

A priori – argument based on logic not experience.

Deductive argument- If the premises of an argument are true, then the conclusion is true.

Contingent- Something which did not have to exist and relies on something else for its existence.

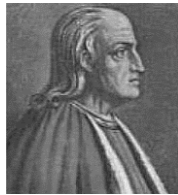
Necessary-Something which does not rely on something else for its existence.

Ontology- 'Ontos' (being) + 'logos' (word/knowledge) = arguing the existence of God from the knowledge/study of his 'being'.

Predicate- An intrinsic property or quality of something.

Key Philosopher: St Anselm.

“and the fool hath said in his heart ‘there is no God’”. (Psalm)



God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived”.

Whether a person believes in God or not, God exists in the mind. Something which exists in reality is better than something which only exists in the mind.



Anselm said that if God only exists in the mind then God won't be the greatest possible thing that can be conceived. We have just agreed that things which exists in reality are SUPERIOR to those which exists only in the mind. So God must exist in reality as well as the mind in order to be logically consistent with the definition of God. Therefore, God exists.



1. God is the greatest possible being (“a being than which nothing greater can be conceived”).
2. God exists at least in the mind or understanding (even atheists can define God even if they don't believe in him)
3. A being who exists only in the mind is not as great as a being who exists in reality as well as the mind.
4. If God existed only in the mind, he would not be the greatest possible being.
5. Therefore God must exist in reality as well as in the mind.

Second argument: “God cannot be thought not to exist.”

There are things you can imagine not existing...eg. Unicorns and Yetis.



There are things you can't imagine not existing...You..and GOD.



Why is it okay for you think a yeti or unicorn does not to exist but you cannot think of God not existing? Because God is the greatest thing which can be conceived...so must be thought as existing if he is to be the greatest.

For Anselm existence is a predicate of God. Existence is a property of God's nature.



Examples- elephant: trunk, tusks, a mammal.

1. God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived”– even atheists agree on this definition of God
2. A being that you can imagine not existing is less great than one you can't imagine not existing
3. Therefore, in order to be the 'greatest being' it must be impossible to deny the existence of God as a being you can't imagine not existing.

Gaunilo and the perfect island. A02 WEAKNESS

Gaunilo maintained that Anselm's argument essentially allowed anything to come into existence. If a perfect island did not exist it would be a contradiction to call it the perfect island. So essentially anything that we think of as perfect must exist. But of course there is no such island. This argument which parallels Anselm's shows that Anselm's argument is absurd.

You cannot define something into existence.



Anselm's response:

The island is contingent as is its existence. God is necessary. You cannot define a perfect island. You can define God.

Aquinas: A02 WEAKNESS

God's existence cannot be regarded as self evident. Compare to the following statement:

“Truth does not exist”.

It is nonsensical to say this because you cannot accept the truth of “Truth does not exist” unless truth does exist after all. It is contradictory. To have a mental concept of the non existence of truth is contradictory. Yet to have a mental concept of God not existing is possible and not contradictory.

Aquinas also challenged Anselm's definition of God. *That than which nothing greater can be conceived*. He said whilst we can approach a certain level of understanding of Gods, the finite human mind could never truly understand God. God will always remain unknowable. So we cannot know that Anselm's definition is correct. He also questions whether an concept of God could be universally shared. Furthermore, even if there is a shared concept this does not mean this concept exists in reality. For example we have a shared concept of what a mermaid is (half fish, half lady) or a unicorn (horse with a horn on its head)...but these things don't have to exist just because we have a shared concept of them.



“Perhaps not everyone who hears the name ‘God’ understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought, seeing that some have believed God to be a body. Yet, granted that everyone understands that by this name ‘God’ is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the name signifies exists actually , but only that it exists mentally.”



Descartes

Argument 1: God is the sum of all perfections



1. God is by definition perfect.
2. An imperfect God would not be God.
3. If God is perfect he must contain all perfections, including the perfection of existence.
4. If God did not exist he would be not perfect
5. Therefore, God exists

Argument 2: Existence is a predicate.

1. Existence is a predicate of the concept of God in exactly the same way three sides and three angles is intrinsic to the concept of a triangle. Without three sides there can be no concept of a triangle.
2. "Existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having three angles to two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle."
3. Existence is part of the essence of God.

Kant: Existence is NOT a predicate. A02 WEAKNESS

This is because existence is not an attribute or characteristic of something. "Exists" does not tell us something about an object that helps identify it. When you say something exists you are not giving it a new quality or characteristic you are just saying those characteristics have been "actualised". There is one real example of this thing in real life. Regardless of which definition of God you take it's a concept. You cannot solve the question of whether this concept has been actualised by adding "existence" to this concept's predicates. You state that the triangle has the predicates of three sides and internal angles that add up to 180 degrees. But to know if that triangle exists you have to investigate/ find evidence.

Equally you could say that a unicorn has the predicate of having a horn. Adding existence to its lists of predicates does not mean this concept has been actualised.



Possible response to Kant...

God's existence is necessary rather than contingent, so maybe existence is predicate of necessary being. This is really going to fail to convince a sceptic of the argument because it requires us to agree that God necessarily exists.

Modern ontological arguments

Norman Malcolm

Agreed with Kant that we can't views existence as a predicate. So the idea that he tries to revive the argument anyway, focusing on necessary existence, could be seen as a strength, because he is responding to a criticism.

1. If God does exist today, then he never can and never will- his existence must be impossible.
2. If God does exists he must exist necessarily.
3. God's existence is therefore either impossible or necessary.
4. God's existence is not impossible. It is not logically contradictory to have the concept of a God who exists- it is an idea that we can entertain without any logical absurdity.
5. Therefore, given that God's existence is not impossible, it must be necessary- so God exists necessarily.

Alvin Plantinga

Focuses on the idea of God as a maximally great being. This means God is omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect. Such a being is not self contradictory- unlike a square circle.

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

The argument is based on modal logic. Premise three works on this system of modal logic, a system that is different to others. It may be criticised that this step of the argument is breaking logical rules.



If you are an atheist or even agnostic you will not agree with the first premise of the arguments that define God. If you don't agree with the first statement about God the rest of the argument becomes obsolete. The arguments are reliant upon agreement with the definitions.

Massive flaw: you are trying to convince people God exists based on a statement/assumption about God. **You will only ever convince people who already believe in God.**

The argument fails at the first hurdle for anyone who do not believe in God. And even some of the most notable theists and philosophers who do have faith don't find the argument convincing!

