

# GOD'S EXTENDED MIND

DAVID P. HUNT

*Whittier College*

**Abstract.** The traditional doctrine of divine omniscience ascribes to God the *fully exercised* power to know all truths. But why is God's excellence with respect to knowing not treated on a par with his excellence with respect to doing, where the latter requires only that God have the (exercised or unexercised) *power* to do all things? The prima facie problem with divine 'omni-knowledgeability' – roughly, being able to know whatever one wants to know whenever one wants to know it – is that knowledge (whether occurrent or dispositional) requires an *internal representation*, whereas mere 'knowledgeability' does not. I argue to the contrary that knowledge does *not* require an internal representation, and that even if it did, an omni-knowledgeable God would satisfy this requirement. Omni-knowledgeability therefore represents a distinct understanding of God's cognitive excellence while satisfying the traditional insistence on full omniscience.

Why is God thought of as omniscient rather than 'omni-knowledgeable', where the latter means roughly 'being able to know whatever one wants to know whenever one wants to know it'? This is, after all, a pretty impressive property, and it's not just obvious why God would be defective, even by Anselmian standards, if he were omni-knowledgeable rather than omniscient. Divine omnipotence, for example, does not require that God be always doing everything he can do. Why then ascribe to God a property requiring that he be always knowing everything he can know?

Various justifications for this asymmetry between divine knowing and doing can of course be offered, but the most obvious, at least, do not seem very persuasive. One might argue, for example, that an all-doing God would be incompatible with the existence of creaturely libertarian agents; if this argument is sound, there is a positive reason not to require that God fully exercise his power with respect to doing things, and so to require nothing more than divine omnipotence. But of course there is

a parallel argument to the effect that an all-*knowing* God is incompatible with the existence of creaturely libertarian agents; if *this* argument is sound, there is a positive reason not to require that God fully exercise his power with respect to knowing things, and so to require nothing more than divine omni-knowledgeability.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this paper is not to review and assess all the justifications that might be offered for insisting on full omniscience when it comes to divine knowing while tolerating ‘mere’ omnipotence when it comes to divine doing. It will be assumed that the parallel with omnipotence creates at least *some* presumption in favour of omni-knowledgeability over omniscience – or if that is too strong, at least some presumption in favour of the theological *availability* of this attribute, should there prove to be good reasons to invoke it. The paper will focus instead on a rebuttal to this presumption which should carry some weight with traditional theists. This is simply that the ascription to God of full omniscience is deeply entrenched in the tradition and is therefore normative for theological theory-construction. The traditional understanding of omniscience is arguably part of the very *concept* of God; certainly it should not lightly be discarded in favour of some innovation. Rather than dismissing this objection, it will be argued that this may be one of those felicitous situations in which one can have one’s cake and eat it too. For God to be omni-knowledgeable *is* for God to be omniscient.<sup>2</sup>

## I.

An omni-knowledgeable being who is fully exercising his power to know is omniscient on anyone’s account. That’s just divine omniscience

---

<sup>1</sup> The *locus classicus* for contemporary discussion of the threat to human freedom posed by divine omniscience is Nelson Pike’s ‘Divine Foreknowledge and Voluntary Action’, *Philosophical Review*, 74 (January 1965), 27-46. In ‘The Compatibility of Divine Determinism and Human Freedom: A Modest Proposal’, *Faith and Philosophy*, 19 (October 2002), 485-502, I look at parallel anti-freedom arguments based on an all-doing and an all-knowing God and I show that certain well-known strategies for responding to the latter would work just as well against the former. I take this to be a *reductio* of such strategies.

<sup>2</sup> I first sketched this view in ‘Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 (April 1995), 153-165, and developed it further in ‘Dispositional Omniscience’, *Philosophical Studies*, 80 (December 1995), 243-78. Andrew Cullison, in ‘Omniscience as a Dispositional State’, *Philosophia Christi*, 8 (2006), 151-160, makes an interesting application of this idea to the Incarnation, but without any apparent awareness of my earlier work.

*tout court*. The controversial claim to be defended here is that an omniscient being who is *not* fully exercising his power to know can also count as omniscient. For such a being *x*, there are at least some truths *p* such that *x* has a *disposition* to believe that *p* (under certain conditions, e.g., the condition of *wondering* whether *p*), but *x* does not (yet) actually *believe* that *p*. The obvious problem for this thesis is that knowledge requires belief; since a mere disposition to believe is not (yet) a belief, it cannot count as knowledge, and so cannot contribute to omniscience.

How does belief differ from a (mere) disposition to believe? Not by being nondispositional: most human beliefs, for example, are dispositional rather than occurrent. A dispositional belief is itself a disposition to believe, and so satisfies the general schema for such dispositions. Since this schema concerns conditions for *x*'s counterfactual access to *p*, it will be called:

*The Access Condition.* Were circumstance *C* to obtain, *x* would occurrently believe that *p*.<sup>3</sup>

(*C* might be *x*'s considering whether *p*, or any number of other conditions.) But more than this is required for a disposition to believe to rise to the level of a (dispositional) belief. What is the differentia by which the species *dispositional belief* may be distinguished from other members of the genus *disposition to believe*?<sup>4</sup>

A natural direction in which to look, given the unacceptable consequences of 'simply defin[ing] a dispositional belief in terms of

---

<sup>3</sup> I first formulated the Access Condition, and the Location Condition that follows, in my 'Does Theological Fatalism Rest on an Equivocation?', *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Robert Audi, in 'Dispositional Beliefs and Dispositions to Believe', *Nous* (1994), pp. 419-34, appears to endorse a different understanding of the relation between dispositional beliefs and dispositions to believe when he writes as follows: 'whereas a belief is – at least in good part – a (state of) readiness to act in certain ways appropriate to its content, at least by affirming the proposition believed, a disposition to believe is a readiness to form a belief. Neither forming a belief nor believing itself is a case of acting' (pp. 423-24). Audi, then, distinguishes dispositional beliefs from dispositions to believe in terms of the former involving dispositions toward an action and the latter involving dispositions toward a non-action. I say 'appears to endorse a different understanding' because it's not clear that this cuts nature at a different joint than I do. So long as anyone who *dispositionally believes* that *p* in Audi's sense thereby has a *disposition to form the occurrent belief* that *p*, then it doesn't matter what dispositions *to act* also accompany, and are even constitutive of, this dispositional belief: a dispositional belief can still be a disposition *to believe* that meets certain further conditions, as it does on my understanding of it.

subjunctives or counterfactuals', is suggested by Alvin Goldman when he writes: 'To say that a person believes proposition  $p$  at  $t$  is to say that  $p$  is somehow lodged in the mind at  $t$  – in memory if not in consciousness.'<sup>5</sup> But what exactly is it for a proposition to be 'somehow lodged in the mind'? Whatever the answer to this question, it won't involve  $p$  itself being in the mind; Goldman's proposal surely requires only that  $p$  be *virtually* present, in the form of a mental representation. (This not only preserves intelligibility, but also accommodates arguments for wide content: that  $p$  is represented in the head does not entail that its meaning is in the head.) Moreover, the mere *existence* of an inner representation of  $p$  won't advance the issue unless it plays a role, and the right kind of role, in  $x$ 's exercise of the disposition to believe that  $p$ . (A grain of rice, inscribed with a sentence expressing  $p$  and surgically implanted in  $x$ 's cranium, won't play this role, unless a 'deviant causal chain' is introduced, in which case it won't play the *right kind* of role.) Goldman is best understood, then, as suggesting that a disposition to believe rises to the level of a (dispositional) belief only if it operates by 'activating' or 'accessing' an inner representation. This condition can be formulated as follows:

*The Location Condition.* The means by which  $C$ 's obtaining would lead to  $x$ 's occurrently believing that  $p$  includes  $x$ 's accessing a representation whose content is  $p$  and whose location is internal to  $x$ .

At the heart of this condition is the distinction between an *internal* representation of  $p$ , such as a configuration of long-term memory which  $x$  would access were she to exercise her disposition to believe that  $p$ , and an *external* representation of  $p$ , such as a configuration of print on the pages of an encyclopaedia which  $x$  would read were she to wonder whether  $p$ . It is the internal representations alone which are supposed to support  $x$ 's claim to a (dispositional) belief that  $p$ .

In defence of divine omni-knowledgeability, it will be argued that the unexercised dispositions to believe of an omni-knowledgeable being can be assimilated to dispositional belief. If successful, this strategy should defeat the principal threat to divine omniscience as omni-knowledgeability, namely, that such a being doesn't really *believe* all true propositions. The foregoing analysis of dispositional belief shows what is *prima facie* problematic about this strategy. Given that analysis,

---

<sup>5</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, 'Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief', *Monist*, 61 (October 1978), 523-35 (p. 526).

- (1) a disposition to believe, if it is to count as a (dispositional) belief, must satisfy the Location Condition;

but

- (2) a being can be omni-knowledgeable without satisfying the Location Condition.

If (1) and (2) are accepted, it follows that an omni-knowledgeable being (at least one whose power to know is not fully exercised) does not actually believe all true propositions, and consequently does not count as omniscient. The task ahead is to show that both these premises are dubious, especially (but not only) when the knower is God.

Before moving on to this main task, however, there is one other problem that needs to be addressed. It won't detain us long. The problem, in short, is that any attempt to reconcile omni-knowledgeability with the traditional affirmation of omniscience will be a non-starter when it comes to what is perhaps *the* traditional view of God: that he is outside of time. The worry can be put as follows:

Suppose God is timeless. Suppose further that God is omni-knowledgeable and not fully exercising his cognitive powers. Then there are some truths which God does not occurrently believe. But then, since there is no passage of time for God, there are some truths which God *cannot* occurrently believe – truths like 'α is actual and α includes *p*', where *p* is some contingent truth that God does not occurrently believe. But truths which God cannot occurrently believe are paradigm cases of truths to which God has no cognitive access. Thus, intuitively, omni-knowledgeability does not guarantee omniscience.<sup>6</sup>

This worry cannot be fully addressed without delving into the question of God's relation to time, and that would take us too far afield. But a couple of things can be said that should be adequate for present purposes.

First, the divine omni-knowledgeability proposal could be given a restricted formulation, limiting it to a sempiternal deity existing in time. This is less of a limitation than one might think. Divine temporality

---

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to Mike Rea for raising this objection. Rea was the respondent when I presented an earlier version of this paper in 2006 at the Pacific Regional Conference of the Society of Christian Philosophers, meeting at the University of San Diego. The indented passage in which the worry is formulated is taken verbatim from Rea's comments at the session, except for an omitted reference to the Secure Access Condition (which I don't introduce until later in the paper).

seems now to be the majority position among Christian philosophers, and it is worth challenging this majority to consider whether omni-knowledgeability might be an acceptable substitute for classic occurrent omniscience.<sup>7</sup> With the proposal restricted to a temporal conception of God, Boethians would simply not be relevant interlocutors.

But second, this concession may be unnecessary, since it isn't at all clear that omni-knowledgeability *wouldn't* be available to a timelessly eternal God. Since my proposal in effect assimilates divine omniscience to divine omnipotence, it would be surprising if a Boethian could accommodate omnipotence but not omni-knowledgeability. The heart of the objection we're considering is this:

There are some truths which God does not occurrently believe. But then, since there is no passage of time for God, there are some truths which God *cannot* occurrently believe.

Now consider the omnipotence version of the objection:

There are some things God does not do. But then, since there is no passage of time for God, there are some things God *cannot* do.

---

<sup>7</sup> And *why* is it worth challenging them on this point? Beyond the sheer philosophical fun of it, one of *my* motivations is to explore the neglected conceptual space between Open Theism and Molinism. The conventional wisdom nowadays is that there are just two 'live options' for Christian philosophers wishing to preserve libertarian freedom in the face of divine foreknowledge and providential control: Molinism, or Open Theism. It seems to me that there has been some defection in favour of Open Theism in recent years. I think this a lamentable development. Insofar as the skids are greased by the assumption that, for anyone who can't accept Molinism, there is no place to stop short of Open Theism, it is worth identifying other stopping points along the way. I have argued elsewhere that 'simple foreknowledge' provides a defensible *via media*, and I believe that omni-knowledgeability may provide another.

Herewith a select bibliography of articles in which I defend the idea that God possesses *occurrent* simple foreknowledge: 'Omniprescient Agency', *Religious Studies*, 28 (September 1992), 351-369; 'Divine Providence and Simple Foreknowledge', *Faith and Philosophy*, 10 (July 1993), 396-416, reprinted in *Oxford Readings in Philosophical Theology*, vol. 2: *Providence, Scripture, and Resurrection*, ed. by Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); 'Two Problems with Knowing the Future', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 34 (April 1997), 273-85, reprinted in *The Importance of Time*, ed. L. Nathan Oaklander, Philosophical Studies Series, v. 87 (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), pp. 207-223; 'Providence, Foreknowledge, and Explanatory Loops: A Reply to Robinson', *Religious Studies*, 40 (December 2004), 485-491; 'The Providential Advantage of Divine Foreknowledge', in *Arguing about Religion*, ed. Kevin Timpe (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 374-385; and 'Perils of the Open Road' (with William Lane Craig), *Faith and Philosophy* (forthcoming).

The Boethian has well-known resources for responding to this second objection, and there is no reason to think that similar resources couldn't be applied to the first objection. Whether others regard the response(s) as satisfactory is irrelevant; the objection has been made on behalf of the Boethian, and it's the Boethian who must be satisfied. Assuming the Boethian finds *some* account reconciling omnipotence with atemporality to be satisfactory, it's unclear on what grounds the Boethian wouldn't find the parallel account reconciling omni-knowledgeability with atemporality to be equally satisfactory.

We now turn to the main problem for divine omni-knowledgeability, based on premises (1) and (2).

## II.

Premise (1) relies on the Location Condition, but there appear to be clear cases of knowledge which fail to satisfy this condition. Suppose that Jane is not occurrently thinking that today is Friday, but that were she to consider what day it is she would form the occurrent belief that it is Friday. Here are a couple of ways that this counterfactual might be true: (i) the closest nonactual world in which Jane considers what day it is, is a world in which she *remembers* that it is Friday; (ii) the closest nonactual world in which she considers what day it is, is a world in which she *finds out* that it is Friday (e.g., by asking her friend Sam). The Location Condition rightly includes (i) as a case of (dispositionally) believing that today is Friday, while excluding (ii). So far so good. But (i) and (ii) hardly exhaust the possibilities; indeed, if Jane is a typical cognizer, there is another scenario that is far more likely than either (i) or (ii). This is where Jane would form the occurrent belief that today is Friday, were she to consider what day it is, because (iii) the closest nonactual world in which she considers what day it is, is a world in which she *figures out* that it is Friday – perhaps by thinking back to what she did earlier (yesterday, this morning), matching what she did with days on which she typically does such things, and arriving at the present by inference. What should be said about this case, where Jane is not occurrently believing that today is Friday, yet it's (iii) rather than (i) that is true? If this isn't deemed to be a case in which Jane (dispositionally) believes that today is Friday, it will be hard to resist the conclusion that people seldom know what day it is, and that's a conclusion to be avoided at almost any cost. But to grant Jane this belief in virtue of (iii) is to accept the propriety of

a (dispositional) belief that today is Friday whose propositional content is not represented in a memory trace or other mental state which satisfies the Location Condition.

I am not suggesting that an ability to figure out that  $p$  licenses the ascription of a belief that  $p$ . It typically doesn't. What I am claiming is that there are cases in which it is perfectly natural to attribute belief or knowledge to a person though the Location Condition isn't satisfied and the person can achieve the occurrent belief only by figuring it out. Cases like that of Jane in the preceding paragraph are neither unusual nor rare. I know my daughter's birthday because I remember it, but I don't remember my son's birthday; I know *his* birthday because I remember a recipe for deriving it from my daughter's birthday. I've lived enough years now that, when asked my age, I sometimes find myself hesitating for just a moment while I make a quick inference, but it's absurd to suppose that I don't know how old I am (I'm not *that* far gone – yet!). And so on.

It may be possible to relax the Location Condition in response to such cases without abandoning it altogether. The 'extended mind' view put forward by David Chalmers and Andy Clark offers one way to do this. The central example in their controversial article involves a fellow named Otto who writes down in a notebook which he always carries with him information he will need later in the day. Even if Otto suffers from a memory disorder so severe that the information recorded in the book leaves no internal mental trace whatsoever, Chalmers and Clark maintain that this information can nevertheless be attributed *to him*, in virtue of its being in the book (and his *knowing* that it is in the book), ready for retrieval at the appropriate time. Daniel Dennett had already drawn attention to 'our habit of off-loading as much as possible of our cognitive tasks into the environment itself – extending our minds (that is, our mental projects and activities) into the surrounding world'.<sup>8</sup> But Chalmers and Clark carry this idea further: insofar as external objects play an integral role in these cognitive tasks, the mind and the environment act as a 'coupled system', a cognitive system of its own. Because of this, Chalmers and Clark credit the memory-challenged Otto with a (dispositional) *belief* whose content is represented in the book and nowhere inside his skin.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, *Kinds of Minds* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> David Chalmers and Andy Clark, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis*, 58 (1998), pp. 10-23.



If Chalmers and Clark are right, there are at least some (ii)-like cases – ones in which  $x$  would *find out* that  $p$  were she to consider whether  $p$  – that should count as (dispositional) beliefs. But it's not clear on the Chalmers-Clark account how Jane knows what day it is when it's (iii) that accounts for her disposition to believe that today is Friday. Though Chalmers and Clark are willing to attribute to Otto a belief whose content is only externally stored, Otto *did* have the information lodged in his mind at an earlier time, when he wrote it in the notebook, and this may contribute to the willingness to credit him with this belief at the later time when it is no longer lodged in his mind. Indeed, Chalmers and Clark make it a general condition of belief-attribution that the information was endorsed by the person in the past and that its storage (whether internal or external) is a consequence of that endorsement. This is the sense in which the Chalmers-Clark 'extended mind' thesis retains a residual commitment to the Location Condition. But Jane, in scenario (iii), never gave her prior endorsement to the proposition that today is Friday. The Chalmers-Clark thesis therefore does not go far enough. Indeed, it's not clear why even in (ii)-type cases prior endorsement should be necessary. If Jane were to *find out* that today is Friday by consulting a calendar-watch she always wears, there seems no less (or more?) reason to attribute to her a prior belief that it's Friday than there is to attribute to Otto what he would find out were he to look in his notebook.<sup>10</sup>

Another way to retain the Location Condition as the ultimate arbiter while introducing some needed flexibility is to hold that  $x$  has a dispositional belief that  $p$  only if the Location Condition is satisfied by  $p$  or by some set of propositions from which  $x$  might infer that  $p$ . (How readily? There will clearly need to be some restriction on the complexity of the inference for the proposal to be plausible.) This move gets around Daniel Dennett's objection that, my dispositional beliefs being 'apparently infinite', to require each belief to satisfy the Location Condition 'means their storage, however miniaturized, will take up more room than there is in the brain.'<sup>11</sup> But this disjunctive version of the Location Condition, while it provides the desired results in cases (i)-(iii), lacks an independent rationale. If internal location is intuitively necessary for belief, what

---

<sup>10</sup> Andy Clark has dropped the 'prior endorsement' in his recent paper, 'Memento's Revenge: The Extended Mind, Extended', in Richard Menary (ed.), *The Extended Mind* (Boston: MIT Press, 2010), pp. 43-66.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel C. Dennett, 'Brain Writing and Mind Reading', in *Brainstorms* (Montgomery, Vt.: Bradford Books, 1978), pp. 39-50 (p. 45).

justifies waiving the requirement when it comes to inferable beliefs like the one supported by (iii)? And if it is waived in such cases, what justifies continued confidence in the original intuition?

In any case, it is easy to think of scenarios which fail this weakened version of the Location Condition but in which it is just as plausible to attribute belief as in (iii). Suppose that Basil is taking his customary Sunday afternoon stroll, along a route with which he is intimately familiar. Lost in thought and paying no attention to his surroundings, he is interrupted by a passerby who asks whether he knows how to get to a certain park. 'Certainly,' he replies, before even noticing where he is but confident in his knowledge of the area. He immediately takes in his surroundings and, without a moment's hesitation, begins telling the passerby the best route to his destination. Trouble for the Location Condition arises not only from Basil's reply – 'Certainly,' he says, in response to the question whether he knows the way – but from the fact that the reply doesn't have to be glossed as simply elliptical for 'I will know in a moment'. Though he had to use his eyes, and not just his memory, in the production of the occurrent belief, it is perfectly natural to say that he *knew* the way, before being asked.<sup>12</sup>

A radical alternative to the Location Condition, which fits well with the preceding example, is pushed by Alan White. Responding to the objection that it is 'because we already have our knowledge stored somewhere, say in our mind or in our memory, that we are able to produce it on demand,' White notes that 'not everything that can be produced is some kind of entity which must have existed somewhere before its production. All that we need have is the ability to produce it; and abilities are not located anywhere.' Knowledge, White concludes, is just such an ability: 'to know that *p* is to be able to give an answer, namely that *p*, which is in fact the correct answer to a possible question.'<sup>13</sup>

Now if this represents nothing more than a retreat to the Access Condition it will of course be unsatisfactory, since that condition tolerates cases which should not count as beliefs. But White's reference to an

---

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Margolis, in 'Knowledge, Belief, and Thought', *Ratio*, 14 (June 1972), 74-82, advocates *accepting* the knowledge-claim but denying the corresponding *belief*-claim. This would allow one to stick with the Location Condition while also conceding that I *knew* the way to the park. But it's doubtful that the Location Condition is worth the cost of abandoning the principle that knowledge entails belief.

<sup>13</sup> Alan R. White, *The Nature of Knowledge*, APQ Library of Philosophy, ed. Nicholas Rescher (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), pp. 116, 119-20.

'ability' to produce the requisite belief 'on demand' suggests a version of the Access Condition considerably less promiscuous than the deliberately open-ended formulation given earlier. To believe that  $p$  is not just to have access to  $p$ , but to be in command of  $p$  – to have access to  $p$  'at will', free (within limits) from frustration or delay. Call this vague requirement the 'Secure Access Condition'. The fact that 'secure access' is vague and a matter of degree is not a serious problem for present purposes, since 'belief' is also vague and plausibly a matter of degree. In any event, the case in point does not appear to require any fine distinctions of degree or meaning: an omni-knowledgeable God, for whom considering whether  $p$  would be sufficient for knowing whether  $p$ , would have maximally secure access to all truths on *any* construal of 'secure access'.

There are at least two respects in which the Secure Access Condition has a marked advantage over the Location Condition. In the first place, the former (unlike the latter) gives the intuitively right answer for all of the test cases: (i) and (iii) – the two cases of (dispositional) belief – exhibit relatively secure access to the relevant information, while (ii) – the case of non-belief – makes access to this information *insecure*, inasmuch as it is dependent on Sam's availability, his knowing what day it is, and so on. In the second place, even in those cases where the Secure Access Condition and Location Condition give the same answer, the latter appears parasitic on the former. The Location Condition requires (a) an inner (b) representation of  $p$ . Regarding (a), a special problem arises when applying the Location Condition to cases of nonoccurrent as well as occurrent belief. For what makes it the case that an unconscious state can be said to be lodged in the *mind*? Presumably nothing but the fact that the activation of this state plays a key role in the exercise of the disposition to believe that  $p$ . A representation satisfies the Location Condition, then, not in virtue of its meeting some independent criterion for 'internalness', but in virtue of its contribution to  $p$ 's accessibility. So it is the Access Condition (Secure or otherwise) that is fundamental. Regarding (b), what makes an inner state a representation *of*  $p$  (and not *of*  $q$ )? A representational state does not possess its meaning inherently and in isolation, but in virtue of its functional relations with other states. Even if one invokes a mental language in which representations are encoded, what confers upon a particular configuration of 'mentalese' the meaning  $p$  is presumably the way this configuration functions in producing an occurrent belief that  $p$ . This makes the Access Condition again fundamental.

There is no doubt that the Location Condition exercises a certain intuitive pull. But this may simply reflect the fact that having  $p$  lodged in the mind, as in (i), is one way to secure access to  $p$ . Even if the human condition is such that there is a strong correlation between internal location and the degree of access required by belief, the correlation is not a necessary one, as (iii) demonstrates; nor is there reason to regard it as other than a human peculiarity with no essential application to God.

It is not, however, necessary for the defence of omni-knowledgeability that the Secure Access Condition be secured. It is enough that the Location Condition be discredited, and this has already been done.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, discredited theories often return in new guises. It is therefore worth noting that even if the Location Condition were somehow rehabilitated, the case against omni-knowledgeability would still not go through, since premise (2) is just as dubious as premise (1).

### III.

There is, to begin with, a general problem in determining location with respect to the mind. The concept of the mind's spatial boundaries is even fuzzier than the concept of its temporal boundaries. Consider a prosthetic memory-device, programmed with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which can be strapped to one's head. Does such a device provide one with (dispositional) belief in the contents of the encyclopaedia, or merely with a disposition to believe in those contents? Would the answer be any different if the memory-device were implanted inside the skull? Or if the person were equipped with wireless access to the on-line version of the encyclopaedia via a transmitter-receiver spliced into the short-term memory centre of the brain? If the Location Condition is taken as guide, such questions are to be answered by determining whether the relevant information is 'internally located'. But it's not clear how this criterion is to be applied in such cases.

This general problem becomes particularly acute when the mind belongs to God. Two attributes of God are chiefly responsible for this

---

<sup>14</sup> This is perhaps too strong. We've been considering a critique of omni-knowledgeability based on the Location Condition, and discrediting the Location Condition means that *that* critique fails. But insofar as I bear the burden of proof, I need to do more than rebut one attack on omni-knowledgeability; I need to make the position itself plausible. Readers must judge whether what I've said on behalf of the Secure Access Condition is sufficient to discharge this burden.

situation. One is divine *omnipresence*. On a straightforward reading of this attribute, nothing is external to God; so any state which plays for God the role of representation in the activation of his disposition to believe would appear to constitute an *internal* representation. (This includes the limit case where representational state and represented state collapse, as when God activates his disposition to believe that Jones is mowing his lawn by directly accessing Jones's lawn-mowing activity.) The other attribute is the traditional conception of God as a *nonspatial spirit*. On a straightforward reading of *this* attribute, God lacks spatial location altogether; so it is hard to see how the internal-external distinction is to be applied to him at all. Between them, these two attributes render the crucial distinction between internal and external even fuzzier than it normally is, making it prohibitively difficult for the critic to demonstrate that *omni-knowledgeability* involves a complete and decisive failure of internalness.

The critic, however, might balk at the use that has just been made of these two attributes. Omnipresence entails that God is in some sense everywhere, while nonspatiality entails that God is in some (presumably different) sense nowhere.<sup>15</sup> But then these attributes are relevant to God's status with respect to the Location Condition only if this condition is understood narrowly as a matter of *spatial* location. There is, however, good reason to reject this interpretation of Goldman's 'internal lodgement' requirement. This is because the intuitions supporting the Location Condition, such as they are, do not appear to be in any way dependent on whether *human* minds are viewed as (essentially) nonphysical and nonspatial: the Location Condition is really just a way of ensuring that the relevant representation is a state *of x*, and this requirement of 'metaphysical' internalness (as it might be called) continues to make perfect sense when *x* is nonspatial.

Given this understanding of the Location Condition, the claims made two paragraphs earlier collapse. The first claim was that God might not fail the Location Condition after all, since he is omnipresent, and everything (including whatever states function for him as representations) is arguably internal to an omnipresent being. But the fact that a particular representational state is (in this sense) spatially internal to God does not

---

<sup>15</sup> According to Aquinas, what permits a nonspatial being to be located everywhere is that '[i]ncorporeal things are in place not by contact of dimensive quantity, as bodies are, but by contact of power' (*Summa Theologica*, q.8 a.2).

entail that it is metaphysically internal as well; so if it is the latter which the Location Condition requires, divine omnipresence provides no reason to believe that an omni-knowledgeable God satisfies this condition. (What *would* provide reason to believe that an omni-knowledgeable God's representations are not just spatially but metaphysically internal to him is *pantheism*; but this goes considerably beyond the mandate of omnipresence, and is generally regarded as inconsistent with theism.)<sup>16</sup> The second claim was that a nonspatial God is not even subject to the Location Condition. But now that this condition has been understood metaphysically rather than spatially, God's nonspatiality clearly earns him no exemption.

The requirement that representations be metaphysically internal to the believer is enough to turn back this first attempt to defend the omni-knowledgeable God's theistic credentials vis-à-vis the Location Condition. But this reverse simply opens the way for a second and more successful attempt. Most who regard the human mind as a nonspatial thing are mind-body dualists. But for dualists like Descartes it is primarily consciousness (i.e., occurrent episodes of belief, doubt, fear, desire) that requires a nonspatial locus, while such unconscious states as nonoccurrent memory are assigned to the extended stuff of the body (brain).<sup>17</sup> When a Cartesian dualist assents to the Location Condition, then, the 'mind' or 'self' with respect to which the representation of *p* must be internal will be understood to include not only *x*'s nonphysical mind but some parts of *x*'s body as well. It is difficult to say just how to specify the relevant parts of the body; but doing so is at least no more difficult for the dualist than for the materialist, who must also distinguish a representation in the brain's memory-storage from a representation tattooed on one's forearm. Goldman suggests a functional account according to which a dispositional state 'has a "site" outside of consciousness, such that its contents can, under suitable circumstances, be drawn into consciousness.'<sup>18</sup> To ensure the exclusion of tattoos and such, let us add to Goldman's account the vague proviso that any site outside of consciousness which is to count as internal to *x* for purposes of the Location Condition must stand in an appropriately intimate (if not direct or immediate) relation to consciousness.

---

<sup>16</sup> For a minority report, see Robert Oakes, 'Does Traditional Theism Entail Pantheism?', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 20 (January 1983), 105-112.

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*, article 42.

<sup>18</sup> Alvin I. Goldman, 'Epistemology and the Psychology of Belief', p. 526.

Now if the materially-stored memories of a Cartesian mind satisfy the Location Condition (as they must if that condition is to be at all credible as a general stricture on belief), then so do the states of affairs that the omni-knowledgeable God would access were he to exercise his disposition to believe that *p*. This is because God stands to the world in much the same relation that a nonspatial mind stands to the memory-traces in its brain. The traditional view of this relation, as Richard Swinburne describes it, is that 'God controls all things directly and knows about all things without the information coming to him through some causal chain'.<sup>19</sup> It is for this reason that the world has sometimes been characterized as God's *body*.<sup>20</sup> More germane to present purposes is the idea that the world functions as God's prosthetic mind, and space (in Newton's phrase) as his sensorium.<sup>21</sup> This is not pantheism; it is simply the traditional doctrine of divine *omnipresence*, whose main ingredients Aquinas unpacks as follows: 'God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being'.<sup>22</sup> This is enough to ensure that all states of affairs will be 'lodged in' the Divine Mind in at least as intimate a way as some brain-states are 'lodged in' a Cartesian mind.

One moral that some have drawn from arguments for 'wide content' is that 'the world enters constitutively into the individuation of states of mind; mind and world are not ... metaphysically independent categories, sliding smoothly past each other'.<sup>23</sup> Whatever one thinks about this thesis as applied to human minds, God's existence as a nonspatial spirit, coupled with a standard conception of divine omnipresence, makes it a particularly compelling view to take of the Divine Mind, and ensures an omni-knowledgeable God's satisfaction of the neutral (and least implausible) version of the Location Condition.

---

<sup>19</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 104.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of this issue, see William J. Wainwright, 'God's Body', in *The Concept of God*, ed. Thomas V. Morris, Oxford Readings in Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 72-87.

<sup>21</sup> Isaac Newton, *Optics*, Query 28.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, q.8 a.3.

<sup>23</sup> Colin McGinn, *Mental Content* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 9.

## IV.

It has been argued that the Location Condition itself is suspect, but that in any case an omni-knowledgeable being arguably satisfies this condition for all truths. This has important implications for theological theory construction. In particular, traditional commitment to the doctrine of divine omniscience should not prevent theistic philosophers from considering the virtues of omni-knowledgeability as an alternative to the standard assumption that God's cognitive power must be fully exercised.<sup>24, 25</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> I identify some of these virtues in my 'Dispositional Omniscience', *op. cit.*

<sup>25</sup> Acknowledgment: This paper was originally presented in Munich, at a conference for the Analytic Theology Project, generously funded by the John Templeton Foundation.