

Gasking's Ontological Argument against God

Anselm wrote that he did not seek to understand so that he might believe but believes in order to understand. He then came up with a statement that as God's non-existence is unimaginable for God is so great and cannot be imagined God exists. This is perhaps best seen as saying not that you can define God into existence but that once you see the beauty of the God concept in faith you will accept it and him. It is often interpreted as a statement of faith rather than an argument for God though many think it is an ontological argument. What Anselm said about not looking for arguments to prove God but to find how faith helps the understanding supports the notion that he is expressing faith and that is all he is doing.

Kant thought that believers were turning existence into part of what is meant by God - so God becomes defined as existence - then that is just circular reasoning. God means existence so God must exist. This would be an ontological argument and for all we know it could be at the back of all believers minds even if they say the argument is illogical.

Douglas Gasking who died in 1994 came up with a proof from pure logic that there could be no God.

Here it is:

- 1 The creation of the world is the most marvelous achievement imaginable.
- 2 The merit of an achievement is the product of (a) its intrinsic quality, and (b) the ability of its creator.
- 3 The greater the disability (or handicap) of the creator, the more impressive the achievement.
- 4 The most formidable handicap for a creator would be non-existence.
- 5 Therefore if we suppose that the universe is the product of an existent creator we can conceive a greater being — namely, one who created everything while not existing.
- 6 Therefore God does not exist.

A problem appears in Premise 1. There the argument assumes the world, in effect Gasking means the whole universe, is really the achievement so great that a better cannot be imagined. But the argument does not need to be right. We just want to see if the conclusion follows from the premises.

Is the idea of a creator out of nothing as important as the idea of a maker? A maker can work on something that was already there. Its not the same idea as a creator. In fact the maker is the most important idea. Who cares if the universe was created or not as long as it was made? If the maker is part of the universe then nothing can be any better than the universe. It does not matter about theory or anything else. It is about what is. Believers in God typically deny he is part of the universe. They say he is outside it and its source. So if you assume God is in the universe and part of it then Premise 1 is correct.

Gasking would respond that even if there is a maker it does not entitle us to call it God. True. It would really be a superhuman creature.

Premise 1 then is correct and does not give us a God.

Premise 3 suggests that the world is made better by being made by a creator that is not really up to the job but who manages it. This is true. Experts such as Graham Oppy sees no problem with it.

The argument is valid but only as far as here. It implies there could be a maker but denies it is worthy of worship. It is a form of atheism.

Premise 4 is a startling problem for it treats non-existence as a property or perfection. This is a real problem. Things can be understood as perfect in their own way. An apple that does not exist cannot be as perfect as one that does. Why? Simply because it does not exist. An apple that does not exist is not an apple at all. Anselm was accused of making existence a perfection which is why he said that God is too perfect to not exist but here we seem to have Gasking saying non-existence is a perfection. Non-existence is just non-existence and perfect or imperfect has nothing to do with it.

Some however wonder if non-existence is perfect in the sense that there is no possibility of suffering. That means there is no chance of it becoming something that can suffer. It cannot intrinsically become something. It cannot intrinsically become something say if God works on it to make it cease to be nothing. There is nothing intrinsic about it. It is nothing. An abstract perfection is only an idea and is not a thing or in any way a power or real.

The most formidable handicap for a creator or maker is non-existence but also the non-existence of its intelligence or the

non-existence of its power. 4 then picks one out and that is wrong.

Premise 5 is just bizarre until you realise that it is saying there is a contradiction with God.

Premise 6 is saying there is no God for it is an incoherent idea.

We conclude that the argument supports atheism but not in the way Gasking thought.