

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005  
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## I. Anselm's ontological argument

There are various consistent characterizations of 'God'.  
Whatever necessarily exists, p 67.  
All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence, p 40.  
Creator and preserver, p 49.

Anselm (1033-1109) uses a different characterization: "that than which no greater can be conceived."  
These are definitions of a term, or a word, but not an object.  
Note the use of '' to indicate when I refer to the term, and not the object to which the term refers.  
That is, there is no presupposition in this characterization that such a thing exists.  
Or, so it seems.

The ontological argument for God's existence (see handout)

- 1) I can think of 'God'
  - 2) If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).
  - 3) But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived
  - 4) So 'God' can not be just an idea
- So, God exists.

Anselm further argues that one can not even conceive of God not to exist.  
This argument is not present in the *Meditations*, and does not concern us.

## II. Descartes' ontological argument, pp 65-66

Descartes' version is simpler.  
It doesn't depend on our conception, our ability to conceive.  
He merely notes that existence is part of the essence of 'God'.  
This is similar to the way that having angles which sum to 180 degrees is part of the essence of a 'triangle'.

The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.  
They are the necessary and sufficient conditions for being that object, or one of that type.  
Something that has all these properties is one.  
Something that lacks any of these properties is not one.  
A chair's essence (approximately): furniture for sitting, has a back, furniture, durable material.  
Bachelor: unmarried man.  
A human person: body and mind.  
God: three omni's, and existence.

### III. From where does the idea of God come?

Descartes urges that the idea of God is imprinted on him, as a mark of the artist on his work, p 51.

Remember that there are three types of ideas, according to Descartes:

1. Innate
2. Acquired
3. Produced by me

We have freedom to create ideas of the third type any way we wish, so the idea of God can not be produced by me.

And the idea of God can not be acquired, since we have no sensory experience of God.

So, the idea of God must be innate.

### IV. Objections to Descartes' ontological argument

From Caterus, a Dutch philosopher, in Objections 1:

The concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence, but it entails no actual lions.

That is, we must distinguish more carefully between concepts and objects.

Even if the concept contains existence, it's still just a concept.

Similarly, from Gaunilo, in response to Anselm:

My idea of the most perfect island does not entail that it exists.

In fact, it may entail that it does not exist, since a non-existing island would be free of imperfections.

Still, the airfare would be pretty steep.