appears at this moment in history that some are using their freewill to create simulacra of people—chatbots, AI-powered interactive programmes, and the like. Whilst one's being fooled into thinking one is in communication with a person—over email, say—when in fact one is not is still a rare occurrence, it is no longer as rare an occurrence as it was, say, twenty years ago. Perhaps in future it will become more common still. Even so, it seems unlikely we shall bring a philosophical-zombie apocalypse down upon ourselves, as even if we house some passable simulacrum of personhood inside a body that is visually indistinguishable from a human, there will still be, one supposes, some tests that will tell them apart. But if these tests require specialist equipment or training, then that may be of little comfort; we might still fall in love with a philosophical zombie and mistakenly think our love returned; we might marry them; and we might spend decades with them, imagining all sorts of shared intimacies none of which in fact were

ever there. Still, unless we are in a simulation of a particular type, the day on which this is a real risk seems a long way off in the future. So, the solution to Locke's problem sketched in this final section, whilst a temporary solution, seems likely to hold for quite a while yet. On Theism, you can be assured you have not married a zombie even if you can't be so sure that your grandchildren will not marry zombies.[8]

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have elaborated a broadly Zagzebskian case for divine omnisubjectivity understood along the lines of her Empathy Model; I defended it against an objection and considered some implications of it. I started by endorsing a thought first expressed by Locke—in modern terminology, the thought that there are qualia—and a sceptical puzzle which it generates. I then moved on to consider how the Empathy Model is best interpreted to account for God's knowledge of qualia. And I considered an implication of this model, namely that it is possible to know how a given quale seems without oneself having had an experience of it, which implication, I argued, is broadly favourable to Theism not simply in that it avoids the problem of "creepy emotions" as it is sometimes called, but also in that it allows God to know what qualia are like in worlds in which He chooses not to create anyone who actually has them. As the claim that one may know how a given quale seems without having experienced it will be *prima facie* counterintuitive to many, I argued, through variants of the Mary thought experiment and a consideration of our engagement with works of art, that it is *ultima facie* plausible that one may know certain qualia without having had them. And finally, I showed how Theism provides a (temporary) solution to the sceptical puzzle that Locke raised.

REFERENCES

CHALMERS, David J. 1996. *The Conscious Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

JACKSON, Frank. 1982. "Epiphenomenal Qualia." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (127): 127–36.

MALEBRANCHE, Nicolas. 1997. *The Search after Truth.* Edited and translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[8] I am grateful to Linda Zagzebski for her comments on the first draft of this paper.

MULLINS, R. T. 2020. "Omnisubjectivity and the Problem of Creepy Divine Emotions." *Religious Studies* 58 (1): 1–18.
WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
WITTGENSTEIN, Ludwig. 1989. *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
ZAGZEBSKI, Linda, 2023. *Omnisubjectivity*, *An Essay on God and Subjectivity.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
ZAGZEBSKI, Linda. *The Two Greatest Ideas: How Our Grasp of The Universe and Our Minds Changed Everything.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021.

OMNISUBJECTIVITY AND SOME OF ITS IMPLICATIONS

Summary

In this paper, I elaborate a broadly Zagzebskian case for divine omnisubjectivity understood along the lines of her Empathy Model, defend it against an objection, and consider some implications of it.

Keywords: theism; omnisubjectivity; Empathy Model; Zagzebski

WSZECHSUBIEKTYWNOŚĆ I JEJ WYBRANE KONSEKWENCJE

Streszczenie

W niniejszym eseju przedstawiam argument zbliżony do argumentu Zagzebskiej na rzecz Boskiej wszechsubiektywności rozumianej zgodnie z jej modelem empatii, bronię go przed zarzutem i rozważam pewne jego konsekwencje.

Słowa kluczowe: teizm; wszechsubiektywność; model empatii; Zagzebski