

Key concepts:

- **Descartes** understood all knowledge as grounded in what he called '**clear and distinct perception**'. Mathematical concepts were clear and distinct perception; however, some philosophical ideas fall into this category as well.
- Descartes takes Anselm's idea of God as something which 'nothing-greater-can-be-thought' and transforms this into the idea of '**a supremely perfect being**'. For Descartes this notion was a clear and distinct perception.
- He argued that this perception necessitates the notion of '**existence**' since supreme perfection would not be supreme perfection without it.
- Therefore, just as the notion of a triangle necessitates 3 angles, or, the notion of mountains necessitates that there must also be valleys, so the notion of God as a supremely perfect being necessitates the attribute of existence.
- Therefore, it is logically necessary that God must exist. It would be illogical to separate the notion of God (as supremely perfect being) from the attribute of existence.
- For Descartes, God was the only supremely perfect being since a supremely perfect being by definition is unique.

- **Norman Malcolm** wrote in the 20th century and so post-dated the criticisms that had been made to both Anselm and Descartes.
- With this hindsight Malcolm could not accept the first argument of Anselm in Proslogion 2, nor the notion of existence as an attribute of a supremely perfect being as proposed by Descartes.
- Malcolm was more interested in the validity of Anselm's second form of the ontological argument found in Proslogion 3.
- Like Anselm in Proslogion 3, Malcolm agreed that to accept the notion of a being which is 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', and then also accept that being to be **subject to the limits** of the possibility of non-existence, was a **logical absurdity**.

- TTWNGCBT must have necessary existence since a being that did not have necessary existence would be inferior to a being that necessarily existed.
- This necessary existence must be **unlimited**, that is, not limited by the possibility of non-existence.
- In other words, a being that was TTWNGCBT that had the possibility – and limitation – of not-existing was not as great as a being TTWNGCBT that necessarily, and always, existed.
- Only an unlimited being could be TTWNGCBT and thereby be worthy of worship.
- Therefore, a being which is TTWNGCBT must exist necessarily and beyond all limitations.

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some see Malcolm's version of the ontological argument as stronger than the one presented by Anselm in Proslogion 2.

Others see it as still retaining a 'hypothetical' nature - John Hick says that Malcolm's 'logical necessity' and 'logical impossibility' are hypothetical and dependent upon the premise 'if'; however, this does not mean that God exists.

Some would argue that just as we cannot prove mathematical concepts 'exist', the strength of the ontological argument is not the proof of God's existence but the establishment of the notion of God as a logical proposition.

Key questions

Do Descartes and Malcolm overcome the issues associated with Anselm's first argument and Descartes' proposals?

Do Descartes and Malcolm ensure it has appeal beyond religious faith?

Key quotes:

"... The second main period in the history of the ontological argument begins with Rene Descartes..." (John Hick)

"...the idea of God ... is one which I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number." (Rene Descartes)

"I cannot think of God except as existing, just as I cannot think of a mountain without a valley." (Rene Descartes)

"Malcolm is thinking of something which does not depend for its existence on anything apart from itself." (Brian Davies)

Key words:

Descartes	clear	distinct	perception
supremely	perfect	triangle	angles
mountains	valleys	existence	necessary
attribute	Malcolm	limits	non-existence
logical absurdity	inferior	unlimited	worthy