

Does the Ontological Argument work?

The Ontological argument is an a priori and depends on whether you would take a non-realist or realist view of the argument. If one were to use a realist view of the argument it would collapse almost every time but if you were to use a non-realist view then the Ontological argument makes sense.

Whereas the cosmological argument is an a posteriori, which is a synthetic argument and derives from experience to prove a statement or a fact, the Ontological argument is an a priori, which involves analytical statements that are independent of experience.

St Anselm wrote in his book, the Proslogian in 1078 in the second chapter that is often known as his first argument, "And indeed we believe you [God] are something greater than which cannot be thought". The argument was a realist argument, realist argument is a statement that corresponds with reality and is true or false depending on the circumstance and if you buy into the ontological argument.

Both theists and atheists understand the definition that Anselm gave. He said that it is something to exist in the mind alone but it is so much better to exist in reality, imagining a piece of cake in your mind, wouldn't it be greater if it were there in real life so you could eat it? If you were to apply the same principle to the statement, "God Exists" then analytically the statement makes sense. This is because we can find that the statement is true by merely analysing what it means to be God, which is perfection that would necessarily mean that He exists because it is in the nature and definition of God to exist. So to Anselm, it would make no logical sense to deny God if one were to understand what God is, because once we have understanding of something, we will never have a different perception of the thing we understand.

Like prime numbers, once we understand what prime numbers are, we can never conceive of prime numbers of being anything else because it goes against the definition of prime numbers because they are necessarily only divisible by "1" and itself. Only a fool would deny the existence of prime numbers if he understood the concept of prime numbers, Anselm would say the same about God and that only a fool would deny the existence of God because it is in the definition of God, God necessarily exists.

Guanilo, a monk at the time of Anselm rejected Anselm's argument by using the concept of the Lost Island in his book On Behalf Of A Fool. He says that he can think of a tropical island more beautiful than can be conceived in his mind so therefore must exist in reality. Guanilo had found a devastating flaw in Anselm's argument by de dicto de re and reducing it to ad absurdum. But Anselm insisted that Guanilo had misunderstood the argument and that God is the only thing that can be greater than be conceived, so the argument only applies to God.

Aquinas however would not agree that we do not all have the same perception of God, some to the disbelief of Aquinas thought that God had a body. This is a fine example of different views on God. He says that we can only know God's purpose through God's actions in the world so any arguments for God have to be a posteriori. Aquinas also rejects the idea of understanding God because he says that God is unknowable, so a real

understanding of God's nature is impossible to know. He holds that if we did know the nature of God then we would have to accept that God is necessary to exist, but as we don't have this knowledge we have to just use synthetic arguments. But Aquinas does agree that the statement "God Necessarily Exists" but as we don't know this to be the case because of lack of knowledge about the nature of God then we must only use statements starting from experience.

Immanuel Kant, another critique of Anselm's argument named the ontological argument and had a realist view. He used the correspondence approach because he was a realist (like Aristotle) and that a statement that corresponds with reality and is true or false depending on the circumstance of the statement.

He said that we have no idea of necessary being and that God is largely defined in the negative terms than positive terms. Also he says quite rightly that when you say, "God necessarily exists", it only necessarily applies to statements because with words and language are used and could only apply to propositions, not reality and that there are no propositions necessarily about reality. The ontological argument doesn't logically work because yes, you can say that a triangle necessarily has 3 sides and you can also say that a unicorn necessarily has a horn but this doesn't mean that there are any triangles or unicorns. So God doesn't have to necessarily exist, there is just the possibility of God existing. So therefore, to Kant existence isn't perfection because things don't necessarily exist.

I think that Kant's argument is very strong because he realises that Anselm's use of philosophical language is flawed because there is no logical explanation to back up the ontological argument. So Kant used his own form of philosophical language to develop his own counter argument to knock down Anselm's. It is therefore impossible for the Ontological argument to work in Kant's point of view because he used a realist theory and by correspondence you can't say that God is necessary because you are making an illogical jump in the argument, *de dicto de re* ("Ontos" deriving from the Latin meaning of an illegitimate jump in an argument).

Norman Malcolm, a disciple of Wittgenstein developed on Anselm's second argument as well and said that God *must* exist because the statement, "God necessarily exists". Is the statement impossible? No because the definition of God is existence because God is perfect and the perfection of existence is far greater than the imperfection of not existing so therefore, God necessarily exists. There is also possibility of God existing because it is impossible for God not to exist, so once again God must necessarily exist.

The second argument addresses the question of what it means to believe in God. Anselm's second argument is however different to the first because it is a non-realist argument, which relies on the coherence theory of truth. A statement such as "A girl is beautiful" could cohere in some cultures because in our culture it is often tall and slender but in others is short and wide. "Within the community the equator exists", a statement made by Garath Moore which cleverly identifies that some people would not even know that the equator exists because they have no understanding or knowledge of it and that the equator only coheres to people who actually know about the

equator and understand it. So what people mean when they say God exists (such as Anselm), God only exists within the community of believers. So Moore's original statement can be applied to God, "within the community, God truly exists". This statement applies greatly to Anselm's Proslogian because it was written to revive the faith of those falling away from religion and from God; it was made to help the believer understand what it means to believe in God. I think that the Ontological argument works very well in this way because Anselm doesn't try to convert people to God but mainly to understand what it means to believe in God, by understanding what it is to know what it means to believe in God rather than Kant's quest for philosophical facts that won't comfort him spiritually.

So would God's existence be more like a unicorn (an object rather than a fictional being) or the equator? The philosopher Kant would say that God is like an object. An object can be or not be and no in-between, so God, being thought of as an object could be or not be. Norman Malcolm would reject this because there could be no possibility of God's existence because God is necessary. So there are two sides of the Ontological argument, the realist view and the non-realist view. With the realist view the Ontological argument will almost certainly fail every time because it makes an illegitimate jump between reality and into the unknown (what Aquinas calls God) by *de dicto de re*. But with the non-realist view the Ontological argument works every time because it doesn't need to rely on logic as much but more to do with faith of a believer. I think that the ontological argument was only supposed to work for believers just to confirm their faith by a non-realist view and that a realist view of supporting the ontological argument will never satisfy the likes of Kant.