Fort Bend Christian Academy

Great God in Boots!- Malcolm's Argument is Valid!

A Thesis Submitted to

the Teacher and Students of the Advanced Apologetics Class

Department of Worldviews and Apologetics

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Introduction

For almost a millennium, philosophers have debated the validity of the proof for God's existence known as the ontological argument. For the purposes of this thesis, an ontological argument is an entirely *a priori* proof that seeks to prove the existence of God based on one's conception of Him. Today, the general consensus in the philosophical community is that all ontological arguments are logically invalid, which means that they are fallacious in some way, and dialectically ineffective, which means that they cannot be persuasive to nontheists. The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that Norman Malcolm's formulation of the ontological argument is both logically valid and has the potential to be dialectically effective. Malcolm's formulation is unique in that it explicitly relies on the necessary existence of God rather than just existence in general. For a being to possess logically necessary existence, its nonexistence must be logically impossible. Ontological arguments other than Malcolm's have, often against their expositors' wishes, been understood in terms of contingent existence, in which that being's nonexistence is possible. As it will be shown in this thesis, Malcolm's use of necessary existence makes his argument defensible from a theistic position.

To demonstrate the thesis, there will first be offered a fairly thorough historical review. This will provide context for the current discussion of the argument by elucidating many philosophers' positions. A consistent, though often underrepresented, theme throughout this history is the necessary existence of God. There will then be offered a proof of the thesis, exploring the major objections that are presented in the historical review along with some other common objections and offering a thorough and conclusive rebuttal to all of them.

A few words are in order before I begin the body of my work. I am well aware that most people have a natural predisposition against the ontological argument. Of all the arguments for

the existence of God, it is certainly the most counterintuitive. Many people are unwilling to even consider it because they believe that it must beg the question, or they wonder what prevents such an argument from proving the existence of imaginary things. Others will consider me audacious for believing that I could actually take on some of the greatest philosophers of all time and argue in any persuasive way against them. I would like to ask both groups to suspend their incredulity. There are many misconceptions about the nature of the ontological argument, and this thesis will hopefully clear up at least some of them. Also, it should be noted that many of the criticisms raised against the argument are certainly not their proponents' best work. With this in mind, I would ask the reader to approach the claims made in this thesis with an open mind. If you do, it is my hope that you will have the same epiphany that Bertrand Russell experienced, however briefly, while strolling through Cambridge 120 years ago.

Historical Review

The Ancient Era

Scholars have long debated whether or not there are any valid examples of ontological arguments in pre-Anselmian philosophers.[1] The goal of this thesis is not to take one side or the other in this historical discussion. However, whether or not any classical arguments could be strictly classified as ontological, there are compelling reasons to believe that the works of some ancient philosophers have implicitly ontological overtones or make statements that point to Anselm's conception of God. The most notable examples come from the prolific Greek philosopher Plato, the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon, and the influential Church Father Augustine of Hippo. To what extent Anselm was influenced by any of these (except for Augustine) is up for debate, but all of them provide a glimpse into the philosophical legacy to which Anselm made an original contribution.

Plato (428-348 B.C.E.)

One of the predominant figures in the history of philosophy, Plato was the first to present elements resembling an ontological argument. Central to understanding Plato's philosophy is his dualistic cosmology, which includes our world and the world of the forms. In this view, the physical world, the world of becoming, is constantly changing, while the world of the forms, or the world of being, is unchanging and perfect. To Plato, "The Forms were the perfect model, the ideal being of every kind of thing."[2] The objects that people perceive are merely shadows of their forms, and the goal of philosophy is to understand the forms through reason.

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[1] For a negative view, see Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Religious Belief*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 4-5. For a more positive view, see Dombrowski, Daniel. *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response*. (New York: Cambridge University Press) 7-11.

[2] Solomon, Robert C. and Kathleen M. Higgins. *A Passion for Wisdom: A Very Brief History of Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 37.

In his *Republic*, Plato expounds upon these views and extensively discusses the form of the good, which is the greatest in his hierarchy of forms.[3] For Plato, as articulated through his spokesman Socrates, the form of the good is like the sun, which provides light to observe the world and sustenance to grow and live. It thus transcends all of the other forms, so much so that it is epistemologically and ontologically necessary: "Therefore, you should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their existence and being are also due to it…."[4] Plato seems to imply here that the form of the good possesses necessary existence; it would be impossible for the good not to exist since all of the other forms are contingent upon it. This concept of necessary existence continues to play a major role in the history of the ontological argument.

With the good's necessary existence established, Plato's emphasis on *a priori* understanding of the good highlights a possible, implicit ontological argument for the existence of the good.[5] To understand the framework in which this argument is made, it is helpful here to consider the famous divided line from Book 6 of the *Republic*, which establishes a ranking of forms of knowledge. The lowest level of the divided line is the visible, which is subdivided into one's sensory perceptions of the world of becoming on the lower level and the actual objects that are perceived on the higher level. The highest level of the divided line is the intelligible. The lower subsection of the intelligible corresponds to *a posteriori* reasoning, in which, "…the soul, using as images the things that were imitated before, is compelled to base its inquiry on

[3] What relation the form of the good has to any sort of god is up for debate; however, such considerations do not majorly impact the discussion here.

[4] Plato. *Republic*. C.D.C. Reeve, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) 205.

[5] *A priori* refers to reasoning or thought apart from sense experience; *a posteriori* refers to reasoning or thought based on sense experience.

hypotheses, proceeding not to a first principle, but to a conclusion."[6] The upper subsection corresponds to *a priori* reasoning, in which the forms are used to reach an unhypothetical first principle, "…proceeding from a hypothesis, but without the images used in the previous subsection…."[7] To put Plato's conclusion differently, *a posteriori* reasoning is grounded in one's perceptions of the physical world and thus cannot yield metaphysical conclusions while *a priori* reasoning is not dependent on such perceptions and can yield metaphysical conclusions.

It is thus natural to Plato that only this latter line of reasoning can be used to analyze the form of the good since it is the ultimate unhypothetical first principle. For J. Prescott Johnson, this claim that the good must be analyzed *a priori* constitutes an implicit ontological argument for its necessary existence in reality, since:

> "The anhypotheton, or the unhypothesized, is the unconditioned. But if the anhypotheton is merely…a conceptual object…it is dependent upon conditions….Thus the anhypotheton is either nothing at all - not even thinkable – or it is ontologically real and independent of all extraneous conditions, including the conditions of thought. Since, however, the anhypotheton is thinkable…it is clear that the anhypotheton is the ontologically real being necessarily existing in the possession of extra-epistemological reality.[8]

Whether or not such an argument can be classified as strictly ontological, this implicit element in Plato's examination of the good marks a major development in the history of the ontological argument and likely explains why most of its proponents have, to some extent, adopted Platonic

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[6] Plato. *Republic*. C.D.C. Reeve, trans. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) 206.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Johnson, J. Prescott. "The Ontological Argument in Plato," *Personalist* 44 (1963): 31.

philosophy.[9] Never before had a philosopher implied that an entity's existence in reality could be deduced *a priori* from its conception, a key element to all ontological proofs.

Diogenes of Babylon (c.230-c.150/140 B.C.E.)

As head of the Stoic school in Athens, Diogenes of Babylon was a principal advocate of Stoicism in Greco-Roman culture. Even though none of his writings are extant today, much of his philosophy can be deduced from fragments in writings by other ancient authors. One such fragment, written by the second century C.E. skeptic Sextus Empiricus, is particularly relevant to the ontological argument. The passage deals with the following argument for the existence of the Greek pantheon of gods presented by the Stoic Zeno of Citium:

1. One may reasonably honor the gods.
2. One may not reasonably honor those who do not exist.
3. Therefore, the gods must exist.[10]

The skeptic Alexinus, who was Zeno's principal antagonist, easily parodied this argument by replacing "the gods" in the first premise with "the wise." This would mean that the wise exist, a proposition that the Stoics would find untenable: "…the Stoics denied the existence of a concrete wise man. Even the founding fathers of the Stoa did not boast to be sages."[11]

This parody left Stoic philosophers with two possible options to recover a valid argument. The first would be to clarify the meaning of honor so that the original argument would be valid but the parody would not. The other option would be to modify the argument

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[9] A demonstration that more modern ontological arguments like Anselm's are consistent with Platonism is provided in: Beckaert, A. "A Platonic Justification of the Argument *a Priori*," in *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*, John H. Hick and Arthur C. McGill, eds. (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 111-118.

[10] Meijer, A.J. *Stoic Theology: Proofs for the Existence of the Cosmic God and of the Traditional Gods: Including a Commentary on Cleanthes' Hymn on Zeus*. (Delft, Netherlands:Eburon Uitgeverij B.V., 2007) 132.

[11] Ibid., 133.

itself so that it could only refer to the gods and not to anything else. Diogenes pursued the latter option. From what is recorded by Sextus, he sought to replace the second premise with, "One may not reasonably honor those who are not of such a nature to exist." This provides a starting point for an original argument.

To begin, Diogenes would have offered two auxiliary arguments to deduce his first premise.[12] The first deals with the impassability of the gods, a basic tenant of Stoicism:

1. If the gods are impassible, then nothing can prevent the gods from existing.
2. The gods are impassible according to their conception.
3. Therefore, nothing can prevent the gods from existing.

The second argument borrows the first premise of Zeno's original argument, but uses it to reach an original conclusion:

1. If the gods are of such a nature as to exist, then one may reasonably honor them.
2. One may reasonably honor the gods.
3. Therefore, the gods are of such a nature to exist.

From the conclusions of these two arguments, Diogenes' first premise of the main argument can be deduced:

1. The gods are of such a nature as to exist and there is nothing that can prevent them from existing.

Based on Papazian's interpretation of Diogenes' understanding of existence,[13] a second premise can also be deduced:

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[12] No complete presentation of Diogenes' argument is extant (Sextus' account is an obvious paraphrase). This presentation is based on Michael Papazian's reconstruction in Papazian, Michael. "The Ontological Argument of Diogenes," *Phronesis* 52, no. 2 (2007): 197-200, accessed October 2, 2013. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40387928

[13] Ibid., 192-194

2. If the gods are of such a nature as to exist and nothing can prevent them from existing, then the gods must exist now or either they must exist in the past but not now or in the future but not now.

The logical result of premises 1 and 2 is that:

3. The gods must exist now or either in the past but not now or in the future but not now.

Diogenes then sought to show based on the gods' conception that the latter two cases are absurd:

4. If the gods existed in the past but not now, then they were destroyed.

5. If the gods exist in the future but not now, then they must be generated.

6. By definition, the gods can neither be destroyed nor generated.

7. Therefore, the gods cannot exist in the past but not now or in the future but not now.

With this result, Diogenes could have constructed a syllogism using 3 and 7 as premises to yield the conclusion that the gods must exist now based on one's conception of them.

The import of Diogenes' proof to the historical development of the ontological argument cannot be overstated. His proof marks the first recorded instance where a philosopher set out explicitly to demonstrate the existence of divine beings based only on an *a priori* conception of those beings and self-evident propositions.[14] In its formulation, it bears a great resemblance to modern ontological arguments that use modal logic,[15] and it is certainly the closest of any classical arguments to the modern ontological argument. Whether or not Anselm had access to Diogenes' work, the proof certainly marks an original contribution to the field of philosophy.

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[14] Some have considered Zeno of Citium's argument to also be a primitive ontological argument. However, it is dubious whether his premises are *a priori* or *a posteriori*. Except where he borrows from Zeno, all of Diogenes' premises are certainly *a priori*.

[15] Papazian, Michael. "The Ontological Argument of Diogenes," *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 203-204, accessed October 2, 2013. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40387928

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.)

As one of the last church fathers, Augustine is recognized as one of the most prominent and influential figures in the history of Christian theology. An epochal figure, Augustine stands on the threshold between ancient and medieval Christianity.[16] He was a prolific writer, and due to the turbulence of the times, a large portion of his work deals with apologetics. In one such passage from *Concerning the Freedom of the Will*, Augustine presents his own argument for the existence of God. Based on the superiority of human reason to all other faculties, Augustine argues that if there is an eternal and changeless reality that is superior to reason, such a reality must be God. He then points to universally recognized *a priori* truths, such as the truths of mathematics, and argues that because such timeless and immutable principles exist, there must be such a higher reality, which may be called God.

Even though this argument is entirely *a priori*, it would not fall under the category of ontological argument since Augustine does not deduce God's existence strictly based on one's conception of God.[17] What is far more relevant to the history of the ontological argument, however, is the concept of God that Augustine presents in his dialogue through his conversation partner, Euodius. Throughout the discussion, Euodius repeatedly makes remarks about the nature of God such as, "God is that reality to which nothing is superior."[18] This conception of God is remarkably similar to Anselm's idea of a being greater than which nothing can be

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[16] Olson, Roger. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) 255.

[17] This argument is, however, an inchoate, *a priori* form of the transcendental argument for the existence of God, using necessary *a priori* truth instead of the laws of logic.

[18] Augustine of Hippo. "Concerning the Freedom of the Will." in *Belief: Readings on the Reason for Faith*. (Edited by Francis S. Collins, New York: Harper Collins, 2010) 34.

conceived, which he uses in his formulation of the ontological argument.[19] It cannot be verified with any certainty that Augustine influenced Anselm in this regard, but it is certainly likely considering Augustine's pervasive influence on medieval theology in general and Anselm in particular.

The Medieval Era

After the fall of Rome in about 500 C.E., philosophy in the West saw little improvement or original contributions for many centuries. When work started to pick up again in about the eleventh century, one of the central issues for theologians was to examine the doctrines of faith, including the existence of God, in the light of natural reason. This movement, called Scholasticism, dominated theology and philosophy in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, and it provides the context for the next major developments in the history of the ontological argument.

This era in the argument's history begins with Anselm of Canterbury, who, in addition to being a great influence on Scholasticism, is also popularly recognized as the creator of the ontological argument. Although his general line of thought is by no means wholly unprecedented, Anselm's work certainly constitutes a quantum leap in the argument's history and marks the first universally recognized ontological argument. The era also marks the argument's first major detractor, Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, whose parody objection was the most philosophically sophisticated criticism posed by Anselm's contemporaries. The other major figure in the argument's history during this period is Thomas Aquinas, who, in addition to posing his famous Five Ways for proving God's existence, also offered a critique of the ontological argument that many still consider valid. Ultimately, the discussion of the argument in the

[19] It is important to note that Anselm did not just blindly accept Augustine's concept of God, but modified it to suit his argument. This distinction is one that Gaunilo did not recognize, and it was important enough for Anselm to mention it in *Responsio*, 5.

Medieval Era would set the tone for the dialogue between its proponents and its detractors that has continued up until the present day.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 C.E.)

A great influence on the development of Scholasticism and the ontological argument, Anselm is a major figure in the history of medieval philosophy and theology. Considered by many the Father of Scholasticism, Anselm's *Monologion* and *Proslogion* are believed by some to constitute the first true works of natural theology in the history of Christianity.[20] This is not to say that Anselm was merely a rationalist, since he famously declared, "For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand."[21] He recognized, however, the utility of establishing a logical basis for Christian belief without appealing to divine revelation. In the process of examining God's greatness for this project, Anselm presented the first universally recognized ontological argument for the existence of a theistic God.

According to one story, Anselm first began contemplating his ontological proof when another monk asked him why the fool of Psalm 14:1 is so foolish.[22] The ultimate result of his examination is presented in Chapters Two through Four of his *Proslogion*, with the most famous argument in Chapter Two. To begin this proof, Anselm offers the concept of God as something greater than which nothing can be thought.[23] According to Anselm, even the fool understands what this idea means. Then, he establishes the distinction between existence in the mind and

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[20] Olson, Roger. *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) 316-318.

[21] Anselm, *Proslogion* 1.

[22] Psalm 14:1 reads: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Throughout the *Proslogion*, Anselm refers to atheists as fools.

[23] Anselm here uses greater in the sense of superior in form or substance.

actual existence. To illustrate this with an example, Anselm speaks of a painter who is working on a painting:

> "Thus, when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has the picture in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it."[24]

It is evident from this example that existence in actuality and in the mind is greater than existence in the mind alone.[25]

This conclusion allows Anselm to move into actually establishing God's existence. The atheist must admit that the concept of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the mind because he or she understands it. This leads Anselm to the conclusion that God must actually exist, "For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater."[26] If God only exists in the mind, then a greater being can be conceived, which by Anselm's definition of God is an absurdity. Anselm's argument can be expressed in a syllogism as follows:

1. One can conceive of a being than which nothing greater can be thought.
2. A concept's actual existence is greater than its mere existence in the mind.
3. Therefore, God must actually exist because the alternative is an absurdity.[27]

From here, Anselm moves into further examining the concept of a being than which nothing greater can be thought. In Chapter 3, Anselm explains that by logical implication, a

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[24] Anselm, *Proslogion* 2.

[25] Anselm uses greater again in the sense of superior impact upon reality or superior intrinsic value.

[26] Ibid.

[27] This is my original rendering of the argument.

being than which nothing greater can be thought must possess necessary existence, since, "…certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist."[28] God must therefore exist necessarily, and everything else must be contingent upon Him. When reading the *Proslogion* without any other sources, it appears as thought this necessary existence argument is merely an afterthought tacked on by Anselm at the end of his main argument in *Proslogion* 2. Both the argument's proponents and its critics have consistently ignored this development in *Proslogion* 3 until the argument's contemporary revival.[29]

One persistent debate about Anselm's proof is whether his purpose was to offer an apologetic without appealing to divine revelation or simply to edify the faithful in their understanding of God. To Karl Barth, the founder of Neo-Orthodoxy and a prominent figure in twentieth century theology, Anselm was a fideist, and in the context of Anselm's theology the proof must be understood not as a rationalist apologetic, but as faith seeking to establish itself: "[The proof is] not a science…that establishes the Church's faith outside of itself. It is a question of theology. It is a question of the proof of faith by faith that is already established in itself without proof."[30] Based on this interpretation, the whole notion of Anselm's work as natural theology, indeed the whole idea of a natural theology, is ludicrous to Barth because natural theology does not start with faith.

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[28] Anselm, *Proslogion* 3

[29] A point made more thoroughly in: Hartshorne, Charles. *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of The Ontological Proof for God's Existence*. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965) 297-298.

[30] Barth, Karl. *Anselm: Fides Quarens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme.* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1960) 170.

Barth's views pose a serious problem for those who would use the ontological argument in the context of natural theology as an apologetic. If the ontological argument was originally posed as a meditation on the greatness of God for religious believers, then can it be used outside of such a context? Moreover, can the nontheist even reach the conclusion that God exists based on reason? If Barth's position of Christian fideism is correct, then the non-Christian's intellect is so corrupted due to the fall of mankind that it would be impossible to reason one's way to the conclusion that God exists.

In response to the first question, it can be argued that even if the ontological argument was originally presented solely for theists, which is highly likely, this does not negate the ability to use the argument in the context of apologetics. Even though his interpretation of Anselm's intentions is correct, Barth does not consider the possibility that the conception of a theistic God is not necessarily internal to a theistic worldview. The atheist must have a conception of a theistic God because he or she cannot deny the existence of an entity of which he or she has no conception. This conception must contain certain necessarily true properties, such as omnipotence, in order to be the conception of a theistic God. As such, the ontological argument can be a part of a natural theology.[31]

These conclusions also offer an answer to the second question. Because the nontheist can conceive of a general theistic God, the ontological argument can be used to prove the existence of the general theistic God. However, natural theology cannot establish the existence of the God of *Christian* theism. Barth is right to assert that one cannot reach the conclusion that specifically the Christian God exists based on natural theology alone. This does not mean, however, that natural theology is useless because it can certainly be used to argue in favor of the existence of

[31] This point about the objectivity of one's conception of the theistic God will be developed more fully in the thesis proof.

some sort of theistic God. Whether this God is the God of Christianity, Islam, or Judaism must be a matter for further debate.

Gaunilo of Marmoutiers (11th Century C.E.)

An argument as unusual as Anselm's cannot go long without stirring up some criticism. The first serious critic of the *Proslogion* 2 argument arose within Anselm's lifetime in the form of the French monk Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. Not much is known about Gaunilo's life, and his only surviving work is his criticism of Anselm, *Pro Insipiente* (On Behalf of the Fool). Nevertheless, this work marks the first philosophically cogent attempt to rebut Anselm's proof.

In his writing, Gaunilo adopts the perspective of an atheist who would potentially be responding to Anselm's argument.[32] Based on this persona, Gaunilo's first objection is that because the atheist has no mental category in which to place God, the concept of God cannot exist in the atheist's mind. To illustrate this point, Gaunilo uses the example of a description of an unknown man. According to Gaunilo, because one has had experience with other men, he or she can form a concept of this unknown man based on his description, even if such a man does not actually exist. However, Gaunilo claims that one cannot have such a concept of God, since, "…I know nothing at all of [a being than which nothing greater can be thought] save for the verbal formula, and on the basis of this alone one can scarcely or never think of any truth."[33] Essentially, Gaunilo is attempting to argue that any *a priori* argument for the existence of God would be impossible because one cannot deduce truth from an abstract concept.

From here, Gaunilo follows the same general strategy that Alexinus used against Zeno of Citium's argument. To Gaunilo, the argument that Anselm presents in *Proslogion* 2 is invalid primarily because it can be used to prove the existence of unreal or dubiously real things. In his

[32] There were no overt atheists in this day since the state enforced strict blasphemy laws against atheism.

[33] Gaunilo. *Pro Insipiente* 4

famous example, he presents a "Lost Island," which is more excellent than any other island. He then follows the syllogism of Anselm's argument, using this island instead of God, and thus "demonstrates" that such an island must exist because if it did not, a greater one could be conceived, namely one existing in reality. As Gaunilo points out, "If, I say, someone wishes thus to persuade me that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should think that he was joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to judge the bigger fool…."[34] Because Anselm's proof can be parodied in this way, Gaunilo considers it formally fallacious.[35]

In his reply to Gaunilo, Anselm bases his arguments more on the necessary existence of God than on the proof from *Proslogion* 2. In response to Gaunilo's claim that the concept of God cannot exist in the mind, Anselm offers some counterexamples. He makes several deductions based on his conception of God, including the necessary existence argument from *Proslogion* 3 and another argument illustrating that a being greater than which nothing can be thought must necessarily be omnipresent. Based on these arguments, he concludes that a being greater than which nothing can be thought must exist in the mind since one can reach these logical conclusions about such a being *a priori*.[36]

In response to Gaunilo's parody argument, Anselm again appeals to the necessary existence of God. Anselm points out that his argument could not apply to anything except for God because only God, by virtue of being that than which nothing greater can be thought, can exist necessarily:

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[34] Gaunilo, *Pro Insipiente* 6.

[35] A formal fallacy is an error in the structuring of the argument itself or, to put it differently, a violation of one of the laws of logic. An informal fallacy is an error pertaining to the veracity of the premises.

[36] Anselm, *Responsio* 1.

> "Now, I truly promise that if anyone should discover for me a being existing in reality or in the mind alone – except for that than which nothing greater can be thought – to which the logic of my argument would apply, then I shall find that Lost Island and give it…to that person. It has already been seen, however, that that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist, because it exists as a matter of such certain truth."[37]

Ostensibly, it seems odd for Anselm to affirm the necessary existence of God as a response to such a criticism. However, on a deeper level, it makes a great deal of sense. Based on the logic of necessary beings, only one necessary being could possibly exist, for if there were two, one of them must be contingent upon the other.[38] Thus, any possible parody must be based on something that exists contingently, especially if it is as dubious as the "Lost Island." It is evident that Anselm believes that his argument requires a necessary being as its subject to be valid, making all attempts at parody untenable.[39]

Ultimately, scholars have upheld Anselm's *Responsio* as a conclusive response to Gaunilo's objection, even if they reject the ontological argument on other grounds. Nevertheless, Gaunilo has had his followers throughout the argument's history, who have tried to revive the parody objection by creating more complex objects to use in their parodies. Even though Anselm's defense was successful, for more than a century after his death, there was no recorded discussion of the ontological argument, most likely because there was no real

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[37] Anselm, *Responsio* 3

[38] This point will be further developed in the discussion of parody objections in the Thesis Proof.

[39] This lends credence to the claim made by Charles Hartshorne that Anselm's emphasis was primarily on *Proslogion* 3, not *Proslogion* 2 as many have assumed.

knowledge of the proof.[40] However, discussion of the proof resumed again in the thirteenth century, and it was then that the argument gained its most prominent and well-respected medieval critic.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 C.E.)

By far the most prolific of the Scholastics, Aquinas produced an incredible volume of work during his lifetime, and his theological approach is recognized as normative in the Roman Catholic Church today. Among his many contributions to philosophy, one of his most famous has been his Five Ways for demonstrating God's existence, all of which are *a posteriori*. One of his other more influential contributions, however, has been his criticism of the ontological argument, a criticism that many today regard as a global objection to all ontological arguments.

Aquinas considers the ontological argument as a possible response to the question of whether or not God's existence is self-evident. In the answer he offers in the *Summa Theologica*, he presents a slightly bastardized version of Anselm's *Proslogion* 2 argument.[41] In response to this formulation, he offers two main critiques. The first is that not everyone conceives of God as a being than which nothing greater can be thought. As an example, he asserts, "…some have asserted God to be a body."[42] Thus, the atheist may not be at a starting point to even consider the proof. In addition, Aquinas also objects that the argument's conclusion does not follow from the premises because the argument begs the question:

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[40] Hartshorne, Charles. *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence*. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965), 154.

[41] Some have suggested that Aquinas may have never read Anselm and relied instead on Bonaventure for this argument. It is notable, however, that his difference in wording, "…weighs the dispute slightly in his favor."; Harrleson, Kevin J. *The Ontological Argument from Descartes to Hegel*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2009), loc 163.

[42] Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 1.

> "Nor can it be argued that [God] actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist."[43]

For Aquinas, a person's acceptance or rejection of the proof is dependent upon whether or not they already hold that God exists. While the premises would provide no difficulty for those who already believe in God, Aquinas argues that introducing a definition of God as the first premise presupposes that God already exists in reality, a presupposition that the atheist would have no reason to accept in and of itself.

In a parallel passage in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas offers a slightly different take on this same objection that further elucidates his position. He explains here that the argument must be invalid because in his interpretation of the argument, "…a thing and the definition of a name are posited in the same way. Now, from the fact that that which is indicated by the name God is conceived by the mind, it does not follow that God exists save in the intellect."[44] It would seem, then, that Aquinas is also rejecting the leap common to all ontological arguments from pure, *a priori* concept to actual reality. For Aquinas, an actual thing can exist in reality, while definitions must remain in the mind as descriptions of things, and thus a thing's existence cannot be deduced from its definition since this would, again, beg the question.

Another development that Aquinas makes in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* that is not in the *Summa Theologica* is a response to Anselm's necessary existence argument. After presenting Anselm's argument from *Proslogion* 3, Aquinas argues that Anselm's conclusion does not

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[43] Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Q. 2, Art. 1.

[44] Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 11.

follow from his premises. According to Aquinas, that one can conceive of God as nonexistent would not result from a potential imperfection on the part of God. Instead, it would result from one's inability to properly conceive of God since, "…[one's intellect] cannot behold God Himself except through His effects and which is thus led to know his existence through reasoning."[45] For Aquinas, God can only meaningfully be understood *a posteriori*, and any argument that tries to claim to the contrary is invalid.

The Modern Era

For hundreds of years after Aquinas, there were no real major developments in the ontological argument's history. However, with the advent of the Enlightenment, philosophers began to reconsider the ontological proof and its potential uses. As a result of the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, and the various wars of religion, European philosophy in the sixteenth century began to tend toward more skeptical conclusions. In an attempt to inject a dose of certainty to philosophy, some philosophers established systems that would yield certain conclusions based on universal, *a priori* reason. The most notable of these was Rene Descartes, who used an ontological argument as a way to establish with certainty that God exists. By offering his own version of the proof, Descartes re-opened discussion of the argument, not as an edification of faith or an apology for theism, but as a means of achieving certainty of God's existence within a rationalistic system. This use of the argument would dominate dialogue between its opponents and critics throughout the modern era.

Responses to Descartes during the modern era were varied and indicated the diversity of thought during this time. The most influential of the argument's proponents was Gottfried Leibniz, who advocated a two-argument proof to clarify the concept of God. This era also saw probably the argument's most influential critic in any era, Immanuel Kant. Building on Hume's

[45] Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, Chapter 11.

earlier objection, Kant crafted a biting critique of the Cartesian argument that has led many to reject ontological arguments altogether.[46]

Rene Descartes (1596-1649 C.E.)

One of the most influential philosophers of all time, Descartes is considered the "father of modern rationalism."[47] His emphasis on reason, certainty, and method have become paradigmatic issues that philosophers since have been forced to reckon with. With this influence, his use of the ontological argument played an inestimable role in reviving its discussion in the modern era, making it a major topic for philosophers of religion.

Based on his methodology, Descartes' use of the ontological argument was a rather natural choice. Following Plato, Descartes' epistemology places a high value on *a priori* knowledge, even going so far as to assert that it could potentially lead to certain truth. As a means of reaching this certitude, he held the rigorous, logical reasoning of mathematics in high esteem: "The long chains of easy reasoning by means of which geometers are accustomed to reach the conclusions of their most difficult demonstrations, had led me to imagine that all things…are mutually connected in the same way…."[48] With this system of logical, *a priori* analysis, Descartes had a framework in which he could develop his own ontological argument.

In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes presents his clearest and most thorough account of his ontological argument. For Descartes, establishing that God exists is a matter of great epistemological significance, since it could be possible that one is deceived in even the

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[46] Hume's objection is very similar to and not as sophisticated or well articulated as Kant's, so it will not be discussed here. A statement of the objection can be found in: Hume, David. "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion: Part IX," in *The English Philosophers from Bacon to Mill*, ed. Edwin A Burtt (New York: Random House, 1939, 733-736.

[47] Solomon, Robert C. and Kathleen M. Higgins. *A Passion for Wisdom: A Very Brief History of Philosophy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 72.

[48] Descartes, Rene. *Discourse on Method*, Part II.

most basic matters if there is no God. To begin his proof in the Third Meditation, Descartes considers the nature of ideas and reaches the conclusion that an idea cannot be more perfect than its object, and there cannot be an infinite regression of the causes of such ideas. He then introduces God as expressed by classical theism[49], and based on these previous conclusions, asserts that God could not just be a figment of someone's imagination. It must follow, then, that God exists:

> "…for though the idea of a substance be in my mind owing to this, that I myself am a substance, I should not, however, have the idea of an infinite substance, seeing I am a finite being, unless it were given me by some substance in reality infinite."[50]

For one to have an idea of an infinite being, an infinite being must exist in reality to be the object of one's idea. Through this argument, Descartes establishes that God exists, and because this God cannot be a liar, he removes the epistemological roadblock that he created for himself.

In the Fifth Meditation, Descartes presents another, more concise formulation of the ontological argument. For this proof, he starts with the concept of a perfect being. A key element of Descartes' proof is his belief in clear and distinct *a priori* concepts. He points to the triangle as an example. Even if no triangle actually exists in reality, "…it remains true nevertheless that this figure possesses a certain determinate nature, form, or essence, which is immutable and eternal and not framed by me, nor in any degree dependent on my thought…."[51] Certain properties of a triangle, such as its possession of three sides, are definitional statements about the essence of a triangle and therefore must always be true.

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[49] For Descartes, this would entail a God that is infinite, eternal, immutable, all-powerful, all knowing, and creator of the universe. The description of God that Descartes uses would also be true of deism.

[50] Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, III.

[51] Descartes, Rene. *Meditations on the First Philosophy*, V.

Descartes then applies this principle to God defined as a perfect being. He starts by asserting that we have some concept of a perfect being and then tries to separate the essence, or properties, of God from his existence. For Descartes, this results in an absurdity, since just as a triangle must have three sides, "…it is not less impossible to conceive of a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is awanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection, than to conceive of a mountain without a valley."[52] To Descartes, existence is a quality that is necessary to perfection, so God must actually exist. This particular passage sounds very similar to Anselm's statement of God's necessary existence, and in his response to objections posed by his contemporary P. Gassendi, Descartes argues that the difference between the triangle and God in his analogy is that God possesses necessary existence, whereas the triangle does not.[53] With this in mind the argument can be expressed as follows:

1. God is a being possessing every perfection.
2. Existence is a perfection.
3. Therefore, God must necessarily exist.

This particular version of Descartes' argument bears great resemblance to Anselm's *Proslogion* 2 argument, and it is the one that most of Descartes' objectors and proponents addressed.[54] Most of the philosophers after Descartes largely ignored the necessary existence aspect of the argument and treated it like the *Proslogion* 2 argument.

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Descartes, Rene. "Descartes' Reply to Gassendi," in *The Ontological Argument: From St. Anselm To Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 48-49.

[54] In spite of this close resemblance, it is generally agreed that Descartes never read Anselm. However, he was very familiar with Aquinas and perhaps was exposed to the argument presented there.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716 C.E.)

One of the preeminent intellectual figures of the late seventeenth century, Leibniz made significant contributions to many fields, developing calculus in addition to his philosophical work. His metaphysical system influenced an entire generation of German philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, whose early works reflected an acceptance of Leibniz's ideas.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Leibniz was a proponent of the Cartesian ontological argument. As stated in his writings, he believed that Aquinas and his Scholastic followers had largely misunderstood the argument and that it is a valid demonstration of God's existence. However, Leibniz also believed he had found one potentially fatal flaw to Descartes' proof: the concept of God itself. Even though he considered the argument logically valid if Descartes' concept of God is coherent, Leibniz supposed that:

> "…[the Cartesian argument] is an imperfect demonstration, which assumes something that must still be proved in order to render it mathematically evident; that is, it is tacitly assumed that the idea of an all-great or all-perfect being is possible, and implies no contradiction."[55]

Leibniz thus believed that the Cartesian argument must be supplemented in order to be completely sound.

To provide this philosophical buttress, Leibniz argues that not only are any two perfections compatible with one another, but one cannot know that they are not incompatible in and of themselves.[56] Thus, Leibniz sought to demonstrate that the concept of a perfect being is

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[55] Leibniz, Gottfried W. "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz." in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, Alvin Plantinga, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 55.

[56] The complete argument, which is not necessary to this discussion, is presented in: Leibniz, Gottfried W. "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz." in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, Alvin Plantinga, ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 56.

coherent and that his auxiliary argument is necessary to a sound ontological argument. For the next century, most German rationalists followed Leibniz in this two-argument form. One of the major concessions that this argument offers to the nontheist is its implication that the notion of existence can be abstracted from our concept of God, contrary to the ontological argument it is supposed to supplement.[57] This provides an out for those who would reject the argument and also engendered some skepticism about Leibniz's argument.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804 C.E.)

This skepticism came to fruition in the writings of Immanuel Kant, who is popularly credited with refuting the ontological argument. Although he started his philosophical career as a Leibnizian rationalist, Kant eventually rejected the system of Leibnizian metaphysics in response to the writings of David Hume. As a result of this conversion to a more skeptical position, Kant attempted to develop a philosophical system that is a hybrid between pure rationalism and unmitigated skepticism, and since rationalists have historically been the principal advocates of ontological arguments, it is natural that his critique should include the ontological argument.

The main crux of Kant's position on the argument in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is based the logic of predicates. In philosophy, a predicate is the part of a statement which is asserted about that statement's subject. For example, in the statement, "A cat is an animal," the subject is "cat," the predicate is "animal," and "is" is the operator positing the relationship between the subject and the predicate. Essentially, this statement attributes the property of being an animal to a cat, which is obviously true.

[57] Harrleson, Kevin J. *The Ontological Argument from Descartes to Hegel*. (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2009), loc 200.

In his writing, Kant distinguishes between a logical predicate and a real predicate, or a determination. A logical predicate can be absolutely anything asserted of the subject, even the subject itself. When only considering logical predicates, the resulting statement need not add to one's knowledge of its subject, for, "…logic abstracts from every content."[58] The only condition necessary for a predicate to be logical is its conformity to the original form of the statement.[59] Based on this definition, essentially anything can be a logical predicate. Real predicates, however, are governed by stricter criteria. Based on Kant's terminology, "…the determination is a predicate which goes beyond the concept of the subject and enlarges it. Thus it must not be included in it already."[60] In order for a logical predicate to also be a real predicate, it must add something to one's understanding of the subject, and thus cannot be a restatement of the subject. In the sample statement about cats, the predicate "animal" would be a real predicate because it adds to one's knowledge of a cat, while "feline" would merely be a logical predicate since by definition a feline is a cat.

Kant's objection to the ontological argument is based on what he sees as a conflation of these two types of predicates. His position is most commonly expressed as, "Existence is not a predicate," but it would probably be better explained in his terminology as, "Existence is not a *real* predicate." Obviously, Kant would consider existence a logical predicate. Other posited attributes of God, such as omnipotence, would be real predicates since they add to one's understanding of God. However, Kant claims that existence cannot be a real predicate, since the statement, "God is existent," can be reduced to, "God is." This latter statement obviously has no

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[58] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, eds. and trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 567.

[59] For example, in my statement involving cats, the form would be "s is p." Statements may certainly take other forms, but this particular form is most relevant to the ontological argument.

[60] Ibid., 567.

predicate and thus adds nothing to the concept of God. In fact, Kant goes so far as to assert that existence cannot be part of a concept: "Thus whatever and however much our concept of an object may contain, we have to go out beyond it in order to provide it with existence."[61] Existence is merely the transition from concept to reality, and such a transition cannot be contained within a concept. It is thus natural for Kant to consider the ontological argument as useless as the actions of a merchant who, "…wanted to improve his financial state by adding a few zeroes to his cash balance."[62]

In addition to this famous objection, Kant also posed a challenge to proving the existence of a necessary being. To frame this objection, Kant considers the cancellation of predicates. By cancellation, Kant is referring to removing that predicate from the concept of something. For example, if the predicate animal were canceled in the statement about cats, then the descriptor of animal would no longer be part of one's conception of a cat. However, this is obviously a contradiction. Kant's solution to this is to cancel the subject along with the predicate, meaning to remove it from the statement: "But if I cancel the subject together with the predicate, then no contradiction arises; for there is no longer anything that could be contradicted."[63] If there is no cat, then there is no contradiction in saying that a cat is not an animal.

To Kant, these same considerations must apply to God. If one were to cancel one of the properties of the theistic God, such as omnipotence, this would result in a contradiction, because such properties must necessarily be a part of the conception of God. However, Kant claims that if one were to cancel the subject, namely God, then the contradiction would be resolved: "But if

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[61] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, eds. and trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 568.

[62] Ibid., 569.

[63] Ibid., 565

you say, God is not, then neither omnipotence nor any other of his predicates is given' for they are all cancelled together with the subject, and in this though not the least contradiction shows itself."[64] If this is the case, then God cannot be necessarily existent because it would certainly be possible for Him to not exist.

Kant's main goal was to refute the Cartesian ontological argument that had become so prominent in Germany due to Leibniz.[65] His conclusion that existence is not a real predicate would negate the second premise of the *Meditation* 5 argument, which states that existence is a perfection. If existence cannot be a predicate, then it certainly cannot be a perfection, which would completely defeat Descartes' point. In this aim, he was greatly successful, and his objection was so widely accepted by the academic community that there would be very few proponents of the argument for the next century and a half.

The Contemporary Era

By the early twentieth century, positive development on the ontological argument had stagnated. However, in the years after World War II, an incredible volume of work was written on the ontological argument. This contemporary revival of the argument centered around a recent turn in scholarship, precipitated by Charles Hartshorne and closely followed by Norman Malcolm, which supposed that the ontological argument had historically been understood only in terms of Anselm's *Proslogion* 2 argument even though his real point or his better point was the necessary existence argument of *Proslogion* 3.[66]

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[64] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason: The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, eds. and trans. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 565.

[65] What relevance Kant's objection has to Malcolm's argument will be discussed in the thesis proof.

[66] Hartshorne's position will not be discussed in this text because I have restricted myself to only ontological arguments which would apply to classical theism or deism, not the panenthesim advocated by Hartshorne. This theological paradigm is the only significant difference between Hartshorne's perspective and Malcolm's, so including both would also be redundant.

This change in perspective among the argument's proponents created a firestorm of controversy in the philosophical community, prompting original formulations of the argument as well as original criticisms. One of the most original critics from this era was Alvin Plantinga, who sharply criticized the auxiliary argument that Malcolm uses to demonstrate his first premises. More recently, agnostic philosopher Graham Oppy launched a scathing and remarkably thorough critique of the argument, going so far as to assert that it is dialectically useless.

Norman Malcolm (1911-1990 C.E.)

The professor of philosophy at Cornell University, Malcolm was the principle philosopher who revived interest in the ontological argument. This role is ironic, since natural theology is inconsistent with his general philosophy of religion, which advocates a form of fideism based on the epistemology of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In Malcolm's view, an atheist could affirm that the ontological argument is valid and still remain an atheist.[67] For Malcolm, one's response to any proof for or against God's existence is based on whether or not that person approaches the world with an inclination or disinclination for belief in God. Whether or not this is the best approach to dialogue between a nontheist and a theist, Malcolm's proof still constitutes the best and most persuasive statement of the ontological argument. [68]

Malcolm begins his work by considering the *Proslogion* 2 argument that has been so frequently associated with Anselm. In response to this argument, Malcolm agrees with Kant that it is invalid because existence is not a predicate:

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[67] Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 159.

[68] A more thorough explanation of Malcolm's fideism can be found in: Malcolm, Norman. "The Groundlessness of Belief," in *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, eds. R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 92-103.

> "The doctrine that existence is a perfection is remarkably queer. It makes sense and is true to say that my future house will be a better one if it is insulated than if it is not insulated; but what could it mean to say it is a better house if it exists than if it does not?"[69]

For Malcolm, as for Kant, to say that a concept is improved by adding existence to it is a ludicrous statement. Any form of the ontological argument that relies on existence in general cannot successfully prove that God exists.

Malcolm then considers the second, previously unconsidered argument that Anselm presents in *Proslogion* 3. In addition to Anselm's original proof, Malcolm offers some commentary in support. Following Descartes, Malcolm claims that the attributes that one would ascribe to the theistic God, such as omniscience and omnipotence, are necessary to one's concept of God in the same way that having four sides is logically necessary to one's concept of a square and not merely a true statement.[70] For example, he asserts that, "It may be helpful to express ourselves in the following way: to say not that *omnipotence* is a property of God, but rather that *necessary omnipotence* is…."[71] Malcolm argues that, based on Anselm's argument, God must exist because His existence is logically necessary.

To defend his point, Malcolm also seeks to demonstrate that God cannot happen to not exist, or in other words, that God cannot exist contingently. According to Malcolm, if God's

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[69] Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 139.

[70] For a property to be logically necessary, its negation must imply some sort of contradiction. For example, a square cannot have more than or less than four sides because by definition it must have four. It is important to note that not all true statements are logically necessary.

[71] Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 146.

existence were contingent, then God would have duration rather than eternity. If this is the case, then questions of temporality could, in fact apply to God: "It would make sense to ask, 'How long has He existed?,' 'Will he still exist next week?'… and so on."[72] Based on one's conception of God as an unlimited being, however, such questions are absurd. Therefore, the notion of contingent existence cannot apply to God.

With these considerations, Malcolm offers a summary of his proof based on the *Proslogion* 3 argument of Anselm:

> "If God, a being a 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 His 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 it is not the case, it follows that He necessarily exists."[73]

This proof can be expressed in a syllogism as follows:

1. If God exists, His existence is logically necessary.
2. If God does not exist, His existence is logically impossible.

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[72] Ibid., 144

[73] Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 146.

3. Therefore, God's existence is impossible or necessary.

4. God's existence is impossible only if the concept of God is contradictory.

5. The concept of God is not contradictory.

6. Therefore, God has logically necessary existence.

This new proof is notable in several ways. First, it would circumvent the Kantian objection since the new argument no longer maintains that existence is a predicate, but that necessary existence is a predicate. For Malcolm, the error with the *Proslogion* 2 argument is its cavalier use of existence. In his view, because this argument does not distinguish the necessary existence of God from the contingent existence of everything else, it cannot withstand Kant's critique. Necessary existence, however, does add to one's understanding of the concept of God, and it must therefore be an actual predicate.[74]

In addition, Malcolm assumes the logical consistency of the theistic God. In response to the possible objection that the concept of God is inconsistent, Malcolm argues that it is not reasonable to demand a demonstration that it is consistent. As an example, Malcolm offers that it has been disputed that a seeing material thing is inconsistent. He asserts that, in response to a particular purported inconsistency, "…one may try to show the invalidity of the reasoning and thus free the concept from the charge of being self-contradictory *on that ground*. But I do not understand what it would mean to demonstrate *in general*, and not in respect to any particular reasoning, that the concept is not self-contradictory."[75] Malcolm therefore argues that it is only

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[74] Whether or not Kant's objection could in fact apply to necessary existence will be discussed in the thesis proof.

[75] Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 157.

possible to demonstrate that a contradiction is invalid if a contradiction is actually presented. Hypothetical contradictions cannot be examined.

Malcolm's ontological argument ultimately provides a reasonable defense for belief in a theistic God based on purely *a priori* argument. Such an argument cannot avoid controversy for long, however, and the argument would gain a new and very prominent critic within a year of its inception.

Alvin Plantinga (1932-)

One of the foremost analytic philosophers of the last half-century, Plantinga has made considerable contributions to philosophy of religion, and particularly theistic apologetics. Among these numerous contributions is an original, "higher-order" ontological argument based on possible worlds.[76] Plantinga also developed the original position that the ontological argument could be used to demonstrate that theism is rational, but not that it must necessarily be true. However, Plantinga also found Malcolm's argument to be invalid, a position that he develops in a paper published not long after Malcolm's argument.

In this paper, Plantinga primarily attacks Malcolm's justification of the first two premises of his argument. In response to Malcolm's assertion that if God does not exist, God's existence is logically impossible, Plantinga argues that Malcolm's first premise does not follow from his auxiliary argument. Based on Malcolm's remarks about the possibility of God coming into existence, Plantinga deduces the logically necessary proposition, "God never has and never will come into existence."[77] When combined with the conditional based on the premise that God does not exist, it should follow that God does not exist. What actually follows, however, is that,

[76] This argument, which is somewhat bizarre even among ontological arguments, is presented in: Plantinga, Alvin. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wrn. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977) 99-112.

[77] Plantinga, Alvin. "A Valid Ontological Argument?," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 163.

"If there is a time at which God does not exist, there is no subsequent time at which He does exist."[78] This proposition obviously cannot serve as a premise equivalent to Malcolm's s in the original argument.

Plantinga then applies this same strategy to Malcolm's first proposition about the necessary existence of God. Based on the same passage from Malcolm, Plantinga also deduces the logically necessary proposition, "God never has and never will cease to exist."[79] By combining this with the previous necessary proposition and the conditional from the premise that God exists, it should follow that God does exist. As before, the argument does not yield the desired conclusion. Instead, it yields the conclusion that, "God has always existed and always will exist," which, when combined with the first conclusion, yields the necessary proposition that, "If at *any* time God exists, then at *every* time God exists."[80] Obviously, this does not get one any closer to proving that God exists since it does not demonstrate that there actually is a time when God exists.

Along with these points, Plantinga also argues that Malcolm has a misunderstanding of contingent and necessary existence. According to Plantinga, Malcolm's argument is such that any statement of contingent existence would entail that its object is also dependent on something to sustain existence. Plantinga emphatically asserts that,

> "…this is surely a mistake. For all we know, certain elementary physical particles…may have always existed, in which case they surely don't depend on anything for coming into existence. And for all we know there may be nothing upon which they depend for their

[78] Plantinga, Alvin. "A Valid Ontological Argument?," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 164.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid., 165.

> continued existence. But of course it would not follow from the truth of these suppositions that the statement '[elementary physical particles] don't exist' is self-contradictory…."[81]

Essentially, if Malcolm's reasoning is correct, then all of the matter in an infinitely old universe would be necessarily existent, a proposition that is obviously not true.

This highlights the fundamental misunderstanding that, for Plantinga, lies at the heart of Malcolm's argument. Based on his understanding of contingency and necessity, the assertion that an unlimited being must exist *if it exists at any time* is in fact a logically necessary statement. However, "…the assertion that a being so defined exists…may well be, for all that Malcolm and Anselm have said, a contingent statement."[82] This statement, if true, would defeat the entire purpose of Malcolm's argument, which is to demonstrate that God must necessarily exist in reality.

Graham Oppy (1960-)

One of the most recent developments concerning Malcolm's proof is Graham Oppy's encyclopedic work, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. There is some ambiguity as to Oppy's overall goal in this work. At some points it would appear that he wishes to provide a conclusive refutation of the ontological argument, implying a demonstration that it is logically invalid.[83] At others, it would appear that he has the more modest goal of demonstrating that the ontological argument is dialectically ineffective in a debate between a theist and a nontheist.[84]

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[81] Plantinga, Alvin. "A Valid Ontological Argument?," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 170.

[82] Ibid., 171.

[83] Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xvii.

[84] Ibid., 2.

Since his final conclusion is that ontological arguments are useless, it is best to treat Oppy's work as a demonstration of dialectical inefficacy, not necessarily of logical invalidity.

Central to Oppy's approach to the ontological argument is his definition of what constitutes an ontological argument. According to Oppy, an ontological argument is one that, "…proceed[s] from considerations that are entirely internal to the theistic worldview."[85] This definition is noteworthy because it sets the stage for Oppy's global objection and elucidates his understanding of the way in which ontological arguments are presented.

Key to understanding Oppy's argument is his use of sentential operators. In Oppy's terminology, extensional operators are those that would, in the context of the ontological argument, import some sort of ontological commitment to the terms and qualifiers used in the premises.[86] Examples of such operators would include stating that someone knows something or that something is necessarily true. Intensional operators, on the other hand, are those that would carry no ontological commitment in this context. An example would be that someone believes something (in the noncommittal sense) or that something is true according to a well-known myth or legend.

To begin his objection, Oppy establishes that in the ontological argument, all of the statements about the divine being whose existence is to be proved, "…either occur embedded in the scope of further sentential operators or do not occur thus imbedded."[87] For Oppy, if there are no embedded sentential operators whatsoever, then the argument must beg the question because it would simply assert that God exists because He exists. If there are imbedded operators, the

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[85] Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

[86] Ibid., 115.

[87] Ibid.

question then becomes whether the argument can be both valid and dialectically efficacious. If the argument is cast using extensional operators, then the argument is logically valid. However, in this case Oppy considers it dialectically inefficacious because, "…an opponent of the argument can reasonably insist that the question has been begged."[88] This would obviously render the argument unpersuasive, even though it would be otherwise valid. On the other hand, if the argument is cast using intensional operators, the argument then becomes invalid because it no longer becomes a question about reality.[89] Therefore, according to Oppy, the ontological argument is invalid because, "…an opponent can always either (i) reasonably claim that the question has been begged or else (ii) object that the inference is simply invalid."[90]

In addition, Oppy also seems to believe that there can be valid parodies to ontological arguments. For example, Oppy considers the parody of the necessary being argument with a being that has necessary existence, but is in all other ways unimpressive.[91] Even though this parody and others may not necessarily show that God does not exist, for Oppy the parodies completely hamper the ontological argument's dialectical effectiveness because the atheist or agnostic has no better reason to accept the premises of the original argument than those of the parodies. For this reason, the ontological argument can at best leave a plurality of reasonable responses, which does not accomplish the theist's original intention.

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[88] Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 115.

[89] An example of a premise cast with intensional operators would be, "According to some theists, if God exists then His existence must be logically necessary."

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 170-173. Oppy's parody was originally conceived by Paul Henle, as presented in: Henle, Paul. "The Use of the Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Grand Rapids, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 173-174.

Ultimately, for Oppy, there are two readings of ontological arguments, one which implies an ontological commitment to the existence of God, and another in which the reader is roleplaying as one who does hold such a commitment. The theist would read the argument from the former perspective, and the atheist or agnostic would read the argument from the latter perspective. Oppy holds that both readings are equally valid, and thus that the argument cannot be persuasive. In other words, "Only those who make the relevant presuppositions will suppose that some ontological arguments are sound; but there is nothing in ontological arguments that establishes a case for those presuppositions from the standpoint of those who do not share them."[92] This, in part, leads Oppy to the conclusion that ontological arguments are completely and utterly useless.[93]

[92] Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 198.

[93] I say in part because Oppy also considers other uses of the argument, like Plantinga's, that are beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of this work, this objection, if true, would count as sufficient reason that the argument is useless with no other objections necessary.

Thesis Proof

Opening Considerations

By offering his original formulation of the ontological argument, Norman Malcolm helped to revive the *a priori* proof that many had considered dead and buried. Of all of the ontological arguments that have been considered in this thesis, Malcolm's is the most defensible for a theist because it circumvents many objections commonly raised against such arguments. Proceeding from the viewpoint that the historical and contemporary objections are correct, many theists and nontheists alike have rejected the ontological argument altogether. However, as this thesis proof will show, all of the objections that are commonly cited against Malcolm's argument are irrelevant, invalid, or generally unconvincing to either party in the discussion.

Response to Aquinas' Objection

In spite of his great insight and immense contributions to philosophy and theology, Aquinas' objections to the ontological argument are far from his best work. The fundamental problem with his objection is that it begs the question. Aquinas approaches the whole discussion with the presupposition that God can only be known *a posteriori*; however, he makes no effort whatsoever to justify this assertion. Obviously, a proponent of the ontological argument would emphatically assert that God *can* be known *a priori*, and because Aquinas makes no argument to persuade one otherwise, much of his objection can be rejected. For example, he asserts that the ontological argument is question begging since it cannot be argued *a priori* that God actually exists, for to do so would be to assume that God actually exists. However, this is only the case if God can be known from experience alone and there are no true *a priori* existence claims. These conditions obviously beg the question and render his objection unworthy of consideration.

In addition, Aquinas' secondary objections are either trivial or irrelevant. For example, Aquinas asserts that the argument is invalid because not everyone conceives of God in the same way. If the argument is simply used to show that God's existence must be self-evident, then this is a valid objection. However, this is not the way in which the argument is commonly used, and in most circumstances it is necessary to establish exactly which conception of God is under discussion. Thus, it is unnecessary for both parties to enter the discussion with the same conception of God because this is established at the outset.

Aquinas also claims that the *Proslogion* 3 argument is invalid because that one can conceive of God as nonexistent would result from a weakness on our part, not from some imperfection in God's being. In addition to the fact that this objection also begs the question[94], it is difficult to see the relevance of this objection to Anselm's argument. Even if the possibility of God's contingent existence were a result of human intellectual frailty, this does not negate the fact that necessary existence is greater than contingent existence, and that a being greater than which nothing can be conceived must therefore be necessarily existent to avoid contradiction. Aquinas' objections fall far short of their goal of conclusively refuting the ontological argument.

Response to Kant's Objection

Of all of the objections to the ontological argument, Kant's is certainly the most frequently cited as a global and conclusive refutation. However, it is necessary to consider the scope of Kant's objection. Kant's aim was to refute the Cartesian ontological argument; it is highly doubtful that he ever read Anselm.[95] It is indisputable that Kant accomplishes his goal

[94] Aquinas justifies his assertion with the belief that God can only be known *a posteriori*.

[95] Hartshorne, Charles. *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence.* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965), 208.

with respect to Descartes' argument; however, it is dubious what bearing this assertion has on the arguments in either *Proslogion* 2 or *Proslogion* 3.

Many philosophers, including Malcolm, have believed that the *Proslogion* 2 argument is invalid because of Kant's objection. This is due to a failure to note the difference between the two senses of greater that Anselm uses in *Proslogion* 2. For Anselm, existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone in the sense that something that exists in reality has superior impact upon reality or greater intrinsic value than a mere concept. However, Anselm's argument does not assert that existence in reality would somehow give a concept a greater form or substance than if it merely existed in the mind. If this were the case, then Anselm's painting analogy would be absurd, because Anselm would be claiming that the painting in reality would somehow be a *higher quality* painting than the one in the painter's mind. Nevertheless, Descartes seems to adopt this later sense of greater in his argument, which Kant rightly recognizes as absolutely ludicrous. However, the former sense of greater offers a coherent argument that makes sense of Anselm's painting analogy and does not hold that existence is a predicate: God, as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, must have the greatest possible intrinsic value and impact upon reality. It is thus evident that existence is not a predicate only when it is misapplied.

With this in mind, the question now becomes whether or not Malcolm misuses existence in this way. Based on his remarks, it is apparent that he does not. Malcolm arrives at his argument as an expansion of the line of reasoning which Anselm uses in *Proslogion* 3. Here, it is evident that Anselm does use greater in the sense of superior in impact upon reality, for if God is necessarily existent, all other beings are contingent upon Him. Even though Anselm does not explicitly state this truth, it is evident that if there is something that contingently exists, there

must be something that necessarily exists to ground its existence. Kant never addresses the notion of necessary existence in his more famous critique of the ontological argument, but it is certainly true that necessary existence must be a predicate. Thus, Malcolm's argument is able to easily withstand Kant's more famous objection because it does not apply to his argument.

This conclusion also highlights a possible response to Kant's objection to a necessarily existent being. If necessary existence is in fact a predicate, then it must have the same status as other predicates used of God, such as omnipotence; as Malcolm himself states, "Anselm's proposition 'God exists' has the same *a priori* footing as the proposition 'God is omnipotent.'"[96] In this case, one can use the context in which Kant's objection is framed to demonstrate that God necessarily exists. Because necessary existence is a predicate of God, it cannot be cancelled without creating a contradiction. However, contrary to what Kant states, God cannot also be cancelled, because this would contradict the determination that God is necessarily existent. Thus, there is no circumstance under which God can be cancelled along with any of His predicates. Kant's objection, therefore, falls far short of demonstrating that God cannot necessarily exist.

Response to Plantinga's Objection

In spite of Plantinga's well-deserved reputation as a philosopher, it is bizarre that so many people have accepted his objection as conclusive. The main thrust of Plantinga's objection is founded on a faulty understanding of God's relationship to time. Plantinga is right to assert that the statement, "God never has and never will come into existence," is necessarily true. However, no syllogism is needed to demonstrate the conditional that God does not exist from

[96]Malcolm, Norman. "Malcolm's Statement of Anselm's Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 148.

this proposition. If God cannot come into existence and He is outside of time, then His existence is logically impossible and could not be otherwise.

Nevertheless, Plantinga claims that a syllogism constructed to demonstrate the conditional would prove not that God does not exist, but that, "If there is a time at which God does not exist, there is not subsequent time at which He does exist." However, this is an incorrect application of time to God. By one's conception of God, He is timeless: He is the creator of time and completely independent of it. If God exists, in order to be independent of time He *must* exist in an atemporal eternity in which any statement of time is meaningless. Thus, the statement that Plantinga claims is demonstrated by his syllogism is inapplicable to God, further evidence that the syllogism should never have been made in the first place.

This also highlights another major flaw with Plantinga's argument. Plantinga addresses the first part of Malcolm's point, that God could not have been created, but he does not address the second part, that God cannot exist contingently. Essentially, Plantinga's conclusion amounts to a statement of God's contingent existence. If claims of time are applicable to God, then God is bound by time and, based on Malcolm's argument, is thus dependent, and if God is dependent, He exists contingently. Because Plantinga does not address Malcolm's objection to the contingent existence of God based on His temporal status, Plantinga's argument fails. These same contentions also follow for Plantinga's objection to the necessary existence conditional as well.

In addition to these difficulties, Plantinga's understanding of necessary existence is rather strange. For instance, his assertion that elementary physical particles may have always existed without a cause for their existence contradicts his own worldview. By one's conception of God

He must be the creator of spatiotemporal reality. Essentially, Plantinga is using an infinitely old universe with no God to demonstrate his view.

With this worldview in mind, it is more useful to consider a possible atheist holding Plantinga's views. By adopting Plantinga's position, the atheist has shifted the dispute from *a priori* grounds to *a posteriori*. At this point, the theist can no longer use the ontological argument to demonstrate God's necessary existence. However, because the atheist has adopted the position of an infinitely old universe, the theist now has recourse to Aquinas' Third Way.[97] This argument states that over an infinite amount of time, all possibilities would have been realized. If all things in the universe are contingent, as Plantinga would claim, then it is possible for all of them to cease to exist. However, if at some point in time everything in the universe stopped existing, then nothing would exist today. Since something obviously exists today, there must be some necessary being, which may be called God, to keep the universe in existence. Therefore, whether or not Plantinga's assertion about the existence of fundamental physical particles is true, God must necessarily exist.

As this example demonstrates, it is ultimately Plantinga and not Malcolm who has an improper view of necessary existence. Anything that is contingently existent must be dependent upon something else, and anything that is necessarily existent must be dependent upon nothing else. Any view, like Plantinga's, that asserts otherwise must be inconsistent on some fundamental level.

Response to Oppy's Objection

Oppy's body of work on the ontological argument is so vast that it would take a whole book just to deal with all of his claims that could relate to Malcolm's argument. However, there

[97] Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. Pt. I, Q. 2, Art. 1.

are some approaches and paradigms that Oppy relies on throughout his work that are at the very least questionable and at most detrimental to his entire argument. One of these is his assumption that statements about God cast using extensional operators entail some sort of ontological commitment. This is not the case because any such statements, in the context of the ontological argument, are cast using the implicit operator, "Based on one's conception of God…."

At this point, Oppy would likely respond that this is still an extensional operator and ontological arguments still beg the question. Upon closer examination, this is not the case. In order to engage in a debate about the existence of the theistic God that is in any way meaningful, both the theist and the nontheist must have a conception of the theistic God. The mere conception of the theistic God thus does not carry with it any ontological commitment. One could say that the conception of a theistic God must include omnipotence and not believe that this God exists. As Malcolm rightly points out, such statements are definitional about the conception of a theistic God. These statements thus cannot be cast using intensional operators because as definitional statements they are necessarily true about the conception of a theistic God. It just so happens that these definitional statements also entail the necessary existence of God.

Because this is the case, Oppy's definition of ontological arguments is also inaccurate. The concept of a theistic God cannot be wholly internal to a theistic worldview. If it were, then there could be no definitional, logically necessary, and objective statements made about what this concept does and does not include. As it has been demonstrated, such statements can be made, rendering Oppy's definition wholly inadequate. A better definition, and the one presented in the introduction to this thesis, is this: an ontological argument is an entirely *a priori* proof that

seeks to prove the existence of God based on one's conception of Him. This resolves the inconsistency created by Oppy's definition.

Oppy's definition also highlights the problem with his global objection. From the way he defines the ontological argument, there is no way that the nontheist would accept the premises because they are entirely external to his or her worldview. However, if this is not the case, then there would be very good reason to accept the premises of an ontological argument. Oppy is right to assert that an ontological argument without any sentential operators begs the question and that an argument cast with intensional operators is invalid. He is wrong to assert that ontological arguments can even be cast using intensional operators or that arguments cast with extensional operators beg the question. Ontological arguments must be cast with extensional operators because their premises are either logically necessary and definitional about the conception of the theistic God or are deduced from such necessary statements. As counterintuitive as it may seem, these statements are objective and are on the neutral ground between theists and nontheists. There is thus no reason that the ontological argument cannot be persuasive to nontheists.

Response to the Maximum of Greatness Objection

It is necessary to this thesis to address a few more objections that have no particularly recognizable historical proponent, but have nevertheless been present throughout much of the argument's history. One such objection is that the concept of a being greater than which nothing can be conceived as interpreted by classical theism is contradictory or incoherent, a position held by Graham Oppy and Charles Hartshorne, among others.[98] Malcolm's assertion that one cannot provide a general demonstration that a concept is coherent and logically consistent is certainly

[98] Oppy, Graham. *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199; Hartshorne, Charles. *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence*. (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965), 301.

true. However, Malcolm was wrong to not address any such objections. The main objection cited against the ontological argument on these grounds is that greatness has no intrinsic maximum. If this is true, then one can always conceive of a greater being, and a being than which nothing can be conceived is impossible.

The mathematical number line provides a helpful demonstration of this position. On a number line, there is no greatest number, since any number, no matter how large, can be added to. Even such an insanely large number as 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 could not be close to the largest number, because a person could simply add one to make it 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,001. This process could be repeated an infinite number of times with no largest number ever reached. The same, the objection holds, is true of greatness. There can be no being greater than which nothing can be conceived because no matter how great this being is, one can conceive of a being that is somehow greater.

Even though a proponent of the ontological argument may contend that greatness must have an intrinsic maximum, it is more philosophically and theologically interesting to consider the alternative that it does not. At this point, it would be helpful to consider Philippe Schlenker's analysis of the *Proslogion* 2 argument. In a recent article, Schlenker suggested that the *Proslogion* 2 argument is an empirical example of Berry's paradox.[99] Berry's paradox states that, assuming that there are a finite number of integers expressible in thirty syllables or less, there must be a *smallest integer that cannot be defined in fewer than thirty syllables*. This statement is paradoxical because the italicized portion defines this integer in fewer than thirty syllables. Using symbolic logic, Schlenker attempts to illustrate that Anselm's *Proslogion* 2 argument is in fact an empirical example of Berry's paradox, which would make the argument

[99]Schlenker, Philippe. "Anselm's Argument and Berry's Paradox." *Nous* 43:2 (2009): 214- 223, accessed October 2, 2013. www.jstor.org/stable/40267338

indeterminate instead of true. He does not, however, show whether the paradox lies with the conception of God or the instantiation of that concept. Thus, he does not effectively demonstrate that the *Proslogion* 2 argument is a semantic paradox.

Even though he does not accomplish his goal, Schlenker's use of Berry's paradox does highlight a potential resolution to the problem of greatness as a maximum. God, as a being greater than which nothing can be conceived, must possess greatness of such extreme magnitude that it cannot be fully defined in finitely many descriptions, for a being whose greatness cannot be defined in finitely many descriptions is greater than one whose greatness can. However, this is an example of Berry's paradox, for this one description just fully defined God's greatness. The concept of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived is thus not incoherent or contradictory, but paradoxical.

One may object to this demonstration that it cannot apply to the ontological argument because Berry's paradox is a linguistic paradox and does not deal strictly with reality. Because the paradox is created by the artificial conventions of language, it may be argued that the paradox does not apply to reality in the way that other paradoxes do.[100] To one who holds this view, the paradox is inapplicable because the ontological argument makes a claim about reality, not about language.

For those to whom this objection is convincing, another argument may be offered to demonstrate that God is paradoxical. Consider a human interacting with a being in a two-dimensional world. Because the being in the two-dimensional world is unable to perceive a third dimension, many aspects of the human would be absurd to this being because it cannot conceive of depth. For example, if the human were to stick the tips of all of his or her fingers on one hand

[100] For example, Zeno's paradox explicitly applies to reality because it deals with points and motion in reality, not arbitrary conventions of language.

into the two-dimensional plane in which the being exists, then it would appear as if the human were in five places at the same time to that being. However, this is a paradox, because it is also true that the human would be in only one place at that exact same moment. This is but one of the paradoxes that would result from the interaction of a three-dimensional being with a being in a two-dimensional world.

The same would be true of God's interaction with the universe. By one's conception of God, God must transcend not only the three spatial dimensions in which humans perceive the universe, but also time itself. It is impossible for one to fully comprehend a being in a fourth spatial dimension, much less a being independent of space or time. Just as in the example, one's understanding of God and His interaction with the universe must necessarily be paradoxical because God is by one's conception of Him beyond the realm of full rational comprehensibility. Thus, aspects of God that would appear contradictory to humans are in fact paradoxes due to the transcendent nature of God.

The astute philosopher of religion will recognize that this is just as it should be, for the theistic God is a God of paradoxes. According to theists, God has eternally been creating a finitely old universe and allows free will yet is completely omniscient. These properties of God are not contradictions but paradoxes that result from one's attempts to comprehend a God who transcends the four space-time dimensions in which one lives. Because of one's limitations, it is only natural that even one's very conception of God must be paradoxical, for a being greater than which nothing can be conceived must be greater than the limits of human understanding. Thus, the objection that greatness has no intrinsic maximum highlights a central, though misunderstood, aspect of theism but by no means refutes the ontological argument.

Response to the Instantiation Objection

Another common objection to ontological arguments deals with the leap from pure concept to reality or, in other words, the claim that God must be instantiated. This is a qualm that a number of people have with the argument because for normal concepts, this is an invalid leap. Just because one can think about something, such as a unicorn, does not necessarily entail that it exists in reality. Characteristic of this position is atheist J.N. Findlay, who asserts that ontological arguments, "are universally regarded as fallacious: it is not thought possible to build bridges between mere abstractions and concrete existence."[101] For him, there is no reason that a concept must exist based on its mere conception.

A major misconception that people have about the ontological argument that leads them to embrace the instantiation objection is an implicit use of the intensional operator "hypothetically" to understand the premises of ontological arguments. An example of a premise cast in this way would be, "Hypothetically, if God exists, He exists necessarily." If this is the way in which the argument is framed, then its conclusion is invalid, for the argument can then only demonstrate that God hypothetically exists necessarily. Obviously, this statement cannot describe existence in reality, which would lead one who implicitly interprets the argument in this way to believe that the jump from concept to reality is invalid.

This reading of ontological arguments, however, is itself invalid. As the response to Oppy's objection demonstrated, using intensional operators in this way with respect to the ontological argument is incorrect because such statements regarding God are definitional about one's conception of God, not hypothetical. It is true that if God hypothetically exists necessarily,

[101] Findlay, J.N. "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?" in *The Ontological Argument: From St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, e.d. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 112.

it is invalid to say that He necessarily exists in reality. However, if God necessarily exists based on one's conception of God, then there is no contradiction in saying that God necessarily exists in reality. In this latter statement, the "leap" made in the former statement is not made. As it has been demonstrated, the statement that God necessarily exists is a definitional statement about God. To affirm that God necessarily exists thus is merely to state that something about one's conception of God entails that He must have an impact upon reality. Although the ontological argument does shift one's conception from God from thought to reality, this leap is thus not the objectionable one that is commonly believed to be made.

Response to the Parody Objection

Ever since Gaunilo, philosophers have continually attempted to prove that the ontological argument is invalid because it can be parodied. However, there is evidence that it may be impossible to construct a valid parody. In a recent article, Yujin Nagasawa presented the hypothesis that all parodies are invalid because they are either not structurally parallel to the ontological argument or are not dialectically parallel to the ontological argument.[102] For a parody to be structurally parallel, its premises must have the same scope of as those of the ontological argument, namely all possible beings. In order to be dialectically parallel, the parody must introduce no assumptions that are not contained in the original argument. If a parody could meet both of these criteria, then it would demonstrate that something, though not necessarily what, is wrong with that particular ontological argument. However, Nagasawa also contends that once one corrects the inevitable problems in these areas, the argument would no longer be a parody, but the ontological argument itself.

[102]Nagasawa, Yujin. "The Ontological Argument and the Devil." *Philosophical Quarterly* 60: 238 (2010): 91, accessed October 2, 2013. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40468278.

Since so many philosophers have accepted the objections made by Plantinga and others, relatively few parodies have been made specifically against Malcolm's argument. The most sophisticated and frequently cited parody of Malcolm's argument is that of Paul Henle. To invalidate Malcolm's argument, Henle supposed that the necessary being that Malcolm's argument proves exists is not God:

> "Let us designate by "*Nec*" a certain being who has necessary existence but is otherwise less than remarkable. He has a certain amount of knowledge, though nothing extraordinary, and certain power, though he is unable to cause motion. As a necessary being, of course, *Nec*'s nonexistence is inconceivable and he does not depend on anything….*Nec* cannot…merely happen to exist, nor can he exist temporally for reasons which Malcolm has explained in a parallel argument….It follows that *Nec* must exist necessarily or he must not exist at all, and assuming what seems plausible, that there is no inherent contradiction in his nature, *Nec* must exist."[103]

From this argument, Henle deduces the existence of a whole gaggle of limited but necessarily existent beings, each of which are superior to *Nec* in varying degrees.

Ultimately, this argument is not dialectically parallel to Malcolm's argument. Henle assumes that a limited being can possess necessary existence. This, however, is not an assumption that Malcolm would share. Henle believes that Malcolm claims that necessary existence entails an atemporal being; however, Malcolm claims that God must necessarily exist based on His relationship to time. Not only does Henle affirm the consequent, he also highlights a major misconception that he has about Malcolm's argument. Malcolm's argument can only prove the existence of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived because his

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[103]Henle, Paul. "Uses of the Ontological Argument," in *The Ontological Argument: From St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 173.

assertions used to deduce the first two premises of his argument could only apply to an unlimited being. God's existence must be a matter of logical necessity or impossibility because of his nature; such ontological categories are inapplicable in this way to any other being.

Additionally, Henle's assertion that a limited being can be completely independent is invalid. If *Nec* has limited knowledge, it would be dependent on its experience of the universe or on some other being to increase its knowledge. If *Nec* wants to cause something to move, it must depend on some other being to do so. There is no circumstance under which *Nec* can be wholly independent of the universe or other beings. This problem is also not alleviated for *Nec*'s greater cousins. The only one of these necessary beings who would not experience this difficulty would be one greater than which nothing can be conceived. This, however, would be God, thus defeating the parody.

As this last situation indicates, Henle's assertion that there can be multiple necessary beings is also suspect. If these beings are arranged in some sort of hierarchy, as Henle suggests, then every being below the greatest possible one must be somehow dependent on the one above it in the hierarchy. Obviously, it cannot be the case that any of these beings actually exists necessarily except for one greater than which nothing can be conceived, which, as stated before, must be God. Therefore, Henle's argument cannot be a successful parody because it is not parallel to Malcolm's argument, and when it is made parallel, it demonstrates God's existence.

These considerations also rule out the possibility of using parody arguments to demonstrate the dialectical inefficacy of the ontological argument, as Oppy attempts to do. Because the premises of the parody argument can be resolved into those of the ontological argument by making them parallel, there is certainly good reason to accept the premises of the

original argument over those of the parody argument. If there can be no true parodies, then there is no good reason to accept the premises of any parody.

Implications for Theistic Apologetics

It has been established in the preceding sections that the ontological argument is logically valid and can be dialectically effective. This conclusion has major implications for theistic apologetics. In recent years, apologetics for theism have largely been dependent upon scientific arguments for the existence of God, primarily the inductive teleological argument and the cosmological argument as it has been buttressed by modern physics. However, this is a dangerous approach because if the scientific theories stop supporting the theist's conclusions, then it would appear that belief in the existence of God is unjustifiable. Philosophical arguments for the existence of God, on the other hand, are not subject to such vicissitudes because they are grounded on *a priori* and *a posteriori* principles, like the laws of logic and the notion of order, that are beyond the realm of scientific claims. Because the ontological argument can be persuasive, this would make it a natural choice when demonstrating that God exists.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding considerations, it can be concluded that Norman Malcolm's ontological argument is, in fact, both logically valid and has the potential to be dialectically effective. By reinterpreting the argument in terms of *Proslogion* 3, Malcolm was able to craft an *a priori* proof that has withstood all of the criticisms brought against it. Based on the conclusions of this thesis, the ontological argument deserves to be taken more seriously by theists and nontheists alike. The theist should be willing to consider the possibility of using the argument for apologetics; the nontheist should be willing to listen without assuming that the question has been begged. In both cases, the argument deserves respect as an original and potent piece of religious philosophy that, though highly counterintuitive, is valid and can be effective.

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