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978-0-521-87966-8 - God and Phenomenal Consciousness: A Novel Approach to Knowledge Arguments

Yujin Nagasawa

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## God and Phenomenal Consciousness

### *A Novel Approach to Knowledge Arguments*

In *God and Phenomenal Consciousness*, Yujin Nagasawa bridges debates in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of religion. He proposes novel objections to Thomas Nagel's and Frank Jackson's well-known 'knowledge arguments' against the physicalist approach to phenomenal consciousness by utilising his own objections to arguments against the existence of God. From the failure of these arguments, Nagasawa derives a unique metaphysical thesis, 'nontheoretical physicalism', according to which although this world is entirely physical, there are physical facts that cannot be captured even by complete theories of the physical sciences.

This book received a John Templeton Award for Theological Promise in 2007.

Yujin Nagasawa is Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Birmingham and Honorary Research Fellow at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the Australian National University. He is the author of numerous journal articles and co-editor of *There's Something About Mary: Essays on Phenomenal Consciousness and Frank Jackson's Knowledge Argument* and *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion*.

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YUJIN NAGASAWA

*University of Birmingham*



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*This book is dedicated with love  
to Asja Pörsch, my wife and my friend.*

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## Preface

When I first became interested in philosophy, I was fascinated by two metaphysical issues in particular. The first was the existence of God in the philosophy of religion. How could we prove the existence or non-existence of the greatest possible being that is worthy of religious worship? I was impressed by philosophers' efforts to answer the question over thousands of years. The second was the mystery of phenomenal consciousness in the philosophy of mind. How could the phenomenal aspect of perceptual experience be realised in the brain, which is nothing but an aggregation of billions of neurons? I was amazed by philosophers' elaborate attempts to analyse and solve this deep metaphysical problem. The goal of this work is to bridge these problems in two distinct areas of philosophy by considering 'knowledge arguments'.

This work is divided into four parts. In Part I, I consider the conceptual background of knowledge arguments. I explain what knowledge arguments are and maintain the following: not only Thomas Nagel's bat argument and Frank Jackson's Mary argument in the philosophy of mind, which purport to refute the physicalist approach to phenomenal consciousness, but also Patrick Grim's argument from knowledge *de se* and the argument from concept possession in the philosophy of religion, which purport to refute the existence of God, are rightly regarded as knowledge arguments. In Part II, I focus on these knowledge arguments in the philosophy of religion. I try to undermine existing objections to the arguments and provide my own new objections. To evaluate the knowledge arguments in the philosophy of religion is an important task in itself. However, in Part III I argue that my analyses of these arguments are also applicable to the knowledge arguments in the philosophy of mind. I demonstrate that the bat argument is structurally parallel to the argument from knowledge *de se* and that the Mary argument is structurally parallel to the argument from concept possession. I put forward novel objections to the bat argument and the Mary argument by contrasting them with their counterparts in the philosophy of religion. Finally, in Part IV, I discuss what I call 'non-theoretical physicalism', which is derived from the failures of the knowledge



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arguments, and consider its implications for relevant issues in the philosophy of religion and the philosophy of mind.

Several parts of this work draw upon material that I have published as the following journal articles: 'Divine Omniscience and Knowledge *De Se*', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53, 2003, pp. 73–82; 'God's Point of View: A Reply to Mander', *Heythrop Journal: A Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 44, 2003, pp. 60–63; 'Divine Omniscience and Experience: A Reply to Alter', *Ars Disputandi* 3, 2003 (<http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000098/index.html>); 'Thomas vs. Thomas: A New Approach to Nagel's Bat Argument', *Inquiry* 46, 2003, pp. 377–394; and 'The Knowledge Argument Against Dualism', *Theoria*, 68, 2002, pp. 205–223. I would like to thank Springer, Blackwell Publishing, the Utrecht University, Taylor and Francis, and *Theoria* for allowing me to use the material here.

Most of the research carried out for this work was funded by the Australian National University (both its Philosophy Program and Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics), the Killam Trust, and the University of Alberta. I am grateful for their academic and financial support. I am also grateful to my colleagues at these universities, including Tom Campbell, Steve Clarke, Keith Horton, Karen Houle, Bruce Hunter, Jeanette Kennett, Neil Levy, Bernard Linsky, Seumas Miller, Adam Morton, Thomas Pogge, Gillian Russell, Amy Schmitter, and Jeroen van den Hoven.

Parts of this work were read at the ANU Philosophy Society in Canberra in 2001 and 2002; the 2002 Pacific Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers in Spokane, Washington; the 2002 Eastern Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association in Philadelphia; and the 2002 Toward a Science of Consciousness conference in Tucson, Arizona. I would like to thank the American Philosophical Association and the Philosophy Program at the Australian National University for their financial support for my attendance at the conferences. I would also like to thank all in the audiences, including Harriet Baber, Karen Bennett, Stephen Biggs, Ben Blumson, Campbell Brown, Philippe Chuard, Daniel Cohen, Nic Damnjanovic, Mitchell Joe, Klaas J. Kraay, Josh Parsons, Karen Riley, Howard Robinson, Laura Schroeter, Kim Sterelny, Charles Taliaferro, and Keith Wyma.

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I also owe a deep debt, of a different sort, to my parents Yonosuke and Yoko Nagasawa, my brother Naoe Nagasawa, my wife Asja Pörsch, and her family Elisabeth and Johann Pörsch, Vislava Potočnik, Anton, Maria, Klara, Zvonka, and Zdenka Truden for their invaluable, loving support.