

### Ontological Argument

Major Premise: Whatever is coherently conceivable is either actual or unactualized [but real, more than merely "logical"] potency.

Minor Premise: God, or Perfect Being, is coherently conceivable.

Conclusion: God is either actual or an unactualized potency.

Third Premise: God is not an unactualized potency ["potency of perfection" being meaningless or self-contradictory].

Conclusion: God is actual.

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As regards the major premise, the argument is that "meanings are logically possible only because referents are ontologically possible or actual." An idea cannot be the idea merely of its own possibility or actuality; rather, it stands in relation to the actuality or the possibility of that which it means, its object. Thus "subjective or logical or epistemological possibility is sufficient evidence for the disjunction: real existence or real potency of existence."

The evidence for the (first) minor premise is as follows: (1) perfection can be meaningfully defined in terms that do not seem to yield any incompatible consequences--namely, "neo-classically." (2) more decisively, "logic and ethics inevitably make at least implicit use of the idea of perfection. Reasoning is sound so far as it is capable of reducing the discrepancy between our knowledge and the ideal of perfect knowledge or omniscience and conduct is right so far as, within our capacity, our motivation accords with the ideal of wholly enlightened or perfect goodwill, that is, with the holiness or all-righteousness of God." If, then, the idea of perfection is incoherent, nonsensical, it follows that the ideal to which all our striving necessarily refers is nonsense. But "the ideal

necessarily involved in all our striving cannot be given up." (3) the cosmological argument supports the ontological argument at just this point. For if (as the cosmological argument shows) we must admit a necessary being and if we have no conception of a character other than perfection which could render a being non-contingent, then the assumption of coherence for the concept of perfection is the only way to meet the demand whose validity the cosmological argument establishes.

The argument for the third (or second minor) premise takes the form of establishing that a perfect being must in some sense be unsurpassable--whether by others only (in which case, the unsurpassability would be R = relative unsurpassability) or by self as well as others (in which case, A = absolute unsurpassability). In either case, unsurpassability undoubtedly entails eternity--being without beginning or end--since any non-eternal being can be conceived as surpassed by an eternal one; and this excludes that perfection can be a mere unactualized potency. Potency means that a transition from potential to actual existence is conceivable. But it is meaningless to speak of an eternal transition or a transition to eternity, to the status of never having come to be. Thus the third minor premise can be shown to follow as a conclusion from two additional premises, such as: unactualized potency involves a conceivable transition to existence, but such transition could not terminate in being unsurpassable in every, if any, respect; or, again, nothing unactual is objectively possible unless an adequate cause of its actuality is actual, but (a) an adequate cause of an unsurpassable being must itself be an unsurpassable being; and (b) a caused being could not be unsurpassable.

Addendum on Ontological Argument--in Relation to Hume's Fork

The validity of the ontological argument turns on the validity or invalidity of a law, admitting of no exceptions, that the relation between essence and existence is always contingent. This can be derived, if at all, only from an understanding of the meanings of "essence" and "existence" as such. Thus if we do not know the validity or invalidity of the law we do not know altogether what we mean by these fundamental conceptions. On the other hand, the ontological argument derives God's exceptional relation to existence from an analysis of his essence, i.e., perfection. If the meanings of the concepts that define perfection ("greater" [= better than], "none," "possible") imply existence, then the above law is shown not to be universally valid. Since necessity of existence is essential to God or any serious religious conception of his nature, one or the other of two things must be true: the conception of God (universal as it is) is sheer nonsense, contradicting the general law connecting properties and individuals--essence and existence--; or this law is not without an exception because of the metaphysical uniqueness of the supreme being.