

## **“The Ontological argument will never be of any use when trying to prove Gods existence”. Discuss. (17 marks).**

Many people the ontological argument is a pointless and weak attempt at proving the existence of God. They argue it has too many problems and unanswered questions to be of any use to us today. However, some find it a very encouraging and up-building theory, which strengthens their belief that there is a God for us to worship, and share a loving relationship with. The question all of us are concerned with however, is ‘can we use the ontological argument to prove Gods existence today?’ To decide whether it will be of any use, we need to look at its problems and its strengths to see if we can logically come to the same conclusion Anselm and Descartes arrived at.

Using an A priori argument, monk Gaunilo came up with the first reply to Anselm’s theory. He said that we ‘cannot define something into existence’ using the metaphor of an island, which he said if it was perfect then this island had to exist. However in Anselm’s reply he said that ‘God is a special case’ in that this only applies to necessary beings and to something that has all the perfection’s. Gods perfection is ultimate so nothing more can be added to it, unlike an island where more things such as more beaches could be added to improve it. God is immutable, is perfection is unchangeable and unique and this is why the ontological argument can only apply to Him.

Some of the strengths of the argument are that it is clear and very logical which if looked at step by step makes sense and seems to prove its point. It highlights the ‘otherness’ of God, showing he is like no other, which is essential to the Christian faith. It shows us how unique and supreme God is and He is completely above our human understanding because we cannot comprehend what it is like to be perfect. It also gives God necessary existence as part of his perfection. This is because he is vital for our very existence, without Him we could not possibly be here.

The second person who criticised the ontological argument was Kant who said it made an ‘illegitimate jump from ideas to ontos (reality) – Vardy, the puzzle of God. He agreed with St T. Aquinas who said we cannot really know what God is because He is so other for us to understand. The only thing we can really do is say what God is not for example we know God is not evil or cruel. Kant did agree that if God did exist then his existence would be necessary just like if Prince Charles became a King he would have to be male. This is using an analytical argument to come to a conclusion after looking at the terms used.

However one of the biggest problems he proposed is that we can’t prove he actually exists using the theory formed by Descartes. He agreed that IF he did exist, just like the triangle needs three sides and angles, then God would exist perfectly. However this does not mean He does actually exist, we can never rid the above statement of its ‘IF’. If we cannot get rid of the if then we are not proving anything. Vardy uses the

example of a unicorn saying that if unicorns did exist then they would have to have horns but this does not mean they do actually exist.

The second problem, and the one with the most destructive impact, was the idea that we cannot say that existence is a characteristic of perfection. The idea of perfection does not add anything to the nature of God, just like my previous comparison to £100. The fact that the perfect £100 is sitting in front of me, does not make it a more perfect £100 than one that wasn't. I may prefer it to be in front of me but it does not add anything to the quality of the £100 or its essence. If we cannot say that existence is definitely a necessary characteristic of perfection, then this makes the ontological argument pointless.

Many people today also say that the ontological argument is useless to convince a non-believer in God. If you do not have faith and a definition of God then the argument doesn't show God actually and objectively exists. This means that if you were an atheist then you would not be convinced. Verificationist would also say there is no physical proof that He exists so therefore it would be pointless to talk about something there was no objective proof of. Likewise empiricists would say there is no empirical evidence or experiences we can rely on to prove He is real and without this the argument becomes useless.

However although the realist Descartes used the ontological argument as an attempted objectional proof, the antirealist Anselm who originally wrote the argument, used it as subjective proof. We have to remember that initially the argument was a prayer of the wonders of God and Anselm said himself he was only writing it to strengthen his own and fellow Christians faith in the existence of God. The prayer did exactly that and to an already existing believer in God, the ontological argument totally proves the existence in God.

In conclusion then, to decide if the ontological argument would be of use to prove the existence of God, then we have to look at one key factor – who are we trying to prove it to? If the argument tries to prove that God exists, has necessary existence and is perfect as an objective proof to an atheist, which is what Descartes was trying to do, then it fails. However if it tries to strengthen the faith in God and His 'otherness' to an existing believer, which as Anselm said was the only reason he wrote the argument, then it completely succeeds.

We can therefore conclude that it is wrong to say the ontological argument 'will never be of use' because to some people it helps them become closer to God and their religion as it proves to them that He does exist for them. Like most philosophical arguments, it depends on your beliefs as to whether the argument is successful, so if you already believe in the Christian perfect idea of God then this strengthens your belief in him. The argument does not however reach our initial goal to prove the existence of God to everyone and change the way our society behaves and lives, because without objective proof for everyone then many will still ponder on the vital question 'does God really exist?'.

