

1 Ontological arguments

Remember that both cosmological and teleological arguments start with an empirical premise about something that exists and how it is.

Ontological arguments, on the other hand, are *a priori*, or independent of experience. They purport to show that God exists based on reason alone.

2 Anselm's argument

St. Anselm (1033-1109), Archbishop of Canterbury

The Cosmological & Teleological Arguments, even if they are correct, don't give us any reason to believe that God is omniscient, omnipotent, good or loving. Anselm's argument avoids that problem by defining 'God' as *a being greater than which cannot be conceived*.

Perfections are those properties that make an entity which has them better or greater.

- Knowledge, power & moral goodness are perfections. Thus God is as knowledgeable, powerful & good as it is possible to be.
- Anselm maintains that existence in reality is a perfection – i.e. if two things are exactly the same in all other respects, but one exists in reality & the other doesn't, then the one that does exist in reality is better or greater.
- An argument for this claim: The perfect 5 dollar bill.

The ontological argument is a *reduction ad absurdum* argument.

- It proves its conclusion by assuming that the conclusion is false, and then showing that this assumption leads to a contradiction.
- Example: The proof that there is no greatest prime number.

The Argument:

1. God exists in the understanding.
2. *Reductio* assumption: God does not exist in reality.
3. It is greater to exist in reality than merely in the understanding.
4. A being having all the attributes of God but also existing can be conceived.
5. Therefore a being having all the attributes of God but also existing would be greater than God.
6. So a being greater than God can be conceived.
7. But this is a contradiction.
8. Therefore God exists in reality – that is, God exists.

Gaunilo's reply "on behalf of the fool": The same form of argument can be used to prove the existence of the perfect island (i.e. an island more perfect than which is not possible), and that is absurd.

The Perfect Island parody argument:

1. The Perfect Island exists in the understanding.
2. *Reductio* assumption: The Perfect Island does not exist in reality.
3. It is greater to exist in reality than merely in the understanding.
4. A being having all the attributes of Perfect Island but also existing can be conceived.
5. Therefore a being having all the attributes of Perfect Island but also existing would be greater than Perfect Island.
6. So a being greater than Perfect Island can be conceived.
7. But this is a contradiction.
8. Therefore Perfect Island exists in reality – that is, Perfect Island exists.