

Philosophy Term Paper

Rajat Tyagi 180020029

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Preface

The topic of this term paper is *Existence of God - The Ontological Argument*. We will talk about the developments and criticisms of the Ontological Argument.

Existence of God in General

Introduction

Existence of God is the oldest Metaphysical question of all time. Everybody in this world, whether a believer of any religion or an atheist, cannot deny the existence of a supernatural power which is responsible for generating this complex world.

Most of the Humans think of God as a being which is *all powerful* (Omnipotent), *All knowing* (Omniscient) and *Morally Perfect*.

In Layman's language we can represent God as;

G	O	D
(Generator)	(Operator)	(Destroyer)

Types Of Arguments

There have been many attempts to prove the existence of God through the years. Some of the most famous arguments which support the existence of God include:

1. ***The Ontological Argument***
2. ***The Cosmological Argument***
3. ***The Teleological Argument***

The Ontological Argument attempts to prove the existence of God by reason alone, whereas the Cosmological and the Teleological arguments rely on empirical evidence.

In this Paper we will mainly talk about The Ontological Argument.

The Ontological Argument

What is The Ontological Argument ?

Ontological Argument is a form of *Deductive argument*, which means that if the premises of the argument are true, then the logical conclusion obtained from the premises has to be true.

Simple example of a Deductive argument is:

P1 : All Labradors are Dogs.

P2 : Brownie is a Labrador.

Conclusion : Brownie is a Dog.

The Ontological Argument can also be categorized as an *A-Priori* argument, which means that its truth can be assessed prior to its experience.

Simple example of an A-Priori argument is:

Argument : “All Bachelors are Unmarried.”

We can assess the truth of the above argument before experience, that is we don't need to find a Bachelor and check if he is married or not, we can directly conclude the above argument from the definition of the term Bachelor.

The Ontological argument proposed to prove the existence of God tells us that if we have an *Idea of what God is*, then we can prove that *God Actually exists*.

Let us take a look at the traditional Ontological Argument proposed By St. Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm's Traditional Ontological Argument

Anselm was a medieval philosopher from Canterbury Italy.

The argument given by Anselm includes three premises:

P1 : God is Something than which nothing greater can be thought of.

P2 : A thing can exist in **Mind only** or in **Mind + Reality**

P3 : It is **Greater** to exist in Mind + Reality than Mind only

The first premise is nothing but the definition of God given by Anselm. Anselm makes an assumption and then uses the method of contradiction to prove that god actually exists.

Assumption : God only exists in our mind.

If we consider this assumption, we can think of a Being (Supergod) who possesses all the qualities of God and also exists in Mind as well as in reality.

In this case according to the premise P3 this Being (Supergod) is greater than God as this being exists in mind and reality.

This creates a contradiction, as the premise P1 tells us God is something than which nothing greater can be thought of, but now we are saying that this Being (Supergod) is greater than god.

This can mean only one thing that the assumption we made is wrong and **God exists in Mind as well as Reality.**

Various forms of The Ontological Argument

There were many supporters of the traditional argument and some of them even proposed their own form of the ontological argument. Some of them include Rene Descartes, Norman Malcolm, Alvin Plantinga, etc.

Alvin Plantinga's Ontological Argument :

Alvin Plantinga uses Modal Logic to conclude the existence of God. He proposed the following premises:

P1 : It is possible that a Maximally great being exists.

P2 : A Maximally great being exists in some possible world

P3 : If a Maximally great being exists in some possible world he has to exist in all possible worlds to truly be Maximally great.

P4 : The Actual World is a Possible world

Hence a **Maximally Great Being (God) exists in Reality.**

Criticisms of the argument

Despite of the convincing nature if this argument, it was opposed by many people.

The traditional form of the argument was mainly criticized on two fronts:

1. Definition of God:

Many philosophers argued that for the conclusion of a deductive argument to be true, all its premises must be *logically coherent* and the definition of God provided by Anselm was logically incoherent, as many qualities such as height, weight etc of a being are non maximal.

2. Reification Fallacy:

Some Philosophers argue that Anselm has committed the *reification fallacy* (*Considering concepts or ideas as objects*), when he assumes “God Exists in Mind”. Mind doesn’t conceive beings, it conceives the concept of beings. Hence this is not the right way to argue.

Conclusion

The Ontological Argument shows that the idea of existence of god is not illogical.

It gives everyone, who has a concept of god in their mind, a reason to believe that god exists.

Because of it's A-Priori nature it also offers an actual proof for God's Existence which can be logically debated rather than relying on changeable evidence.

The Argument as well as it's criticisms are both very convincing. Hence, finally it's up to an individual if they want to support or oppose this argument.

The End