

Deductive Arguments for the Existence of God – Ontological Argument



By the end of this lesson you will:

- Have a firm understanding of how a deductive argument is different to an inductive argument
- Have been introduced to the origins of the ontological argument as a priori proof of God's existence
- Discussed and understood the basic premises of the ontological argument with your group

Recap task- pick at least 4 words from the selection below & explain them!

Blue = 1 point each (ALL)

Red = 2 points each (MOST)

Black = 3 points each (SOME)

Inductive	A Posteriori	Synthetic
Analytic	God of Gaps	Leaky Buckets
Deductive	A Priori	Reason

Deductive Proof and A Priori Arguments

- The ontological argument is **Deductive** and **A Priori**
- Remind yourself of what these words mean!



Starter Task – Ontological Argument

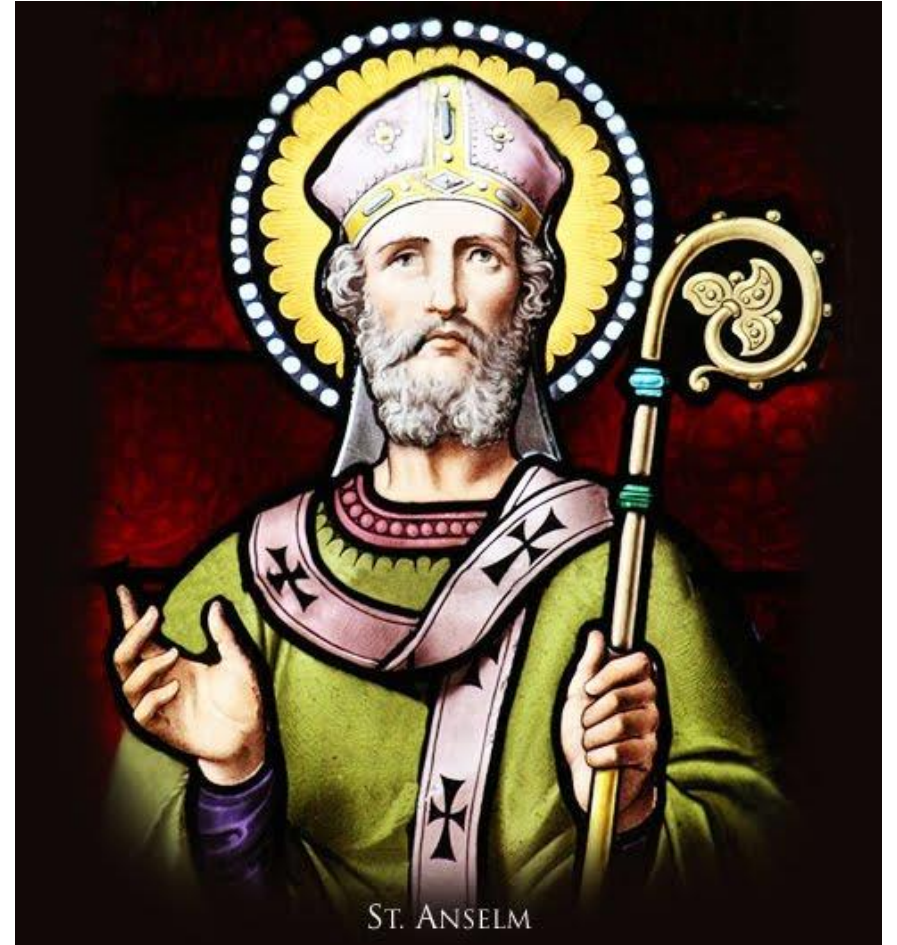
2mins

- **TASK:** Imagine a picture in your head.
 - Does your painting currently exist in reality?
 - Quickly draw your picture on a sheet
 - Does your painting now exist in reality?
-
- **Key Question:** Does God exist in both the mind and in reality?



Saint Anselm's Ontological Argument

- 11th Century Catholic scholar
- Wrote *Proslogion* which is used as a meditation, but also includes his ontological argument where he sought to prove the existence of God
- Is a deductive argument, meaning if you agree with the premises you **MUST** agree with the conclusion.



Reciprocal reading

15mins



- Turn to page 33 of your textbook and read **'Anselm – God as the greatest being'**.

READER – Read each paragraph aloud

SUMMARISER – Summarise each paragraph into three simple points

CLARIFIER – Look up words/phrases you don't fully understand

SPEAKER – Feedback your summary to the teacher/class

Extension task:

Evaluate Anselm's argument – which criticisms does he avoid with his deductive method? Is it convincing?

MAKE NOTES

Questions on Anselm – Use only summary sheet

10mins



- Feedback on your answers:
- 1. What comes first for Anselm; faith or reason?
- 2. Which Psalm does Anselm use to support his idea that ‘only the fool would believe there is no God’?
- 3. What are the two opposing ideas (which are at a dichotomy) in reference to the existence of God?
- 4. Why, according to Anselm, do some people choose not to believe in God?
- 5. For Anselm ‘God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived’. Explain this briefly in your own words.
- 6. Can something exist in both the mind and in reality according to Anselm?
- 7. Does **God** have to exist in both the mind and reality according to Anselm?
- 8. Write the two premises and conclusion for Anselm’s ontological argument

Anselm's Ontological Argument

1

God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

- This means that God is the greatest possible being that can be **thought** of.
- Anselm said that **atheists** can define God even though they don't believe in him.
- Look back at your words to describe / define God. Even if you are the 'fool' that denies God exists, you already understand the word 'God' or else you could not say there is no God!
- Thus God already exists in the **mind** (*in intellectu*) of anyone who understands the word.

Anselm's Ontological Argument

2

Something that exists in reality and in the mind is greater than something that exists as an idea or thought in the mind alone.

- THINK - Imagine your perfect partner.
- PAIR - Tell your 'elbow buddy' all the amazing qualities such a person would have. Discuss whether you would you rather go out with the real person or the imaginary one?
- SHARE – Share your ideas with the class.

Anselm's Ontological Argument

2

Something that exists in reality and in the mind is greater than something that exists as an idea or thought in the mind alone.

Which is greater?



OR



Anselm argues that the **real** thing is always greater than the **thought**.

③

Anselm's Ontological Argument

If there is no being greater than God, God cannot only exist in the mind. Therefore, God must exist in reality and in the mind.

- Anselm is arguing that God **logically** has to exist!
- If God only existed in the mind/thought we would be able to think of something greater because ...
- **Something that exists in reality is greater than that which exists in the mind alone.**

③

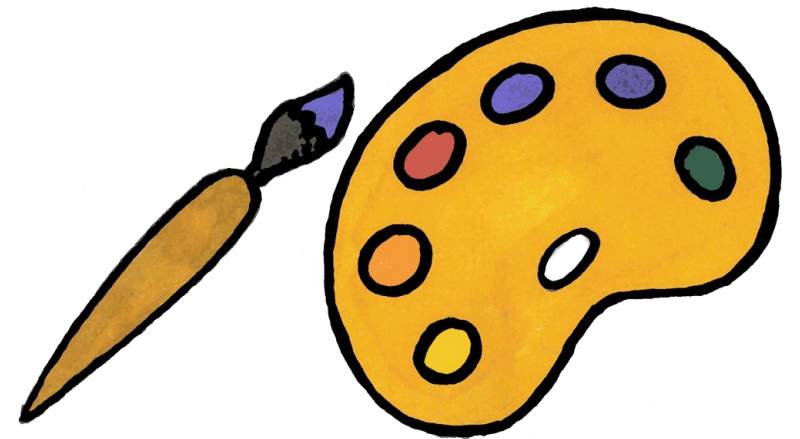
Anselm's Ontological Argument

If there is no being greater than God, God cannot only exist in the mind. Therefore, God must exist in reality and in the mind.

- Yet if God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived (as point 1), God has to exist in **reality**.
- If we can conceive of a God it would be **contradictory** to say he doesn't exist!

Learning Check - Rich Picture

- In pairs, use your whiteboards to draw a picture of Anselm's argument for God's existence



Learning Check - Notes

7mins

- Make notes in your workbooks on the following:
- Faith and reason
- Psalm 14:1
- Dichotomy of investigation
- Anselm's fool
- God as a being than which no greater can be perceived
- Existing in the mind and reality
- The premise and conclusion of the ontological argument

A01 – Explain the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God (20)

- Write the first paragraph for this essay. You can use the PEEL structure if you want.
- **Point:** St Anselm argues that because God is the greatest thing that can be thought of – he must exist in reality as well as the mind.
- **Explain:** Here explain St Anselm's premises to support his conclusion.
- **Evidence:** Explain the 'greatest partner' analogy – the greatest partner would have to exist in mind AND reality to be the greatest possible partner
- **Link:** This shows, for Anselm, that God must logically exist.

Gaunilo – On Behalf of the Fool

Of God, or a being greater than all others, I could not conceive at all, except merely according to the word. An object can hardly or never be conceived according to the word alone ...



As humans, our experiences gained through the senses have shown us that things are not perfect. They always have the potential to improve. It is impossible for humans to think of a fully perfect being.

Gaunilo's Island

- Gaunilo doesn't really believe in the island's existence.
- He is using an device known as *reductio ad absurdum*. What does this mean?
- Latin for 'reduction to absurdity'. It's an argument that shows a statement to be false or absurd if its logical conclusions were to be accepted.
- Why is Gaunilo's response to Anselm a good example of *reductio ad absurdum*?

Anselm – God has necessary Existence

- Anselm continue his ontological argument in **chapter 3** of his *Proslogion*
- This is based on the idea that God has **necessary** existence so must exist a priori and analytically
- **TASK:** Turn to page 35 of your textbook and read it individually.
- Make notes in your exercise booklet.

Anselm – God has necessary Existence

Proslogion 3 – God has **necessary** existence.

Contingent

- Dependent on something else for its existence.
- Something that might or might not be.

Necessary

- Something that has to be.
- Something which logically must be true.

Anselm – God has necessary Existence

“Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone, the very being than which nothing greater can be conceived is one than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence there is no doubt that there exists a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in the reality.” (Anselm, Proslogion 3)

Anselm – God has necessary Existence

- **Premise 1:** God is the greatest possible being so nothing greater can be conceived.
- **Premise 2:** It is greater to be a _____being than a _____being.
- **Premise 3:** If God exists only as a contingent being, so can therefore be imagined not to exist, then a greater being could be imagined that cannot be conceived not to exist.
- **Premise 4:** This being would then be greater than God.
- **Premise 5:** God is therefore a _____being.
- **Conclusion:** God must exist in r_____.

A02 – “A priori arguments for the existence of God are persuasive”. Discuss this view (30)

ARE persuasive	AREN'T persuasive