

## *Why God Cannot Think: Kant, Omnipresence, & Consciousness*

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**Abstract:** It has been argued that God is omnipresent, that is, present in all places and in all times. Omnipresence is also implied by God's knowledge, power, and perfection. A Kantian argument shows that in order to be self-aware, apply concepts, and form judgments, in short, to have a mind, there must be objects that are external to a being that it can become aware of and grasp itself in relationship to. There can be no external objects for an omnipresent God, so he cannot have a mind.

The standard theological attributes of God are omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. Philosophical discussions have also focused on a set of metaphysical attributes of God that include properties such as perfection, timelessness, immutability, absoluteness, and omnipresence.<sup>1</sup> There is also a set of tertiary attributes that God may have by implication of the other properties or that are implied by classic characterizations. These are consciousness, will, desire, and goals. It is often said that God is aware of your sins, God issues commands, God has a plan, God wants you to do good, and so on.

I believe that a coherent conception of God cannot be formed from the complete set of the theological, metaphysical, and tertiary attributes. Nor can a coherent conception of God be formed from several of the subsets of these attributes because some of the attributes themselves are incoherent, or because combinations of some of the attributes are inconsistent.<sup>2</sup> In this article I will argue that omnipresence is not consistent with having what I will call higher consciousness, which includes the cognitive capacities to recognize and judge objects in the world and to be aware of one's representations as representations. Let us call the combined property of being omnipresent and having higher consciousness, omniconsciousness. This article will argue that 1) omniconsciousness is not possible because in order to be conscious a being must be limited in ways that an omnipresent thing is not, and 2) since omnipresence has been attributed to God by a number of influential theologians and omnipresence is implied by omniscience, omnipotence, and perfection, God cannot have higher consciousness.

The argument turns on some of the powerful insights from Immanuel Kant's arguments in the Critique of Pure Reason. In the "Refutation of Idealism" and the "Transcendental Deduction" sections of the Critique, Kant argues that self-awareness is not possible without awareness of objects external to one's mind. And unless a being is aware of the self and of external objects as different from self, that being cannot grasp that its mental states are representations of something different from itself. Furthermore, if a being cannot make these fundamental distinctions between self and external objects, that being cannot form judgments about objects. Building from these points in Kant, I will argue that an omnipresent being cannot make object/representation discriminations, so it cannot make a self/other distinction. If it cannot make self/other distinctions, then it cannot apply concepts or form judgments. Without those crucial abilities, an omnipresent being cannot have higher conscious, so it cannot have a mind.

### **The Features of Higher Consciousness**

There are two distinguishing and defining characteristics of what we are calling higher consciousness that are precluded by omnipresence.

**A. Higher consciousness includes the capacity to recognize one's mental states as representations or draw a distinction between one's representations and the thing being represented.**

In order to grasp that a representation is a representation of an object, a being must be able to comprehend several things. First, that being must recognize that there is an object that the representation is a representation of. Humans, for example, are not merely conscious of objects external to us the way a plant can be said to be aware of the sun when it turns its leaves towards the light. Our sensory and mental faculties provide us with representations of things outside of us, and we are aware of those representations as representations. To understand that the representation is of something, a being must recognize that the representation is different from the thing represented. That is, the being must grasp that what appears to be the case in the representation may not be the case in the object, and what is the case in the object may not appear to be the case in the representation.<sup>3</sup> When the distant 20 story building appears to be 1 inch tall according to the ruler in my hand, I recognize that it is my representation of the building that appears small, not the building itself. I also recognize that there may be things about the building, that it houses a crowd of people, for instance, that are not reflected in my representation. Furthermore, I must be able to see that the divergence or the possibility of error in my representation arises from my use of the representation to stand in for the object; the representation is not the same as the object represented. Understanding the difference between the representation and the object represented also presupposes that the person be able to grasp herself as a distinct object from the one being represented. The representation, understood as a representation of an object, serves as a bridge that connects a being's consciousness with the things that surround it. And to have what we are calling higher consciousness, a being must be able to see itself, the representation, and the object in this three-way relationship. The representation is the means by which a being can have any awareness of objects as objects at all.

Kant argues that object/representation discrimination is also a necessary presupposition of self-awareness. A being with higher consciousness must do more than merely recognize or react to objects in the world; it must be able to separate those objects into the one that is the self and the others that are not, it must separate the subjective course of its experience from the objective state of affairs, and it must be able to place itself as an object among the non-self objects. This conceptual difference between the self and others is not possible for a being that does not possess the ability to make object/representation discriminations. The point here is very close to one he makes in the "Refutation of Material Idealism" in the Critique of Pure Reason. Descartes and Berkeley had maintained that self-awareness is possible prior to knowing or even without the existence of external objects. In contrast, Kant argues that being aware of the self is only possible through the existence and awareness of non-self objects. He says, "The consciousness of my own existence is simultaneously a direct consciousness of the existence of other things outside of me."<sup>4</sup>

Kant also explains the relationship between self-awareness and object awareness this way:

The I think must be capable of accompanying all my presentations. For otherwise something would be presented to me that could not be thought of at all-which is equivalent to saying that the presentation either would be impossible, or at least it would be nothing to me.<sup>5</sup>

Kant's "I think" that must be able to accompany a higher consciousness' representations is that being's awareness of itself as a thing among other things in an objective world. A being can recognize the

difference between its representations and the objects that they are representations of if and only if that being is also capable of being self-aware.

Let us stipulate that a being that is aware in some sense, but is not capable of object/representation discrimination is a being with lower consciousness. Self-awareness of the sort Kant describes is not possible for this being because it necessarily presupposes the capacity to make object/representation discriminations. Many animals fall into the lower consciousness category. The family dog who wags its tail or growls and barks at itself reflected in the mirror is not aware of the image as an image. And it is no accident that it fails to recognize the image as an image and it fails to recognize the dog in the mirror as itself. Object/representation discrimination cannot be had without self/other awareness because they are two sides of the same ability. Without it, the only sort of interaction with the world that the dog can have is an immediate and instinctual stimulus response.

There are good reasons to think that this capacity is one of the properties that are necessary for having a mind. It is not merely the capacity to have representations that distinguishes the beings with minds from the beings without minds, but the capacity to grasp that those representations are a subjective reflection of an objective state of affairs. A lower consciousness is aware of nothing but the series of representations it has, in the order that they occur. Higher consciousness grasps that its representations are merely one possible subjective course of representations among many that can be had through an objective world. In Kant's famous example, even though I first observed the ship upstream and then downstream, I can conceive of the ship's being downstream first and traveling upstream.<sup>6</sup> The family dog comes to associate the jingle of keys with going somewhere in the car, in that order. We could as easily condition the dog to associate the ringing of a bell with going somewhere in the car. In contrast, we recognize that the keys can jingle or the bell can ring for a number of reasons and that travel in the car may or may not be next. And it is this ability to see that my representations could have been different as well as the ability to causally order my representations that distinguishes higher from lower consciousness. I can separate the cause of an event from objects that are merely accidentally associated with it.

The difference between these two levels of consciousness appears to be a difference in kind, not merely degree. It is also the boundary between beings with minds and beings without because it is the difference between having the capacity for self-reflection, self- and other- awareness, and even freedom, Kant argues. All of these abilities are lacking in lower consciousness. The merely representational and associative consciousness is acted upon by the world, but the being that is aware that its stimuli serve as representations of the world locates itself and its subjective experience in relationship to the world; such a being is aware that objects in the world are acting upon it to generate representations.

A closer look at some beings that are very close to having higher consciousness makes the distinction between higher and lower even sharper. In a recent study on chimpanzees, researchers put a spot of paint on the chimps' forehead without their knowing it. When the chimps were shown a mirror, they noticed the red spot in the reflection and reached up to their own foreheads to remove it.<sup>7</sup> Their reaction suggests that these chimps both have a higher level of self-awareness than the animals that react to the mirror as if it is another animal, and that they have some rudimentary awareness of the difference between a representation of an object (in the mirror) and the object itself (the paint spot on their own heads.) While they may have a partial grasp of the difference between the image and the object, other research suggests that they do not have a conception of what it is for another being to share their level of consciousness. In several tests, chimps were just as likely to beg food from a researcher wearing a blindfold or a bucket over her head as from a researcher with her eyes uncovered.<sup>8</sup> These tests suggest that the chimps are not

making a distinction between what it is for another being to be aware or not be aware of events around it. So we can modify our account of full self-awareness such that it includes the capacity to make object/representation discriminations, self/other awareness, as well as the capacity to recognize that others possess higher consciousness and self-awareness.

There is another distinctly Kantian mental capacity that we should include in our account of higher consciousness before we examine the implications for God's omnipresence.

**B. Higher consciousness includes the capacity to form judgments about objects, identifying and attributing properties to them.**

Some creatures, like ourselves, can identify properties that objects possess, and we can ascribe those properties to the object by means of concepts.<sup>9</sup> Identifying the properties that an object has requires relating it to other similar objects with a general, abstract term that labels the property they have in common. Possessing the concept, brown, for instance, makes it possible for me to grasp that the trunk of the tree and a dog have something in common. Subsequently, I can form judgments about both: "The tree is brown," and "The dog is brown." But being able to apply the concepts is not enough to form judgments. A being must also be able to recognize the relationships between the different concepts, how and in what order they are connected, which combinations are not syntactically coherent, and so on. Kant refers to this kind of concept employing and judging consciousness as a discursive consciousness in contrast to an intuitive consciousness whose cognitive access to objects is not mediate. It has direct and immediate access to objects as they are in themselves.<sup>10</sup>

So judging requires both the capacity for abstraction, or the ability to recognize the use of one representation to stand in for a group of others, and it requires the ability to employ those concepts within their syntactic system. Again, recent studies on chimps shed light on what these abilities are. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Duane Rumbaugh<sup>11</sup> have been able to draw out some remarkably abstract conceptual abilities and even syntactic awareness in chimps with some carefully designed training and trials. The chimps were trained to sort one group of items into two groups of items: food and tools. Then the chimps were trained to associate each of these two groups with abstract symbols that did not resemble the objects in either of the groups. In time, when they were presented with an entirely new food item or tool, the chimps were able to place it with either the symbol for food or tool correctly.

Some of the chimps who had received previous lexical and syntactic training were more successful at the symbol-sorting project than others. These chimps had been trained to use a simple language of 2 verbs (one for solids and one for liquids) and 4 nouns (2 solid foods and 2 liquid foods) so that they could form simple requests like, "Give banana." The researchers devised a complicated set of exercises to teach the chimps not only which combinations of the 6 terms were grammatical and allowable, but which of the numerous combinations did not form grammatical assertions like "banana juice give."<sup>12</sup> Eventually the chimps were able to make grammatical requests in their simple language with new food items and a corresponding new symbol for that food item. It appears that the chimps had mastered the primitive syntax of their language and had learned to correctly integrate new symbols into the language, although the number of symbols, the syntactical structure, and the abstraction of the symbols were all significantly limited for the chimps. They appear to be poised at the cusp for both of the abilities of higher consciousness that we have singled out.

## Omniconsciousness is Impossible

We are now in a position to see why an omnipresent being cannot have higher consciousness, or why omniconsciousness is impossible. Here is the argument in schematic form:

1. A being with higher consciousness possesses two abilities A) the ability to discern between the object and a representation of the object, and B) the ability to apply concepts and form judgments about objects.
2. If a being has the ability to discern between the object and a representation of the object, and the ability to apply concepts and form judgments, then that being must be able to grasp the difference between the self and not-self.
3. A being is omnipresent when that being occupies or is present in all places, far or near, in all times, past, present, or future.
4. There is nothing that is not-self for an omnipresent being by definition of omnipresence.
5. So an omnipresent being cannot grasp a difference between the self and not-self.<sup>13</sup>
6. Therefore, an omnipresent being cannot possess higher consciousness.
7. In short, God cannot have a mind because omniconsciousness is impossible.

A brief return to Kant's argument in the "Refutation of Material Idealism" will help clarify the argument that omniconsciousness is impossible. In response to Descartes' skepticism and Berkeley's denial of the existence of external objects, Kant argues first that consciousness (higher consciousness, in our terms) presupposes the capacity to distinguish the self from the non-self, and secondly, if a being is aware of the self, there must be something in the world that is not that being. Necessarily, for a being to have higher consciousness, there must be something independent or different from that being and that being must be aware of those independent objects as separate. Berkeley thought that the concept of mind-independent objects is incoherent. Descartes thought he could prove the existence of his own mind while the existence of external objects remained in doubt. Kant argues that being aware of one's own existence as a thing with properties (which neither Berkeley nor Descartes denied) is only possible if some mind-independent objects exist and if a being grasps the difference between itself and those objects.

Notice that Kant's conclusion is stronger than the one I have been arguing for. There is an important difference between Kant's anti-skeptical conclusion that 1) higher consciousness requires that material objects exist in the world, and the claim in this article that 2) higher consciousness requires that a being must think of objects in the world as being external. In the "Refutation," Kant is attempting to disprove radical skepticism or idealism about the existence of material objects. Kant's stronger conclusion would support the argument we have been making about omniconsciousness, but it is not necessary to adopt the strong anti-skeptical position. The weaker conclusion 2) shows the problem with omniconsciousness just as well, but it makes a more modest claim about the way a conscious mind must think about the objects of its representations, whether there be external, material objects or not. So the success of the argument does not depend upon Kant's strongest anti-skeptical argument. Being omnipresent precludes the possibility of there being any objects external to that being as well as the possibility of that being's accurately thinking of objects as external.

If there is nothing external to a being or nothing that the being can accurately think of as external, then that being cannot draw a distinction between itself and objects which are not itself. There are no objects that would make such a distinction possible. Without the subject/object distinction, a being cannot possess either of the capacities of higher consciousness. That being cannot recognize that it has representations of objects and that those representations are different from the objects themselves because that being cannot grasp the relationship between itself, its representations, and the objects that it represents. Nor can that being form judgments about objects by attributing properties to them since judging also presupposes the subject/object distinction. In order to judge, "My neighbors are playing loud music," I must be able to distinguish between what the real state of affairs is and what I represent it to be. I assert that the music really is being played loudly, and not merely that I am hallucinating it. When I make a judgment I assert something to be true (rightly or wrongly) about the real state of affairs that I intend my judgment to reflect. If I cannot distinguish between the self and the non-self (which an omnipresent being would not be able to do) I cannot grasp that there is a gap between what I represent to be the case and what is the case.

## Omnipresence

A more careful analysis of omnipresence is needed to complete this argument. There are a number of questions to ask. What reasons do we have for thinking that God is omnipresent? And what exactly does omnipresence entail? If a being is omnipresent, is it true that there is nothing that it can conceive of as separate from itself?

There are several substantial reasons to attribute omnipresence to God. First, a number of important theistic philosophers have insisted that God is omnipresent and their analyses of the property provide some additional insights into what it is to be omnipresent. On Aquinas' account, God's presence in the world is all pervasive, no matter how far or how many places there may be,

It belongs therefore to a thing to be everywhere absolutely when, on any supposition, it must be everywhere; and this properly belongs to God alone. For whatever number of places be supposed, even if an infinite number be supposed besides what already exist, it would be necessary that God should be in all of them; for nothing can exist except by Him. Therefore to be everywhere primarily and absolutely belongs to God and is proper to Him: because whatever number of places be supposed to exist, God must be in all of them, not as to a part of Him, but as to His very self.<sup>14</sup>

Aquinas' conception of God's omnipresence is mirrored by John Wesley's, the founder of Methodism, who maintains that, "In a word, there is no point of space, whether within or without the bounds of creation, where God is not."<sup>15</sup>

In Newtonian space, the presence of an object in a certain location in space and time normally precludes the presence of another object in that same time and place. Aquinas argues, however, that God's presence in all locations has a different character that does not prevent the presence of other objects,

It is written, "I fill heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 23:24). . . . God is in every place; and this is to be everywhere . . . and God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby

excluded from it; indeed, by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place.

Aquinas argues that there is another sense in which God's presence is not like that of other bodies,

God is in all things; not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident, but as an agent is present to that upon which it works. For an agent must be joined to that wherein it acts immediately and touch it by its power . . . as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being.

So God's omnipresence must be a necessary attribute, not a property that is true of God accidentally. And God's presence in every thing is a function of his perfect agency which brings all things into existence and sustains their being. He can be said to be all present because all things are immediately subject to his power. So on Aquinas' account omnipotence implies omnipresence. Having the power to do anything to any object entails having perfect, immediate presence in all things.

We might also attribute omnipresence to God on the basis of his perfection. A being that does not exist in all times or places would be limited, hence it would lack perfection. Nothing can be separate from a being that is perfect. And as J.N. Findlay has argued, a being that lacks perfection or the other divine attributes is not worthy of the name God; such a being would not be a "proper object of religious reverence."<sup>16</sup> So if there is a thing that is an appropriate religious object, it must be, among other things, omnipresent. Furthermore, omniscience requires omnipresence. In order to have flawless and complete knowledge of all things, past, present, and future, a being would need to be present in all things at all times. First, an omniscient being must have access to every object to possess all knowledge. And second, that access to each object itself must be perfect. In order to have omniscient access to every truth about every object, there cannot be any object or any part of an object that is not exhaustively present to that being. While it is possible to know some of the truths about an object without being present in that object, exhaustive and perfect knowledge of that thing is not possible for a being that remains separate from it; the mind of the omniscient being must be immediately and completely unified with the objects of its knowledge.

So an omnipresent God occupies or is present in all places, far or near, in all times, past, present, or future. His presence does not preclude other things. God is necessarily omnipresent. Omnipresence is implied by omnipotence, perfection, and by omniscience. Any lesser being would not be deserving of the name God.

The argument against omniconsciousness outlined above poses a serious problem for a coherent characterization of God. The objector to the argument might have granted the point and simply given up omnipresence. Without omnipresence, the possibility that God could have higher consciousness remains open but other problems occur. First, a characterization of God that is not omnipresent runs afoul of several classic portrayals like Aquinas' and even God's own claim in Jeremiah 23:24. And second, there are several reasons to think that God cannot be omniscient, omnipotent, or perfect without omnipresence. So the being in question is either semi-present and undeserving of the name God or it is omnipresent and mindless, incapable of judging or doing many of the things that God is commonly thought to be capable of doing.

## **Objections and Responses**

## **The "Parts of Self" Response**

The critic of the argument against omniconsciousness might accept omnipresence as it has been presented and maintain that even if God is everywhere, God would be able to discriminate between parts of himself as being different from each other, and he could thereby possess higher consciousness. My hands, for instance, are part of me, yet I can think about them as objects, form judgments about them, be aware of my representations of them as representations. Why is it impossible for an omnipresent God to be conscious of all things the way we are conscious of the parts of our own bodies?

The answer is that even being aware of a part of one's self, like one's hands, requires the capacity to make the subject/object distinction. And an omnipresent being cannot distinguish between subject and object for the reasons discussed above. When I form a judgment like, "This is my right hand," or "My hand hurts," or even that "There are hands" at all, I am judging that there are objects in the world that possess properties. There is a thing, me, that has the property of having hands. I judge that these are my hands and not the person's across the room. And I cannot be aware of these hands as mine, or even as things at all, unless I can distinguish between them and other things in the world that are not me. A necessary condition of being conscious of any object, whether that object be the self, a part of self, or something more distantly external, is being able to judge that the world is occupied with objects, some of which are not me. For an omnipresent being, however, there are no objects in the world that are not the self. So that being cannot make the crucial distinction between itself and other things that makes judgments possible.

## **The Dualist Response**

The theist may present a sort of dualist objection to the way omnipresence has been characterized. God is a spiritual being, according to the objection, composed of spiritual, not material, substance. Spiritual substance, according to Descartes, is not spatial. The Cartesian dualist (and theist) may propose that God's spiritual substance pervades, or is copresent with all things, hence he is omnipresent. But God is not material, so there remains something in the world that is different from God. So God is capable of drawing a distinction between himself and the material world, hence God can have higher consciousness. And since God's spiritual being is present in all things, God is omnipresent as well.

I think a couple of responses can be made to this attempt to reconcile omnipresence and higher consciousness. First, even if we grant the possibility that spiritual, non-spatial substances are possible, a being composed of this substance cannot be omnipresent. By the objection above, at best God is only semi-present, since God is only present in one of the two fundamental categories of substance. If God is not spatial, then there is a class of things, namely spatial things, that God cannot be present in or with. And if there is a class of things that a being cannot be present in or with, it is impossible for that being to be omnipresent. Second, one pays a high price in accepting dualism to solve any philosophical problem. The philosophical community rarely agrees about anything. But one set of issues that is widely agreed upon is the long list of problems and unanswered questions associated with dualism. Mind and body are distinct substances. The latter spatial and temporal, the former temporal only. How does a non-spatial thing control or affect a spatial thing? Where is the locus of their interaction? What are the regularities or laws that govern their interaction? What evidence do we have to think that there are these non-spatial, spiritual substances? What are the other features of these entities? And so on. Unfortunately, satisfactory answers for most of these questions have not been given. Dualism, while often discussed by philosophers, has a number of problems that make it untenable. So proposing a dualist answer to the omniconsciousness problem creates more difficulties for the theist than it solves.



## The Anthropomorphism Response

Thus far, I have argued that an omnipresent being cannot have a mind because it would not be capable of making a crucial distinction between itself and the non-self. The critic might reply that the conception of consciousness employed here is too anthropomorphic. If a perfect omni-being exists, it is unlikely that its consciousness will resemble ours either in the way that it represents objects (if it even has representations) or in the way that it judges objects (if it even judges objects). Proving that God does not have higher consciousness does not prove that God is not conscious.

First, let me point out that this kind of objection to my argument has conceded the point. This response has agreed that an omnipresent God cannot have higher consciousness. Theists may respond that it is not a serious compromise of their position to grant that God does not have a representing and judging consciousness; indeed, an argument for this conclusion can be seen, they respond, as strengthening their conviction that God is something so far beyond us, he is scarcely comprehensible. I believe that conceding the conclusion of my argument is a much more serious breach for classic theism than this response suggests. Reconsider the conclusion being argued. I have said that an omnipresent being cannot make a subject/object distinction, cannot have representations of objects, and cannot judge objects. What has been argued is that an omnipresent being cannot be aware of objects as objects. And the type of consciousness that I have described is not idiosyncratic, inessential, or even anthropomorphic. The sort of consciousness I have been considering is consciousness of objects. If a being cannot be said to be aware of objects and is unable to form thoughts or judgments about their properties, then in what sense of the word can it be said to be conscious at all? There are forms of consciousness, I have conceded, that cannot judge or grasp representations as representations; these beings do not see objects and the self as separate. But the theist will not want to fall back on the position that God's consciousness resembles dog consciousness. The kind of cognitive abilities that we have discussed boost a consciousness from being aware of a mere blind play of representations to being aware of itself, its representations, objects as distinct objects in the world with their own properties, and other beings with higher consciousness. I believe we can side with Kant in saying that this argument describes mental abilities that are no mere accident of human consciousness but are necessary components for a being to think and have a mind. So if theists insist that God possesses some more exotic form of consciousness, the burden of proof is now upon them to explain just what sort of consciousness this is, how it can think about objects, and what reasons they have for believing God's is of this sort.

Kant's distinction between discursive and intuitive consciousness may be useful to the theist here. In contrast to our own, an intuitive mind's awareness of objects is direct, immediate. It is not mediated by representations; it grasps "things as they are in themselves," in Kant's famous phrase. I believe that even Kant is being credulous here, however. As was pointed out in the discussion of omniscience, to grasp something directly and perfectly is essentially to be unified with that object. If there is a separation between the object and the mind of God such that God represents the object to think about it or have knowledge of it, God's knowledge cannot be complete or exhaustive. To know something perfectly is to completely apprehend every facet of its being; to be omniscient is to collapse the distinction between objects and one's representations of objects. And having a mind or being conscious of objects as objects is impossible if this distinction is lost. The substantial burden of proof for the theist is to explain how God can be aware of objects as objects, without God's consciousness being representational. The challenge will be to show how an intuitive and perfect awareness of objects counts as a kind of awareness at all.

There are other problems for the theist's objection that God's consciousness is radically different than the kind we have addressed. Theists in a variety of religious traditions have maintained that God is a being that they can establish and develop a relationship with, a being that is aware of us, who knows our plight, who loves us, who passes judgment on us, and so on. But an omnipresent God can do none of these things. An omnipresent God cannot be aware of itself or us, cannot form thoughts, cannot relate to people as individuals any more than the universe can.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It has been my purpose to show that the consciousness of an omnipresent being can be neither discursive, nor representational. If a being is all present, it is impossible for that being to distinguish between objects and representations of objects, be aware of the difference between the self and other, recognize that other beings have higher consciousness, apply concepts, and form judgments.

At its foundation, to have higher consciousness of something is to be different from it; to be separated from it somehow, yet have some kind of cognitive access to it. For us, that access is through our mental representations generated by sensations. I have argued that for a being to have a mind, or higher consciousness, that being must be able to form ideas of the object and grasp that those ideas themselves are different than the object being considered. Such a mind is representational by its nature. That is, there is some cognitive content that stands in for or presents the object to the mind, and the mind is aware that there is a difference between the cognition and the thing being thought about. Unless a being can form ideas or have some sort of representations that it is aware of as such, I do not believe that we can plausibly claim that the being has a mind in any substantial sense of the term.

### **Some Implications of the Argument Against Omniconsciousness**

An interesting result of the argument that I have presented here is that only semi-present beings can have minds. That is, a being must be limited in time and place in order to be conscious of objects and itself, be aware of its representations of them as representations, and form judgments about them. In many western theistic traditions, the finite and circumscribed position of the individual in the world is much decried. It is our limitations that are responsible for our sinful ways, our lack of understanding, and our failure to appreciate God, for instance. But if the argument in this article is correct, consciousness is possible only by means of being a finite creature. Our finitude is the foundation of selfhood and of having a mind. To eliminate our limitations and become infinite would eliminate the mind we identify as the self.<sup>17</sup>

The impossibility of omniconsciousness also has some serious implications for omniscience. Traditionally, epistemologists have separated kinds of knowledge into knowledge how, propositional knowledge, and knowledge by acquaintance. I know how to ride a bicycle, I know the proposition, "The earth orbits the sun," and I know what Elvis looks like, respectively. Since omnipresence rules out the possibility of higher consciousness, then omnipresence also precludes the possibility of propositional knowledge. If a being is not, never has been, and never will be conscious in the manner described above, then it cannot have propositional knowledge. Whatever it means for a being to have exhaustive and perfect knowledge of all truths, past, present, and future, it cannot mean that it knows them in

propositional form. (There are reasons to believe that a perfect being cannot know by means of propositions since propositions require the use of concepts, as well.<sup>18</sup>)

If omniscience requires a presence or access to all things, perhaps the kind of knowledge an omniscient being can have is more akin to knowledge by acquaintance. God might have a direct, immediate, non-propositional apprehension of all truths that is similar to our immediate recognition of a face, or our intuition that  $1=1$  simply because it is true. Knowledge by acquaintance is consistent with what we have characterized as lower consciousness. But most theists will not be happy with the result that God's consciousness is more akin to a chicken's than to ours.

The implication of this argument, then, is that in the case that God has higher consciousness, some of the traditional characterizations of God and descriptions of his activities are inconsistent. A God with higher consciousness could love, judge, issue commandments, and so on. God could be the sort of being that we could relate to as another creature with a mind. But such a being cannot be omnipresent. So, it appears that he cannot have all propositional knowledge, or be omnipotent, thus he would fail to have two of the standard theological attributes. Without those attributes, it is not clear that a being that is only omnibenevolent, if one exists, would be an appropriate object of a religious attitude or worship.

In the case that God is omnipresent, it may still be possible for God to be omniscient. But this being's knowledge could not be propositional, suggesting a fairly serious lack of perfection, i.e., God could not know that the proposition, "Jupiter is the largest planet in the solar system," is true. Indeed, since this being could not have a mind, there would be nothing to apprehend the truth. It could not be conscious of objects as objects, aware of its own representations as representations, or form thoughts about objects in the world, including itself. Furthermore, without a mind, it is not clear how this being could be said to have all power in any non-trivial sense. The various teleological notions we have of God's having a divine will, or that he exercises his power to bring about a plan, would be difficult to apply non-metaphorically to a mindless entity. God may still be said to have all power in the sense that the universe can be said to contain all power.

Without higher consciousness, a being could not have the kind of personal relationship with humans that many theistic traditions promise. A God lacking higher consciousness would not be able to love, pass judgment, or issue commandments, among other things. If we are to take Findlay's suggestion seriously, a being that is fitting of the title God cannot exist whether omnipresent or not.

## References

1. I would like to thank Prof. Jim Feiser, Rebekah Donaldson, Prof. Eric Sotnak, and David Corner for their insightful comments on this article.
2. There may remain some subsets of the list of God's attributes that are logically consistent such that a being possessing them could exist. But those beings would fall short of the title of God and they would not be worthy objects of worship.

3. And as Kant's boat example from the "Second Analogy" makes clear, what is true of the order of a series of my representations need not be true of the objects I represent. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), A 192/B 237.

4. *Ibid.*, B 276.

5. *Ibid.*, B 132.

6. *Ibid.*, B 237.

7. Gordon Gallup, Jr., "Animal Self-Awareness: A Debate: Can Animals Empathize? Yes," *Scientific American Special Issue: Exploring Intelligence* (Winter 1998): 66-71. Online version available at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/specialissues/1198intelligence/1198debate.html>

8. Daniel Povinelli, "Can Animals Empathize? Maybe Not," *Scientific American Special Issue: Exploring Intelligence* (Winter 1998): 67-75. Online version available at: <http://www.scientificamerican.com/specialissues/1198intelligence/1198debate.html>.

9. This is a cursory and oversimplified discussion of concepts and their role in thought, but it will suffice for the purposes of this argument.

10. Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, B93, B283. This distinction between discursive and intuitive consciousness will be useful later in our discussion

11. Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, David Rumbaugh, and S. Boysen, "Symbolization, language and chimpanzees: A theoretical reevaluation based on initial language acquisition processes in four young Pan troglodytes," *Brain and Language* vol. 6, (1978), 265; Sue Savage-Rumbaugh, David Rumbaugh, S.T. Smith, and J. Lawson, "Reference: The Linguistic Essential," *Science* vol. 210 (1980): 922-925.

12. Terrence Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Coevolution of Language and the Brain* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 85.

13. Self-awareness implies the possession of the object/representation discrimination. And the ability to make object/representation discrimination implies the capacity for self-awareness.

While the ability to apply concepts and form judgments implies self-awareness, the reverse is not true. A being could be self-aware, at least to the extent that chimps are, and not be able to employ concepts or form judgments.

14. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 1, question 8, articles 1-4, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benzinger Brothers Inc., 1947).

15. John Wesley, "On the Omnipresence of God," sermon 111, text from the 1872 edition, <http://gbgmumc.org/UMhistory/Wesley/sermons/serm-111.html>.

16. J.N. Findlay, "God's Existence is Necessarily Impossible," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. Louis Pojman (Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth Publishers, 1998), 95.

17. The conclusion that the elimination of our limitations would eradicate the self fits nicely with the tenets of Buddhism and a number of eastern religions. The highest state of enlightenment is achieved when we are able to remove all desire, all that makes us individuals, and reach an infinite expansion of consciousness.

18. While it is not vital to the success of the argument in this paper, there are good reasons to think that an omniscient mind cannot have propositional knowledge by means of concepts. A concept is a general property that we judge different particular objects to share. Propositional knowledge that employs concepts is thus constrained to identify the ways in which unique and particular objects resemble each other. Resemblance can only be recognized by ignoring or failing to recognize the ways different objects are different. That is, resemblance is only possible through lack of resolution and clarity. Propositional information about an object can never be exhaustive and perfect because it can never completely capture the particularity of an object. All propositional information about it must be in terms of properties that the object shares with others. And only a mind that lacks perfect resolution in its apprehension of objects can grasp similarities. A perfect, omniscient apprehension of an object would grasp it directly, as it is in itself, not by means of its crude resemblance to other objects.