Philosophy of Religion
Theme 1: Arguments for the existence of God – deductive
Booklet 3

Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

D	**Deductive arguments - origins of the ontological argument**
	Deductive proofs; the concept of *'a priori'*. **St Anselm** - God as the greatest possible being (Proslogion 2). St Anselm - God has necessary existence (Proslogion 3). [The ontological argument from the internet dictionary of philosophy](#)

E	**Deductive arguments - developments of the ontological argument:**
	Rene Descartes - concept of God as supremely perfect being; analogies of triangles and mountains/valleys. **Norman Malcolm** - God as unlimited being: God's existence as necessary rather than just possible.

F	**Challenges to the ontological argument:**
	Gaunilo, his reply to St Anselm; his rejection of the idea of a greatest possible being that can be thought of as having separate existence outside of our minds; his analogy of the idea of the greatest island as a ridicule of St Anselm's logic. **Immanuel Kant's objection** - existence is not a determining predicate: it cannot be a property that an object can either possess or lack.

AO2 – 30 mark questions
Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

- *The extent to which 'a priori' arguments for God's existence are persuasive.*
- *The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God.*
- *The effectiveness of the ontological argument for God's existence.*
- *Whether the ontological argument is more persuasive than the cosmological/teleological arguments for God's existence.*
- *The effectiveness of the challenges to the ontological argument for God's existence.*
- *The extent to which objections to the ontological argument are persuasive.*

Deductive arguments - origins of the ontological argument

Deductive proofs; the concept of *'a priori'*.

See activities on inductive and deductive arguments on the Eduqas website – access through RS Blog

The ontological argument rests on the **premise** that there is a universe, and that its existence is **contingent** – it depends on something else to exist. Whatever provides the explanation for the universe cannot be contingent itself, but is necessary. The ontological argument provides a necessary explanation located in the existence of a supremely perfect being. It argues **deductively**, not **inductively,** this means it hopes for a universal proof not dependent on empirical evidence about which we may be mistaken. The ontological argument is also **analytic** – the truth (or falsity) of an analytic statement is completely determined by the meanings of the words and symbols used to express it (it is true by definition). The argument reaches conclusions about the existence of God that are based on the definition of God used in the premises. Its scope is therefore greater than that of the other arguments for God's existence since they give only a limited view of what God is like, while the concept of God as the most perfect being implies a whole range of qualities. It is also **a priori** – known to be true independently of experience (though some experience may be necessary to understand what the statement means).

Introduction

Anselm, then the Archbishop of Canterbury, prayed for a single, short argument which would prove almost everything about God, including his nature and existence. As a result*, 'Suddenly one night during matins the grace of God illuminated his heart, the whole matter became clear to his mind, and a great joy and exultation filled his inmost being'* (**The Proslogion 1078**). The ontological proof was born. For Anselm, the existence of God, held by him to be true by virtue of faith, was now also true by logical necessity, relying only on the analysis and meaning of terms and avoiding deduction about the nature of God drawn from the observation of the natural world – **reason** demonstrating what is already believed in by faith. The Proslogion offers a form of deductive metaphysics, setting out from self-evident principles in order to answer the central question of metaphysics: *Why should there be anything at all?* The notion of whether something should 'be' or not focuses the argument very clearly on the problems of what it actually means to say that something exists or has being.

The process of Anselm's reasoning led him to the conclusion that 'Thanks be to thee good Lord, thanks be to thee, because I now understand by thy light what I formerly believed by thy gift'. Effectively, Anselm was trying to prove the existence of God by means of ***reductio ad absurdum***. This method of reasoning aims to demonstrate the truth of something by reducing to absurdity the very opposite of what you are aiming to prove. In Anselm's case, the opposite of his conclusion would be that God does not exist, which he aimed to show to be absurd by means of an argument demonstrating that the existence of God is logically necessary (i.e. he cannot not exist).

1. **How was Anselm trying to prove God? Method of reasoning?**

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When Anselm argued that the proposition 'God does not exist' is a contradiction as his non-existence is impossible, it demonstrated that philosophy and theology were effectively one and the same process for him. Today, we separate the two disciplines but Anselm, and later Descartes, worked in a time in which it was perfectly reasonable to make the assumption that human reasoning is correct because humans are made in God's image.

Anselm's argument was rejected by other Christian theologians on the grounds that the human intellect was too weak to know enough of God's essence and nature to be able, as Anselm attempted, to deduce from it His necessary existence. Nevertheless, the ontological argument offers one of the most profound issues in philosophy. As Bertrand Russell observed: *'Is there anything we can think of which, by the mere fact that we can think it, is shown to exist outside our thought?'*(History of Western Philosophy).

2. **Why did other Christians reject Anselm's argument?**

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3. **Add definitions of**

A priori

Deductive

Premise

Contingent

Analytic

Ontology

Metaphysical

St Anselm - God as the greatest possible being (Proslogion 2).

Read the extract from Vardy *The Puzzle of God* pages 83-85 to support your learning

The argument can be broken down into three stages:

1. The definition of God as *'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'* and the implications of this
2. Why the non-existence of God is logically impossible
3. Why 'the fool' believes that which is impossible to be true.

Defining God

Anselm's argument is based on the word 'God' and what is meant when the word is used. He makes an assumption which is crucial for the argument to work, which is that 'God' is effectively shorthand for **'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'** or 'the being than which nothing greater can be thought'. His argument is that when the believer (and the non-believer for that matter) speaks of God, they intuitively understand what is meant by the concept of God – that in the sense that he is supremely perfect.' That than which nothing greater can be conceived' must possess all perfections in order to be so described and when we speak of God we speak of such a being.

4. How did Anselm define God?

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Perfection and existence

Furthermore, Anselm argues that if such a being does indeed possess all perfections, then he must exist. This assumption is based on the principle that existence itself is a perfection. Anselm places existence into the same category as he would place goodness, love, wisdom or justice, for example, and by so doing he treats it as a defining characteristic.

4. What perfections must this being have? _____

This step is important to the argument because it establishes that existence may be possessed or lacked, and that to possess existence is necessarily greater than to lack it. Existence may be *in re* (in reality) or merely *in intellectu* (in the mind). That which exists in the mind may hypothetically possess all other great-making qualities, but that which exists in reality is undeniably greater.

Anselm writes:

Therefore, Lord, who grants understanding to faith, grant me that, in so far as you know it beneficial, I understand that you are as we believe and you are that which we believe. ***Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be imagined.***

Then is there no such nature, since the fool has said in his heart: God is not? But certainly this same fool, when he hears this very thing that I am saying - something than which nothing greater can be imagined - understands what he hears; and what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it is. For it is one thing for a thing to be in the understanding and another to understand that a thing is.

5. **What does the fool understand?**

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For when a painter imagines beforehand what he is going to make, he has in his understanding what he has not yet made but he does not yet understand that it is. But when he has already painted it, he both has in his understanding what he has already painted and understands that it is.
Therefore even the fool is bound to agree that there is at least in the understanding something than which nothing greater can be imagined, because when he hears this he understands it, and whatever is understood is in the understanding.

6. **Why does this being have to exist in understanding and reality?**

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*And certainly that than which a greater cannot be imagined cannot be in the understanding alone. For if it is at least in the understanding alone, it can be imagined to be in reality too, which is greater. Therefore if that than which a greater cannot be imagined is in the understanding alone, that very thing than which a greater cannot be imagined is something than which a greater can be imagined. But certainly this cannot be. **There exists, therefore, beyond doubt something than which a greater cannot be imagined, both in the understanding and in reality.***

Anselm attempts to clarify his thinking by use of an analogy. When a painter is considering his next work, it is already in his mind and he has a clear idea of it. However, it cannot be said to exist until he has executed it, so that it exists in reality and not just in the mind. Such existence, Anselm maintains, is undeniably greater than existence *in intellectu,* and since God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, God must possess the perfection of existence both in reality and in the mind. If this was not the case, then something other than God that did exist in reality would be greater than God, and this is impossible.

7. **Summarise Anselm's painter analogy.**

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Thinking through the argument

Like all arguments for the existence of God, the ontological argument can be set out in various series of premises and a conclusion. This helps our understanding of how its logic appears to work. Consider these examples:

1. God exists or does not exist

2. If God does not exist, then a greater being can be conceived, but this is impossible (a reductio ad absurdum).

3. Therefore, to say God does not exist is a logical impossibility.

4. Therefore, God exists.

The fool believes the impossible to be true

Anselm is, of course, aware that the existence of God can, and is, denied by the atheist. In response to this, he cites Psalm 53 –'the fool has said in his heart there is no God.' The Psalmist's fool is the atheist who, Anselm observes, says what is impossible to say since it cannot possibly be true: that God does not exist. Nevertheless, the atheist does say this and Anselm explains that this is because the atheist has failed to understand the full implications of the concept of God. Had the atheist grasped the real meaning of God as that than which nothing greater can be conceived, it would be impossible for him to deny this existence. In order to deny the existence of God, the atheist must at least have a concept of God in his understanding. It is then only a short step to recognising the impossibility of denying the existence of such a being:

Can it be that there is not such being, since the fool hath said in his heart 'There is not God'… But when this same fool hears what I am saying – 'A being than which none greater can be thought' – he understands what he hears . . . even if he does not understand that it exists . . . Even the fool, then, must be convinced that a being than which none greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding.

Throughout **Proslogion,** Anselm returns to what Descartes later concerned to investigate – the quest for intelligibility, reaching beyond mere words to articulate his proof for God's existence. He was aware that words can be ambiguous and misleading, but from this perspective, his arguments were an analytical commentary on the concept of the God of Classical Theism rather than a proof of his existence as such. Anselm deduces the attributes of God from the perfection that is inherent in the concept of God itself.

St Anselm - God has necessary existence (Proslogion 3).

Aseity – self-existence

In the second form of his argument, which is closely linked to the first, Anselm argued that it was impossible for God not to exist as God's **existence is necessary**. The argument goes like this:

1. Nothing greater than God can be conceived '*that than which nothing greater can be thought'*.

Contingent beings (those which come in and out of existence, and which depend on other things for their existence) are inferior to beings with necessary existence (which are eternal and depend on nothing else for their existence, and of which the only example is God).

2. To be thought not to exist would be inferior to thinking of something that must always exist

Conclusion:

Therefore, God must necessarily exist

In summary, God must be a **necessary being**, meaning that he cannot not exist. The word 'necessary' here means logical necessity. It would be a logical contradiction to claim that God does not exist, since any being that has the property of necessary existence could not fail to exist. It has been argued that his second argument was aimed at believers as a proof that existence in God is rational – to justify a belief in God. For Anselm, then, the existence of God is not something which needs to be demonstrated by referring to evidence. It is something which we can know simply by considering the concept of 'God', and working out what this means.

The concept of necessary existence

In all this, Anselm makes clear that his understanding of God is of a being possessing **necessary existence**. This concept was integral to the cosmological argument too, but it applies differently to the ontological argument. In this case, God's necessary existence is *de dicto* necessary – by definition. Because the definition of God requires that he should exist to deny his existence would be absurd. When this is fully understood, it is impossible to deny the existence of God, as Anselm explains:

For something can be thought of as existing which cannot be thought of as not existing, and this is greater than that which can be thought of as not existing . . . So, then, there truly is a being than which a greater cannot be thought – so truly that it cannot even be thought of as not existing . . . He therefore, who understands that God thus exists cannot think of him as non-existent.

8. **Why does Anselm believe God's existence is necessary?**

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A useful summary of Anselm's second argument

AO1 Skills Development

Skills – consider how what you have learned can be focused and used for examination style answers by practising the skills associated with AO1.

Assessment objective 1 (AO1) involves demonstrating knowledge and understanding. The terms 'knowledge' and 'understanding' are obvious but it is crucial to be familiar with how certain skills demonstrate these terms, and also how the performance of these skills is measured (see the generic and descriptors for A level).

Answer

Anselm's ontological argument is used to prove God's existence 1. It is based on the idea that God is the most amazing thing that exists in the universe 2. Anselm states that the idea of God means he exists in the mind and reality. 3. Anyone, even a fool, can think of God in their mind and that is important to Anselm's argument. 4. In his Proslogian, Anselm tells the reader that God must exist in the mind and reality because reality is greater. 5. As God exists in reality and in the mind he is the greatest most amazing thing in the universe. 6. This is how Anselm proves God's existence using the ontological argument. 7

Task – Above is a weak answer to a question on Anselm's ontological argument. Using the band level descriptors you need to place this answer in the relevant band – Band _____

In order to do this you must consider:

What is missing from the answer?

What is inaccurate?

This analysis of the essay will help you – match each statement to a number in the essay.

a. This paraphrases incorrectly the central definition/theme of Anselm's argument
b. This is poorly expressed – needs to state why the fool is important to the argument
c. This is just a repeat of the first sentence. It does not properly show how Anselm proves God's existence.
d. The statement gives no details beyond stating what the argument is used for. Needs expanding and exploring
e. An opportunity is missed here to show accurate understanding. The stages of the argument are glossed over and summarised in such a way as to miss the point.
f. Misses the point – needs to be explained in more detail
g. The summary is accurate in general terms, although again, poor expression leads to a sense of confusion in the answer.

Chunk Anselm's Ontological Argument

1. Type of argument

2. Anselm's aim

3. Proslogian 2

4. Painter analogy and the fool

5. Proslogian 3

1 E Deductive arguments - developments of the ontological argument:

- Rene Descartes - concept of God as supremely perfect being; analogies of triangles and mountains/valleys.
- Norman Malcolm - God as unlimited being: God's existence as necessary rather than just possible.

Rene Descartes (1598-1650) – The Fifth Meditation

Descartes developed Anselm's argument and Peter Vardy has claimed that it is 'in some way clearer than that of Anselm.' His definition, that God is **'a supremely perfect being'**, is the basis for his argument. The argument appealed to him as a rationalist philosopher who sought to prove the existence of God by reason alone, rejecting untrustworthy information that came from the senses alone. Doubting all his knowledge, he realised that the very act of doubting proved his own existence, inspiring the famous saying 'I think, therefore I am'.

> In this context, **perfection** means flawless, or lacking any faults.

9. Why did Descartes think God must exist?

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From this, Descartes believes we can conclude that **God exists, because existence is a predicate of a perfect being; therefore, God must exist to avoid being self-contradictory.**

Analogy 1

Descartes says that trying to imagine God without the predicate of existence is illogical, like imagining a triangle without three sides.

10.   Analogy 2 Mountains and valleys – explain this analogy

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As Descartes could conceive of his own existence, he could also conceive of the existence of a perfect being:

1. I exist.
2. In my mind I have the concept of a perfect being.
3. As an imperfect being, I could not have conjured up the concept of a perfect being.
4. The concept of a perfect being must therefore have orginated from the perfect being itself.
5. A perfect being must exist in order to be perfect.
6. Therefore a perfect being exists.

Descartes argument is based on an **innate** idea, something we are born with, not that we have learned through experience.

Vardy writes 'Descartes did take into account the type of attack that Gaunilo (see later in the booklet) made against Anselm's argument. Descartes says:

1   The argument applies only to an absolutely perfect and necessary being. It cannot, therefore, be applied to something like a lost island

2   Not everyone has to think of God, but if they do think of God then God cannot be thought not to exist (note the significance of this when we examine Malcolm's version of the argument below).

3   God alone is the being whose essence entails God's existence. There cannot be two or more such beings.

Definitions

Necessary – inevitably resulting from or produced by the nature of things…etc., so that the contrary is impossible.

Contingent – that which need not be, that which could have been different; something that has dependency.

11. Create a diagram to show Descartes argument
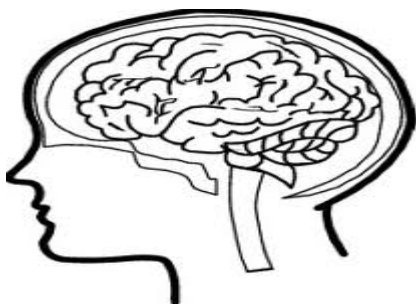
Chunk Descartes' argument

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Norman Malcolm - God as unlimited being: God's existence as necessary rather than just possible

In *The Philosophical Review* (1960) Norman Malcolm re-examined the ontological argument and presented it in a form that responded to its previous critics and developed the argument further from that written by both Anselm and Descartes centuries earlier.

Malcolm considers Anselm's arguments, and concludes that the second section (Prosologian 3) is more accurate than the first (Prosologian 2). He also rejected Descartes' argument. Why is this?

1. Some versions of the ontological argument are subject to specific criticism (Kant and Gaunilo): existence is treated as a predicate that things either have or lack (such as blue eyes or brown eyes).
2. According to Malcolm, Prosologian 2 is subject to such a criticism and therefore fails. He believed you can't add the concept of existence to a list of qualities that something has and then claim that it therefore exists.
3. He believes that Prosologian 3 does not treat existence as a predicate: Anselm is saying that God must exist because the concept of God is the concept of a being whose existence is **necessary**. This is a necessary consequence of being the greatest possible being that can be thought of – quite simply because a being that did not have necessary existence would be inferior to one that did have necessary existence. As both can be conceived then it is the being with necessary existence that is the greater – and as the greatest possible being must exist.

Malcolm claims that, because God is the greatest possible being that can be thought of, then God must be described as an **unlimited being**. This means a being with no limits – possesses all perfections to the greatest possible degree and, because God is considered as an unlimited being, then for the religious believer, he is worthy of worship. If God was not an unlimited being then he would have limits and would not be the greatest thing and therefore would not fit our understanding of what it means to be 'God' (as defined by Anselm) and therefore would not be worthy of worship.

Thus, God must, of necessity by definition be an unlimited being.

Peter Vardy writes:

'Malcolm begins by stating that if God does not already exist, God cannot come into existence since this would require a cause and would make God a limited being which, by definition, God is not. Similarly, if God already exists, God cannot cease to exist.

Therefore, maintains Malcolm, either God's existence could only be impossible if it were logically absurd or contradictory and, as it is neither, then God's existence must be necessary. The statement 'God necessarily exists,' therefore, can be held to be true.'

On the basis of this conclusion, Malcolm develops Prosologian 3 as follows:

If God, a being greater than which cannot be conceived, does not exist then he cannot come into existence. For if He did He would either have been caused to come into existence or have happened to come into existence, and in either case He would be a limited being, which by our conception of Him He is not. Since He cannot come into existence, if He does not exist He existence is impossible. If He does exist He cannot have come into existence … nor can He cease to exist, for nothing could cause Him to cease to exist nor could it just happen that He ceased to exist. So if God exists his existence is necessary.

Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary. It can be the former only if the concept of such a being is self-contradictory or in some way logically absurd. Assuming that this is not so, if follows that He necessarily exists.

Summary of Malcolm's argument from the Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy

'The unlimited character of God, then, entails that his existence is different from ours in this respect: while our existence depends causally on the existence of other beings (e.g., our parents), God's existence does not depend causally on the existence of any other being.'

12. **Chunk Malcolm's argument. Why does he prefer Proslogian 3?**

1.

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4.

5.

1 F. Challenges to the ontological argument:

- **Gaunilo, his reply to St Anselm; his rejection of the idea of a greatest possible being that can be thought of as having separate existence outside of our minds; his analogy of the idea of the greatest island as a ridicule of St Anselm's logic.**
- **Immanuel Kant's objection - existence is not a determining predicate: it cannot be a property that an object can either possess or lack.**

Gaunilo of Marmoutiers' objection to Anselm's Argument (1033-1109 CE)

One problem with Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God is that it invites **parody**. Parallel arguments purporting to prove the existence of any perfect thing at all can be constructed. This objection was first raised by one of Anselm's contemporaries, the monk **Gaunilo of Marmoutiers**, who constructed an ontological argument for the existence of the perfect island in his **On Behalf of the Fool**.

1. Gaunilo invited his readers to think of the greatest, or most perfect, conceivable island.
2. As a matter of fact, it is likely that no such island actually exists.
3. However, his argument would then say that we aren't thinking of the greatest conceivable island, because the greatest conceivable island would exist, as well as having all those other desirable properties.
4. Since we can conceive of this greatest or most perfect conceivable island, then it must exist.

Gaunilo argued that this line of argument was no less absurd than Anselm's original argument.

Similar arguments for the existence of the perfect rugby player, or the perfect husband or dragons or even unicorns —for the existence of any perfect thing at all—can be constructed. If any of these arguments is sound, it seems, then they must all be sound.

Clearly, though, these arguments are not all sound; the perfect rugby player does not exist, and neither does the perfect husband. There is something wrong with the logic of these arguments. Each of these ontological arguments, though, uses the same logic. They must therefore all be unsound.

13. Why does Gaunilo believe the Anselm's argument is not sound?

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The fact that there is no perfect island, and no perfect rugby player, then, shows that the logic of the ontological argument for God's existence is flawed.

Such objections are known as **"Overload Objections"**; they don't claim to show where or how the ontological argument goes wrong, they simply argue that if it is sound, then so are many other arguments of the same logical form which we don't want to accept, arguments which would overload the world with an indefinitely large number of things like perfect islands, perfect pizzas, perfect pencils, etc.

14. What are 'Overload Objections'?

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Such objections always depend upon the accuracy of the analogy. That is, we must be able to show that the objector's argument is sufficiently like the ontological argument for us to be able to conclude that if one works so must the other.

Criticisms of Gaunilo's Objection – Anselm's Reply

The main problem with Gaunilo's objection is the definition of 'perfect'. There will be disagreements as to what makes an island perfect i.e. tropical, deserted, inhabited…etc. When we analyse it any definition here of 'perfect' in the case of an island would be subjective. Your idea of a perfect island might not be my idea of a perfect island.

Another problem is the use of the term 'perfect' in the case of islands. By definition any piece of land surrounded by water is an island. Any piece of land perfectly (i.e. – completely) surrounded by water is a 'perfect island'. In this case all islands are perfect islands.

Anselm would argue that this line of argument does not work for everyday objects. Anselm is concerned with a being and a necessary being at that – the greatest being one can conceive.

Anselm argued that he was not talking about temporal contingent things such as islands which are rooted in time and space. Such things are dependent upon other things for their existence. Anselm is talking about the greatest thing that can be thought. God is not contingent or temporal. God's existence is necessary i.e. not dependent upon other things for his existence.

15. What three issues does Anselm raise with Gaunilo's challenge?

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Immanuel Kant's objection - existence is not a determining predicate: it cannot be a property that an object can either possess or lack.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) does not seem to show familiarity with Anselm's version of the ontological argument, and it appears that he is responding to its less impressive forms found in the writings of René Descartes (1596-1650) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754). Nonetheless, his objection has historical significance and is often cited by contemporary philosophers as good reason to reject the ontological argument.

Kant thought the ontological argument was flawed. Any argument for the existence of God based on the proposition that a God that exists in reality is greater than a God that only in the imagination is based on a confusion.

Predicates

According to Kant the confusion lies in the fact that **existence is not a predicate**. The predicate is that part of a sentence which is not the subject but which gives information about the subject. A predicate might be a single word like 'John laughed' where John is the subject and 'laughed' is the predicate. Or a string of words as in the sentence Clare went to school, 'Clare' is the subject and 'went to school' is the predicate. A predicate is a property that a thing can either possess or lack.

Predicates and the Existence of God

When people assert that God exists they are not saying that there is a God and he possesses the property of existence. If that were the case, then when people assert that God does not exist they would be saying that there is a God and he lacks the property of existence, i.e. they would be both affirming and denying God's existence at the same time. Kant suggests that to say that something exists is to say that the concept of that thing is exemplified in the world. For Kant, existence is not a matter of a thing possessing a property i.e. existence. Existence is a concept corresponding to something in the world.

Kant's objection to the ontological argument is that existence is not a property that can be attributed to beings like we can attribute other properties such as being blue, hard, or round. When we talk about entities existing, Kant contends that we do not mean to add existence as a property to their beings. In other words, the objection seems to be that one cannot go around adding existence as a property to God (or anything else for that matter) in order to define God (or anything else) into existence. Unfortunately, defining my bank account as such a place that contains millions of pounds would not mean that a careful understanding of that definition of 'my bank account' would really make it so. In order to see if that definition were true, we would have to go to an ATM and check the balance of my account and see if it is accurate. Similarly, a definition of God must be checked with reality to see if it is correct.

Kant used an example to show that that which exists in reality contains no more than that which is in the imagination. A hundred real thalers (old German coins) does not contain one coin more than the 100 thalers in the mind. In other words 'exists in reality' is not serving the function that Anselm claims it is. Reality and in the mind give the same result.

Kant's Objection to Descartes' Ontological Argument

Descartes had argued that God had existence in the same way as a triangle has three sides. Kant would agree, if you had a triangle then you did indeed have an object with three sides. But if you do not have the triangle, you have neither its three angles nor its three sides. If you accept that there is a God, it is logical to accept also that His existence is necessary. But you don't have to accept that there is a God.

16. **Write a summary of Kant's challenge to the ontological argument – focus on his challenge to Descartes.**

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(A) Explain Anselm's Version of the Ontological Argument for Proving God's Existence. AO1 20 marks

From Philosophical Investigations

St Anselm (1033-1109) was an Italian monk who went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury. Anselm was an avid philosopher and studied the commentaries of Boethius who he frequently cites in his own works. Anselm's most famous work was a book called Proslogion (1078) in which he outlines his Ontological argument (though he didn't give it that name; it was given by Kant several centuries later) in the medium of a prayer spoken directly to God. As a firm believer in God, Anselm wished to prove God's existence and confirm his strong faith by using logic and reason.

Chapter Two of Proslogion introduces Anselm's argument. This particular part of the Ontological Argument focuses on the definition of God. Anselm defines God as 'something than which nothing greater can be thought.' Moreover, he claims that everybody, whether they believe in God or not agrees with this definition (even the fool in the Psalms who claims he doesn't believe in God). As well as this, Anselm agrees to the fact that there is a difference between understand God as a concept and understanding him to exist. To further explain this point, he uses the analogy of a painter. He claims that, before a talented painter creates a masterpiece, he can see it clearly in his head though he knows it not to exist; he understands it as a concept. However, once the painting has been finished and it can be seen by the man it reality, the painter both understands the concept of the painting and understands in to exist. The latter stage is the position which a believer of God who agrees with Anselm's argument would be at.

If this definition is correct (which Anselm stresses very strongly is true), God is perfect and greater than any other thing in existence. It is upon this definition that Anselm places his argument. An existent God is clearly greater than a non-existent one and therefore, God – who is perfect by definition – must exist; if God didn't exist he wouldn't be the greatest thing in existence and therefore, wouldn't be God. In other words, Anselm is claiming that 'existing' is a defining predicate of the subject 'God.' Seeing as God is perfect, he must exist because a non-existent God would be less than perfect and, by definition, not God. Therefore, the statement 'God exists' is entirely analytic; by definition, God must exist.

Moreover, Chapter 3 gives a slightly different side of the Ontological argument and focuses on the nature of God rather than the definition of him. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the first quality of God: the fact that he must exist. Humans and other living and inanimate things are contingent; they depend on the existence of other things and are not in any way necessary. For example, a child depends on his parents conceiving him and the world could continue to exist if he had never been born. However Anselm is not simply saying that God is necessary. He is going further than that and saying that he is 'not possible not to be'; there is no way he could not exist (this is one of Boethius' four categories of existence). Therefore, it is impossible to think of God and agree that he fits Anselm's 'correct' definition and still not believe him to exist. Anselm goes on to claim that if something greater than God could exist, it would 'rise above and…judge the creator, which is the height of

absurdity.' Therefore, logically and by definition God must, in all his perfection (including the perfection of existence) exist.

Furthermore, it is important to take into account Anselm's responses to criticisms of his argument by his contemporaries – namely, Gaunilo. Gaunilo was also a monk who therefore believed strongly in God. However, he disagreed strongly with Anselm's way of trying to prove this. In his book In Behalf of the Fool, Gaunilo claimed that, by Anselm's logic, anything could be thought into existence. To further illustrate this point, he used the example of a Perfect Island. If a Perfect Island didn't exist it would be a contradiction to call it perfect. Therefore, by definition, the Perfect Island must exist seeing as an existent Island would clearly be 'more perfect' than a non-existent one. This obviously, however, is not the case. Therefore, if parallel arguments such as these don't work, neither does the original argument attempting to prove God's existence.

However, Anselm gave an official response to this criticism and made the following point; parallel arguments such as the Perfect Island don't work because they are contingent, not necessary and self-reliant. The Island, for example, relies on the sea and the Earth meaning that Anselm's Ontological Argument is not applicable to this and other contingent objects. Moreover, Anselm states that it is entirely impossible to define the perfect Island; would adding an extra grain of sand make the Perfect Island more perfect? This is important to take into account because, in order for Anselm's argument to work, you must truly understand what the definition of a 'perfect' thing is (though Anselm only applied the theory to God). While it is impossible to define a Perfect Island, Anselm believed that it was entirely possible to define God as 'something than which nothing greater can be thought.' The Fool's disbelief of God (according to Anselm) came from not truly understanding the concept of God. For Anselm's argument to work, you must understand agree with the correct definition of God

17. Strengths of the essay – use the generic grade bands and your knowledge of Descartes

18. Areas for development

'Explain Descartes' Ontological Argument' from Philosophical Investigations. AO1 20 marks

The Ontological Argument is a deductive argument in that it attempts to show that its premises lead to a logical conclusion which can't be doubted. In this case, philosophers have attempted to show that the phrase 'God Exists' is an analytic statement in that it is logically impossible for it not to be the case, just as it is impossible for a bachelor to not be an unmarried man. This type of argument is known as 'a priori' because it is based on logical reasoning.

Descartes form of the Ontological Argument followed a similar pattern to that of Anselm who formulated the argument originally. For both men, the definition of God is crucial to the argument. Anselm had stated that 'God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. By this, he meant that it was not possible to think of anything greater than God and logically, it must be better for this God to exist in reality and not just in the mind. Therefore, if we accept this definition, and Anselm felt that even Atheists would, we must logically conclude that the greatest possible being must exist in reality, otherwise there would be the possibility of something greater existing. Therefore, logically, God exists! Anselm's second form of the argument focused on God's 'necessary existence', again overlapping with themes later proposed by Descartes.

Descartes' background in Mathematics was undoubtedly influential in his argument with his use of logical reasoning to formulate an argument evident from the outset. It should also be noted that Descartes believed that each of us had an innate knowledge of God within us, often compared to a company stamp placed within each of its products before leaving the factory. This is important because the idea that everyone has an innate idea of God would lead to the assumption that we would all therefore have a definition of God.

For Descartes, the definition of God which he felt would be acceptable to everyone was a 'Supremely Perfect Being'. Using the same principles as Anselm, he argued that once this definition is accepted, then the existence of God cannot be doubted. His reasoning was that a predicate of perfection should include existence. A predicate is a necessary quality which something must possess so if we accept that God is perfect, then according to Descartes, logically we must accept that He exists. Although this premise has been widely debated and often criticised, Hartshorne supported Descartes' belief that existence should be a predicate because it undoubtedly added something to God's nature e.g. actually having an illness certainly adds to the idea of having an illness.

Continuing to focus on the word 'perfection', Descartes believed that the definition of the word perfection is that it cannot lack anything. Therefore, it is illogical for God, an omnipotent being, to lack existence. Similarly to Anselm, Descartes concluded that God must exist 'necessarily'. His reasoning came from his belief in an immutable, timeless God who was beyond the limits of the universe and therefore was not subject to the contingent universe. If God wasn't necessary, there are things which He could lack, but as we've just established, a Supremely Perfect Being cannot lack anything. Therefore,

existence is one of God's necessary qualities. He is the sum of all parts and therefore cannot NOT exist – it would be a logical impossibility.

Descartes used the example of a triangle to emphasise that A Supremely perfect Being and existence were inseparable. When we think of a triangle, even if we have never seen one, we know that it must possess three sides and three angles which total 180 degrees. If either of these properties is removed, then it is no longer a triangle. Similarly, we cannot have mountains without the necessity of having valleys as well. Therefore, if we accept that God is a Supremely Perfect Being, then we cannot deny that he possesses existence as a necessary quality/part of His essence. Existence is as fundamental to the nature of what God is as 3 sides are fundamental to the nature of what a triangle is. To argue differently is contradictory and therefore it can logically be stated that 'God exists' is an analytic statement.

In recent years, Norman Malcolm has defended Descartes' conclusion

19. Strengths of the essay – use the generic grade bands and your knowledge of Descartes

20. Areas for development

Other AO1 exam style questions to practice – each question is worth 20 marks

21. **Explain Malcolm's ontological argument. Remember to start with the style of argument.**

22. **Compare the Anselm and Descartes' ontological arguments. See PPP**

23. **Compare Descartes and Malcolm's ontological arguments.**

24. **Explain the challenges to the ontological argument developed by Gaunilo and Kant.**

AO1 Developing Skills

Complete this essay writing frame 'Examine the origins of the ontological argument.' 20 marks

The ontological argument is an a priori and deductive argument for the existence of God. This means that it is . . .

The ontological argument, as it is recognised today, was first developed by St Anselm of Canterbury in his book _____. In this work Anselm considers two key points. Firstly, that God is the greatest possible being and secondly, that God has _____ _____.

Anselm's first proof starts with reference to the verse in the Psalms that states
'_____'. Anselm uses this verse to demonstrate that to state that there is no God, when one is able to assert that such a concept exists, is indeed 'foolish'. For Anselm, the word 'God' is defined thus: 'God is that than _____

_____'. From this he demonstrates that God must exist.

The argument runs thus – it is better to exist in reality than in the mind, for things that exist in the mind
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____
_____

Anselm developed his argument in Proslogion 3 …

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Philosophy of Religion
Theme 1: Arguments for the existence of God – deductive

Evaluation of 1 D,E and F

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

1. The extent to which **'a priori'** arguments for God's existence are persuasive.

2. *The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God.*

3. The effectiveness of the ontological argument for God's existence.

4. Whether the ontological argument is more persuasive than the cosmological/teleological arguments for God's existence.

5. The effectiveness of the challenges to the ontological argument for God's existence.

6. The extent to which objections to the ontological argument are persuasive.

Can philosophers ever prove God exists in re?

AO2 Challenges to the Ontological Argument – Questions 1 and 3-6

1. Complete the timeline of the challenges to the Ontological Argument **include – *Gaunilo*, Aquinas, *Kant*, David Hume, Russell and Hick. Use Vardy**

Recap - **Gaunilo (1033-1109CE)** rejected the ontological argument as a proof of God's existence –

Aquinas (1224-1274CE) said that people have different definitions of God. Anyway, as a matter of obvious fact, not all are convinced by the argument. If it had been a very strong argument then everyone would find God's existence to be self-evident, but it is not. God's existence is synthetic and cannot be proved by analysing a concept. This is the same point that Hume made.

People have different
_____ of God.

Therefore, the _____ argument fails

David Hume (1711-1776) could never accept the ontological argument. Hume was known as the supreme sceptic (doubter).Certain knowledge is impossible.

Hume was an empiricist, and that all knowledge comes from the experience of our five senses. He rejected rationalists such as Descartes and believed that reason is not a basis for knowledge. The ontological argument is not based on sense experience but rather relies on reason, therefore Hume regarded it as a failure. He rejected the existence of innate or inbuilt ideas. In essence, Hume said that you cannot establish the truth of something by analysing it. 'However much our concept of an object contain, we must go outside of it to determine whether or not it exists.' So, God's existence cannot be proven by analysing the word God. 'God exists' is a synthetic statement, it is either true or false and sense experience would be needed (which cannot be done) in order to determine its truth or falsity.

Kant (1724-1804CE) – Include – response to Descartes' triangles, existence is not a predicate and the thalers (old German coins) example.

Russell (1872 –1970) Existence is not a predicate – if it was then: E.g.

Men exist

Santa Claus is a man

Therefore Santa Claus exists

Hick (see Peter Vardy – The Puzzle of God page 90)

AO2 Explain and evaluate the strengths of the ontological argument?

1. Many religions accept Anselm's definition of God. Theistic religions from the Abrahamic tradition, such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, all accept the definition of God as proposed by Anselm and therefore they would also consider this to be an effective form of argument as it confirms their own faith views, that God is the greatest possible being, one which nothing greater can be thought of in the entire realm of reality.

2. It is deductive and a priori – What does this mean and how can it be a strength

_____

_____

_____

3. Existence can be a predicate – S.Davis

If existence was a perfection/predicate of a supremely perfect being, then to deny the conclusion that 'God, a supremely perfect Being exists' would be a contradiction. In fact, Stephen Davis says that existence can be a real predicate. He claimed, my concept of the real 100 thalers has the predicate/perfection of purchasing power in the real world. My concept of 100 thalers in the imagination does not have this predicate. **How can we use Davis' argument to challenge Kant?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. It is based on a convincing premise – it is better to exist in reality. Why is this persuasive?

_____

_____

_____

5. Demonstrates God's existence. Anselm did not intend to prove God to an atheist, what did he intend to do?

6. The challenges fail. Gaunilo misunderstood the ontological argument and applied his criticisms incorrectly. Gaunilo does not seem to understand that God is unique and the ontological argument only applies to him – no other being. This is because only God is necessary. All other beings are contingent and so cannot apply the same definition to themselves.

Your task is this: below is a weak answer that has been written in response to a question requiring evaluation of the extent to which 'a priori' arguments for God's existence are persuasive. Using the band level descriptors you need to place this answer in a relevant band that corresponds to the description inside that band. It is obviously a weak answer and so would not be in bands 3–5. In order to do this it will be useful to consider what is missing from the answer and what is inaccurate. The accompanying analysis gives you observations to assist you. In analysing the answer's weaknesses, in a group, think of five ways in which you would improve the answer in order to make it stronger. You may have more than five suggestions but try to negotiate as a group and prioritise the five most important things lacking.

Answer

Proving God's existence is not an easy task. Philosophers have argued about this for thousands of years [1].

However, there are two main types of argument that can help prove God's existence: inductive, a posteriori and deductive, a priori [2].

The cosmological and teleological arguments are both inductive a posteriori arguments. The ontological argument is a priori and deductive. A posteriori arguments are arguments that are based on evidence so people can see what it is they are arguing about and it is very difficult to argue against when you have evidence to support your argument [3].

A priori arguments do not use evidence and so because of this they are very difficult to prove because people can always argue against you when there is no evidence to support your argument. However, some people think that some ideas are so obvious that no evidence is needed [4].

For instance it is a priori true that all bachelors are unmarried males and no evidence is needed to argue against that and so it is true with the idea of God, as Anselm defines him, there is no evidence needed because the word God means that he exists [5].

Therefore in my opinion a priori arguments can be very good at showing people how God's existence can be proved [6].

Analysis of the answer

1. An introduction that does not properly address the question but instead focuses on the generic issue of God's existence being proven.

2. Has a basic grasp of the concepts of a posteriori and a priori arguments.

3. The explanation of a posteriori is limited, despite being accurately linked to the cosmological and teleological arguments, the candidate does not seems to have a proper grasp of what an a posteriori argument is.

4. A clumsy and poorly expressed understanding of a priori arguments.

5. A basic point that is not developed sufficiently and so is poorly expressed.

6. A conclusion that is not linked to the question.

'A priori arguments for God's existence are more persuasive than a posteriori arguments' Assess this view.

Argument – a priori are more persuasive	Counter – argument – a posteriori are more persuasive – CA and TA	Evaluation
Hume- problems with sense experience, our senses can be mistakenso a posteriori arguments can be flawed	However, knowledge gained from our senses is reliable . . . Hume also challenged the ontological argument . . .	
In conclusion,		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The extent to which 'a priori' arguments for God's existence are persuasive

Arguments for God's existence can be categorised into 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' arguments. A priori arguments are arguments that are independent of our experience or any evidence that may present itself to us.

In general terms, the only thing needed for an a priori argument is an understanding of the language in which it is expressed! In this sense, it could be argued, that this very independence from experience means that they are intrinsically persuasive as they are not tainted by the experience of an individual or group, neither do they rely on evidence (which can often be found to be unreliable).

On the other hand, in general terms, a posteriori arguments, those based on evidence and experience, give us an empirical basis upon which we can prove, with scientific method, how reliable a particular claim or argument may be, that seems far more sensible to the 21st-century mind! We accept arguments about the reliability of medicines, technology and even educational systems based on empirical research, i.e. a posteriori research. We would not accept a priori that any of these things could be claimed as reliable thus proving that a posteriori arguments are more persuasive than a priori ones.

Countering this is the fact that a priori arguments tend to lead to inescapable conclusions – they state what is known and it is accepted as such. In this it could be considered that a priori arguments are more persuasive, particularly when dealing with subject matter such as the possible existence of God.

However, we should bear in mind the fact that a priori deductive proofs depend heavily on their premises in terms of providing sound arguments. If the premises are suspect, inaccurate or wrong then the conclusion that they lead to will inevitably also suffer from these defects. In this, the persuasiveness of an a priori argument for God's existence is considerably undermined.

The ontological argument, as an a priori form, depends on the understanding of what it means to be God. We accept certain facts about God, purely based on the definition of the word. In this, the assertion that God necessarily exists, because he is the greatest possible being that can be thought of and must possess all perfections, including that of existence, appears to be highly persuasive.

Countering this is the existence of the a posteriori arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological and teleological forms. Both of these have enjoyed a lengthy existence as possible arguments for God's existence and are used by philosophers and theologians even today in the 21st century, accepting them as persuasive forms or proofs for the existence of God.

Specification content

The extent to which 'a priori' arguments for God's existence are persuasive.

AO2 Activity *Possible lines of argument*

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. A priori arguments for God's existence are entirely persuasive.

2. The persuasiveness of a priori arguments depends on our understanding of language

3. Arguments for the existence of God are not persuasive unless they are based on evidence and experience.

4. The persuasiveness of a priori arguments depends on your faith view.

5. A priori arguments are only persuasive when a posteriori arguments fail.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Specification content

The effectiveness of the ontological argument for God's existence.

AO2 Activity *Possible lines of argument*

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. The ontological argument effectively proves God's existence beyond any reasonable doubt.

2. Only later forms of the ontological argument are acceptable, the classical form from Anselm is entirely ineffective.

3. Using the ontological argument to prove God's existence is philosophically futile.

4. The ontological argument's effectiveness depends on your religious beliefs.

5. The effectiveness of the ontological argument is undermined by modern scientific thought.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The effectiveness of the ontological argument for God's existence

The ontological argument for God's existence has a thousand-year history in the annals of religious philosophy and deserves respect. As an a priori argument it is a rational proof whose logic is inescapable when the deductive form of its premises is accepted. For Anselm, this argument was entirely effective in confirming his own theistic beliefs – that God's existence was both obvious and necessary.

Theistic religions from the Abrahamic tradition, such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, all accept the definition of God as proposed by Anselm and therefore they would also consider this to be an effective form of argument as it confirms their own faith views, that God is the greatest possible being, one which nothing greater can be thought of in the entire realm of reality.

What further demonstrates the effectiveness of the ontological argument is that it fits contemporary forms of philosophy and logic, such as the modal systems adopted by modern-day ontological argument philosophers, such as Malcolm.

The ontological argument, as an a priori form, depends on the understanding of what it means to be God. We accept certain facts about God, purely based on the definition of the word. In this, the assertion that God necessarily exists, because he is the greatest possible being that can be thought of and must possess all perfections, including that of existence, shows how effective the argument is.

We should also bear in mind the fact that the ontological argument, as an a priori argument, leads to an inescapable conclusion – i.e. that God exists. This makes it highly effective as long as one accepts the reasoning put forward in the argument!

However, not all philosophers or religious believers accept that the ontological argument is an effective proof for God's existence. Indeed, one of its earliest critics was Anselm's contemporary, Gaunilo, who rejected the idea that it was possible to define anything into existence.

Equally Immanuel Kant, centuries later, also rejected the argument, suggesting that Descartes was misusing the word 'exist'. It was not possible, in his view to simply add the word exist to a list of perfections that something did or didn't have – thereby showing the argument to be ineffective.

We should also appreciate, in line with these critiques, that whenever any of the premises of an a priori argument can be shown to be weak or inaccurate, then the conclusion that is produced by virtue of the reasoning will also be either weak or inaccurate – this links strongly to the views put forward by Kant.

In conclusion, the arguments against the ontological argument are sufficiently robust to undermine any reasonable claim that it is an effective argument in proving the existence of God.

'The ontological argument effectively proves God's existence.' Assess this view

Argument – effective proof	Counter – argument – not effective proof	Evaluation
A priori . . .		
Deductive		
Existence can be a predicate		
It is better to exist in reality		
Anselm never intended a proof for atheists		
In conclusion,		

Possible AO2 questions

'The ontological argument is convincing.' Assess this view.

The ontological argument is a deductive and a priori argument for the existence of God. It can be seen as convincing because it is deductive and therefore logical …

However, to be convincing it would need to be able to persuade an atheist to become a theist and it …

Also, empiricist philosophers such as David Hume rejected the argument as he believed all knowledge comes through the senses and therefore . . .

While it might not have the power to convert an atheist it might be convincing for someone who already has faith. St Anselm already had faith and was trying to show how obvious His existence was to him and how absurb atheism is. St Anselm was using reason to demonstrate what he already believed through faith. However, Karl Barth believed human reason was corrupted by the Fall and therefore …

The whole argument relies on a definition of God as 'that than which none greater can be known', the beauty of the argument is it's simplicity, if the definitition is accepted and is convincing then the whole argument works and is convincing. This is because existence is a predicate of a being 'that than which none greater can be known'. However, Kant argued that existence is not a predicate or quality of something as it does not add to the basic definition . . .

In response to Kant we can use the ideas of S.Davis who claimed that existence can be a real predicate. For example, my concept of the real 100 thalers has the predicate/perfection of purchasing power in the real world. My concept of 100 thalers in the imagination does not have this predicate. This means that St Anselm's analogy of the painter, and the whole argument are persuasive as it is better to exist in reality as well as the mind.

Aquinas also believed that an argument for God based on a definition was not convincing because …

The first argument that claimed the ontological argument was not convincing was developed by Gaunilo, a fellow monk and contemporary of St Anselm. Gaunilo claimed that …

In response to Gaunilo it can be claimed that the ontological argument is still convincing as he …

AO2

Developing Skills

► **Your task is this:** below is a strong answer that has been written in response to a question requiring evaluation of whether the ontological argument proves the existence of God. Using the band level descriptors you can compare this with the relevant higher bands and the descriptions inside those bands. It is obviously a strong answer and so would not be in bands 1–3. In order to do this it will be useful to consider what is good about the answer and what is accurate. The accompanying analysis gives you clues and prompts to assist you. In analysing the answer's strengths, in a group, think of five things that make this answer a good one. You may have more than five observations and indeed suggestions to make it a perfect answer!

Answer

In order to see whether the ontological argument proves the existence of God, it is important to consider, firstly, what we mean by proof. Three forms of proof are generally available to us: direct, deductive and inductive. Direct proof involves use of one or more of the five senses, and is sometimes also referred to as 'empirical proof'. In terms of proving the existence of God, this is one of the more contentious forms as claims of visions, miracles and other physical 'proofs' of God's existence are difficult to verify conclusively. [1]

Deductive proof uses premises to form a conclusion – thereby offering a form of 'logical' or rational proof. It is this form of proof that the ontological argument is based upon. The third type of proof is inductive and is the form utilised by the cosmological and teleological arguments. [2]

The relative success of the ontological argument, as a form of deductive proof, is heavily dependent – as all deductive proofs are – on the acceptance of the premises. For Anselm, these premises include the acceptance that the definition of the word God proves beyond reasonable doubt that he exists. God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. It is also better to exist in reality than in the mind alone. Therefore if God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, it necessarily follows that he exists not only in the mind but in reality as well. [3]

This argument, at first glance, appears convincing. However, it asks us to accept certain premises that some were unhappy to accept. For instance, the monk Gaunilo could not accept that you could simply move from a definition to an existent reality. He countered Anselm's argument by stating that were he to think of a perfect island then that must mean that that island also existed, otherwise it would not be a perfect island! This of course is an absurd idea. It would have seemed that Gaunilo had defeated Anselm's argument and that the ontological argument could not prove the existence of God. This was not the case though. [4]

In his response to Gaunilo, Anselm pointed out that the properties of an island and the properties of God were entirely different. For instance, an island could always be improved upon – this was not the case with God. God was unique, and because of this the idea of his existence as necessary only applied to him – it did not, and could not, apply to anything else in the physical world. Therefore Anselm believed that his ontological argument had successfully proven God's existence. [5]

Descartes developed Anselm's ideas by explaining that the very idea of God meant that he had to exist, in the same way that it was impossible to think about a triangle without thinking of a three-sided shape, it was equally impossible to consider the idea of God without equally thinking of a being that necessarily existed. This therefore proved God's existence. [6]

Kant's objection to Descartes was that existence could not be treated like a predicate and so it was philosophically unsound to move from a definition where all perfections were claimed and then to include existence as a perfection. For Kant, existence was not a property that a thing could lack – for if that were so, it would not exist in the first place! Existence was an integral part of something in the real world, but it was not a defining characteristic of that thing. Therefore whilst he accepted that it was possible to hold the idea of God, it did not follow that God actually existed – Kant seemed to have shown that the ontological argument had not proven God's existence. [7]

By looking at the arguments as presented above, it would seem that the ontological argument does not prove the existence of God. [8]

Completed hints

1 Introduces the topic by looking at what is meant by the idea of proof.

2 Continues outlining definitions of proof. The information is accurate.

3 Introduces the ontological argument as presented by Anselm. Deals accurately with the information.

4 Introduces a counterpoint to the argument; makes good use of relevant evidence.

5 Introduces a counter-argument to the counterpoint. This demonstrates effective evaluation of the subject material.

6 Further evidence is added to support the argument by introducing a different philosopher.

7 The counter-argument is provided by reference to Kant's rejection of both Anselm and Descartes' arguments.

8 A brief conclusion that does not expand on a basic statement. Evidence is not restated to support the conclusion being made.

Whether the ontological argument is more persuasive than the cosmological/teleological arguments for God's existence

God's existence or non-existence has long been a debate for philosophers. Strong views are formed on both sides of the debate. In order to support this debate a number of different forms of 'proof' have been offered. These proofs exist in both a priori and a posteriori forms. The ontological argument is an a priori argument for the existence of God whilst both the cosmological and teleological arguments are a posteriori forms.

The persuasiveness of the ontological argument depends, as is so often the case, on the willingness of the individual to accept the deductive premises upon which it is based. If these premises are accepted – i.e. the idea that the definition of God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' and the associated argument that this proves God has necessary existence (otherwise God cannot be the greatest possible thing that can be thought of) – then it is very difficult to deny the conclusion that God necessarily exists. This would make the ontological argument entirely persuasive.

However, if the premises are rejected – as Gaunilo, Kant and others did – then the ontological argument fails entirely. It is never accepted because the idea of existence following on from definition is seen as entirely fallacious and is not at all persuasive.

The cosmological argument is based on the empirical fact that there is a universe, and poses the question 'What started the universe?' from which the reasoning of philosophers such as Aquinas, Leibniz and Craig propose the answer as God.

The teleological argument starts from the philosophical observation that the universe contains evidence of design and that things within the universe appear to work towards an end or purpose, even when there is no obvious reason for this to happen. The conclusion inductively drawn by philosophers such as Aquinas, Paley and Tennant, is that the reason for this is God.

Both of the latter arguments use empirical evidence. In a scientific age, empirical evidence is always valued as a starting point for any persuasive argument and therefore, it could be argued, that these arguments are both more persuasive than the ontological argument, in proving the existence of God.

However, both of these inductive arguments are subject to a number of criticisms, not least of which is that even if all other ideas are accepted within the line of inductive reasoning, why does the ultimate conclusion for this inductive reasoning have to be God? To this, neither argument gives a definitive or persuasive answer.

It then becomes a matter of preference for the type of reasoning adopted in accepting a more persuasive form of argument for the existence of God. Those preferring an experience or evidence base will no doubt prefer the inductive arguments from cosmology or design – those who prefer the logical reasoning found in the deductive form of the ontological argument will prefer this. Some may therefore conclude that the relative persuasiveness of the arguments becomes a subjective matter, much like the acceptance or denial of belief in a divine being.

AO2 Activity *Possible lines of argument*

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. The ontological argument is the most persuasive argument for the existence of God.

2. The cosmological/teleological arguments are the most persuasive arguments for the existence of God.

3. Neither of the arguments are persuasive.

4. All of the arguments are equally persuasive.

5. The arguments' relative persuasiveness will depend on the philosophical viewpoint of the individual.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

'The ontological argument is more persuasive than the cosmological and teleological arguments for God's existence.' Assess this view – Deductive Vs Inductive from 1 a, b and c

Argument –The OA is more persuasive	Counter – argument – The CA and TA are more persuasive	Evaluation
A priori - reason	A posteriori - experience	
Deductive		
In conclusion,		

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The effectiveness of the challenges to the ontological argument for God's existence

Gaunilo's challenge to the ontological argument was in the fact that he felt that Anselm had used an absurd argument. Using the philosophical argument *reductio ad absurdum*, he showed that trying to define something into existence merely by definition was a ridiculous idea.

His presentation of the perfect island was in response to Anselm's definition of God as a being greater than which cannot be conceived. Gaunilo stated that he could think of an island of which none greater could be conceived but that did not mean that it actually existed – indeed, such a claim clearly made no sense. Gaunilo's challenge here appears particularly effective, attacking as it does the core of Anselm's argument.

However, Gaunilo did not appreciate that Anselm's claim was about God – and as God was that than which nothing greater can be conceived – then that definition applied to him alone. Gaunilo's concept of a perfect island could not work as an island can always be added to or improved – complete perfection (in the sense that nothing could ever be improved upon it) makes no sense when talking about a contingent reality such as an island. God was necessary – an island was not. This leads to Gaunilo's attack on Anselm's argument being considered ineffective as it did not make use of valid reasoning.

Kant's challenged Descartes' assertion that existence was a predicate of God. Descartes had stated that as the supremely perfect being, God possessed all perfections. Included within this was the 'perfection' of existence. However, Kant rejected this as he felt that Descartes's use of the word existence was incorrect. Predicates tells us something about the nature of the reality they are trying to describe. The concept of existence tells us nothing about the nature of a reality. Therefore, according to Kant, the ontological argument fails – and his challenge to the ontological argument is considered effective.

Some have questioned whether Kant's understanding of Anselm's original argument was fully accurate, though. It has been observed that Kant was talking about Anselm adding the concept of existence to the concept of God in order to make his argument work; however, other scholars have suggested that this misunderstands Anselm, who they say was instead asking his readers to compare something existing merely in the understanding with something existing in reality as well.

'The challenges to the ontological argument are convincing.' Assess this view

Argument – the challenges are convincing/ effective/persuasive	Counter – argument – the challenges are not convincing/ effective/persuasive	Evaluation
Challenges to a priori and deductive arguments	However, deductive arguments are logical	
Gaunilo's challenge	Anselm's response and challenges to Gaunilo	
Aquinas' challenge		
Kant's challenge	Weaknesses in Kant's argument S. Davis	
Hume's challenge		
In conclusion,		

pecification content

ne extent to which objections to the
ntological argument are persuasive.

The extent to which objections to the ontological argument are persuasive

The relative persuasiveness of the objections to the ontological argument depend on how far the individual considers these objections to be valid, as well as how far the original arguments were accepted as sound.

Gaunilo's objections centre on the claim that in the same way that Anselm argues it is possible to argue the existence of God through the definition of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived', then it must therefore be possible to have the idea of a perfect island and, because of this idea, then this island must exist. Gaunilo says 'If a man should try to prove to me by such reasoning that this island truly exists .... I know not which I ought to regard as the greater fool myself, supposing that I should allow this proof, or him, if he should suppose that he had established with any certainty the existence of this island.' To demonstrate how persuasive an argument this could considered to be we should reflect on Gaunilo's stance that just because you can define a greatest possible being does not automatically lead to the fact that one actually exists.

However, there are critics of Gaunilo's position here. They state that he has misunderstood the ontological argument and is applying his criticism incorrectly. Gaunilo does not seem to understand that because of God's uniqueness the ontological argument only applies to him – no other being. This is because only God is necessary (non-contingent). All other beings are contingent and so cannot apply the same definition to themselves. This counter-argument, if accepted, considerably undermines any persuasiveness that Gaunilo may have had with his objection.

Contrary to the relative non-persuasiveness of Gaunilo's objections, the objections that are stated by Kant appear far more persuasive. This is because Kant does not attempt to directly undermine Anselm's argument by virtue of his definition but instead challenges Descartes' position. This, in turn, affects the position taken by Anselm on the nature of God. Kant shows Descartes reasoning in defining God's existence through a consideration of his perfections as invalid reasoning. Kant explains that existence, which was considered a perfection possessed by God is not a determining predicate – as existence cannot add anything to the idea of something. Only those qualities that add to the nature of God (e.g. omnipotence; omniscience; omnipresence, etc.) can be called predicates. Existence adds nothing new to our understanding of the nature of God and so cannot be called a predicate. This therefore undermines Descartes' position and strengthens the persuasiveness of Kant's objection.

However, if we accept that Kant had misunderstood Anselm and that the idea of adding the concept of existence to the concept of God was not what Anselm was suggesting, then the strength of Kant's objections are somewhat undermined. This would therefore demonstrate that Kant's objections are not as persuasive as at first thought.

AO2 Developing skills

It is now time to reflect upon the information that has been covered so far. It is also important to consider how what you have learned can be focused and used for examination-style answers by practising the skills associated with AO2.

Assessment objective 2 (AO2) involves 'analysis' and 'evaluation'. The terms may be obvious but it is crucial to be familiar with how certain skills demonstrate these terms, and also, how the performance of these skills is measured (see generic band descriptors Band 5 for AS AO2).

Obviously an answer is placed within an appropriate band descriptor depending upon how well the answer performs, ranging from excellent, good, satisfactory, basic/limited to very limited.

▶ **Your task is this:** below is a reasonable answer, although not perfect, that has been written in response to a question requiring an examination of the strengths of the challenges to the ontological argument. Using the band level descriptors you can compare this with the relevant higher bands and the descriptions inside those bands. It is obviously a reasonable answer and so would not be in bands 5, 1 or 2. In order to do this it will be useful to consider what is both strong and weak about the answer and therefore what needs developing.

In analysing the answer, in a group, identify three ways to make this answer a better one. You may have more than three observations and indeed suggestions to make it a perfect answer!

Key skills

Analysis involves identifying issues raised by the materials in the AO1, together with those identified in the AO2 section, and presents sustained and clear views, either of scholars or from a personal perspective ready for evaluation.

This means that it picks out key things to debate and the lines of argument presented by others or a personal point of view.

Evaluation involves considering the various implications of the issues raised based upon the evidence gleaned from analysis and provides an extensive detailed argument with a clear conclusion.

This means that the answer weighs up the various and different lines of argument analysed through individual commentary and response and arrives at a conclusion through a clear process of reasoning.

Answer

The strengths of the challenges to the ontological argument are many. Gaunilo's challenge to the ontological argument clearly shows that Anselm's reasoning was absurd because he was trying to prove God's existence by giving a definition that included the idea that God had to exist.

This was not a good argument because, as Gaunilo said, if you could define things into existence then he could define a perfect island into existence and that didn't make any sense. It was impossible, from Gaunilo's point of view, to define anything into existence merely by saying that it had to exist, as part of the definition of what the thing was.

Some scholars think that Gaunilo was confused in his arguments, though, and therefore they weren't very strong. This is because Gaunilo did not make a distinction between contingent objects (which everything in the universe is) and non-contingent or necessary objects (which only God is). As God is the only non-contingent being in the universe then the ontological argument as presented by Anselm only applies to God and nothing else and because Gaunilo missed this point his criticism was not particularly strong.

However, a stronger form of challenge was made by Immanuel Kant who recognised that including existence as a describing word (or predicate) for God was inaccurate. This is because existence only tells you whether something is or not – it does not tell you what it is, or anything else about it, and therefore cannot be considered to be a proper predicate. Kant says that both Descartes and Anselm misunderstand this point in their arguments and because of this their ontological arguments should both be considered to be invalid.

Kant's challenged Descartes' assertion that existence was a predicate of God. Descartes had stated that as the supremely perfect being, God possessed all perfections. Included within this was the 'perfection' of existence. However, Kant rejected this as he felt that Descartes' use of the word existence was incorrect. Predicates tells us something about the nature of the reality they are trying to describe. The concept of existence tells us nothing about the nature of a reality. Therefore, according to Kant, the ontological argument fails – and his challenge to the ontological argument is considered effective.

The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God. Use Vardy pages 92-94 for a summary

1. How does Anselm define God?

_____
_____

2. How does Descartes define God?

_____
_____

3. How does Malcolm define God?

_____
_____

4. How does Aquinas define God? Trick question

_____
_____

5. What does Kant say about God?
'We have no clear idea of a necessary being. God is defined largely in negative rather than in positive terms.' God is not like a triangle

_____
_____

6. What do Phillips and Moore claim about God's nature and existence?

_____
_____

Specification content

The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God.

The extent to which different religious views on the nature of God impact on arguments for the existence of God

According to the traditional concept of God in Classical Theism, God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. In other words, God can do all things, knows all things and is everywhere. This would be a view upheld by Christianity, Islam and Judaism – often collectively known as the western or Abrahamic religions.

When considering the theistic proofs considered so far (i.e. cosmological, teleological and ontological) it is worth reflecting on how much each of these is based on an understanding of God's nature as presented by these faiths.

For example, God's omnipotence is a key feature of both cosmological and teleological arguments which describe a being capable of creating a universe and designing a universe respectively. Were God not attributed with this power, then how could either of these feats be attributed to him? It must be considered vital to these arguments that God has these abilities (creator/designer) as an essential part of who he is considered to be.

Equally, the ontological argument describes God as possessing 'all perfections'. Indeed, this definition of God is the crux of the argument. Were it not so then the ontological argument would be a non-starter. The very idea of God is a God whose nature includes the idea of these perfections as a necessary part of who he is.

The question can then be asked 'what about other considerations about the nature of God? Would these arguments still work if God is described in any other form – e.g. impersonal, limited to a specific sphere of nature, entirely transcendent (i.e. beyond our physical world and incapable of interacting with it), etc. Certainly, this would seem to undermine the validity of all three arguments, as we traditionally understand them at least.

However, concepts of God beyond those recognised above do not necessarily entail such characteristics. In such cases, the nature of God – which might contain characteristics of limited power or malevolent intent – do not impede traditional questions regarding the existence of god in the face of the issues regarding evil and suffering for instance. (Polytheistic or dualist faith traditions could be included in this.) Whilst the traditional theistic arguments as outlined above, do not usually promote an understanding of the nature of God in this way, it certainly raises interesting questions about attempting to explain God's nature and asks why we assume the characteristics attributed to the God of Classical Theism.

In conclusion, traditional arguments for God's existence tend to arise out of specific faith traditions and, as a consequence, are intimately associated with the specific nature of God as described in that tradition. As such, it would seem that different religious views about the nature of God do indeed impact on arguments for the existence of God.

'The success of arguments for the existence of God depend entirely on ideas about the nature of God'

Assess this view. 30 marks. Write out an answer to this question using Vardy pages 91-94

Believers have different views about the nature of God. Some believe Him to an objective reality, this means that . . .

This view is supported by Aquinas who attempted to argue for God's de re necessary existence through his five ways. These arguments were inductive and . . .

These arguments can be seen to be successful,...

However,...

Furthermore, Anselm developed an a priori and deductive argument for the existence of God...

If this argument is attempting to prove God as an objective reality it can be seen to have failed because...

However, if God is not seen as an object in any way at all then maybe it can be seen as successful. Believers don't talk about God's existence, they live their lives as if He does; they presume that He does. Phillips would support this view,

Anselm is not trying to prove God to an atheist, but offer a rational justification to someone who already has faith 'I have written the following treatise in the person of one who … seeks to understand what he believes …' Therefore, we can say Anselm's argument is successful. For Anselm God is self-evident. Gareth Moore made a parallel with the equator …

In conclusion,