OMNIPOTENCE AGAIN

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One of the cornerstones of western theology is the doctrine of divine omnipotence. God is traditionally conceived of as an omnipotent or all-powerful being. However, satisfactory analyses of omnipotence are notoriously elusive. In this paper, I first consider some simple attempts to analyze omnipotence, showing how each fails. I then consider two more sophisticated accounts of omnipotence. The first of these is presented by Edward Wierenga; the second by Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso. I argue that both of these accounts fail. Finally, I propose and defend a novel account of omnipotence.

When people have tried to read into "God can do everything" a signification not of Pious Intention but of Philosophical Truth, they have only landed themselves in intractable problems and hopeless confusions; no graspable sense has ever been given to this sentence that did not lead to self-contradiction or at least to conclusions manifestly untenable from a Christian point of view.

— Peter Geach

1. *Introduction*

One of the cornerstones of western theology is the doctrine of divine omnipotence. God is traditionally conceived of as an omnipotent or all-powerful being. However, satisfactory analyses of omnipotence are notoriously elusive. At least one philosopher has argued that no adequate analysis of omnipotence can be given.[1] Some of the difficulties can be made apparent by considering some simple analyses of omnipotence.

A natural understanding of omnipotence is that it is the ability to do anything. As a first attempt to define 'omnipotent', then, we might try:

(D1) x is omnipotent =df. x can bring about any state of affairs.

(D1) leads to trouble immediately. It implies that an omnipotent being can bring about

(rs) There exists a round square.

Yet God cannot bring about (rs) since (rs) is metaphysically impossible. Thus, (D1) implies that God is not omnipotent. (D1) is unacceptable for

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theological reasons. We can weaken (D1) to this:

(D2) x is omnipotent =df. x can bring about any state of affairs that is metaphysically possible.

But God has promised not to lay waste to the earth with a flood[2], that is, He has promised not to bring about this state of affairs:

(ef) The earth is laid to waste by a flood.

(ef) is a metaphysically possible state of affairs. But God is traditionally thought to be *impeccable* — He never does anything that is morally wrong. Furthermore, God has this property essentially. Let us say that x has F *essentially* =df. (i) x has F, and (ii) there is no possible world in which x exists and does not have F. Since God is impeccable in every world in which He exists, there is no world in which God performs a morally wrong action. Thus, God is incapable of performing any morally wrong actions. On the plausible assumption that it is morally wrong for God to break his promise not to bring about (ef), it follows that God cannot bring about (ef).[3]

So (ef) is metaphysically possible; yet God cannot bring about (ef). Therefore (D2), like (D1), implies that God is not omnipotent. This result is theologically unacceptable.

A third analysis of omnipotence suffers from a different kind of defect. Consider:

(D3) x is omnipotent =df. x can bring about any state of affairs, p, such that: it is metaphysically possible that x brings about p.

Imagine the following fairly minor deity. This deity is essentially such that it is incapable of bringing about any state of affairs in which a non-gray object exists. Let's assume that the deity is sufficiently powerful that it can bring about any contingent state of affairs which is not such that a non-gray object exists in that state of affairs. Since it is metaphysically impossible that this deity bring about any state of affairs in which a non-gray object exists, (D3) implies that this deity is omnipotent. The deity can bring about any state of affairs that it is metaphysically possible for him to bring about. But it is clear that this relatively low-powered deity is not an all-powerful or omnipotent being. This deity can create only the drabbest of all possible worlds. Therefore, (D3) is defective because it implies that an obviously non-omnipotent being is omnipotent.[4]

This brief discussion illustrates two of the main difficulties that arise in discussions of omnipotence. On the one side we have the Scylla of theological unacceptability; on the other lies the Charybdis of essentially limited beings. Any successful account of omnipotence must somehow navigate a course between these twin terrors.

In what follows I examine a pair of more complicated accounts of omnipotence. I argue that each of these accounts is unacceptable. I then suggest a new approach to omnipotence and show that it avoids the difficulties that undo other accounts.

2. *Edward Wierenga*

Edward Wierenga presents a sophisticated analysis of omnipotence in his book *The Nature of God*.[5] His analysis makes use of (i) the notion of an *initial segment of a possible world*, and (ii) a distinction between *strongly actualizing a state of affairs* and *weakly actualizing a state of affairs*.

Wierenga describes the notion of an initial segment of a possible world in these lines:

> It seems clear that two possible worlds could be alike up to a certain time and then diverge. For example, there might be worlds W and W′ which are alike up until a certain time t, but in W Jones freely commences to mow his lawn at t whereas in W′ Jones freely refrains from mowing his lawn at t. Before t, W and W′ seem indistinguishable; we can describe them as sharing an initial segment that terminates at t.[6]

Wierenga does not offer an analysis of the concept of an initial segment of a possible world. He notes that "the concept of an initial segment is an intuitive one, but it is difficult to make it precise."[7] Instead, he presents five principles about initial segments. Let us say that 'S(W,t)' indicates an initial segment of a world, W, terminating at time t. Wierenga's five principles are:

> (W1) For every world W and time t, there is a state of affairs S(w,t), which is an initial segment of W terminating at t. (For any world and time, there is aninitial segment of that world terminating at that time).[8]

> (W2) If S(W,t) and S′(W,t) are initial segments, then S(w,t) = S′(w,t). (No world has more than one initial segment terminating at a given time).[9]

> (W3) If S(W,t) = S(W′,t), then, for every time t′ such that t′ is earlier than t, S(W,t′) = S(W′,t′). (If two worlds share an initial segment up to a certain time, then they share all their initial segments terminating at earlier times).[10]

> (W4) IF S(W,t) = S(W′,t), then for all x, x exists before t in W if and only if x exists before t in W′. (If two worlds share an initial segment terminating at t, then the very same objects exists in those two worlds before t).[11]

> (W5) A proposition p is true in an initial segment S(W,t) if and only if it is not possible that S(W,t) obtain and p be false.[12]

Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence also makes use of a distinction. Following a number of other philosophers (e.g., Chisholm and Davidson), Wierenga distinguishes two senses in which a being may be said to bring about a state of affairs.

He writes: "some of the states of affairs we cause to obtain we cause directly. These are ones we bring about but not by bringing about some other state of affairs."[13] Wierenga refers to this first way of bringing about a state of affairs as "strong actualization." He notes that "[w]e can often arrange it that some state of affairs obtains without *causing* it to obtain."[14] Wierenga refers to this second way of bringing about a state of affairs as "weak actualization," and he offers this account of it:

> (W6) x weakly actualizes a state of affairs S if and only if there is some state of affairs T such that (i) x strongly actualizes T, and (ii) if x were to strongly actualize T, S would be actual.[15]

Here, then, is Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence:

> (O′) a being x is omnipotent in a world W at a time t =df. In W it is true both that (i) for every state of affairs A, if it is possible that both S(W,t) obtains and that x strongly actualizes A at t, then at t x can strongly actualize A, and (ii) there is some state of affairs which x can strongly actualize at t.[16]

Wierenga puts the definition less technically in these lines:

> [W]hat is required for a being to be omnipotent is that it be able to strongly actualize any state of affairs which is such that that being's strongly actualizing it is compatible with what has already happened. The second clause is added to preclude essentially impotent things, for example, stones, from trivially satisfying the definiens.[17]

Despite its sophistication, Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence is defective. Let us say that a state of affairs, p, is *red-infected* =df. p is a state of affairs in which a red object exists. An obvious example of such a state of affairs is that a red wagon exists. More generally, we can say that for any color, C, a state of affairs, p, is *C-infected* =df. p is a state of affairs in which a C-colored object exists.

Let us say that a being, x, is *red-impaired* =df. x is unable to actualize (weakly or strongly) any red-infected states of affairs. More generally, we can say that for any color, C, a being, x, is *C-impaired* =df. x is unable to actualize any C-infected states of affairs.

Imagine a series of deities. The first of these deities, Deity_1, is essentially red-impaired. It is impossible that Deity_1 exists and is able to actualize some red-infected state of affairs. Therefore, it is impossible that Deity_1 exists and that Deity_1 actualizes some red-infected state of affairs. Since a being cannot actualize a state of affairs without existing, it follows that it is impossible that Deity_1 actualize any red-infected state of affairs. Nevertheless, Deity_1 satisfies condition (i) of (O′), if, aside from this limitation, Deity_1 has unlimited power. Because it is impossible that he actualize any red-infected state of affairs, his inability to actualize any red-infected states of affairs does not prevent him from satisfying condition (i) of (O′).

$Deity_2$ is also essentially red-impaired. Furthermore, he is essentially blue-impaired. But, aside from this limitation and the limitations shared by $Deity_1$, $Deity_2$ has unlimited power.

The rest of the deities in the series are characterized in the same fashion. Each deity, $Deity_n$, has all the limitations of $Deity_{n-1}$, and is essentially impaired with respect to some color that none of the preceding deities is impaired with respect to. The last deity in the series is essentially impaired with respect to every color except gray. This last deity can actualize only states of affairs in which gray objects exist.[18]

Consider the following series of possible worlds. Each possible world is empty except for one of the deities in the series described above. There is one such possible world for each deity in the series. We can refer to these possible worlds by the position of the deity in the series. So, for instance, 'w_5' designates a possible world containing nothing but $Deity_5$. Finally, let 't_n' designate an arbitrary time in w_n.[19]

This imaginary example is the basis of the following objection to Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence:

The Series of Deities Objection

1. If (O') is correct, then each $Deity_n$ is omnipotent in w_n at t_n.
2. It's not the case that each $Deity_n$ is omnipotent in w_n at t_n.
3. Therefore, (O') is incorrect.

Premise (1) is clearly true. Each deity in the series is unable to bring about any states of affairs that is ruled out by his various color impairments, but since it is impossible for a given deity to bring about a state of affairs ruled out by his color impairments, the fact that he cannot do so is no threat to his omnipotence on Wierenga's analysis. Each deity, $Deity_n$, can strongly actualize any state of affairs such that his strongly actualizing it is compatible with $S(w_n, t_n)$. So each deity satisfies condition (i) of (O'). Furthermore, every deity, even the last in the series, can bring about some state of affairs or other, and so each deity satisfies condition (ii).

Premise (2) is supported by two distinct intuitions. The first intuition is that the last deity in the series, the one that is color-impaired with respect to all colors except gray, is clearly not an omnipotent being.

However, the objection need not stand or fall with this intuition. There is a stronger intuition that supports premise (2). The intuition is that each deity in the series is less powerful than the one that precedes it — and certainly the last deity in the series is much less powerful than the first deity in the series. But omnipotence is supposed to be the highest possible degree of power. Thus, it seems absurd to suppose that two beings which are such that one is much more powerful than the other could *both* be omnipotent. Yet this is exactly what (O') implies; therefore, (O') is unacceptable.

Wierenga is not persuaded by this sort of objection. He writes:

> [someone might claim that] it is possible that there is a being with a wide range of abilities who is nevertheless essentially incapable of performing some other action (say, tying a shoe, remembering the second stanza of our national anthem, or creating *ex nihilo*) which an omnipotent being ought to be able to do. But is it really possible that there be a being whose abilities are *essentially* limited in this way? For any agent who is incapable of tying a shoe, it would seem to be at least possible that God confer on the agent greater powers that include the ability to tie a shoe. In that case, it would be possible for any such limited being to do more than it is able to do.[20]

Wierenga, then, replies to objections like the one I have given above by denying the logical possibility of essentially limited beings like the deities I have described. This denial is based on the claim that God is able to confer greater power on any limited being. Therefore, for any being and any limitation of that being, there is a possible world in which the being exists and does not have that limitation, and so the limitation is not an essential one.

This response will not do. The problem is that God himself is an essentially limited being. He is essentially incapable of doing anything that is morally wrong. If Wierenga is right, however, God is able to confer on himself the power to perform morally wrong actions, and so He is not essentially limited after all.

I can see no plausible basis for allowing that God is essentially limited and yet denying the logical possibility of any other essentially limited beings. I conclude that the Series of Deities objection refutes Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence.[21]

3. *Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso*

Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso tackle the problem of giving an analysis of omnipotence in their article "Maximal Power."[22] Before stating their own view, they present five conditions that any analysis of omnipotence (or, as they would have it, maximal power) must meet. The first three conditions are:

> (C1) The analysis should be stated in terms of an agent's power to actualize or bring about states of affairs.[23]
>
> (C2) An omnipotent being should be expected to have the power to actualize a state of affairs only if it is logically possible that someone actualize that state of affairs.[24]
>
> (C3) Any adequate account of omnipotence must be relativized to a time.[25]

The fourth condition makes use of a number of technical concepts that must be explicated before the condition can be stated. Like Wierenga, Flint and Freddoso draw a distinction between strong and weak actualization. They offer this account of strong actualization:

> Roughly, an agent S strongly actualizes a state of affairs p just when S causally determines p's obtaining, i.e., just when S does something

which in conjunction with other operative causal factors constitutes a sufficient causal condition for p's obtaining.[26]

For instance, imagine that I flip a switch. This flipping of the switch, together with various other conditions involving wiring and electricity, is a sufficient causal condition for a light to go on. I have strongly actualized the state of affairs that a light is on.

Flint and Freddoso characterize weak actualization as bringing about a state of affairs by, or in virtue of, strongly actualizing some other state of affairs.[27]

Flint and Freddoso also appeal to the concept of a *world-type*. This concept in turn makes use of two additional technical concepts: the concept of an *individual essence* and the concept of a *counterfactual of freedom*. Flint and Freddoso offer this account of an individual essence (which they attribute to Plantinga):

> P is an *individual essence* if and only if P is a property which is such that (i) in some possible world there is an individual x who has P essentially and (ii) there is no possible world in which there exists an individual distinct from x who has P.[28]

An example of an individual essence is the property of being David Lewis. There is a possible world in which some individual has this property essentially (namely, him, in the actual world) and necessarily, anyone who has this property is him.

The second technical concept is the concept of a *counterfactual of freedom*:

> Q is a *counterfactual of freedom* =df. Q can be expressed by a sentence of the form "If individual essence P were instantiated in circumstances C at time t and its instantiation were left free with respect to action A, the instantiation of P would freely do A."[29]

Flint and Freddoso endorse a libertarian account of freedom — that is, a view of freedom according to which "every free action must involve the occurrence of an event for which there is no antecedent sufficient causal condition."[30] On such an account of freedom, no being can strongly actualize a free action.[31] Recall the analysis of strong actualization given above. In order to strongly actualize a free action, a being would have to bring about some state of affairs which, together with some other facts, constitutes an antecedent sufficient causal condition for the occurrence of the free action. But if every free action necessarily involves an event for which there is no antecedent sufficient causal condition, then there can be no antecedent sufficient causal condition for a free action, and hence no one can strongly actualize a free action.[32]

Another consequence of this view of freedom is that for any being, there is a set of counterfactuals of freedom such that the being has no control over the truth values of those counterfactuals.[33] Flint and Freddoso call such sets *world-types*:

> [A] world type is a set which is such that for any counterfactual of freedom, either that counterfactual or its negation is a member of the set. . .for any free agent x there will be a set of all and only those true counterfactuals of freedom. . .over whose truth-value x has no control. . .let us refer to [this set] as the *world-type-for-x*.[34]

So:
A counterfactual of freedom, c, is a member of the world-type-for-x if and only if: (i) c is true, and (ii) x has no control over the truth-value of c.

If 'Lx' designates the world-type-for-x, then we can state Flint and Freddoso's fourth condition like this:

> (C4) A being, x, should not be required, in order to rank as omnipotent, to possess the power to actualize any state of affairs that does not obtain in any world in which Lx is true.[35]

As an illustration of this requirement, consider an example discussed by Flint and Freddoso. Imagine a being, Jones, who is in a certain set of circumstances, C, at a certain time, t, and is free with respect to writing a letter to his wife. In such a case, according to Flint and Freddoso, Jones has the power at t to actualize

> (7) Jones's freely deciding in C at t to write a letter to his wife,

and he also has the power at t to actualize

> (8) Jones's freely deciding in C at t to refrain from writing a letter to his wife.[36]

Imagine that the following counterfactual of freedom is true (where 'C' indicates the circumstances Jones is in at t):

> (9) If Jones were in C at t, he would freely decide at t to refrain from writing a letter to his wife.

Now consider the world-type-for-Smith, where Smith is distinct from Jones. Since (9) is a true counterfactual of freedom and Smith has no control over whether or not (9) is true, (9) is included in the world-type-for-Smith. Smith cannot actualize (weakly or strongly) (7). But this does not exclude Smith from being omnipotent. (9) and (7) are incompatible: (7) is false in any world in which (9) is true. Since (9) is a member of the world-type-for-Smith, (C4) implies that Smith may be omnipotent even though he cannot actualize (7).

Flint and Freddoso's fifth condition is designed to avoid the difficulties presented by essentially limited beings:

> (C5) [N]o being should be considered omnipotent if he lacks the kind of power which it is clear an omnipotent agent ought to possess.[37]

Flint and Freddoso claim that the following account of omnipotence satisfies each of (C1) through (C5):

(D) S is omnipotent at t in W if and only if for any state of affairs p and world-type-for-S Ls such that p is not a member of Ls, if there is a world W* such that
(i) Ls is true in both W and W*, and
(ii) W* shares the same history with W at t, and
(iii) at t in W* someone actualizes p,
then S has the power at t in W to actualize p.[38]

There are at least two important differences between this account and Wierenga's analysis. First, Wierenga's analysis dealt only with what a being could strongly actualize. Flint and Freddoso's account deals with what a being can actualize strongly and weakly. Second, notice condition (iii) above. One of Wierenga's necessary conditions for a state of affairs to be relevant to a given being's omnipotence is that it be metaphysically possible that *that being* strongly actualize the state of affairs. Flint and Freddoso offer a requirement that is easier for a state of affairs to satisfy: that it be metaphysically possible that *someone* actualize (weakly or strongly) the state of affairs.

This second difference is of particular importance because it enables Flint and Freddoso's account to avoid the Series of Deities objection that refuted Wierenga's analysis. Consider this state of affairs:

(rw) There exists a red wagon.

$Deity_1$ cannot actualize (rw) in w_1 at a given time t. But there is a world w_1^*, such that (i) L_{Deity1} is true in both w_1 and w_1^*, (ii) w_1^* shares the same history with w_1 at t, and (iii) at t in w_1^* someone actualizes (rw).[39] Therefore, (D) implies that $Deity_1$ is not omnipotent at t in w_1. Flint and Freddoso's account avoids the objection that felled Wierenga's analysis.

Condition (ii) involves the notion of two worlds sharing the same history. Although Flint and Freddoso offer an account of what it is for two worlds to share the same history, I think that their notion of two worlds sharing a same history is sufficiently similar to Wierenga's notion of two worlds sharing an initial segment that we can forego an examination of their discussion.

At any rate, I think the discussion up to this point provides us with a clear enough picture of Flint and Freddoso's account of omnipotence to see that it is defective.

Flint and Freddoso consider the following objection to their account of omnipotence:

> It might be thought that there are some states of affairs which are *so* evil that *no* possible world containing them is a world that anyone could be morally justified in actualizing. Hence, since no divine being could ever have the power even to weakly actualize these states of affairs, no such being could rank as omnipotent.[40]

Let's assume with Flint and Freddoso that there are such states of affairs. An example might be this state of affairs:

(ic) An innocent child is tortured for one thousand years.

The objection in the passage above can be formulated like this:

1. If (D) is true, then God is not omnipotent.
2. God is omnipotent.
3. Therefore, (D) is false.

The idea is that (D) implies that any omnipotent being is able to actualize (ic). Since God cannot actualize (ic), it follows from (D) that God is not omnipotent (first premise). But this is absurd — God is omnipotent (second premise). Therefore, (D) is false. The objection charges (D) with theological unacceptability.

Flint and Freddoso deny premise (1):

> [the objection] lacks efficacy against one who holds the. . .belief that Yahweh is an essentially divine — and so essentially impeccable — being. For on this view no state of affairs of the sort just described obtains. . .in any possible world in which Yahweh exists.[41]

The existence of God is logically incompatible with (ic) — and with any state of affairs relevantly like it.[42] But why is this so? God is traditionally thought to be the creator of the world. Using Flint and Freddoso's terminology, we can say that x is *creative* =df. x (weakly or strongly) actualizes any state of affairs which is such that someone actualizes it.[43] God is essentially creative: in any world in which He exists, He (at least weakly) actualizes all the states of affairs that are actualized by anyone in that world.[44] So, if God exists in a world in which (ic) obtains, then God (at least weakly) actualizes (ic) in that world. But since it is morally wrong for any being to actualize (ic), and God is essentially impeccable (essentially such that He never performs any morally wrong action), it follows that there is no world in which God actualizes (ic). So if God exists in a world in which (ic) obtains it follows both that (i) God actualizes (ic) in that world, and (ii) God does not actualize (ic) in that world. Therefore, God does not exist in any world in which (ic) obtains.

Recall (D) from above. Consider any time, t, and any world in which God exists, w. God cannot actualize (ic) at t in w. The objection charges that given this fact, (D) implies that God is not omnipotent at in w. But this is so only if there is some world, w*, such that (i) w* shares the same history with w and (ii) (ic) obtains in w*. Since God exists in w prior to t, w and w* share the same history only if God exists in w* prior to t.[45] Furthermore, God is *essentially indestructible* — it is impossible that God ceases to exist.[46] Since God exists prior to t in w*, He exists at all times after t in w*. But, as shown above, if God exists in w*, then (ic) does not obtain in w*. Thus, if w and w* share the same history, then (ic) does not obtain in w*. Therefore, there is no world w* that satisfies both (i) and (ii) above, and so (D) does not imply that God is not

omnipotent at t in w (at least not on the basis of the fact that God cannot bring about (ic) at t in w).

I think that Flint and Freddoso's response is satisfactory. It shows that the reasoning supporting premise (1) is faulty, and so that premise is unsupported. Thus, the objection fails. However, their response to the objection opens the door to a revised version of the Series of Deities objection.

Recall the series of deities discussed in section 2. Imagine that, in addition to his various color impairments, each deity has two additional features. First, like God, each of these deities is essentially indestructible. It is impossible for any of the deities in the series to cease to exist. Second, each of these deities is essentially creative.

Given these additional stipulations, the existence of a given deity in the series is logically incompatible with certain kinds of states of affairs. In particular, if a given deity is impaired with respect to color C, then the existence of that deity is logically incompatible with any state of affairs in which a C-colored object exists.[47] The proof of this is straightforward. Consider a given deity in the series, D, who is impaired with respect to some color C. Assume for reductio that there is a world, w, in which it is true both that (i) D exists and (ii) a C-infected state of affairs, c, obtains. Since D is essentially creative, it follows that D (at least weakly) actualizes c in w. This implies that D is able to actualize c in w— but this is incompatible with the fact that D is essentially C-impaired. Therefore, there is no world in which both (i) and (ii) are true.

As before, imagine a series of possible worlds containing nothing but one of these deities — i.e. w_n contains nothing but $Deity_n$. Aside from his various color impairments, each deity has unlimited power. Let 't_n' designate an arbitrary time in w_n. This example is the basis of the following objection:

The Series of Deities Objection (revised version)

1. If (D) is true, then each $Deity_n$ is omnipotent at t_n in w_n.
2. It's not the case that each $Deity_n$ is omnipotent at t_n in w_n.
3. Therefore, (D) is false.

Each of the deities can actualize any state of affairs not ruled out by conditions (i)-(iii) of (D). On (D), each deity's inability to actualize certain states of affairs (i.e. those ruled out by the deity's color impairments) is compatible with that deity's omnipotence. Consider, for instance, $Deity_1$. His existence is logically incompatible with any state of affairs in which a red object exists. $Deity_1$ exists at all times prior to t in any world that shares the same history with w1 at t. Since he is essentially indestructible, $Deity_1$ exists at all times after t in any world that shares the same history with w1. Therefore, no state of affairs in which a red object exists obtains in a world that shares the same history with w1 at t, and (D) implies that Deity1 is omnipotent at t in w1. Similar considerations apply for each deity in the series. Thus, premise (1) is true.

As before, two distinct intuitions support premise (2). The first intuition is that the last deity in the series is obviously not an omnipotent being. If this intuition is correct, then Flint and Freddoso's account of omnipotence fails to satisfy their own condition (C5).

The second intuition is that since omnipotence is the highest possible degree of power, it is impossible that there are two beings such that the first is much more powerful than the second and yet both are omnipotent. But (D) implies that the first and last deities in the series are both omnipotent, and the first deity is much more powerful than the last. I conclude that Flint and Freddoso's account of omnipotence is unacceptable.[48]

4. *A New Approach*

Every account of omnipotence we have examined so far has been shown to be defective, including two of the most sophisticated attempts to date. A new approach is in order. In this section I offer an account of omnipotence that is significantly unlike any of the accounts discussed in this paper. I then argue that my account adequately handles the cases that cause problems for these other accounts.

The Case of Hercules

Imagine a very strong man. Imagine that he is the strongest possible person: necessarily, no one is stronger than he is. Let's call him "Hercules." Perhaps we doubt that Hercules is in fact the strongest possible person. We want to test his strength. How might we go about this?

One obvious test of strength is lifting ability. We ask Hercules to lift a one hundred pound stone. He lifts it easily. Next we ask him to lift a one thousand pound stone; He does so. Similarly for ten thousand pounds, one hundred thousand pounds — Hercules even lifts a million pound stone.

So far we have failed to prove that Hercules is not the strongest possible person. But now imagine that we take a ten pound stone and coat it with a substance that renders it incredibly slippery. It is so slippery that no one can get a grip on it. Now we ask Hercules to lift this ten pound stone. Hercules cannot grip the stone and so cannot lift it. "Aha!" we declare triumphantly, "Hercules, you are a liar! You said that you were the strongest possible person, yet you cannot lift this ten pound stone. This proves that you are not the strongest possible person."

But of course we have not proven that Hercules is not the strongest possible person. For we know that Hercules is strong enough to lift the slippery stone — we have just seen him lift much heavier stones. It is not a lack of strength that prevents Hercules from lifting the stone; it is the slipperiness of the stone.

Imagine that we have somehow acquired a ten pound stone that is *essentially* slippery. It is so slippery that no human can grip it, and so no human can lift it. Let's assume that Hercules is essentially human. It follows that there is no possible world in which Hercules lifts this stone. Yet it seems clear that Hercules is strong enough to lift the stone — *even though it is metaphysically impossible that he do so.*

Now imagine that we happen to know some other facts about Hercules. For instance, we know that he is so honest that he is literally incapable of breaking promises.[49] We discover that he has previously promised never to lift a particular ten pound stone. We ask Hercules to lift this stone. He

is unable to do so. He is so honest that he is incapable of breaking his promise never to lift this stone.

Again, it is clear that we have not proven that Hercules is not the strongest possible person. As with the slippery stone, it is not a lack of strength that prevents Hercules from lifting this stone; rather, it is his honesty that renders him unable to do so.

The moral of this story is that lifting ability is not a perfect indicator of strength. Which objects a being is able to lift varies with a variety of factors. One of these factors is of course the strength of the being, but it is crucial to notice that there are others. The examples above show that which objects a being can lift can vary depending on (i) the (non-weight-related) properties of a given object, and (ii) the moral qualities of the being.

Imagine that we are interested in giving an account of what it is to be the strongest possible being. We might say that such a being is 'omni-strong.' The case of Hercules shows that it would be a mistake to try to explicate this concept in terms of lifting ability. Consider for instance:

(A) x is omni-strong if and only if x can lift any object.

There are at least two objects that Hercules cannot lift. Yet it is clear that this fact does not entail that Hercules is not the strongest possible being. (A) is false. (A) is based on the mistaken supposition that:

(B) If x cannot lift y, then x lacks the strength to lift y.

The examples above show that (B) is false. Those examples involve objects that Hercules cannot lift but which Hercules has the strength to lift.

Now consider this principle:

(C) x is omnipotent if and only if x can bring about any state of affairs.

This is the starting point of many discussions of omnipotence. Many philosophers proceed by modifying (C) in an attempt to arrive at a satisfactory analysis of omnipotence.[50] What I want to suggest is that just as it is a mistake to try to explicate omni-strength in terms of which objects a being can lift, it is also a mistake to try to explicate omnipotence in terms of which states of affairs a being can bring about.[51] Just as which objects a being can lift can vary depending on factors other than that being's level of strength, so which states of affairs a being can bring about can vary depending on factors other than that being's level of power.[52]

Like (A), (C) is based on a mistaken supposition. Specifically, (C) is based on the mistaken supposition that

(D) If x cannot bring about p, then x lacks the power to bring about p.

In the discussion of Hercules it quickly became clear that the fact that there was a particular object that Hercules could not lift was not sufficient to prove that Hercules is not the strongest possible being. A further question had to be asked: *why* is Hercules unable to lift the object? If the answer is

that Hercules is lacking in strength, then we have proven that Hercules is not the strongest possible being. For instance, imagine that Hercules tries to lift a ten million pound rock. He struggles with it, grunting and sweating, but is unable to lift it. There are no other factors that might account for this inability (e.g., the rock is not slippery, it is not attached to the ground, he hasn't promised not to lift it). Hercules is unable to lift the rock — and the reason he is unable to lift it is that he lacks strength. This case, were it to occur, would prove that Hercules is not the strongest possible being.

Similarly, with respect to power, the fact that a being is unable to bring about a particular state of affairs is not sufficient to prove that the being is not omnipotent. A further question must be asked: *why* is the being unable to bring about the state of affairs? If the answer is that the being is lacking in power, then it follows that the being is not omnipotent. Thus, I propose the following account of omnipotence:

(O) x is omnipotent if and only if it is not the case that there is some state of affairs, p, such that x is unable to bring about p because of a lack of power in x.

There are many different kinds of power that a being might have. Hercules, for instance, has the highest possible degree of physical power. Another kind of power might be mental power — intelligence. A third kind of power is what we can call "willpower." Willpower is a capacity for making things happen simply by willing them to happen. Humans have a relatively low level of willpower. We can move our bodies in various ways by exerting our willpower. For instance, I can make my arm go up simply by willing that it do so. God has a much higher level of willpower. Everything in the universe is subject to His will. He can create and destroy through the sheer force of His will.

(O) implies nothing about what kind of power an omnipotent being has. It is consistent with (O) that there is an omnipotent being that is completely devoid of a particular kind of power. This seems to be the case with God. Since He has no body, He has absolutely no physical power. The source of His omnipotence is His tremendous willpower.

It seems that me that (O) handles each of the difficulties we have encountered so far. I turn now to consideration of these difficulties.

Impossible states of affairs

Just about everyone (with the infamous exception of Descartes) agrees that an omnipotent being should not be required to be able to bring about impossible states of affairs. A classic example of such a state of affairs is:

(rs) There is a round square.

God cannot bring about (rs). But on (O), we need not conclude from the fact that God is unable to bring about (rs) that He is not omnipotent. Recall the case of Hercules. Hercules could not lift a certain stone because it was too slippery. The source of Hercules' inability to lift the stone lies not in Hercules but rather in the stone. The case is the same with respect to God and (rs). The source of God's inability to bring about (rs) lies not in God

(specifically, it is not due to any lack of power in God), but rather in (rs) itself. Hercules cannot lift the slippery stone because the stone is slippery; God cannot bring about (rs) because (rs) is impossible.

Essentially immoral states of affairs

Someone might plausibly maintain that there are some states of affairs that are so intrinsically bad that necessarily, it is morally wrong for any being to bring them about. We can call such states of affairs *essentially immoral*. In my discussion of Flint and Freddoso's account of omnipotence I offered this state of affairs as an example of an essentially immoral state of affairs:

(ic) An innocent child is tortured for one thousand years.

Recall that God is essentially impeccable. Thus, there is no possible world in which God performs a morally wrong action. Since it is necessarily true that bringing about (ic) is morally wrong, it follows that there is no possible world in which God brings about (ic). Therefore, God cannot bring about (ic). This constitutes a prima facie threat to His omnipotence.

But if we adopt (O), then we are not forced to conclude that God is not omnipotent. Although the source of God's inability to bring about (ic) lies in God, it is not a lack of power in God that makes Him unable to bring about (ic). Instead, this inability is due to the fact that God has the highest possible degree of a certain property — moral goodness. Just as Hercules was unable to lift the ten pound stone that he had promised not to lift because he was honest, so God is unable to bring about (ic) because he is morally perfect. God's inability to bring about (ic) is compatible with the claim that God is omnipotent.

Promises

Recall the example in which God has promised not to lay waste to the earth with a flood. Once He has made this promise, God is unable to bring about this state of affairs:

(ef) The earth is laid to waste by a flood.

Again, this fact does not imply that God is not omnipotent. The solution to this apparent difficulty is much the same as the solution to the case involving an essentially immoral state of affairs. God's inability to bring about (ef) is not due to a lack of power in God. It is due to the fact that He has the highest degree of moral goodness.

The mysterious case of Mr. McEar

In *God and Other Minds* Alvin Plantinga discusses a strange and sad man who has come to be known in the literature as "Mr. McEar." McEar, for unspecified reasons, is incapable of doing anything other than scratching his ear. Furthermore, he can in fact scratch his ear. It is clear, goes the argument, that whatever else may be said about such a bizarre being, McEar is

surely not omnipotent. Yet many accounts of omnipotence seem to imply that McEar is omnipotent. Such accounts are unsatisfactory.

Consider this state of affairs:

(ed) The earth is destroyed by a comet.

McEar cannot bring about (ed). But according to (O), this fact by itself does not entail that McEar is not omnipotent. (O) requires that we ask this question: why is McEar unable to bring about (ed)? If this inability is due to some lack of power in McEar, then (O) implies that McEar is not omnipotent. If this inability is due to some other factor, then the fact that McEar cannot bring about (ed) does not imply that McEar is not omnipotent.

Before we answer this question we must address another issue. On (O) what is relevant to a being's omnipotence is the explanation for that being's inability to bring about a given state of affairs. But there are two special kinds of cases we must consider. The first kind of case is illustrated by the following example.

Consider Hercules' younger brother, Hercules the Younger. Hercules the Younger is extremely strong, but he is not as strong as Hercules. Consider some very heavy stone — a stone that weighs, say, ten thousand pounds. This stone is extremely slippery. It is so slippery that neither Hercules nor Hercules the Younger can get a grip on it, and so neither can lift it. Hercules is strong enough to lift this stone. The only thing that prevents him from lifting it is its slipperiness. However, Hercules the Younger is not strong enough to lift this stone. Even if he could grip it, he would not be able to lift it.

In this case, Hercules the Younger is unable to lift the stone in question because (i) he cannot grip it and (ii) he lacks the strength (anyway). Each of (i) and (ii) by itself is sufficient to guarantee that Hercules the Younger cannot lift the stone. We can say that Hercules the Younger's inability to lift this stone is overdetermined.

Consider a second kind of example. Imagine a heavy stone that is somewhat slippery. The stone is slippery to such a degree that Hercules the Younger can get a grip on it, but he cannot get a secure enough grip on it to apply all of his strength in the attempt to lift it. He is unable to lift this stone. What is the explanation of this inability?

It seems to me that this second case is a case where there are two factors, each of which partially explains Hercules inability to lift the stone, and neither of which alone explains that inability. If Hercules were significantly stronger, he would be able to lift the stone in question; similarly, if the stone weren't quite as slippery, he would be able to lift it. Thus, he is unable to lift this particular stone because it is slippery and he lacks strength.

These examples reveal that there are two possible interpretations of (O):

(O1) x is omnipotent if and only if it is not the case that there is some state of affairs, p, such that x is unable to bring about p *solely* because of a lack of power in x.

and,

(O2) x is omnipotent if and only if it is not the case that there is some state of affairs, p, such that x is unable to bring about p *at least partially* because of a lack of power in x.

I wish to endorse (O2). (O2) implies that in cases of overdetermination, if the fact that a given being is lacking in power is one of the reasons that being cannot bring about a given state of affairs, then that being is not omnipotent. In cases of partial explanation, it implies that if part of the explanation for a given being's inability to bring about a given state of affairs is that the being is lacking in power, then that being is not omnipotent.

As far as I know, no one has ever explained just why it is that McEar is incapable of doing anything other than scratching his ear. But it is safe to assume that McEar is an ordinary person except for his strange disability.

On this assumption, (O2) implies that McEar is not omnipotent. Ordinary people simply are not powerful enough to bring about (ed). For instance, as I noted earlier, ordinary people have a relatively low level of willpower. McEar, then, has a relatively low level of willpower. He doesn't have enough willpower to bring about (ed); he is not strong enough to bring about (ed); in short, he doesn't have the power to bring about (ed). And this fact about McEar is at least part of the explanation of his inability to bring about (ed). Therefore, (O2) implies (correctly) that McEar is not omnipotent.

Free Human Actions

One problem faced by theists is the problem of reconciling God's omnipotence with the possibility of free actions on the part of humans. A full discussion of this topic lies well outside the scope of this paper. In this section I undertake the more modest goal of showing that there is at least one view concerning the relationship between God and free human actions such that the following four items are consistent: (i) the view in question, (ii) (O2), (iii) the claim that God is omnipotent, and (iv) the claim that sometimes human beings perform free actions.

The view I have in mind is the Molinist position described and defended by Thomas Flint in various places, most recently in his book *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account*.[53] One of the central components of this view is the claim that God's knowledge comes in three varieties: natural knowledge (God's knowledge of necessary truths), middle knowledge (God's knowledge of those true contingent propositions the truth or falsity of which are *not* dependent on God's free will) and free knowledge (God's knowledge of those true contingent propositions the truth or falsity of which *are* dependent on God's free will). Of particular interest here is the distinction between middle knowledge and free knowledge. Those truths that God knows by His middle knowledge are "supposed to be true prior to, and hence independent of, God's will."[54] Among those truths God knows by His middle knowledge are all true counterfactuals of freedom (see section 3 above).

One implication of this view is that prior to any willing on the part of God, it will be true that God is unable to actualize (strongly or weakly) certain states of affairs. For example, suppose that the following counterfactual of freedom is true (where 'C' indicates a given set of circumstances and

't' indicates a particular time):

(CF) If Jolene were in circumstances C at time t, Jolene would freely eat ice cream.

Consider this state of affairs:

(jr) Jolene freely refrains from eating ice cream in C at t.

God is unable to actualize (jr). Does this fact imply that God is not omnipotent? The answer, if we adopt (O2), is no. The reason is that it is clear that on the Molinist picture the fact that God cannot bring about (jr) is a consequence of the truth of (CF) and (CF) is true (logically) prior to any willing on God's part. Thus, we know that God is unable to actualize (jr) without even considering how powerful God is. Indeed, no matter how powerful God is, He will be unable to actualize (jr). And this shows there is no reason to think that a lack of power on the part of God contributes to His inability to bring about (jr).

Yet another variation on the case of Hercules may be helpful here. Suppose we ask Hercules to lift a certain stone which is totally inaccessible to Hercules — a stone that is on another planet, for instance. The fact that Hercules cannot lift the stone in question (now) does not tell against Hercules' strength; lifting that stone on this occasion is simply out of the question for Hercules for reasons that have nothing at all to do with his strength. Similarly, on the Molinist view, actualizing (jr) is out of the question for God for reasons that have nothing at all to do with His power.

The series of deities

Recall the series of deities discussed previously. What does (O2) imply about these beings? As with McEar, we must ask why it is that these deities have the limitations that they have. Unlike McEar, we cannot assume that the deities are much like ordinary people. As I have described them, they are very unlike ordinary people — they are deities.

One possible explanation for the deities' various color impairments is a lack of power on the part of each deity. Let us assume that the deities' create by exercising their willpower. But each deity has a different level of willpower. For example, Deity_1, despite having a relatively high level of willpower, simply lacks the willpower to create a red object. For instance, no matter how much he concentrates on the state of affairs that a red object exists and wills that this state of affairs obtain, nothing happens. The other deities' color impairments have similar explanations.

If this is the case, then (O2) implies that none of the deities in the series is omnipotent. None of the deities can bring about this state of affairs:

(ro) There exists a red object.

Furthermore, the explanation for each deity's inability to bring about (ro) is that the deity lacks power. Therefore, according to (O2), the deity is

not omnipotent. This is the correct result.

But this is not the only possible explanation for the deities' impairments. Another possibility is that although each deity has enough willpower to will any object into existence, the deities' are simply unacquainted with certain colors. One possible explanation for this condition is that the deities' visual organs are constructed in such a way that they simply cannot perceive certain colors.[55]

On the assumption that it is this lack of knowledge, and not a lack of power, that accounts for each deity's inability to bring about certain states of affairs (and barring any other impairments), (O2) implies that each deity in the series is omnipotent. But doesn't this show that (O2) is refuted by the very same example that refutes Wierenga's as well as Flint and Freddoso's account of omnipotence?

The answer is no. After all, if each deity in the series really is powerful enough to create any object, then each deity in the series really is omnipotent, despite his various limitations. The case of Hercules is helpful here. We can imagine a series of beings like Hercules — that is, beings such that necessarily, no being is stronger.

Now imagine that each of these beings has a strange psychological condition: each is terrified of any object over a certain weight. So, for instance, the first being in the series, Hercules_1, is terrified of any object over one hundred thousand pounds. Hercules_2 is terrified of any object over ten thousand pounds; Hercules_3 is terrified of any object over one thousand pounds, and so on. These psychological conditions are so severe that each of these beings is unable to be in the same room with, much less actually lift, an object over a certain weight.

Hercules_1 can lift objects that are much heavier than any object that Hercules_3 can lift. Nevertheless, Hercules_1 and Hercules_3 are equally strong. I think the case is much the same with the series of deities. Each is equally powerful, despite the extreme variance in the kinds of objects that each can in fact create. And each is omnipotent.[56]

5. *Conclusion*

I have examined a total of six accounts of omnipotence in this paper. Each of the first five of these has been shown to be defective. What these five defective accounts have in common is that each one, as Geach would have it, tries to read into "God can do everything" a signification of Philosophical Truth. My view is that the expressions "God is omnipotent" and "God can do everything" have much less to do with each other than is commonly thought. I have offered an account that does not try to explicate omnipotence in terms of which states of affairs a being can in fact bring about. And I have shown that my account avoids some of the difficulties that plague other accounts.

(O2), then, succeeds where many other accounts of omnipotence have failed. Perhaps there are problems with (O2) as well. But I think I have established that (O2) constitutes a promising alternative to more traditional approaches to omnipotence.[57]

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NOTES

1. Richard LaCroix, "The Impossibility of Defining 'Omnipotence'," *Philosophical Studies* 32, August 1977.
2. This example is borrowed from Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), page 18. I discuss Wierenga's analysis of omnipotence in section two.
3. This line of reasoning is based on the assumption that God is temporally located. Some theologians, for instance Boethius and Thomas Aquinas, have denied this assumption. Adequate discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper; I shall assume that it is at least possible that God is temporally located, and so any satisfactory account of omnipotence must be able to accommodate the claim that God is temporally located.
4. The deity described here is an essentially limited being, a close relative to the character who is incapable of doing anything other than scratching his ear. This character, known in the literature as "Mr. McEar," was introduced by Alvin Plantinga in *God and Other Minds* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), page 170. I discuss McEar in the fourth section of this paper. To avoid possible difficulties about changing the past, we can assume that the deity described here is atemporal.
5. Wierenga, *op. cit.*, chapter 1. This chapter is a revised version of Wierenga's "Omnipotence Defined," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. XLIII, No. 3, pages 363-375.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
17. *Ibid.*
18. I discussed this deity in section one.
19. The astute reader may wonder why I imagine a series of possible worlds each of which is empty aside from a particular deity in the series. Wierenga provides an account of what it is for a given being to be omnipotent *in a given world at a given time*. Thus, in attempting to refute the account, I need to specify not only beings but also worlds and times. My choice of worlds that are empty but for a single deity is to a certain extent arbitrary. As far as I can see, nothing in the argument depends upon each world being empty aside from a given deity.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
21. As the literature on McEar indicates, essentially limited beings like the ones I invoke are controversial. I do not claim to have proven that the beings I imagine are in fact possible. Rather, I am trying to establish the weaker claim that Wierenga has not provided a good argument against the possibility of such beings. As I see it, essentially limited beings must be considered on a case-by-case basis. It may well be that there is something problematic about the deities I imagine, but an argument must be given for this claim. For another critical discussion of Wierenga's view, see Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz, "Omnipotence Redux," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49 (1988).

22. "Maximal Power," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Freddoso (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pages 81-113.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
31. This is a bit loose; strictly speaking, it is states of affairs, not actions, that are actualized. So "actualize a free action" should be understood as "actualize the state of affairs that a particular free action is performed."
32. I would like to thank an anonymous referee for *Faith and Philosophy* for helping me to clarify this paragraph.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 97. This condition can also be understood as the claim that an omnipotent being is not required to bring about any state of affairs that is incompatible with the world-type for that being.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 94. I have inserted the qualification "in C" into each of (7) and (8).
37. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
39. It is possible that at t, a free agent pops into existence and freely creates a red wagon.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
41. *Ibid.*
42. This claim is a premise in one version of the problem of evil, the other premise being the claim that states of affairs relevantly like (ic) do in fact obtain.
43. Not all states of affairs are actualized by someone. Some exceptions might be: that 2 + 2 = 4, and that God is omnipotent.
44. Just which states of affairs are actualized of course varies from world to world.
45. This, at least, is certainly implied by Flint and Freddoso's account of what it is for two worlds to share a history.
46. Notice that essential indestructibility does not imply necessary existence.
47. This claim is the first premise in an argument analogous to one version of the problem of evil. We might call this argument "the problem of redness":

    1. If any of the deities in the series exists, then the world contains no red objects.
    2. The world does contain some red objects.
    3. Therefore, none of the deities in the series exists.

48. The argument against Flint and Freddoso's account is more tenuous than the one against Wierenga's account in that the former argument requires that I assume that there could be beings distinct from God which are essentially indestructible and essentially creative.

It might be objected that in making such assumptions I have simply gone too far; no being aside from God could be essentially indestructible and essentially creative. My reply is that it may well be that I have gone too far here, but I submit that it must be shown that I have gone too far. That is, an argument, or at least a reason, must be given for thinking that there could not be beings aside from God that are essentially indestructible and essentially creative. For other critical discussions of Flint and Freddoso's view, see Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, *op. cit.*, and Jerome Gellman, "The Limits of Maximal Power, "*Philosophical Studies* 55 (1989).

49. If this seems implausible, we can stipulate that, like Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, Hercules has been conditioned to avoid breaking his promises — the mere thought of breaking a promise renders him incapacitated by nausea.
50. Each of the philosophers whose views are discussed in this paper proceeds in roughly this fashion. Other examples include: Alvin Plantinga, *op. cit.*, Peter Geach, "Omnipotence," *Philosophy* 48 (1973), Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, *op. cit.*, and Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) (although Kenny's own account of omnipotence differs significantly from the standard approaches).
51. In arguing that no satisfactory account of omnipotence can be given, Richard LaCroix assumes that any account of omnipotence must take this form (LaCroix, *op. cit.*, p. 184). I deny this claim; if I am right, then LaCroix's argument fails.
52. There is a sense of 'power' according to which "x is powerful enough to bring about p" means the same as "x can bring about p." Obviously I am not using 'power' in this sense; I believe there is another sense of 'power' according to which it makes sense to say that a being has enough power to bring about p and yet is unable to bring about p (for other reasons).
53. Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).
54. Flint, *op. cit.*, p. 123. The priority here is logical, not temporal.
55. This case was suggested by Ben Bradley. As always, we need to assume that these impairments are essential properties of the deities. To make the example work, we may need to flesh out these deities somewhat. Suppose that the deities must create by mentally visualizing what they wish to create and then willing the visualized object into existence. This would make it clear that if a given deity is unacquainted with a particular color that deity will be unable to create an object of that color (since he will be unable to visualize an object of that color).
56. Notice that this example does not undermine my objections to the views of Wierenga and Flint and Freddoso. For even in the first case, where the deities lack the willpower to bring about certain states of affairs, those other accounts imply that each deity is omnipotent.

57. I wish to thank Fred Feldman, Gary Matthews, and three anonymous referees for *Faith and Philosophy* for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 1998 Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers at the University of Delaware. I would like to thank the audience on that occasion for many helpful comments. A different shorter version of this paper was discussed by the Philosophy of Religion reading group conducted at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst during the summer of 1998. I wish to thank the members of that group for their comments, particularly Lynne Baker and Dan Kaufman. I also wish to thank Ed Abrams, Ben Bradley, and Mike Molloy for helpful conversations on the topic of omnipotence. An e-mail discussion of the paper and related topics with Abrams has been particularly stimulating. Finally, a special thanks is due to Jolene Crook for patiently tolerating interminable questioning on this and other philosophical topics.