

OMNISUBJECTIVITY ^{AND} PASSIBILITY: A Defeater to Thomas G. Weinandy's Rejoinder Against Divine Passibilism

In Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Doctrine of Divine Impassibility TH871
Presented to Oliver D. Crisp

Fuller Theological Seminary

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June 14, 2013

Introduction

Thomas G. Weinandy has articulated a divine impassibilist argument against divine passibilism that stands out above the rest and thus deserves to be addressed.¹ In so many words, Weinandy says that the very thing passibilists want to preserve and cultivate—God as an authentic human empathizer—is the very thing they negate when they hold that the divine in Christ suffers. His reasoning is that a divine sufferer cannot know what it is like to suffer as a human being as long as passibility is located in Christ’s divine nature.² Initially, his riposte had a juggernaut-like effect on me, a passibilist, from which there seemed to be no response. That was until I was introduced to Linda Zagzebski’s argument for the possibility of “omnisubjectivity.”

In this paper, I argue two things: (1) omnisubjectivity complements passibility, and (2) omnisubjectivity offers a defeater to Weinandy’s rejoinder against passibility. I take seven logical steps to defend my conclusion: (1) offer a brief overview of the concept of impassibility and passibility, while qualifying both terms (2) summarize Zagzebski’s argument for the possibility of omnisubjectivity, (3) demonstrate how omnisubjectivity complements passibility, (4) state Weinandy’s rejoinder against passibility, (5) discuss how omnisubjectivity applies specifically to Jesus Christ suffering qua divine, and (6) offer omnisubjectivity as a defeater to Weinandy’s rejoinder against passibility.

1 Brief Overview of Impassibility and Passibility

I start this section by explaining a distinction between “weak” impassibilism and “strong” impassibilism followed by a brief description of the four facets of God that *do not* and/or *cannot*

¹ From now on I will address “divine impassibility” and “divine passibility” simply as “impassibility” and “passibility.”

² See Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 204.

change in order to make a further distinction regarding impassibility, what I call “hard” impassibilism and “soft” impassibilism.

With such a broad topic as impassibility, which entails all the ways God is unchanging, it is important to make meaningful distinctions of the different ways impassibility can be interpreted. Richard E. Creel has surveyed the impassibilist literature and has compiled eight definitions of impassibility in relation to one another.³ To incorporate this panoply of definitions into my paper would take me beyond the allotted space. I do, however, want to bring attention to one meaning of impassibility highlighted by Creel: “. . .[T]he most consistent element of meaning across these [eight] definitions of impassibility is . . . that which cannot be affected by an outside force.”⁴ This meaning of impassibility—God cannot be affected externally—may be what I am calling “strong” impassibilism.

1.1 Weak Impassibilism and Strong Impassibilism

Weak impassibilism is the notion that God is impassive or not affected by an outside force (e.g., by his creation). However, it does not follow that because God *is* not externally affected that he *could not have been* externally affected. Weak impassibility allows for the possibility that God could have been affected by an outside force, say, if he had willed it. Employing possible world semantics, a weak impassibilist could assert that God is not affected in the actual world, but in his freedom God could have chosen to actualize a possible world where he could have been externally affected, if he so desired. *In nuce*, weak impassibilism entails that God is not externally affected, but he could have been externally affected if, intrinsically, he had chosen to be affected by an outside force.

³ See Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, [1986] 2005), 9-12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

Strong impassibilism, however, takes the concept of God not being affected one step further. Not only is God not being affected externally, he could not have been affected externally. That is, it is necessary that God not be affected externally. The mechanism for strong impassible seems to be that God's nature is such that he cannot internally will to be externally affected. So God is necessarily impassive. Employing possible worlds semantics, there is no possible world where God is affected by an outside force. Again, it is possible that what Creel highlights as the most consistent element of meaning within his survey of definitions of impassibility is, or is similar to, the notion that God cannot be externally affected across all possible worlds.⁵ *In nuce*, strong impassibilism entails that God cannot be affected externally.⁶

In the following sub-section, I lump together weak and strong impassibilism as I discuss the four ways God may be impassible in order to demonstrate where these four divine facets "fall under" the broader category of either "hard" or "soft" impassibilism. (My purpose here and in the next sub-section entitled *A Brief Description of the Four Facets of God that Do and Have to Change* is not to adjudicate which of these ways is superior to the others.) It is also important to note that from here onward, I will sometimes speak of impassibility by referring to the divine as immutable, which implies that God cannot be externally affected. So when I say that there are four ways that God may be unaffected, thus impassive, I mean that there are four ways that God may be changeless. However, I am not suggesting that the doctrine of impassibility collapses into

⁵ Assuming that is the case, what I call strong passibilism has enjoyed the historical status quo within Christendom, until recently. Something like weak impassibility since the time of Karl Barth has begun a paradigm shift in how theologians, as well as lay Christians, understand some of God's attributes. To read about how God allows himself to be externally affected via his divine freedom, see Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 370-1.

⁶ It should be obvious that the difference between weak and strong impassibilism is the difference between what is possible and what is impossible for God. According to some modern theologians, because there is a possibility that God could have been passive given his freedom, I have chosen "weak" as the appropriate adjective to describe this notion of impassibility. And because, according to traditional theologians, there is no possibility that God could have been passive given his nature, I have chosen "strong" as the appropriate adjective to describe this notion of impassibility.

the doctrine of immutability, or vice versa. I am suggesting, however, that impassibility and immutability are correlated. Taxonomically, I understand impassibility to be a subspecies of immutability.

1.2 A Brief Description of the Four Facets of God that *Do Not* and/or *Cannot* Change⁷

The four ways that the divine may be impassive vis-à-vis weak and strong impassibilism include his impassive, and thus immutable, nature, knowledge, emotions, and will.

1.2.1 An Impassive Nature

All impassibilists assert that God does not and/or cannot undergo vicissitudes to his very being. In regards to external and internal changes in the divine, Creel writes, “If the nature of God were subject to change by outside force, then God would not be omnipotent; if God were able to change his own nature, then he could not be trusted without concern; but by definition ‘God’ refers to one who is categorically omnipotent and trustworthy.”⁸ So, according to Creel, omnipotence and trustworthiness entails an immutable nature for God.

1.2.2 An Impassive Knowledge

Classical theists agree that all of God’s attributes are necessarily without deficiency, not least of all, his knowledge. God has perfect knowledge of the entire realm of actual and possible states of affairs from an eternal perspective.⁹ And if God has perfect knowledge of all true propositions, then there is no need for God to change in his exhaustive knowledge.

⁷ My description of the four ways God is impassible is taken primarily from traditional sources. Comparatively, my description in the following sub-section of the four ways God is passible is taken primarily from contemporary sources.

⁸ Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 13.

1.2.3 Impassive Emotions

The early Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Novatian, Lactantius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine, believed that God has emotions, yet he is impassible.¹⁰ That is, the emotional life of the divine does not negate that God is fully in control of his emotions, unlike human beings. The type of emotion that these patristic theologians are referring to are the *affections*—“voluntary movements of the rational soul”¹¹—like kindness, and not the *passions*—the type of emotion affiliated with the sinful movements of the soul like lust.¹²

1.2.4 An Impassive Will

Given God’s eternal knowledge of all possibilities, Creel asserts, “God will never know anything more of relevance to the determination of his will than he has always known.” And if God’s eternal perspective ensures the determination of his will, then there is no need for him “to change his mind because he discovers something of relevance that he did not know earlier.”¹³

1.2.5 “Hard” Impassibilism or “Soft” Impassibilism?

Now that I have classified the four ways God is impassive vis-à-vis weak and strong impassibilism, I move to categorize them as either “hard” or “soft” impassibilism.

I define hard impassibilism as a broad view of impassibility that encompasses weak and strong impassibilism about God’s own being. In other words, if God’s nature is immutable,

⁹ See Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 35.

¹⁰ See Paul L. Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, eds. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 58-60.

¹¹ Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 243, in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 401.

¹² See Vanhoozer, 400-4. This account of impassibilist emotions implies that God is dynamic, and not static.

¹³ Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 21.

assuming that a person's essence is *harder* to change than knowledge, emotions, and/or will, either contingently or necessarily, then this inability to change is "hard"; hence, the term, hard impassibilism.

In comparison to hard impassibilism, I define soft impassibilism as a broad view of impassibility that encompasses weak and strong impassibilism about God's knowledge, emotions, and/or will. In other words, if these facets of God are immutable, either contingently or necessarily, then his inability to change is "softer" than, or not as "hard" as, hard impassibilism; hence, the term, soft impassibilism.

1.3 A Brief Description of the Four Facets of God that *Do* and/or *Have to Change*

The four ways that the divine may be possible vis-à-vis weak and strong passibilism include his passive, and thus mutable, nature, knowledge, emotions, and will.

1.3.1 A Passive Nature

Nearly all passibilists agree that God's essential nature cannot suffer change. Kevin J. Vanhoozer writes, "Virtually no Christian theologian [impassibilist or passibilist] says that something could happen to God that would render him [permanently] no longer holy or loving or just."¹⁴ However, there are passibilists like Paul S. Fiddes who believe that when God became incarnate and suffered death on the cross it was not only Christ qua human that died but also Christ qua divine, since death is "the end of the whole person...."¹⁵ And if Christ qua divine experienced death, then something happened to the Second Person of Trinity that rendered him *temporarily* no longer holy or loving or just via a mutable nature as a result of Atonement.¹⁶ That is, if Christ

¹⁴ Vanhoozer, 397.

¹⁵ Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1988] 1992), 194.

qua human and qua divine died for a temporary amount of time before he was resurrected, then for that duration of time he would be incapable of exercising those properties (holiness, love, and justness), since a non-existent being entails not having any properties.

1.3.2 A Passive Knowledge

Creel argues that perfection of knowledge involves God's awareness of things changing, which entails changes in God: "In order to be perfect in knowledge, God must know things as they are. Some things are changing; therefore God must be aware of things as changing. But awareness of change in an object requires change in the subject who is aware; the subject must change from being aware that *x* is not happening to being aware that *x* is happening."¹⁷ What is implied in this explanation of a passive knowledge for God is that God, who is perfect in knowledge (omniscience?), must not only know tenseless facts (all propositional truths about reality), but also tensed facts (all present *now* moments that change as a result of passing in and out of existence).

1.3.3 Passive Emotions¹⁸

Almost all passibilists hold to the notion that in a world saturated with sin and suffering God's love for his creatures necessitates that he be affected by them, which entails suffering with them

¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, a passibilist, also believes that Christ qua divine experienced death on Good Friday, but he qualifies it by saying, "Jesus' death cannot be understood 'as the death of God', but only as death *in* God." Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, [1974] 1993), 207. He goes on to say, "Jesus suffers dying in forsakenness, but not death itself." *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁷ Richard E. Creel, "Immutability and Impassibility," in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., eds. Charles Taliaferro et al. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 323. Creel adds, "This argument applies to God even if God knows eternally all that will ever happen, for God must also know what is happening *now*, and what is happening now is changing, so the content of God's awareness must change as actuality changes. Therefore, in order to have perfect knowledge of the world as it is, God must be mutable." *Ibid.*

¹⁸ The most hotly debated element of the (im)passibility debate is whether or not God's emotions change or whether or not God is/can be emotionally affected by his creation. And of the emotional aspect of God's (im)mutability, divine suffering via divine love is the dominant topic in question.

and because of them: Terence E. Fretheim asserts, “The very act of creation . . . might be called the beginning of the passion of God. God has so entered into the world that God cannot but be affected by its life, including its sinful life. Because this condescending God fully relates to sinful creatures with integrity, and with the deepest possible love, God cannot but suffer, and in manifold ways.”¹⁹

1.3.4 A Passive Will

Most passibilists also believe that God’s will can be (and has been) influenced by his creatures. This brings to mind two Scriptural references in which human prayer has purportedly changed God’s mind: the parable of the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8), and the account of Abraham interceding with God on behalf of Sodom (Gn 18:16-33).

1.3.5 “Hard” Passibilism or “Soft” Passibilism?

Now that I have classified the four ways God may be passive vis-à-vis weak and strong passibilism, I move to categorize them as either hard or soft passibilism.

I define hard passibilism as a broad view of passibility that encompasses weak and strong passibilism about God’s own being. In other words, if God’s nature changes, either contingently or necessarily, then this change is “hard”; hence, the term, hard passibilism.

¹⁹ Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 58. *À la* Daniel Day Williams, “There can be no love without suffering. Suffering in its widest sense means the capacity to be acted upon, to be changed, moved, transformed by the action of or in relation to another.” Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 117. Adding to the concept of a personal God who relates to others, Paul S. Fiddes observes that the nature of divine love necessitates a sympathetic God: “If God is not less than personal, and if the claim that ‘God is love’ is to have any recognizable continuity with our normal experience of love, the conclusion seems inescapable that a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore suffering God.” Fiddes, 17.

I believe that God’s love is not exhausted by the concept of a suffering God. That is, God’s love could be conceived as not only having an affectionate and thus passible side, but also a more rational side, which can be expressed as benevolent acts of charity for his creatures. Sarot calls the former “affectionate love” and the latter “benevolent love.” See Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1992), 89. Impassibilists typically hold to benevolent love, while passibilists typically hold to both benevolent love and affectionate love, but passibilists emphasize affectionate love in a sinful and suffering world.

In comparison to hard passibilism, I define soft passibilism as a broad view of passibility that encompasses weak and strong passibilism about God’s knowledge, emotions, and/or will. In other words, if God’s knowledge, emotions, and/or will changes, either contingently or necessarily, then this change is “soft”; hence, the term, soft passibilism.

2 Summary of Omnisubjectivity

Linda Zagzebski, in her article, “Omnisubjectivity,” defends the possibility of a divine attribute called omnisubjectivity, which she believes is entailed by omniscience (“cognitive perfection”).²⁰

À la Zagzebski, an omniscient being has perfect epistemic states, which means that God has “the deepest grasp of every object of knowledge, including the conscious states of every creature.”²¹

God consciously grasps “with perfect accuracy and completeness” the conscious states of his creatures by assuming their first-person perspective.²²

Zagzebski argues,

If God is omnisubjective, that would solve two puzzles of omniscience: (1) An omniscient being ought to be able to tell the difference between the different qualia of conscious beings, and (2) An omniscient being ought to be able to tell the difference between the first person and third person perspectives on the same state of affairs.²³

She concludes her piece by stating the metaphysical, theological, and moral implications of omnisubjectivity.

²⁰ Linda Zagzebski admittedly takes for granted that “[i]f God is omniscient, he must know every aspect of his creation, including the conscious states of his creatures.” Linda Zagzebski, “Omnisubjectivity,” in *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Jonathan L. Kvanvig, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 231.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 232.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 231.

2.1 Explaining Linda Zagzebski's Argument for Omnibusjectivity

2.1.1 Perfect Total Empathy as Omnibusjectivity

Zagzebski attempts to solve the first puzzle by adopting Julinna Oxley's dual perspective in the case of assuming another person's conscious mental states in order to empathize with the person's emotions²⁴: the first perspective, empathy, entails a level of consciousness at which A imagines being B's friend, and at that level A adopts B's emotion; and, the second perspective involves another level of consciousness underlying that, one that motivates A to adopt the perspective and emotion of B's friend.²⁵ "The fact that A has a dual perspective when empathizing with B means that A's emotion is not identical to B's,"²⁶ although, it is "homologous" (Alvin Goldman) or "congruent" (Julinna Oxley).²⁷ Thus, an empathetic emotion is not identical with the target emotion; it is a copy of the target emotion.²⁸ Moreover, A does not adopt the intentional object of B's target emotion as A's own intentional object.²⁹

²⁴ It is important to note that empathizing with an emotion necessitates feeling the emotion: "A person cannot empathize with an emotion or a sensation without feeling the emotion or sensation because a copy of an emotion is an emotion, and a copy of a sensation is a sensation." *Ibid.*, 242-3

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 239. Arguably, the underlying motivation may be an attitude (feeling?) of sorrow or pity for others, commonly referred to as "sympathy." If this is the case, then sympathy can be a cause of empathy. Empathy is different than sympathy in that empathy involves understanding and sharing the feelings of others, whereas sympathy does not necessarily involve feeling what other people feel.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁷ See Alvin Goldman, "Ethics and Cognitive Science," in *Ethics* 103:2 (Jan, 1993), 337-60, and Julinna Oxley, *Empathy and Contractual Theories of Ethics*, PhD Dissertation (2006), Tulane University, Ch. 1.

²⁸ For example, "Empathetic grief or anger is never exactly the same as the grief or anger with which one empathizes because the empathizer is aware of her emotion as a copy, whereas the target emotion is not a copy of anything." Zagzebski, 240.

²⁹ *Ibid.* "[S]ince having a copy of an emotion with an intentional object does not include adopting that intentional object as one's own, omnibusjectivity does not have the unwanted consequence that God fears, hates, or is angry at the things we fear, hate, or are angry at. God does not love what we love in the state of empathy either, although, of course, he may love those things from his own point of view. I am assuming that no conscious state is intrinsically evil in the absence of its directness towards a certain intentional object, so if God lacks the intentional object, his conscious representation of the state is not evil." *Ibid.*, 243.

Zagzebski also believes that if it is possible to represent (empathize with or copy) another person's emotions, it ought to be possible to represent another person's conscious states.³⁰ From this, she argues for "perfect total empathy": "If perfect empathy includes a complete and accurate representation of another person's emotions, perfect total empathy includes a complete and accurate representation of all of another person's conscious states."³¹ And to have a complete and accurate representation of all of another person's conscious states is to tell the difference between the different qualia of conscious beings. Zagzebski concludes that in order to tell the difference between the different qualia of conscious beings, an omniscient being must be their perfect total empathizer. In other words, an omniscient being must be a perfect total empathizer in order to know what it is like for his conscious creatures to have their distinctive sensations, emotions, moods, and attitudes. Perfect total empathy is the divine property she calls "omnisubjectivity."

2.1.2 A First-Person Perspective as Omnisubjectivity

Zagzebski attempts to solve the second puzzle by employing a human example of knowledge, which she borrows from John Perry but re-words to make her point, concerning the epistemic states between the first-person perspective (*de se* knowledge) and the third-person perspective (*de re* knowledge): what is happening when she, Zagzebski, knows "(1) I [Linda Zagzebski] made a mess in the market and everybody is staring at me" is not identical to what is happening when she or somebody else knows "(3) She (e.g., the woman in the mirror [referring to Linda Zagzebski]) is making a mess and people are staring at her."³² From this, she argues that "in

³⁰ Ibid., 241.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 234-5.

order to tell the difference between the state of a subject who first knows *de re* that she is making a mess and then comes to know *de se* <I am making a mess>, an omniscient being must be able to assume her first-person point of view.”³³ In other words, an omniscient being must be able to assume a first-person perspective in order to distinguish between the objective state of *de re* knowledge and the subjective state of *de se* knowledge. And assuming a first-person perspective is the divine property Zagzebski calls “omnisubjectivity.”³⁴

3 Omnisubjectivity Complements Passibility

Assuming that omnisubjectivity is based on sound reasoning, I argue that omnisubjectivity complements passibility, or, more specifically, that omnisubjectivity complements a qualified version of passibility, what I call, soft passibilism, particularly *a passive knowledge* and *passive emotions*. I make the argument here in order to substantiate the later argument (in section six) that omnisubjectivity offers a defeater to Weinandy’s rejoinder against passibility.

Omnisubjectivity complements soft passibilism by offering conceptual clarity to the question of how an omniscient being, God, is affected in his knowledge and emotions.³⁵ That is, omnisubjectivity identifies the mechanism of God’s noetic and emotional mutability. Omnisubjectivity entails a systematic model of divine empathy that starts with an omniscient being assuming a first-person point of view of all conscious beings and ends with him

³³ Ibid., 236.

³⁴ It seems that by assuming a first-person perspective an omniscient being must have perfect total empathy with all conscious beings.

³⁵ I am not saying, however, that my argument here—omnisubjectivity complements passibility—is what Linda Zagzebski had intended in her piece. She explicitly states, “I will not address the issue of whether omnisubjectivity is compatible with the other traditional divine attributes....” Zagzebski, 242. Regardless, omnisubjectivity, I argue, complements (makes a suitable and efficient contribution to) passibility.

empathizing with all their conscious states, which entails being aware of and feeling their emotions.

3.1 Omnisubjectivity and Conceptual Clarity of a Passive Knowledge

It is by assuming a first-person perspective of all conscious creatures that God is able to know with cognitive perfection their distinctive sensations, emotions, moods, and attitudes that are happening at each and every present *now* moment. And as soft passibilism (viz., a passive knowledge) entails, “God must . . . know what is happening *now*, and [since] what is happening now is changing, so the content of God’s awareness must change as actuality changes.”³⁶

Omnisubjectivity complements passibility by showing that God is passive in his knowledge of all tensed facts concerning his conscious creatures because in order to know what is happening *now* in all conscious mental states, he must experience the qualia of all conscious creatures, which is to say that God endures temporal change to his knowledge. Put differently, God is noetically affected and thus changed by outside forces because God adopts a first-person perspective of these conscious, outside forces (viz., his conscious creatures), which enables him to know the changes of these tensed facts that his creatures experience. Allow me to explain by using a hypothetical situation.

When I, Chester Delagneau, am exceptionally grieved over the loss of a loved one at T_1 , and then over an extended period of time am no longer exceptionally grieved over the loss of the same loved one at T_2 , an omniscient being, God, is made directly aware of my exceptional grief (as a copy of my target emotion) at T_1 and my overcoming my own exceptional grief (as a copy of my target emotion) at T_2 by adopting a first-person perspective of my qualia (i.e., “what-it-is-like” to be Chester). By being directly acquainted with my changing conscious states (viz., my

³⁶ Creel, “Immutability and Impassibility,” 323.

grief), he changes in his awareness of my grief. And by changing in his awareness of my grief, he is affected by my grief. And whenever he is affected by my grief, he has a passive knowledge.

3.2 Omniscient Subjectivity and Conceptual Clarity of Passive Emotions

Likewise, it is by assuming a first-person perspective of all conscious creatures that God is able to empathize perfectly with their distinctive sensations, emotions, moods, and attitudes that are happening in the present. And as soft passibilism (viz., passive emotions) entails, God's love for his creatures in a suffering world necessitates that he be affected by them (i.e., suffer with them and because of them). Omniscient subjectivity complements passibility by showing that when God perfectly empathizes with our emotions via directly experiencing our qualia, he feels whatever emotions we are feeling. And when he feels whatever emotions we are feeling, his emotions change in order to know exactly what it is that we are feeling, which is to say that God is affected by our emotions. And when God is affected by our emotions, he is passive in his emotions. Allow me to explain by using a similar hypothetical situation as illustrated above.

When I, Chester Delagneau, am exceptionally grieved over the loss of a loved one at T_1 , and then over an extended period of time am no longer exceptionally grieved over the loss of the same loved one at T_2 , an omniscient being, God, is not only aware of my exceptional grief at T_1 and my overcoming my own exceptional grief at T_2 , he also perfectly empathizes with (feels) my exceptional grief at T_1 and my overcoming my own exceptional grief at T_2 because he has assumed a first-person perspective of my qualia. And it is by empathizing with my exceptional grief at T_1 that he is able to suffer with me, which implies that he changes emotionally because of me. *In nuce*, when God knows and feels the quantitative distinction of my grief at T_1 and T_2 , he is affected by my grief at T_1 and T_2 , otherwise, he could not know what it is like to be me, who experiences changes to his (Chester's) emotions. And when God is affected by my grief at

T₁ and T₂, he is emotionally passive at T₁ and T₂. And thus, omnisubjectivity complements (soft) passibility.

In sum, omnisubjectivity explains how God is passible, in the “soft” sense, viz., God’s knowledge and emotions change as he adopts a first-person point of view of our conscious states, which enables an omniscient being to be directly aware of all changes to our conscious states. Thus, omnisubjectivity complements (soft) passibility.

4 Weinandy’s Rejoinder Against Passibility

Now that I have argued that omnisubjectivity complements passibility via offering a systematic model of divine empathy that involves an omniscient being assuming a first-person perspective of all conscious beings, I move to state (below) Weinandy’s rejoinder against passibility.

À la Thomas G. Weinandy,

Even if one did allow the Son of God to suffer in his divine nature, this would negate the very thing one wanted to preserve and cultivate. For if the Son of God experienced suffering in his divine nature, he would no longer be experiencing human suffering in an authentic and genuine human manner, but instead he would be experiencing ‘human suffering’ in a divine manner which would then be neither genuinely nor authentically human.³⁷

It seems that passibilists are misled in their dual affirmations that the Son of God suffers in his divine nature *and* that he experiences genuinely what it is like to suffer as a human.

Weinandy is not so much arguing here that Christ qua divine does not suffer (although, he does argue that elsewhere) as he is arguing that passibilists cannot have it both ways: attesting the pathos of God in Christ and attesting that God in Christ is an authentic human empathizer.

Contextually, Weinandy discusses what passibilists believe about what God *the Son* experienced during his lifetime as God incarnate. His riposte against passibility, then, is not

³⁷ Weinandy, 204.

specifically targeted to combat strong passibilism, although, it includes it. Weinandy's rejoinder applies to both soft and hard passibilism.³⁸ I raise this observation to clarify what I will be and what I will not be doing in section six: I will not respond to how omnisubjectivity addresses Weinandy's rejoinder against *hard* passibilism, but I will discuss how omnisubjectivity addresses Weinandy's rejoinder against *soft* passibilism, particularly against God's passive knowledge and passive emotions.

5 How Does Omnisubjectivity Apply to Christ Suffering Qua Divine?

Omnisubjectivity argues that an omniscient being must have perfect total empathy of all conscious mental states, including emotions, via adopting a first-person perspective of all conscious beings. In her piece, Zagzebski calls this omniscient being by name, "God," whom she refers to by quoting a small portion of the *ketuvim* (the "Writings") from the Tanakh, particularly, Psalm 139:1-5.

Moving from my argument that omnisubjectivity complements (soft) passibility, which entails that God suffers when he empathizes with our suffering (or to put it plainly, God suffers when we suffer), I discuss how omnisubjectivity applies specifically to Jesus Christ suffering qua divine, which is needed in order to respond to Weinandy's rejoinder, which focuses on the pathos of God the Son incarnate, and not the pathos of God, generally speaking.

As I have already argued, the reason an omnisubjective God suffers is because we suffer. To be more precise, God suffers as a result of completely and accurately representing (perfectly empathizing with) the suffering emotions of all conscious beings. But at the Incarnation, God the

³⁸ In case there is any doubt, here is the context from which the aforementioned quote was extracted: "If one wishes to say in truth that the Son of God actually experienced and knew what it was like to be born, eat, sleep, cry, fear, grieve, groan, rejoice, suffer, die, and most of all, love *as a man*, and it seems this is precisely what one does want to say, then the experience and knowledge of being born, eating, sleeping crying, fearing, grieving, groaning, rejoicing, suffering, dying, and again most of all, loving must be predicated of the Son of God solely and exclusively *as a man*." Ibid. (emphases in the original)

Son not only suffers because all conscious beings suffer, he also suffers because he himself suffers in his own humanity. To be more precise, Christ qua divine suffers as a result of perfectly empathizing with the emotions of *all conscious beings* via assuming their first-person perspective, which includes perfectly empathizing with his own human emotions via assuming his own human first-person perspective.³⁹ (From here onward, I will only discuss the omnisubjectivity of Christ as it applies to him empathizing with himself, and not as it applies to him empathizing with all conscious beings.)

To be clear, God the Son incarnate suffered as a result of perfectly empathizing with what grieved him as a man. Generally speaking, Christ qua divine felt what Christ qua human felt. So when Christ's humanity felt grieved hungry, tired, happy, sad, etc., Christ's divinity also felt hungry, tired, happy, sad, etc., as an effect of the direct (noetic) awareness of his own humanity. Consider the specific example of Christ grieving in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was betrayed and arrested: Christ personally agonized in fervent prayer to the Father, which resulted in something like *hematidrosis* ("sweating blood") (Lk 22:39-46). *À la* omnisubjectivity, Christ's divinity suffered as a result of his perfect empathy with his own humanity at the heavenly request of not having to endure his own cup of suffering. The application of omnisubjectivity to Christ suffering qua divine is that the Son of God perfectly empathizes with his own human suffering. The omnisubjectivity of Christ's divine suffering entails that God the Son directly experiences (noetically and emotionally) what it is like to suffer as a human being because Christ qua divine adopts a first-person perspective of his own human suffering.

³⁹ My assessment of Christ's omnisubjectivity stops at Christ qua divine perfectly empathizing with the emotions of all conscious beings at the Incarnation, and does not address how the Father perfectly empathized with the emotions of the Son at the Incarnation, or how the Holy Spirit perfectly empathized with the emotions of the Father and the Son at the Incarnation, or any combination of how the three Persons of the Trinity perfectly empathized with one another. I am aware that further nuances can be made vis-à-vis the omnisubjectivity of the immanent Trinity during the Incarnation; however, that is not a requirement for my argument.

Thus, the systematic model of divine empathy proposed by Zagzebski has direct application in addressing not only how God suffers with us and because of us, but also how God (the Son) personally suffers via direct (noetic) awareness of his own humanity, which is relevant in addressing Weinandy's rejoinder against (soft) passibilism (i.e., locating suffering in Christ's divinity actually prohibits God the Son from knowing what it is like to suffer as a human.).

6 Omnisubjectivity as a Defeater to Weinandy's Rejoinder Against Passibility

Before I offer omnisubjectivity (of Christ) as a defeater to Weinandy's rejoinder against (soft) passibilism, it is necessary to elucidate a distinction between two accounts of divine empathy that have been explicitly and implicitly discussed: (1) divine empathy via first-person perspective, and (2) divine empathy via personal experience (without adopting a first-person perspective of all conscious beings). Obviously, omnisubjectivity represents (1), and the idea that God empathizes with us when he becomes incarnate and personally suffers as God represents (2), which I assume is the divine empathy model that Weinandy is responding to. I will interweave these concepts into my argument.

Weinandy's rejoinder against passibilism is well taken. Ironically, passibilists locate suffering in Christ's divinity in order to claim that God experiences his creatures in the most relationally intimate (meaningful) way possible—by being a fellow sufferer with them—but *de facto* when Christ suffers as God he is incapable of experiencing what it is like to suffer as a human, and thus the notion of a passive God negates the very thing passibilists want to preserve and cultivate—God as an authentic human empathizer.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Weinandy has, in my opinion, effectually exposed this line of reasoning as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument.

I believe Weinandy is right! That is, I believe Weinandy's rejoinder stands if God empathizes with us on account of (2). In other words, God's "authentic human empathy" is ineffectual if his ability to understand us and what we experience on a regular basis is dependent on Christ qua divine suffering as God and not as man. Christ can neither authentically nor genuinely feel what we feel (empathize with us) as human beings if what he understands about suffering is located in his personal divine experiences, (2). Weinandy's rejoinder stands! But what if we apply (1) to the Son of God suffering in his divine nature?

For the sake of argument, Weinandy gives the passibilists what they want—the pathos of God the Son in his divinity. But in getting what they want, passibilists have unknowingly and unwittingly buried their best argument for and defense of the pathos of God in Christ. Or have they? The omnisubjectivity of Christ suffering qua divine not only resurrects an answer to the question "How can Christ suffer as God and empathize with us as humans?" but, more importantly to defend the thesis of this paper, it offers a defeater to Weinandy's rejoinder against (soft) passibilism. Put differently, when we apply (1) to the Son of God suffering in his divine nature, the dilemma (and irony) that God in Christ suffers and also empathizes with us dissipates. Allow me to explain.

As previously stated, omnisubjectivity represents (1). That is, an omniscient being, God, perfectly empathizes with our sufferings (as well as the full spectrum of human emotions) via mapping on to our first-person point of view. But omnisubjectivity *simpliciter* is not enough to address Weinandy's rejoinder since his argument against (soft) passibilism entails the suffering of the Son of God incarnate in his divinity. Thus, the omnisubjectivity of Christ is needed. By applying (1) to the pathos of Christ in his divine nature, God incarnate perfectly empathizes not only with our human sufferings via assuming our first-person perspective, but also with his own

human sufferings via assuming his own first-person perspective of what it is like to suffer as a man. The importance of divine empathy via first-person perspective, (1), for my argument cannot be overstated. The omnisubjectivity of Christ defeats Weinandy's rejoinder against (soft) passibilism because Christ qua divine perfectly empathizes or directly experiences (noetically and emotionally) what it is like to suffer as a human being via assuming a first-person experience of all human sufferers, which includes himself. Thus, the omnisubjectivity of Christ entails that the Son of God both suffers in his divine nature and that he genuinely experiences human suffering, which enables God to be authentic human empathizer. The application of the omnisubjectivity of Christ to the Gospel of Luke mentioned above is enlightening.

When Christ qua divine directly experienced his own human qualia at the moment of his spiritual agony in the Garden he became intellectually and emotionally aware of what it is like to suffer excruciating pain as a human. However, just moments prior to his suffering, say, at T_1 , he was partaking of the Passover Meal with his disciples in the *kataluma* ("upper room"), which symbolized The New Covenant. Then, at T_2 , he left to pray on the Mount of Olives. And inevitably, to fulfill prophecy, at T_3 , he was arrested, betrayed, and brought before the Sanhedrin. These changes (moving from T_1 to T_2 to T_3) as they pass into and out of existence ("temporal becoming") affect Christ in his human nature: at T_1 he becomes aware of what it is like to experience the Seder Meal as a human; at T_2 he becomes aware of what it is like to feel suffering in the Garden; and at T_3 he becomes aware of what it is like to be betrayed, arrested, and falsely tried before the Jewish Council as a human. He perfectly empathizes with his own human experiences at T_1 , T_2 , and T_3 via becoming directly acquainted (via first-person perspective) of these (tensed) facts. This entails that the Son of God incarnate personally suffered and that he perfectly empathized with his own human suffering, as well as the human suffering of all human

beings. And because he knows personally what human suffering feels like Christ qua divine is able to be an authentic human empathizer, which affords some people the comfort of knowing that God experiences them in the most relationally intimate way possible.

Conclusion

I have formulated two arguments concerning omnisubjectivity: (1) omnisubjectivity complements (soft) passibilism—the notion that God is passive in his knowledge and emotions, and (2) the omnisubjectivity of Christ defeats Weinandy’s rejoinder against (soft) passibilism. I have substantiated (1) by arguing that omnisubjectivity offers conceptual clarity to the concept of divine pathos by showing that an omniscient being, God, is affected in his knowledge and emotions when he assumes a first-person perspective of all conscious beings and empathizes with all their conscious states, including their emotions. And I have substantiated (2) by arguing that the Son of God both suffers in his divine nature and that he genuinely experiences human suffering, which enables God to be an authentic human empathizer.

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