

The Ontological Argument

Anselm

1. It is true by definition that God is a being than which none greater can be imagined.
2. God exists as an idea in the mind
3. A being that exists as an idea in the mind and in the world is greater than a being which only exists in the mind
4. If God exists only as an idea in the mind then we can imagine a being that is greater than God
5. We cannot imagine something greater than God as God is the greatest possible being that can be imagined
6. Therefore, God exists



1033 - 1109

An a priori

Something which can be known without experience

Gaunilo's Island

1. It is true by definition that 'Island Paradise' is an island than which none greater can be imagined.
2. 'Island Paradise' exists as an idea in the mind
3. An island that exists as an idea in the mind and in the world is greater than an island which only exists in the mind
4. If 'Island Paradise' exists only as an idea in the mind then we can imagine an island that is greater than 'Island Paradise'
5. We cannot imagine something greater than 'Island Paradise' as 'Island Paradise' is the greatest possible island that can be imagined
6. Therefore, 'Island Paradise' exists



Response to Gaunilo's Island

Premise 1 is incoherent

We do not have an idea of a maximally perfect island, nor is this possible.

There is an intrinsic maximum for the properties of God

Aquinas

- We don't really have an idea of a being than which none greater can be imagined
 - Response - we understand the concept
- People have different concepts of God
 - Response - the argument can still work if we remove reference to 'God'

Kant's Criticism

- Existence is not a property
- It is a precondition
- Existence doesn't make something greater, rather it is a precondition of something being great



Immanuel Kant
1724 - 1804

Anselm's 2nd formulation

1. 'By definition, God is a being than which none greater can be imagined. A being that necessarily exists in reality is greater than a being that does not necessarily exist.
2. Thus, by definition, if God exists as an idea in the mind but does not necessarily exist in reality, then we can imagine something that is greater than God.
3. But we cannot imagine something that is greater than God.
4. Thus, if God exists in the mind as an idea, then God necessarily exists in reality.
5. God exists in the mind as an idea.
6. Therefore, God necessarily exists in reality.'

- Kenneth Einar Himma, 'Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Existence is a property for a necessary being, unlike for a contingent being

Existence is in its own nature

Something which doesn't depend on anything else for its existence is greater than something which does

The Malcolm's version of the argument

1. God is a being than which none greater can be conceived
2. If God did not exist then he cannot come to exist
 - a. Caused to exist - would mean God is dependent upon something
 - b. Happened to come into being
 - i. In both cases God is a limited being and so we can conceive of something greater
3. As God cannot come into being God must necessary exist or it it is impossible that God exists
4. God is only impossible if the idea of his existence is logically absurd, contradictory or paradoxical
5. Given if is not, God must exist necessarily

The Modal Ontological Argument

Alvin Plantinga:

1. The concept of a maximally great being is self-consistent.
2. If 1, then there is at least one logically possible world in which a maximally great being exists.
3. Therefore, there is at least one logically possible world in which a maximally great being exists.
4. If a maximally great being exists in one logically possible world, it exists in every logically possible world.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being (that is, God) exists in every logically possible world.