

On Behalf of the Fool

Anselm: Pegasus, a being whose powers are only given to him by story-tellers and artists, has only those mediated causal powers that they have given to him. ... Still, Pegasus has not only the mediated power to fly, but also the mediated power to entertain us and perhaps even inspire us. ... However, something than which nothing greater can be conceived would and does have unmediated causal powers.¹

Fool: So, on your account, beings that exist in reality have at least some unmediated causal powers, whereas beings that exist only in the understanding have only mediated causal powers. Moreover, on your account, the mediated causal powers of beings that exist only in the understanding are of two kinds. On the one hand, there are causal powers that are attributed to beings that exist only in the understanding, in stories, myths, theories, acts of understanding, and so forth. In this case, of course, the stories *say* that the beings possess unmediated causal powers: Pegasus is *said* to have the (unmediated) power to fly in the relevant stories and myths. On the other hand, there are causal powers that are intimately related to unmediated causal powers of acts of storytelling and the like: if Pegasus has the mediated causal powers to entertain and inspire us, that is only because acts of telling stories about Pegasus have unmediated causal powers to entertain and inspire us. And in this case, of course, it need be no part of the story to say that the beings possess the unmediated causal powers: the relevant myths and stories do not need to *say* that Pegasus has the unmediated causal power to entertain and inspire us in order for Pegasus to have these mediated causal powers.

Anselm: Yes, of course.

Fool: But, even given all of this, I cannot see that your argument is any further advanced. I say that something than which nothing greater can be conceived exists only in the understanding. Its mediated causal powers are of two kinds: those that are attributed to it in stories, myths, theories, acts of understanding, and so forth; and those that arise from the unmediated causal powers of acts of relating stories, myths, and theories concerning that than which no greater can be conceived. Of course, the stories, myths, theories, and so forth do not say that that than which no greater can be conceived has only mediated causal powers: on the contrary, those stories, myths, theories and so forth say that that than which no greater can be conceived has maximal unmediated causal power. But, for all that, they are still only stories, myths and theories: in reality, there is nothing than which no greater can be conceived, and there is nothing that has maximal unmediated causal power.

Anselm: You contradict yourself!

Fool: How so?

Anselm: That than which no greater can be conceived would not be that than which no greater can be conceived if it did not possess maximal unmediated causal power;

¹ See G. Matthews and L. Baker (forthcoming). See, also, Matthews and Baker (2010) and Oppy (forthcoming).

that than which no greater can be conceived would not be that than which no greater can be conceived if it did not exist in reality.

Fool: There is no contradiction here. If that than which no greater can be conceived exists in reality, then, of course, it has maximal unmediated causal power. But, if that than which no greater can be conceived exists only in the understanding, then it has only mediated causal powers, including, of course, *mediated* maximal causal power. On the one hand, Pegasus has mediated unmediated-power-to-fly just because the stories and myths *say* that Pegasus has unmediated power to fly. On the other hand, that than which no greater can be conceived has mediated maximal-unmediated-causal-power just because the stories, myths, theories and so forth say that that than which no greater can be conceived has maximal unmediated causal power.

Anselm: Those hyphens—and that talk of ‘mediated unmediated-powers’—look pretty suspicious to me!

Fool: In my view, those suspicions simply cast doubt on talk reliant upon your underlying distinctions between existence in the understanding and existence in reality and between mediated and unmediated causal powers. But, in any case, perhaps we can bring out the difficulties here by a different route. Consider, then, that Richmond footballer than which no greater Richmond footballer can be conceived. Among his attributes, that Richmond footballer will evidently have maximal unmediated football-related causal powers. For, were that not so, there would be lesser Richmond footballers with greater football-related causal powers—and that is surely absurd. Yet, alas, it is not the case that there is, in reality, a Richmond footballer than which no greater Richmond footballer can be conceived. Can you tell me why you maintain that there is no contradiction in supposing that there is no Richmond footballer than which no greater Richmond footballer can be conceived—no Richmond footballer with maximal unmediated football-related causal powers—even though you maintain that there is a contradiction in supposing that there is no being than which no greater being can be conceived—no being with maximal unmediated causal powers?

SOPHIS
Monash University
Clayton Campus
Wellington Road
Clayton Vic 3800
AUSTRALIA
Graham.Oppy@monash.edu

References

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