

## SOME OMNIPOTENT BEINGS!

LOUIS WERNER  
University of Illinois

This is a limited defense of the claim that (1) there could be more than one omnipotent being (ob).<sup>1,2</sup> The defense is limited in three respects. First, it is a rebuttal of only a single argument against (1). The single argument is, however, the natural argument, or a version of the natural argument,<sup>3</sup> that

<sup>1</sup> The sign, "ob", will stand here sometimes in place of "omnipotent being" and sometimes in place of "omnipotent beings." Also, by "there could be more than one ob", I mean (or mean something like) "it is logically possible that there be more than one ob", although of course I have no useful analysis to offer for "logically possible". Furthermore, I shall often in this paper write as if I understood (or thought I understood) the words, "the will of an ob", "timelessly", and certain words and phrases related to these. But of course I do not understand them (and do not think I do).

<sup>2</sup> On the paradox of the stones, see, e.g. G. I. Mavrodes, "Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence", *The Philosophical Review*, LXXII (1963), 221-223; H.G. Frankfurt, "The Logic of Omnipotence", *ibid.*, LXXIII (1964), 262-263; C. W. Savage, "The Paradox of the Stone", *Ibid.*, LXXVI (1967), 74-79. Some other relevant articles, which I have found after writing most of this paper, are J. L. Cowan, "The Paradox of Omnipotence", *Analysis*, XXV (1965-66), 102-108; I. T. Ramsey, "The Paradox of Omnipotence", *Mind*, LXV (1956), 263-266; S. A. Grave, "On Evil and Omnipotence", *ibid.*, 259-262; G. B. Keene, "A Simpler Solution to the Paradox of Omnipotence", *ibid.*, LXIX (1960), 74-75; B. Mayo, "Mr. Keene on Omnipotence", *ibid.*, LXX (1961), 249-250; G. B. Keene, "Capacity-Limiting Statements", *ibid.*, 251-252; A. F. Bonifacio, "On Capacity Limiting Statements", *ibid.*, LXXIV (1965), 87-88; J. L. Mackie, "Omnipotence", *Sophia*, I:2 (1962), 13-25, esp. 21; A. Olding, "Finite and Infinite Gods", *ibid.*, VI:1 (1967), 3-7; S. Gendin, "Omnidoing", *ibid.*, VI:3 (1967), 17-22. J. Cargile, "On Omnipotence", *Nous*, I, 201-205 (1967).

<sup>3</sup> In another version of our argument, it is supposed that one of the ob might will that the other ob be destroyed, and it is further supposed that the second ob might will that he not be destroyed. Without this further supposition of a specific conflict of wills, however, one might offer a different argument from ours, based simply on the supposition that one ob might will that the other be destroyed. In either case, however, the reasoning seems to assume that it is logically impossible for an ob to cease to exist. If this is logically impossible, then by the reasoning of this paper, the would-be destroyer does

leads to widespread doubt of (1).<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the statement of the rebuttal takes for granted the correctness of a certain approach to the paradox of the stone, a paradox that some persons take to show that there could not be even one ob. Indeed, the most important suggestion in the paper probably is that the question whether there could be a plurality of ob is apparently amenable to a treatment that is commonly recommended for the paradox of the stone. But because the relevant approach to that paradox is not defended at length here, one may say that I mainly seek to show, not that (1) is true, but that *if* there could be one ob despite the paradox of the stone, *then* there could be more than one ob despite the natural objection to this latter claim. Thirdly, I have no way to show that I have canvassed all of the objections to my central contention. I certainly feel there ought to be some convincing objection to it. Still, in a search for one, it should be kept in mind that I am at most defending the view that there could be, not the view that there probably are, two or more ob. (For simplicity's sake, I shall henceforth write as if we were con-

not have his way, but nevertheless he is omnipotent. (See pp. 5-10.)

It seems possible, though, that an ob cease to exist. The best argument to the contrary probably is that if an ob ceased after *t* to exist, then there would be actions than an ob could not perform, namely all the actions that can be performed only after *t*. But there probably are no actions that can be performed by an ob only after *t*. An ob could will in advance that an action occur after *t*.

If an ob could cease to exist, then it is not clear that one ob could not destroy another. Perhaps the best reasoning is that if an ob could be destroyed without warning, he might not think to will in advance that certain actions occur after *t*, and thus he would be unable to perform those actions. If, on the other hand, he were threatened with destruction, he might object or he might not. If he did not, then he would cease to exist. But if he did, there would be a conflict of wills, and the main body of this paper would apply here.

<sup>4</sup> My friends, Hugh S. Chandler and Robert Wengert, have informed me that Scotus and Ockham addressed themselves to the question whether there might be two omnipotent beings, and considered the natural argument. See John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, 1, 2, 3, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Wadding and L. Vivès (Paris, 1891-1895), VIII, 497-498; William of Ockham, *Quodlibeta septem* (Louvain, 1962), Quod. 1, q. 1. A translation of the Scotus appears in John Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings: A Selection*, trans. A. W. Wolter (Indianapolis, 1964).

cerned to determine only whether there could be two ob, and not whether there could be more than two.)

### *The Natural Argument*

The natural argument against (1), or the version of that argument to be discussed here, rests heavily on the assumption that (if there were or could be two ob) the wills of two ob might conflict. On this supposition, the argument purports to reduce (1) to absurdity. One might try to put the argument thus:

Suppose

- (a) there are two ob;
- (b) if anything is an ob, its will cannot be frustrated;<sup>5</sup>
- (c) if there are two ob, their wills may conflict.

Then

- (d) unless (b) or (c) is false, (a) is false.

For

if (by (c)) the wills of (say)  $x$  and  $y$ , may conflict, then the will of at least one of them might be frustrated; but (by (b)) the will of  $x$  ( $y$ ) could not be frustrated, if  $x$  ( $y$ ) were an ob. So,  $x$  ( $y$ ) is not an ob.

For numerous reasons, however, this is not a valid *reductio* of (1). Most significantly at this point, (a) is not (1): (a) states that there are two ob, whereas (1) asserts that there could be two ob; to deny (a) is not to deny (1). Nevertheless, if the preceding argument were to yield the conclusion that (a) is not just false but is necessarily false, then the argument would demonstrate that (1) is false. But the argument does not entail that (a) is necessarily false. (a), (b), and (c) do

<sup>5</sup> For one to be an ob, it would not suffice that one's will were never frustrated. If it did, then a person who never willed much might be omnipotent. For the same reason, I believe it would also not suffice that it be necessarily true that one's will were never frustrated.

entail, if you like, both (a) and not-(a) are true, and since it is necessarily false that (c) and not-(a) are both true, we may infer that it is necessarily true that some premise or other is false (because the conjunction of the premises is necessarily false). But this is not to say that the premises contain among themselves any particular member that is necessarily false, let alone that (a) is that premise or is such a premise.

One might, though, put the natural argument in this way:

Suppose

- (1) it is possible that there are (be) two ob;
- (b') it is necessarily true that if something is an ob, its will cannot be frustrated;<sup>5</sup>
- (c) it is necessarily true that if there are (were) two ob, their wills may (might) conflict.

Then

- (d') unless (b') or (c') is false, (1) is false.

For

*if* (in accord with (c')) the wills of (say)  $x$  and  $y$  may conflict, then the will of at least one of them might be frustrated; *and* if (c') [that is, if it is necessarily true that if there are or were two ob their wills may or might conflict], then it is necessarily true that the will of at least one of them might be frustrated; *but* (by (b')) if something is an ob, its will cannot be frustrated; *so* it is necessarily true that at least one of the pair,  $x$  and  $y$ , is not an ob; *so* it is not possible that both  $x$  and  $y$  are (be) ob.

It is noteworthy that (c') differs from (c). With (c) and without (c'), one could conclude (from (1) and (b')) that at least one of the pair,  $x$  and  $y$ , is not an ob, but one could not conclude that it is necessarily true that at least one of them is not an ob. The weaker of these two conclusions implies only that  $x$  and  $y$  are not ob, whereas the stronger implies that it is not possible that both  $x$  and  $y$  are (be) ob.

### *Four Replies*

Despite the allure of the natural argument, at least four replies to it are available; one of these is, I think, especially interesting. First, one may simply say that the argument is not a conclusive argument against (1). For it is not at all plain why one should take the argument to be a *reductio* of (1), and not (say) a *reductio* of (c') or even of (b'). (b') may look analytic or at least indisputable at first glance; and at first glance (c') may look more plausible than (1). But if the natural argument is to be shown to deserve its popularity, the preferability of (c') and (b') over (1) will have to be demonstrated.

Secondly, of the only two arguments for (c') that have occurred to me, one is a *non sequitur* and the other begs the question. The former is that an ob presumably is an abstract entity, and thus presumably could not be distinguished from another ob by, say, spatio-temporal location; but there must be something that distinguishes one from the other, and this probably is the contents of their wills. There are obvious difficulties in this argument, but I want to state just one: the argument shows at most that the wills of two ob (would) have to be different (in at least one respect), and does not show that their wills (would) ever have to be in conflict or even that they may (or might) conflict. I shall leave the question-begging defense of (c') till later.

Thirdly, there is an independent argument to show that (c') is false. Let us make the traditional assumption<sup>6</sup> (among others) that an ob is, in one sense, necessarily omniscient: the assumption, that is, that (2) if (say)  $x$  is an ob, then it is necessarily true that  $x$  is omniscient. Now, if (2) is true, then it is necessarily true that (if there is an ob,  $x$ )  $x$  never wills anything that would require the frustration of the will of an ob. The reasoning is: if (2) is true, then it is necessarily

<sup>6</sup> It would suffice to assume that just one ob is, in our sense, necessarily omniscient.

true that  $x$  knows whether anything he might will would require the frustration of the will of an ob; also, if (2) is true, it is necessarily true that  $x$  knows it is logically impossible to frustrate the will of an ob; finally (—and not I hope, too controversially—), it is necessarily true that no one knowingly wills what he knows to be logically impossible.

Whatever is to be said about this argument against (c'), there is a fourth, and much more interesting, reply to the natural argument. This reply shares a presupposition with a familiar response to the paradox of the stone. The presupposition is (3) that an ob cannot do the logically impossible (*i.e.*, cannot bring it about that a self-contradiction be true), but that this inability does not detract from his omnipotence (*i.e.*, does not entail that the (putative) ob is not (or is not really) an ob). According to this reply: if there were two ob, their wills could conflict, but could conflict only in certain ways; furthermore, if their wills were to conflict in these certain ways, the resultant inefficacy of their wills would not detract from their omnipotence; lastly, the inability of their wills to conflict in other ways does not detract from their omnipotence.

More explicitly, it is suggested that two ob can have contrary wills but cannot have contradictory wills; that if they have contrary but not contradictory wills, neither can enact his will, but the reason why his will is ineffective is *merely* that he has, *in effect*, willed the logically impossible; that the reason why they cannot have contradictory wills is *merely* that it would be logically impossible for two ob to have contradictory wills.

Two beings have contrary wills, for our present purposes, just in case (i) one wills that some proposition  $p$  be true and the other wills that some other proposition  $r$  be true, (ii) it is not possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  be true, (iii) it is possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  be false, and (iv) it is possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  fail (in Strawson's sense) to refer. Two beings have contradictory wills, for our present purposes, just

in case (i) one wills that some proposition  $p$  be true and the other wills that some other proposition  $r$  be true, (ii) it is not possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  be true, (iii) it is *not* possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  be false (unless both fail to refer, and unless failure of reference produces falsehood), and (iv) it is *not* possible that both  $p$  and  $r$  fail to refer.

Suppose, next, that two ob were to have contrary wills. Each would, in effect, be willing something that is logically impossible: namely, something contrary to the will of an ob. For example, if one ob were to will at some time (or perhaps timelessly) that, at time  $t$ , all physical objects be red all over, but another ob were simultaneously (or timelessly) to will that, at  $t$ , all physical objects be blue all over, then neither would have his way. One ob would in effect be willing that, contrary to the will of an ob, every physical object be red all over at  $t$ , whereas, the other ob would in effect be willing that, contrary to the will of an ob, every physical object be blue all over at  $t$ . Although neither would have his way, it would not follow that each or either is not an ob (if (3) is true).

Before considering questions about these remarks, and before going on to discuss the impossibility of contradictory wills, we should pause to look at two arguments that closely resemble the natural argument against (1). Both differ from that argument in that they purport to reduce to absurdity the proposition that there could be one ob. One of them is, loosely stated, that the will of an ob might be inconsistent with itself, and that therefore the will of even a solitary ob could be frustrated. More strictly, this argument is:

Suppose

- (1') it is possible that there is (be) an ob;
- (b') it is necessarily true that if something is an ob, its will cannot be frustrated;
- (c') it is necessarily true that if there is (were) an ob, its will may (might) be inconsistent with itself.

Then

(d') unless (b') or (c') is false, (1') is false.

This argument, like the natural argument against (1) is open to at least four replies. First, one may remark that, without further proof, the argument might with equal justice be taken as a *reductio* of (c') (if not of (b')). Secondly, one may reject arguments for (c'). Thirdly, one might argue, on independent grounds, that (c') is false. (Suppose again that (2) if (say)  $x$  is an ob, then it is necessarily true that  $x$  is omniscient. From this supposition, it may be argued that it is necessarily true that the will of an ob is always consistent with itself.) Fourthly, one may hold that an ob can will that contraries be true but cannot will that contradictories be true; that if he wills contraries, the reason why his will is not done is merely that, in effect, he wills the logically impossible; that the reason why he cannot will contradictories is merely that it would be logically impossible for an ob to do so.

(Perhaps we can imagine an ob who is somewhat forgetful. Picture him at  $t$  willing that  $p$  be true, and then observing that  $p$  is not (or does not become) true. He checks his diary, and discovers that before  $t$  he had willed that not- $p$  be true. If, in the circumstances, he (perhaps justifiably) feels less than omnipotent, we should attribute his difficulty to his memory and not, for example, to a loss of strength or to increasing recalcitrance of the world external to him.)

Next, consider this argument:

Suppose

- (1'') it is possible that there is (be) an ob;
- (b'') it is necessarily true that if something is an ob, its will cannot be frustrated;
- (c'') if there could be an ob, there could be a stone too heavy for anyone to lift, for an ob could create such a stone.

Then

(d'') unless (b'') or (c'') is false, (1'') is false



For

if there could be (as (1') and (c'') imply) a stone too heavy for anyone to lift, then, contrary to (b'), the will of an ob might be frustrated; he might will to lift that stone or such a stone, but if he willed this, his will would be frustrated.

One well may reply to this that, if there were an ob, a stone too heavy for anyone to lift would, *in effect*, be a stone too heavy for an ob to lift; that a stone too heavy for an ob to lift is logically impossible; and that it is compatible with omnipotence to be unable to create such a stone.<sup>7</sup>

Now, having briefly displayed two arguments that resemble the one on which we are focusing, and having in the process, I hope, enhanced or exposed the acceptability of a certain sort of reply to such arguments, I may ask us to return to the distinction between contrary and contradictory wills. The point of drawing this distinction in the present context is probably obvious: if the wills of two ob are merely contrary, then even though neither has his way, there is still something (else) that can happen; but if two ob will exhaustive and mutually exclusive alternatives, then nothing (else) can happen. I think, in this light, that it is logically impossible for there to be two ob with contradictory wills. But nothing obvious seems to compel us to conclude from this that there cannot be two ob, or to conclude that it is logically impossible for there to be two ob with merely contrary wills.

At this point one may raise the question-begging defense of (c') that I mentioned above. According to it, the wills of an alleged ob is limited in the ways we have envisaged, the being does not deserve to be called omnipotent. This objection warrants expansion, and we shall look at it more closely

<sup>7</sup> In some variations of this argument, the conclusion is that an ob both could and could not lift such a stone, and that an ob could create such a stone but could not lift it. In more important variations, the argument involves, not a stone too heavy for anyone to lift, but a stone too heavy for its creator to lift. I should think that "its creator" functions here in the confusing way that "anyone" does; see pp. 12-13. See also the works cited in note 2.

below. But the short reply to it is, of course, that the concept of omnipotence is not clear, that we are trying to clarify it, and that at this point it should be an open question whether to abandon (1) or whether to give up (c'). In seeking an answer to the question, one may again observe that we probably accept various limitations on ob, and should not be astonished to find another. Again, too, I am anxious to add, the issue before us is not whether it is likely that there are two ob, but only whether it is logically possible.

### *An Objection*<sup>8</sup>

The handling of the paradox of the stone that I endorse is not universally accepted. I am less concerned to answer objections to it than to show that they, and the reply to them, pertain both to the paradox and to the question of a plurality of ob. Brief consideration of one objection may, however, further my restricted aims.

According to that objection, there are crucial disanalogies between the impossibility of (*e.g.*) round and square objects and the impossibility of (*e.g.*) stones too heavy for anyone to lift. These disanalogies are obscured by the use of expressions like "in effect, logically impossible". Round square objects are, without qualification, logically impossible. But the stones are logically impossible only if there is an ob. It may clearly be no limitation on an ob that he cannot create objects that are (at once, in the same respect, etc.) both round and square. But objects that are logically impossible only if there is an ob seem to impose on an ob limitations that are peculiarly his own. And these limitations look incompatible with omnipotence. Things that are logically impossible only if there are two ob, and only if they will this or that, seem to be even less firmly impossible, and even less compatible with omnipotence.

<sup>8</sup> On this objection, see the exchange between Keene and Mayo, cited in note 2 above. For help in understanding this objection, I am indebted to Hugh Chandler.

But in fact the logical impossibility of stones too heavy for anyone to lift is absolute, or rather it is as absolute as the impossibility of round square objects.<sup>9</sup> The impossibility of round square objects may be taken to amount roughly to this: it is necessarily true that, if anything is a square object, then that thing is not (at the same time, etc.) round. There is, we should observe, no urge to say that the impossibility of round square objects is only conditional on there being square objects.

Focus next on stones too heavy for an ob to lift. Such stones are, without qualification, logically impossible. It is necessarily true that if there is an ob, and if there are any stones, the ob can lift those stones. This is so regardless of whether there are any ob or stones.

In speaking, though, of stones too heavy for anyone to lift, we find the word, "anyone", causes us needless trouble. If it ranges only over humans, then regardless of whether there are ob, or humans, or stones, it is logically possible for there to be stones too heavy for anyone to lift. (Boulders are stones, I presume.) If, however, "anyone" applies to both humans and ob, then we are concerned with stones too heavy for anyone, including ob, to lift. Regardless of whether there are ob, humans, or stones, it is logically impossible that there be such stones.

(It is possible, though, to take "anyone" to mean "anyone existent" or to mean "anyone possible". Reading it in the former of these two ways, we might judge contingent the question whether stones too heavy for anyone to lift are impossible. But this would be to beg important questions, because it might be necessarily true that some ob does exist. If, on the other hand, "anyone" is understood to mean "anyone possible", and if we held that ob are logically impossible,

<sup>9</sup> By making some traditional assumptions, we may render the impossibility of stones too heavy for anyone to lift much firmer than that of round square objects. Suppose that *if* (say)  $x$  is an ob, *then* (a) it is necessarily true that  $x$  exists, (b) it is necessarily true that  $x$  is an ob, and (c) if  $x$  wills that (say)  $p$ , it is necessarily true that  $x$  wills that  $p$ .

we might arrive at still another view of stones too heavy for anyone to lift. But this too would beg important questions. It seems best, therefore, to treat "anyone" as "anyone, including ob" (or as "anyone possible", if we do not just assume that ob are logically impossible).

It is on these grounds that I have been holding that stones too heavy for anyone to lift are, unconditionally, logically impossible. It remains merely to apply our reasoning directly to the question whether there might be more than one ob. We need only comment that regardless of whether there is any ob, regardless of whether there are two or more ob, and regardless of what, if anything, an ob wills, it is necessarily true that if there is an ob, and if he wills that some proposition be true, that proposition is (or will be) true (—if it does not involve some logical impossibility).

### *Two More Objections*

Two further specifiable objections should be discussed here. The first of them is a development of the defense of (c') that I called question-begging. It may be said, then that although it is compatible with omnipotence to be unable to do some things that are logically impossible, it is not compatible with omnipotence to be unable to do certain other things that are logically impossible. In particular, it may seem, it is not compatible with omnipotence to be unable to frustrate the will of another ob, because it is not compatible with omnipotence to be hampered in any way by the will of another being of any sort.

This objection, as I have claimed, begs the question. Part of our problem is to determine what an ob would be. Although one may have used to feel, and may still feel, that an ob could not be hampered in any way by the will of any other being, it does seem that at this point one may equally well feel that, after all, there is *one* way in which an ob can be hampered by the will of another being. For a being seems just as weak (or as not-weak) when unable to make round

square objects as when unable to frustrate the will of a being whose will cannot be frustrated.

A second objection to our reply to the natural argument is that if there were two beings that might hamper each others' wills, then neither would be an ob, because a solitary ob would be more powerful than either of them, and because an ob could not possibly be less powerful than some other being.

But it is not obviously true that (4) if there were two (or more) ob, each would be less powerful than a solitary ob. It is, of course, not even clear what (4) might mean. Considering, however, the difficulties that arise in the individuation of actions, we would do best to read (4) in a way that does not require that we be able to count the things that agents can do. Interpreted acceptably, then, (4) might amount to (4.1): if there were just one ob, he could do some things that neither of a pair of ob could do.

In support of (4.1), it might be said that, in any world in which there is just one ob, the ob can do  $M$  and he can do not- $M$  (if neither  $M$  nor not- $M$  is logically impossible), but that, in some worlds in which there are two ob, one of them cannot do  $M$  (or not- $M$ ) because the other of them has already done (or willed) not- $M$  (or  $M$ ). It is false, however, that, in any world in which there is just one ob, he can do  $M$  and he can do not- $M$ , because he himself may already have done (or willed)  $M$  or not- $M$ ). Admittedly, in such a world, he would be limited by himself and not by another being; but, again, it begs the question to make this difference the basis for ascribing or denying omnipotence.

In support of (4.1), it might further be said that, in some worlds with just one ob, the ob could create a stone too heavy for any-being-but-one to lift, whereas, in any world with just two ob, neither of them could do this. This is true; but it will not support (4), because it is also true that, in any world with just two ob, each could create a stone too heavy for any-being-but-just-two to lift, whereas, in some worlds with

just one ob, the ob could not do this. (Some worlds with just one ob differ in an important way from others with just one ob: in some of them, there is also a being that is not omnipotent but that can lift a stone of any weight.)

Perhaps some other way of viewing (4) should be considered; yet in the absence of another interpretation of it, it seems untrue, and we still seem to have no obstacle to believing that there could be more than one ob.

### *Conciliatory Remarks*

I do not know how to explain the unrelenting suspicion that trickery is afoot. But the suspicion might be rooted in one of the following two places.

First, some of us feel that a good thing is better or more admirable if it is unique than it would be if it were one of a pair. (But I doubt the same persons feel that one of a pair would be better or more admirable if the other of them were to disappear or had never existed.) I do not share this feeling. (My objection is not, say, that I like matched pairs: perhaps a matched pair is a single *objet*.) My own sentiment is that if there were a perfect (baseball) pitcher, one (say) who struck out on three good pitches every batter he faced, I should admire him, and that if another such pitcher came along, I should then admire each of them as much as I had the first. (On the other hand, I have to admit that if there were a great many pitchers that could, on three good pitches, strike out each batter they met, their ability would not look like much of a skill.)

Secondly, some of us think about omnipotence because we care about religion, but my own interest in omnipotence arises because it poses some puzzles.<sup>10</sup> If my concerns were less narrow, I might want to link together, or to identify, the

<sup>10</sup> See F. C. S. Schiller, "Omnipotence", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, XVIII (1917-18), 247-270; C. F. D'Arcy, "The Theory of a Limited Deity", *Ibid.*, 158-184; W. M. Thorburn, "Omnipotence and Personality", *Mind*, XXIX (1920), 159-185; Ramsey, *op. cit.*

questions whether there could be two ob and whether the universe could have two sovereigns.<sup>11</sup> Thus, because the answer to the latter question probably is no, some of us may feel my answer to the former is unacceptable. For others of us, however the notion of omnipotence has in part been severed from its religious ties. For the latter of us, the tentative conclusion of this paper are not blasphemous but merely surprising.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See I. Tammelo, "The Antimomy of Parliamentary Sovereignty", *Archiv für Rechts- und Sozialphilosophie*, XLIV (1958), 495-513; K. J. J. Hintikka, "Remarks on a Paradox", *ibid.*, 514-516.

<sup>12</sup> For discussion of the topics of this paper, I am indebted to Hugh S. Chandler and Robert Wengert, whom I have already mentioned, and to Catherine Conner, Robert Stalnaker, Richard Schacht, James Wallace, and John Cooper.

## RESUMEN

Esta es una defensa de la afirmación (1) de que podría haber más de un ser omnipotente (ob). Se podría decir que principalmente trato de mostrar, no que (1) es verdadero, sino que *si* pudiera haber un ob, a pesar de la paradoja de la piedra, *entonces* podría haber más de un ob a pesar de la objeción natural a esta última afirmación.

Debe mantenerse presente que cuando mucho estoy defendiendo la opinión de que podría haber, no la opinión de que probablemente hay, dos o más ob.

El argumento natural en contra de (1) se basa en la suposición de que si hubiera o pudiera haber más de un ob las voluntades de 2 (o más) ob podrían ponerse en conflicto. Supongamos (a) hay dos ob; (b) si algo es un ob, su voluntad no puede ser frustrada; (c) si hay dos ob, sus voluntades pueden ponerse en conflicto. Entonces al menos que (b) o (c) sean falsas, (a) es falso. Porque si (por (c)) las voluntades de  $x$ ,  $y$ , pueden ponerse en conflicto, entonces la voluntad de al menos uno de ellos puede frustrarse. Pero (por (b)) la voluntad de  $x$ ,  $y$  no puede ser frustrada, si  $x$ ,  $y$  son ob. Por lo tanto,  $x$ ,  $y$ , no son ob. Esta no es una reducción válida de (1). (a) no es (1). (a) afirma que hay 2 ob mientras que (1) afirma que podría haber 2 ob; negar (a) no es negar (1). Se podría poner el argumento natural de la siguiente manera: supongamos (1) es posible que hay (podría haber) dos ob; (b) es necesariamente verdadero que si algo es un ob, su voluntad no puede ser frustrada; (c') es necesariamente verdadero que si hay (hubiera) dos ob, sus voluntades pueden (podrían) ponerse en conflicto. Entonces (d') a menos que (b') o (c') sean falsos, (1) es falso. Porque *si* de acuerdo con (c') las voluntades de  $x$ ,  $y$  pueden ponerse en conflicto, entonces la voluntad de al menos uno de ellos pueda ser frustrada; y si (c'), entonces es necesariamente verdadero que la voluntad de al menos uno puede frustrarse; pero (por (b')) si algo es un ob, su voluntad no puede ser frustrada; por lo tanto, es necesariamente verdadero que por lo menos uno del par  $x$ ,  $y$  no es ob; por lo tanto no es posible que ambos,  $x$ ,  $y$  sean ob.

Hay cuatro respuestas al argumento natural: 1) El argumento no es conclusivo en contra de (1). 2) ob es probablemente una entidad abstracta y, por lo tanto, presumiblemente no puede ser distinguida de otro ob por sitio o localidad espacio-temporal. Lo que probable-



mente los distingue es el contenido de sus voluntades. 3) Un argumento independiente para probar que (c') es falsa.  $x$  es un ob.  $x$  es omnisciente; por lo tanto, nunca ordenará algo que requiera la frustración de la voluntad de un ob (2). Si (2) es verdad, es necesariamente verdadero que  $x$  sabe que es lógicamente imposible frustrar la voluntad de un ob. Nadie conscientemente ordena algo que sabe que es lógicamente imposible. 4) Un ob no puede hacer algo que es lógicamente imposible (3). Es decir, no puede hacer que una autocontradicción sea verdadera, pero esta incapacidad no le resta nada a su omnipotencia. Por lo tanto, dos ob pueden tener voluntades contrarias pero no contradictorias. Si las voluntades de dos ob solamente son contrarias todavía puede ocurrir algo. Pero si dos ob ordenan alternativas exhaustivas y mutuamente exclusivas ninguna otra cosa puede ocurrir. En esta luz es lógicamente imposible que haya dos ob con voluntades contradictorias, pero no es lógicamente imposible que haya dos ob con voluntades contrarias.

Objeciones: 1) De acuerdo con esta objeción hay desigualdades iniciales entre la imposibilidad de, por ejemplo, objetos cuadrado redondos y la imposibilidad de piedras demasiado pesadas para que alguien las levante. Realmente la imposibilidad de objetos cuadrado redondos está condicionada por la existencia de objetos cuadrados. Piedras demasiado pesadas para levantar son, sin cualificaciones, lógicamente imposibles. Es necesariamente verdadero que si hay un ob y si hay piedras, el ob las pueda levantar.

2) No es compatible con omnipotencia ser incapaz de hacer ciertas cosas como frustrar la voluntad de un ob porque no es compatible con omnipotencia el ser impedido de cualquier forma por la voluntad de cualquier ser de cualquier clase. Pero uno también puede pensar que hay una forma en que un ob puede ser impedido por la voluntad de otro ob. Puede un ser parecer tan débil (o tan no débil) cuando es incapaz de hacer objetos cuadrado redondos, como cuando es incapaz de impedir la voluntad de un ser cuya voluntad no puede ser frustrada.

3) Una objeción a nuestro argumento natural es que si hubiera dos seres que pudieran estorbarse o impedirse en su voluntad, entonces ninguno sería un ob, porque un ob único sería más poderoso que cualquiera de los dos, y porque un ob único no podría ser menos poderoso que otro ser. Pero no es obviamente cierto que (4) si hubiera dos o más ob cada uno sería menos poderoso que un ob único. Entonces, interpretado aceptablemente (4) podría significar que (4.1) si solamente hubiera un ob, éste podría hacer algunas cosas que ninguno de un par de ob podría hacer.

Observaciones conciliatorias: 1) Algunos de nosotros pensamos que

una cosa buena sería mejor o más admirable si fuera única que si fuera una de un par. Pienso que dos buenos pitchers de baseball son tan buenos como si solamente existiera uno. 2) La noción de omnipotencia ha sido separada, en parte, de sus lazos religiosos. Tengo interés en el tema puesto que plantea algunos acertijos.