



Introduction to Ontological Argument

An introduction to the ontological argument begins by understanding its basic premise: if it is possible to conceive of a perfect being – that is, a being greater than which nothing else can be conceived – then such a being must exist in reality. In other words, our ability to imagine perfection implies its existence.

This argument moves from an analysis of possible concepts about God's essence towards asserting His actuality in real world. It works fundamentally on logical grounds without referring any empirical or observable evidence; thus standing out among various philosophical approaches employed within theology.

Understanding the concept of God in Ontological Argument

The ontological argument emphasizes that understanding this notion about God does not require empirical evidence or physical proof but purely rational intuition and logical reasoning.

It suggests that if something exists in our understanding (in intellectu) which could also have existed in reality (in re), then it would be greater if it did exist in reality – thus underlining how existence contributes to the greatness of a thing or being.

Henceforth such a greatest conceivable entity cannot solely reside within human cognition but must exist outside it too.

Anselm's classic argument and its philosophical implications

The philosophical implications of Anselm's argument are profound and contentious. It challenges materialist philosophies by asserting God's existence without empirical evidence or observable phenomena.

Rather, it uses pure reason to demonstrate His existence – establishing a precedence for rationalism over empiricism within theology debates. Nonetheless, while its logical consistency has been praised by some philosophers like René Descartes and Gottfried Leibniz; others like Immanuel Kant have critiqued its foundational assumptions about how predicates like 'existence' operate.

Counter-arguments by Gaunilo and Kant

Immanuel Kant further critiqued this premise in his work "Critique of Pure Reason". He asserted that "existence" is not an attribute or property but rather posits something's occurrence within reality.

It doesn't add anything conceptually to our understanding of what that entity is like; therefore, according to Kant, one cannot argue from conceptual analysis alone towards asserting existential claims about God.

Plantinga's Modal Ontological Argument

The significance of this reformulation lies not merely in its logical consistency but also in how it shifts emphasis from understanding 'God' as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' towards conceiving Him as a 'maximally excellent' or perfect entity.

It reinforces the idea that perfection entails necessity - hence underlining why such an entity would inherently have to manifest within reality rather than merely existing as a concept.

The relevance of the Ontological Argument in contemporary philosophy

The modern discussions often revolve around reformulating Anselm's classic argument in various logical frameworks or critically examining its underlying assumptions about God and existence.

Notably, Alvin Plantinga's modal version of the ontological argument has been influential in bringing this medieval idea into late 20th century analytical philosophy debates.

Irrespective of whether one accepts or rejects its conclusions, there is little doubt that studying this profound philosophical idea can enrich our understanding about reality and our conceptual capacities.