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Divine omnipotence and moral perfection

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Abstract: **Divine omnipotence entails that God can choose to do evil (even though He will not) by taking up a human nature. In showing others by way of example how temptations are to be overcome, His exposure to evil desires in such circumstances is consistent with moral perfection. The view that 'God has the greatest power and is morally perfect *simpliciter*', is religiously more adequate than 'God has great power and is *essentially* morally perfect'. The essentiality of other divine attributes to God is discussed, and rebuttals to Anselmian arguments are offered.**

Introduction

In recent years, many different definitions of divine omnipotence have been offered in the literature.[1] Critics, however, have argued that these attempts are flawed.[2] While many of these arguments have been responded to,[3] the objections concerning the issue of God's omnipotence in relation to moral perfection have not been adequately addressed.

In this paper, it will be argued that omnipotence is incompatible with the Anselmian view that God possesses essential moral perfection. First, after a brief discussion on the notion of omnipotence, it will be shown that divine omnipotence entails that God has libertarian active power, and that He can make it possible that He chooses to do evil by taking up a human nature that allows Him to be exposed to desires to do evil, even though He will not choose to do evil under any circumstances. I will then argue that the view that 'God has the greatest power and is morally perfect *simpliciter*', is religiously more adequate compared to the view that 'God has great power and is *essentially* morally perfect'. Finally, a number of Anselmian arguments and the essentiality of other divine attributes to God will be discussed.

Omnipotence as maximal power

Let us begin with a brief discussion on the notion of omnipotence that will be used in this paper. Because of the difficulties involved in defining the notion of omnipotence in terms of the production of states of affairs,[4] I will be using the notion of omnipotence as maximal power, meaning that no being could exceed the overall power of an omnipotent being.[5]

For the subsequent discussion of this paper, it is important to note that the notion of omnipotence as maximal power does not imply that a maximally powerful being can bring about any state of affairs (including necessary and impossible states of affairs), a view known as 'universal possibilism'.[6] The problem with universal possibilism is that its proponent is not affirming anything that God is supposedly able to actualize. To see this, one could ask the universal possibilist what he is trying to affirm when he makes the statement 'God can make it true that *x* is a shapeless cube'; in particular, the universal possibilist should be asked to explain the words 'shapeless cube'. It turns out that he is not affirming anything that God is supposedly able to bring about. He will not be able to say what is *that* which God is supposedly able to actualize, for he will not be able to explain what a 'shapeless cube' is.

This does not mean that '*x* is a shapeless cube' is gibberish, for (unlike gibberish) this phrase is syntactically well-formed,[7] and the individual words 'shapeless' and 'cube' have meanings of their own. Nevertheless, using the adjective 'shapeless' for 'cube' simply cancels both words out, so that it is like writing something and then immediately erasing it.[8] Morris puts it well when he writes, 'Logically impossible tasks are not just particularly esoteric and unusually difficult tasks – when you have attempted to describe an act or task and end up with an expression of a logical impossibility, you end up with nothing that can even be a candidate for power ascriptions.'[9]

What, then, are the states of affairs that cannot be brought about by God, assuming that God is a being with maximal power? It has been pointed out by a number of philosophers that these would include necessary states of affairs (e.g. $2+2=4$),[10] logically impossible states of affairs (e.g. Smith's being exactly 20 years old and 35 years old at the same time),[11] anything that is in the past,[12] and free acts of beings other than Himself, given that God has given these beings libertarian freedom.[13]

Omnipotence and other divine attributes

Many philosophers and theologians have also argued that God has certain attributes *essentially* (being *essentially* uncaused, morally perfect, all-knowing, omnipotent, etc), and this implies that certain things are impossible for God, for example, to perform a morally wicked act (to be not morally perfect), to believe to

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be true something that is false (to be not all-knowing), or to create a stone that He cannot lift (the famous paradox of the stone).[14] Likewise, Aquinas argues that God cannot make God, for it is of the essence of a thing made that its own being depends on another cause, and this is contrary to the nature of the being we call God.[15] Modern philosophers and theologians who assert this view typically holds to an Anselmian view of God, according to which God, as the greatest conceivable being, implies that God exists *as God* in all possible worlds.[16]

A number of theologians and philosophers have challenged the Anselmian view by denying that God has these attributes essentially. It is important to note here that the word 'God' can be referring to a 'title' or 'the being who holds the title'.[17] While the attributes of omnipotence, moral perfection, etc are essential for God as a title, it has been argued that these attributes are not essential to the being who holds the title. In other words, the being who holds the title 'God' can lose some of these attributes, but if He were to do so He would cease from holding the title. Thus, they deny that God exists *as God* in all possible worlds. For example, it has been argued that God[18] can cease to be omnipotent if He so wills; in fact, omnipotence should include the ability to give up and so to lose one's power. As Karl Barth argues, to deny God has this ability would be to make Him the prisoner of His own power.[19] Hence, with regard to the paradox of the stone, God can create and move a stone while omnipotent, and subsequently bring it about that He is not omnipotent and powerless to move it.[20] Similarly, it can be argued that God could bring it about that He possesses a false belief and ceases to be omniscient and holds the title 'God'.

Omnipotence and God's ability to do evil

It has also been argued that God's omnipotence would imply His ability to do evil, even if He never chooses to do it. After all, the most obvious problem with the Anselmian view is that, if God has certain attributes such as moral perfection essentially, then there are states of affairs that we may have the power to bring about and that God is unable to bring about.[21] It should be noted that, in contrast to the previous groups of impossibilities (bringing about necessary or impossible states of affairs, changing the past, determining free acts in creatures), these activities are impossible not because they are inherently impossible (e.g. there is nothing inherently impossible about doing a wicked act, such as causing an innocent person to suffer intensely for no good reason; villains like Hitler have done it before.). Rather, these activities are impossible for God by virtue of the essential attributes God is said by the Anselmian to possess.[22] Thus, it is argued against the Anselmian that a being who *cannot* do many things (murder, rape) that ordinary humans can do has no claim at all to being judged omnipotent.[23]

In a widely cited response, Thomas Morris objects that the argument seems to interpret the proposition 'God cannot sin' to be equivalent in meaning to

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'God lacks the power to sin'. But this is a misunderstanding, because there is no such thing as a discrete power of sinning, a power possessed by us but lacked by God. This can be seen by reflection upon two parallel stories: (1) Smith, a policeman, raises a gun in his right hand, aims it at Jones, whom he correctly believes to be an innocent person, and, for no good reason, squeezes the trigger with the aim of killing Jones, which is thereby achieved. Surely Smith has thereby sinned, or done evil. (2) Smith, a policeman, raises a gun, aims it at Jones, whom he correctly believes to be a mass murderer about to commit his next heinous act (which otherwise cannot be stopped), and squeezes the trigger with the aim of killing Jones, which is thereby achieved.

Morris argues that in the second story what Smith does is morally permissible. Thus, in the first story he sins, in the second he does not. But in the first story Smith does not exercise a power which he does not exercise in the second story: the causal powers exercised remain, by hypothesis, invariant between the two stories. What this shows is that there is no discrete power of sinning. Hence, it is not that case that God necessarily lacks a power to sin; it is rather necessarily the case that He never *uses* His perfect power to order to sin. As a perfect being, there is no possible world in which He wills to do evil.[24]

The deeper question for Morris's proposal is whether God is able to will to do evil, i.e. does God have the power to choose to do evil, even if He never chooses to do evil. This question is related to whether God's necessary unwillingness to do evil is to be conceived of in compatibilist or libertarian terms, i.e. whether God has the discrete power to act as a 'first mover' in His decisions.[25] If it is conceived of in compatibilist terms, then God would lack a certain power which it is possible for Him to have, viz. the 'active power' in the libertarian sense, the ability to initiate movement as the 'first mover'. Hence, God's necessary unwillingness to do evil should be conceived of in libertarian terms.[26] In an interesting exchange in *Religious Studies* between Wes Morriston and Tim Mawson, Morriston argues further that:

> Suppose that there is a being just like the Anselmian God except that (a) although it is morally perfect, it is not *necessarily* so; and (b) its basic power extends to *both* good *and* evil choices. Would such a being not be more powerful in some very intuitive sense of 'powerful' – than the Anselmian God is supposed to be? I think it would be.[27]

Morriston concludes that since the ability to make evil choices is a bona fide active power, then an omnipotent being would necessarily have this power (even if He chooses never to exercise it).[28] An omnipotent being would have the 'active power' in the libertarian sense, and He would have the power to choose evil.

Mawson replies by first defining power as an ability *that it is good to have*, and he argues that for God, the ability to do less than what perfect goodness demands would be a liability rather than a power for Him. Furthermore, he argues that God cannot want to do anything that is less than what perfect goodness demands,

because it is necessary that no-one can want to do something that is less than what perfect goodness demands for the sake of its being less than what perfect goodness demands. God's omnipotence assures Him of being able to achieve whatever end He might want by means in accord with what perfect goodness demands, and His omniscience ensures that He knows this.[29]

Against Mawson's understanding of power, it can be argued that, for God, the ability to do less than what perfect goodness demands is not a liability if God never chooses to use the ability.[30] As for Mawson's point that it is necessary that no-one can want to do something that is less than what perfect goodness demands, Morriston denies this. He argues that libertarians like himself will insist that motives can incline without determining, and hence it is not true that a person necessarily does what he believes he has most reason to do. Morriston argues only for the weaker claim that no-one ever chooses to do anything without seeing something in favour of doing it – that there is always something that inclines one in the direction of what one chooses, even if one knows it is a stupid thing to do.[31]

The Anselmian can respond to Morriston by first agreeing that there is always something that inclines one in the direction of what one chooses. He can then argue that having at least some inclination toward an evil choice is a necessary condition for being able to choose evil, and that God cannot even have inclinations to do things that are other than what perfect goodness demands. As Maximus the Confessor observes, having libertarian free choice by itself does not imply the possibility of sinning, for 'self-determination is a characteristic of will, not of choice'.[32] It could be the case that God possesses active power but the desire for (and hence choice of) evil is not available, therefore it is impossible for Him to choose to do evil.[33] Morriston could press the point that in such a case God would have less power than a being B who is just like Him except that its basic power extends to *both* good *and* evil choices.[34] However, the Anselmian would object that this argument does not work because, while 'B making evil choices' is a possible state of affairs, 'God making evil choices' *ex hypothesi* is not: the Anselmian would claim that no being, whether B or God, can make bring about a states of affairs in which 'God makes evil choices'.

Nevertheless, it can be responded to the Anselmian that, even if the claim that 'having at least some inclination towards an evil choice is a necessary condition for being able to choose evil' is accepted, and that God *does* not have motives to do things that are other than what perfect goodness demands, God *can* still make it possible that He chooses to do evil, by causing himself to take up a human nature (as in the incarnation) that allows Him to be exposed to desires to do evil (such as in situations of temptation). In such a scenario, after the incarnation God would have the ability to choose to do evil.[35]

One might ask, 'But why would God want to choose to be so exposed, since *as God* He has no desire to do evil?'. In response, God could desire to do that not

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because He desires to do evil; rather, God could desire to do that if there are circumstances in which it would be good for Him to show that 'He can choose to do evil, but He will not'. An example of such circumstances is God showing humans, by way of example, how temptations are to be overcome. It might be objected that true moral perfection excludes the possibility of evil inclinations of the sort that would make temptation possible.[36] After all, many people would think that being free from evil desires is a good thing, and that such a state is a perfection that one ought to strive for. In response, it can be argued that being free from evil desires is a good thing *only if there is no morally good reason to have such desires*. However, for a person who is the paradigm of moral goodness, there are morally good reasons in certain circumstances to show others by way of example how temptations are to be overcome.[37]

Indeed, in our common experiences, we often realize it to be better for the leader or the teacher to lead or to teach by example than merely to give instructions. Thus, a morally perfect and omnipotent God, who can resist the strongest of temptations and who knows that He can do that, could create circumstances in which He would have morally good reasons to show others, by way of example, how temptations are to be overcome. In these circumstances, it would be a state of moral perfection for Him to be exposed to certain evil desires and to overcome them, and as long as He does not yield to such desires, He is not doing evil.

Hence, it is not inconsistent with moral perfection for God to be incarnated and to have certain desires to do evil in situations of temptation, desires to which He will not yield; on the contrary, there might be perfectly good reasons for Him to do that, such as to show humans by way of example how temptations are to be overcome.

What the foregoing discussion implies is that, since God should be conceived of as having libertarian active power, and since it is a possible state of affairs for God to make it the case that He can choose to do evil by taking up a human nature, then God being omnipotent would have such abilities. What this implies is that there are some possible worlds in which God chooses to do evil. Hence, it is not the case that God (i.e. the being who holds the title 'God') is essentially morally perfect.[38]

Against this, it has been argued that omnipotence actually implies essential moral perfection. For example, having defined sin as 'to fall short of a perfect action', Aquinas argues that since God is omnipotent He cannot sin.[39] Similarly, Anselm argues that to be capable of being corrupted is not power, but impotence, and since God is omnipotent He cannot be corrupted.[40] However, such reasoning fails for, as Nelson Pike observes, there is no conceptual difficulty in the idea of a diabolical omnipotent being. Creative power and moral strength are readily discernible concepts. Hence, it does not follow from the claim that God is omnipotent that He is unable to sin.[41] It has also been argued that if God can do

evil (such as sinning and lying), then His power is actually less, for then He will be 'suffering what He does not will'.[42] In response, the ability to suffer what one does not will is an ability, in which case God's power would actually be greater if He had this ability.

A radically different solution concerning God's omnipotence and impeccability was offered by William of Ockham. According to Ockham, to say that God cannot sin is not to imply that there is something doable that He cannot do, or some action that He cannot perform, but only that there is some description that none of His actions can fit.[43] For Ockham, to sin is to act contrary to one's obligations, but God's sovereignty over creation consists not only in the fact that its existence depends on His free and contingent volition, but also in the fact that God is a debtor to no-one. Thus, God does not have any obligations to anyone and so cannot act contrary to His obligations, no matter what He does.[44] Hence, Ockham insists that with respect to His absolute power, God can punish a creature without any demerit and reward a creature without merit, without violating the person's rights.[45] While this implies that the present order is radically contingent, this does not imply that it is thoroughly unreliable; the fact that God is not constrained by external and previously established norms does not mean that He acts unwisely. God is guided by His own inner sense of justice which, even if it cannot be predicted, commends itself to human reason as self-consistent and reasonable, once it is revealed.[46]

Nevertheless, the problem with Ockham's position is that, if what is good is simply what God wills or does, we would have a problem understanding the word 'good' in the sentence 'God is good'; it would turn out that 'God is good' is no more informative a sentence than 'God is God'.[47] The second problem is that it allows for the possibility that God is a being whom humans have no moral reason to worship. On Ockham's view, God can will murder, rape, etc and still be regarded as good; however many would (justifiably) argue that if God willed such things He would no longer be morally good (as they understand the term). Consequently, they would have no moral reason to worship Him.[48]

It has also been argued by Joshua Hoffman and Gary Rosenkrantz that a being with maximal power does not need to have all kinds of powers; in particular, such a being does not have to be able to bring about whatever any other agent can bring about. If agent A can bring about S, and agent B cannot, it does not follow that B is not overall more powerful than A, since it could be that B can bring about more states of affairs than A can. Therefore, even if God does not have the ability to choose evil, an ability that humans have, it does not follow that God is not overall more powerful than humans, since it could be that God can bring about more states of affairs than humans can.[49] However, this reply is vulnerable to Morriston's objection that there could be a being that is more powerful than God: an agent C who has all the abilities that God has, plus an ability to be incarnated and choose to do evil, will be more powerful than God.[50]

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Against Morriston's objection, it has been argued that conceivability is not necessarily a good guide to possibility; even though one can conceive of a being like agent C, this does not entail that such being is possible.[51] It has also been argued that if God exists, then such an agent C cannot possibly exist. The argument offered is as follows:

(1) If God exists, He exists eternally in every possible world.
(2) There cannot be more than one omnipotent agent.
(3) Thus, if God exists, then an omnipotent agent C cannot possibly exist.[52]

In reply, Morriston argues that, for purpose of analysing the concept of omnipotence, the bare conceptual possibility of these examples is quite sufficient (even if the existence of beings like agent C is metaphysically impossible).[53]

Addressing some arguments for the Anselmian view

What the foregoing discussion implies is that the being who is God is not essentially morally perfect. For such a being to cease from possessing this attribute seems to be a logically and metaphysically possible state of affairs, and hence it would be consistent with His omnipotence to be able to bring it about. This does not mean that God could likewise lose any of His other attributes, as some of these are metaphysically impossible for God to lose. For example, God cannot lose His attribute of being uncaused. Since any being who holds the title God necessarily exists beginninglessly as an uncaused being, God cannot be caused to exist. Furthermore, even if one does not hold the Anselmian view that God has His attributes *essentially*, it still remains that certain things are impossible for God as long as He possesses these attributes. For example, as long as God possesses divine omniscience, no-one (not even God himself) can teach God knowledge.[54] Moreover, given God's omnipotence and (non-essential) moral perfection, even though God can choose to do evil in any circumstances, He will not choose to do evil in any circumstances; this implies that it is also impossible that any being can make it the case that in some circumstances God will choose to do evil.[55]

It should be noted that, in distinction from inherently possible states of affairs such as causing an innocent person to suffer intensely for no good reason, what is being argued here is that these states of affairs (God being caused to exist, improving His knowledge while being omniscient, etc.) are intrinsically metaphysically impossible: no other being can bring about that God was caused, improve His knowledge, etc. Hence, God's inability to bring about these states of affairs should not be taken to impugn His omnipotence, since they are intrinsically metaphysically impossible.

Against the view that God could be other than morally perfect, omnipotent, omniscient, etc., it has been objected that it would be idolatrous to worship a

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being for His good fortune, i.e. a being that happened to be morally perfect, etc.[56] In response, asserting that God could cease to have attributes such as moral perfection does not imply that He possesses these attributes by chance ('it happened to be so, by good fortune'). On the contrary, the position taken here is that God has these attributes beginninglessly, i.e. uncaused by chance events, and that He could not cease to have these attributes except by His will.

Morris offers an argument for the Anselmian view based on intuition. He argues for the reliability of intuition in discerning the nature of God by saying that if God exists and creates rational beings whose end is to know Him, it makes good sense that they should be able to come to know something of His existence and attributes without the need of highly technical arguments which are only accessible to a few. He then claims that the intuition that God must be necessarily good, *understood as the inability to actualize a morally reprehensible state of affairs*, is a strong initial intuition among theists.[57]

In response, while one can agree that there are good reasons to think that God would give humans reliable intuition of His nature, it is highly questionable that Morris's intuition of God's goodness is stronger than the intuition that 'God can do evil but He will not choose to do it'. It is at least arguable that if a being can do evil but he will not choose to do it, such a being is more morally praiseworthy than a being who does not do evil because he cannot do evil, as moral goodness has to do with 'will', not 'predetermined capacities.'[58] In reply, Edward Wierenga argues that God's goodness in other possible worlds might contribute to His overall greatness. He cites Calvin, who writes, 'Suppose some blasphemer sneers that God deserves little praise for his own goodness, constrained as he is to preserve it. Will this not be a ready answer to him: not from violent impulsion but from his boundless goodness comes God's inability to do evil?'[59]

The problem, however, is not that God's inability to do evil would be from *violent* impulsion, rather, the problem is that God's inability to do evil, and His goodness in other possible worlds, would be ultimately due to the predetermined capacities that He has, in which case it is His predetermined capacities that are ultimately responsible. One might object that God not being able to be tempted (James 1.13) *is* such a predetermined capacity. In response, it can be argued that James 1.13 can be taken to mean that God cannot be tempted *being God simpliciter*, and this does not exclude the possibility that God can be tempted if He chooses to be incarnated.[60] The reason why God cannot be tempted being God *simpliciter* is because He cannot have evil desires *being God simpliciter*. However, since God can take up a human nature which would make experiencing evil desires and temptation possible,[61] the reason why He does not sin is not because He cannot be tempted being God *simpliciter*. Rather, it is because His will would not choose to sin, whether or not He is tempted.

One might ask, 'But why prefer a model in which God has the greatest power and is morally perfect *simpliciter* over a model in which God has great power and

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is *essentially* morally perfect?' In reply, a being who has the greatest power has greater power in the actual world than a being who merely has great power. On the other hand, essential moral perfection vis-à-vis moral perfection *simpliciter* only confers the additional claim that God has moral perfection in other possible worlds; it does not confer any superiority in the actual world where moral perfection is concerned. Moreover, on the view being defended here, a God who has moral perfection *simpliciter* would be imperfect (and hence not the greatest possible being) *only if He so chooses*, and, being morally perfect, He will never choose to be so in the actual world (even though He could). Since a being A who is actually the greatest possible being is more worthy of worship than being B who is merely a great being (even if B is a greater being in possible worlds where A chooses not to be the greatest possible being), a model in which God has the greatest power possible and is morally perfect *simpliciter* is to be preferred.

Conclusion

It has been shown that divine omnipotence entails that God can make it possible that He chooses to do evil by taking up a human nature that allows Him to be exposed to desires to do evil, even though He will not choose to do evil under any circumstances. In showing others, by way of example, how temptations are to be overcome, His exposure to evil desires in such circumstances is consistent with moral perfection. It has also been demonstrated that the view that 'God has the greatest power and is morally perfect *simpliciter*' is religiously more adequate than 'God has great power and is *essentially* morally perfect'. Therefore, it can be concluded that divine omnipotence is incompatible with the Anselmian view that God possesses essential moral perfection, and that the view that 'God has the greatest power and is morally perfect *simpliciter*' is to be preferred.[62]

Notes

1. For some significant examples, see Thomas Flint & Alfred J. Freddoso 'Maximal power', in Alfred J. Freddoso (ed.) *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 81–113; Edward Wierenga *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Joshua Hoffman & Gary S. Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Fall 2006 edn; Erik Wielenberg 'Omnipotence again', *Faith and Philosophy*, **7** (2000), 26–43.
2. For criticisms against the first three, see Graham Oppy 'Omnipotence', *Philosophy & Phenomenological Research*, **71** (2005), 59–84. For criticisms against the fourth, see Wes Morriston 'Omnipotence and the power to choose: a reply to Wielenberg', *Faith and Philosophy*, **19** (2002), 358–367.
3. See e.g. Brian Leftow 'Omnipotence', in Thomas Flint & Michael Rea (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
4. For a discussion of the difficulties involved, see the literature cited in nn. 1, 2, and 3.
5. The concept of 'maximal power' is taken from Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence', though my understanding of this concept differs from theirs (see 11f).

6. Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence'. 'Universal possibilism' is famously argued by Descartes, and it continues to have appeal to believers of a more *fideistic* inclination; Gijsbert van den Brink 'Capable of anything? The omnipotence of God', in *idem* & Marcel Sarot (eds) *Understanding the Attributes of God* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1999), 148–149; *idem*, *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993), 95. Brink notes that Descartes' treatment of this is scattered over some eight letters which Descartes wrote to various persons and his *Replies to Two Sets of Objections* against his *Meditations*. See also *Meditations 1* from his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. For philosophers who have defended a similar view recently, see Danny Goldstick 'Could God make a contradiction true?', *Religious Studies*, **26** (1990), 377–387; Earl Conee 'The possibility of power beyond possibility', in James Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives 5: Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero CA: Ridgeview Publishing Co., 1991), 447–473.
7. Cf. Peter Geach 'Omnipotence', *Philosophy*, **48** (1973), 7–20.
8. Thomas Morris *Our Idea of God* (South Bend IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 67.
9. *Ibid.*, 66–67; *contra* Goldstick 'Could God make a contradiction true?', 383–384.
10. William Rowe 'Divine power, goodness, and knowledge', in William Wainwright (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–18.
11. *Ibid.*, 17–18.
12. Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence'.
13. Rowe 'Divine power', 18. Cf. Morriston, who referring to Plato's demiurge and our pre-philosophical concept of omnipotence, complains that 'the idea of God's having to work with a stock of possible persons which have various dispositional properties that limit his power sounds a bit too much like the idea of a finite limited craftsman who does the best he can with the admittedly recalcitrant materials at his disposal'; Wes Morriston 'Is Plantinga's God omnipotent?', *Sophia*, **23**:3 (1984), 45–57, 55. In response, this complaint seems to presuppose a pre-philosophical and universal possibilist's concept of an unlimited craftsman, where God is supposedly able to determine and hence take away human libertarian free actions while at the same time give human libertarian free actions! Unlike Plato's demiurge who has to deal with eternally existing materials, the existence of humans are not eternal but dependent on the free choice of God who is pleased to bring them into existence.

    In relation to the issue of free will, it has been argued that the presence of evil is inconsistent with a perfect good and omnipotent God (e.g. J. L. Mackie 'Evil and omnipotence', *Mind*, **65** (1955), 200–212; Wes Morriston 'Power, liability and the free-will defence: a reply to Mawson', *Religious Studies*, **41** (2005), 71–80). For responses, see e.g. Alvin Plantinga *God Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1974); Stewart Goetz 'The argument from evil', in William Lane Craig & J. P. Moreland (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 449–497.
14. Since, necessarily, an omnipotent agent can move any stone, no matter how massive, a stone too heavy for him to lift is impossible. But, as we have seen, an omnipotent agent is not required to be able to bring about an impossible state of affairs; Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence', see also Rowe 'Divine power', 19–20.
15. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 25, 17.
16. It should be noted that Anselm was not the first to suggest such a view of God's omnipotence. Augustine, for example, asserts that God cannot die, err, etc.; Augustine *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York NY: Random House, 1950), 156–157.
17. Keith Yandell 'Divine necessity and divine goodness', in Thomas Morris (ed.) *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 314–315, 318.
18. That is, the being who holds the title 'God'; this qualification applies for the rest of this paper.
19. Brink 'Almighty God', 181; Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics*, II, part 1, T. H. L. Parker & Geoffrey William Bromiley (trans.) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark. 1957), 587.
20. Cited in Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence'; See also Richard Swinburne *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 151; Brink 'Capable of anything?', 181; Stephen Davis *Logic and the Nature of God* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 73–76.
21. Rowe 'Divine power', 19–20.
22. *Ibid.*
23. W. R. Carter 'Impeccability revisited', *Analysis*, **45** (1985), 52–55.
24. Thomas Morris *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 70–75.

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25. Morriston 'Power, liability and the free-will defence', 73, who points out that this issue is the heart of the disagreement between himself and Mawson in their recent exchange in *Religious Studies* concerning God's omnipotence and goodness.
26. Aquinas asserts that given God's knowledge of the future, it follows that He cannot do what He has foreknown that He will not do, or abstain from doing what He has foreknown that He will do; Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 25, 25. This is true, but it does not necessarily imply theological fatalism, according to which God's foreknowledge determines His choices such that He has no (libertarian) free choice. Against the implication of theological fatalism, one can assert the Ockhamic thesis that foreknowledge is dependent on what God will freely choose to do (not vice versa), and foreknowledge has no causal influence on what He will freely choose to do; see William Lane Craig & J. P. Moreland *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), 518–521. If God foreknows that He will do A, He will do A, but He could have done not-A, in which case He would have foreknown that He would do not-A. There is a possible world in which God will do A and He foreknows that He will do A, and there is a possible world that God will do not-A and He foreknows that He will do not-A. However, there is no possible world in which God will do not-A but He foreknows that He will do A (and vice versa, this would be consistent with Aquinas's assertion).
27. Wes Morriston 'Omnipotence and necessary moral perfection: are they compatible?', *Religious Studies*, **37** (2001), 143–160, 156–157.
28. *Idem* 'Are omnipotence and necessary moral perfection compatible?: reply to Mawson', *Religious Studies*, **39** (2003), 441–449, 441.
29. T. J. Mawson 'Freedom, human and divine', *Religious Studies*, **41** (2005), 55–69, 67.
30. This reply is not what Morriston makes in his exchange with Mawson. Morriston's own reply is that a case may perhaps be made for saying that it would not be good for God to have such a power, but on the ground marked out by Mawson there is at least as strong a case for saying that it is not good for us to have it either; Morriston 'Power, liability and the free-will defence', 74–75. This is related to Morriston's argument from evil (see n. 13).
31. *Ibid*., 74.
32. Demetrios Bathrellos *The Byzantine Christ: Person, Nature, and Will in the Christology of Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 191–192.
33. Cf. *ibid*.
34. Morriston 'Omnipotence and necessary moral perfection', 156–157.
35. For the view that God incarnate could choose to do evil in situations of temptation, see Yandell 'Divine necessity'.
36. This objection was pointed out to me by an anonymous referee for the journal.
37. To show others by example does not imply that God would have to be exposed to *all kinds* of evil desires. Rather, depending on the circumstances, exposure to a few kinds of temptations would be sufficient to illustrate some general principles which are applicable to all kinds of temptations.
38. Morriston notes that his argument in his correspondence with Mawson is only problematic for the Anselmian view of God. The theist who does not hold this view can reply by simply denying that God is morally perfect in every possible world, and affirming that as long as God is morally perfect in the actual world, all is well; Morriston 'Omnipotence and necessary moral perfection', 158.

    Metcalf, however, thinks that even affirming that God is morally perfect in the actual world will not do, because 'moral perfection must persist in an omnipotent and omniscient being. For it is morally imperfect to choose to cease being morally perfect, and surely an omnipotent and omniscient being couldn't be taken unawares and forced or coerced into abandoning its moral perfection'; Thomas Metcalf 'Omniscience and maximal power', *Religious Studies*, **40** (2004), 289–306, 296–297. In response, the theist can affirm that God *will always choose* to remain morally perfect (which is what moral perfection requires), even though He is *able to choose* not to remain morally perfect (which is what omnipotence requires).
39. In Part I, Q25, article 3, reply to objection 2 of the *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas thinks that God necessarily wills Himself to be good and happy and that He cannot make Himself not to be good or happy; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 25, 20–22.
40. Anselm *Proslogium*, ch. 7.

41. Nelson Pike 'Omnipotence and God's ability to sin', in Paul Helm (ed.) *Divine Commands and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 72. Based on his conclusion that there is no passive potency in God, Aquinas argues further that God cannot move, cannot change, cannot fail, cannot be weary or forgetful (since weariness results from a defect of power, and forgetfulness from defect of knowledge, God having no passive potency and thus cannot change cannot possibly be subject to either), cannot be overcome or suffer violence (for these are found only in something having a movable nature), can neither repent, nor be angry or sorrowful (because all these things bespeak passion and defect); *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book 2, ch. 25. In response, it has been pointed out that it is not obvious that the thesis that God is pure Act with no passive potency is true, except on the supposition that God is timeless (Richard Sturch *The Word and the Christ: An Essay in Analytic Christology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 175–176), a supposition that is dubious in view of God's actions in the world and God's knowledge of tensed facts; see William Lane Craig 'Divine eternity', in Flint & Rea *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*.
42. William Shedd & Alan W. Gomes *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003), 288–290.
43. Marilyn McCord Adams *William Ockham*, 2 vols (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 2:1160.
44. *Ibid.*, 2:1160, 1264–1265.
45. *Ibid.*, 2:1265.
46. David Steinmetz 'Calvin and the absolute power of God', in Richard Gamble (ed.) *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: A Fourteen Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles*, IX (New York NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), 7.
47. Davis, *Logic*, 91.
48. *Ibid.*, 91–92.
49. Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence'.
50. Morriston 'Omnipotence and necessary moral perfection', 156–157.
51. Thomas Senor 'God's goodness needs no privilege: a reply to Funkhouser', *Faith and Philosophy*, **23** (2006), 423–431, 424–426.
52. Hoffman & Rosenkrantz 'Omnipotence'.
53. Morriston 'Omnipotence and the power to choose', 365.
54. Cf. Metcalf 'Omniscience', 290–299, who argues that given libertarian freedom God cannot bring about that 'somebody freely learns', whereas another being (call Jane) with all the power God has and not being omniscient can bring about that 'somebody freely learns' by bringing about that 'herself (i.e. Jane) freely learns'. In response, 'somebody freely learns' is an imprecise description of the states of affairs in question [even though 'we speak of ''some person'' doing something fairly frequently, and we are certainly aware of when this state of affairs has obtained' (*ibid*., 298); any state of affairs that anyone is able or unable to bring about should have the object (in this case, the 'somebody') clearly specified. Once the 'somebody' is specified as God who is omniscient, it follows that, since it is metaphysically impossible to increase the knowledge of an omniscient being, failing to bring about 'an omniscient being freely learn' should not be taken to count against omnipotence. It is interesting to note, however, that God can take up a human nature and *simulate* the learning experiences of humans; see Andrew Loke 'On the coherence of the Incarnation: the divine preconscious model', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, **51** (2009), 50–63.
55. While this means that God's actions will always be good, this does not mean that a being who has all the power God has but is not morally perfect would have more power than God, for God can choose to do all that this being does, just that He will not choose to do so. *Contra* Oppy (Oppy 'Omnipotence', 82) and Senor (Senor 'God's goodness', 424), who think that the inconsistency with omnipotence remains even if God is not conceived of as essentially perfect.
56. Jordan Sobel *Logic and Theism: Arguments For and Against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14–15.
57. Thomas Morris *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 134–136.
58. For criticism of the Anselmian view on this point, see Davis *Logic*, 95–96; Patrick Grim 'Impossibility arguments', in Michael Martin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 211; Rowe 'Divine power', 21–23.

59. Wierenga *The Nature of God*, 212; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II. iii. 5.
60. A Christian who is theologically orthodox would affirm that Jesus was God (incarnate) and He was tempted according to the scriptures (e.g. Hebrews, 4.15).
61. See 8f.
62. I am grateful for the very helpful comments and assistance from Dr Alister McGrath (my doctorate supervisor at King's College London) and Mary Lim, as well as from Professor Peter Byrne and an anonymous referee for *Religious Studies*.