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The Ontological Argument: Can God be Found Through Pure Reason?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the ontological argument for the existence of God. This argument has been around for almost a thousand years, if not longer. In its initial form it was devised to prove the existence of the Christian God. The ontological argument is one of the most recognised philosophical arguments for the existence of God. Other examples are the cosmological argument and the fine-tuning argument. The ontological argument is unique among the other arguments because it is based on reason rather than observation, so it is a deductive argument whereas the other arguments are inductive.

The search for meaning has been integral to humanity and how civilisations have developed. Societies and countries have taken different paths in their developments because of beliefs in different Gods, or ideologies like communism or capitalism. The idea of God was first thought of long before the prevailing political ideologies started emerging from the 18th century. The circumstances, rules, norms, opportunities and threats that affect 'normal' people will largely be based on the prevalent ideology of where they live: it will have a strong influence on their lives.

It is not too much of an exaggeration to state that everyone who survives until adulthood will have thought about the idea of God, if not questioned it out loud. People want to make sense of their environment, and the universal questions are ones like 'where did I come from', 'what is the meaning of life', 'what happens after death' and 'how will I find happiness and love'. A belief in a God can answer most of these big questions.

This thesis mainly concentrated on the Abrahamic Gods, notably the Christian one. This is because Christianity was the foundation of the ontological argument and many proponents and commentators on the subject were either Christian or were referring to the Christian God. This has meant that other ideas of a monotheistic God have largely not been covered. The attributes and definition of God have been adjusted to consider other concepts of God, mostly non-theistic versions based on contrary philosophical and scientific ideas. These ideas of a God have then been subjected to a recognisable version of an ontological argument to determine whether it could prove or strongly indicate the existence of such a God.

There are an abundance of articles, publications, lectures and discussions about the ontological argument and there could be gaps in the thesis where some important ideas and updated theories were completely missed.

Although the ontological argument for the existence of God is popular among theologians and philosophers, it is very much a niche subject for a layman. There were no interviews carried out for this thesis. As the ontological argument requires careful thinking to determine its strengths and weaknesses it seemed a significant task to ask people what they thought of it and why, having first to probably state a form of the argument without prejudicing a response and to get a true and well thought through response. Of 20 people asked locally, who were employed and had families, 16 said they had not heard of the ontological argument for the existence of God and the other 4 said they had heard of it, but did not know what it was. This small section of people was chosen because they were relatively 'successful' and educated, and they were all at least in their 40s so had time to come across it. The collection of 'personal views' for the thesis was therefore taken by articles and videos from interested content creators. These were generally philosophers or theologians. A significant proportion of videos featured more than one person, often with conflicting views.

This thesis tried to explore different versions of the ontological argument using a balanced approach to try and encompass the prominent versions of the argument as well as their strengths and weaknesses. It also attempted to question all the aspects from a philosophical, scientific and theological perspective.

The main objective of the thesis was to examine whether a version of the ontological argument could be used to prove that a recognisable God existed, whether one from an organised religion or a different form of an intelligent creator of the universe.

Secondary objectives were firstly to look at and critique the structure of the variants of the arguments and to determine if they are philosophically sound and consist of logical steps. Secondly, consider how developments in general knowledge and specific advances in areas that affect the arguments impact on earlier versions of the arguments, if at all. The final

objective is to consider if these arguments are truly deductive, from pure reason, or inductive from experience.

The research was started at the library with relevant reference books as well as ordering some more accessible books that covered the ontological argument. Presentations and discussions were watched and online articles on the university's website as well as other websites were sought and read to gain more knowledge of the various versions of the argument. Ideas about further research were generated based on examining comments about the arguments from previous research and from considering the detailed structure of the arguments. This led to research into wider topics around the argument and this process was repeated whenever a new opportunity was noticed.

There are two aspects of the ontological argument that make it a particularly fascinating topic. These are that it attempts to answer possibly the most important question for humanity and that it tries to do so with just clear thinking and without specialist knowledge. This makes it reasonably accessible and understandable to those who come across it and think about it. It seems to have engaged the interest of philosophers and others for centuries. The argument is strong enough that it seems to easily confirm biases, but there is perhaps too much faith required to move from the logical reasoning given to believe in an actual existent being that could be recognised as God.

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INTRODUCTION AND AIM OF STUDY

1.1 Background of the Study

For many years I have been interested in philosophy, but academically I went down the science route, notably mathematics. I am a layman in philosophy, but admire the breadth of study and differing views, which I find hard to disagree with, even when contradicting each other. I think this is partly due to the power of language to persuade when used by the cleverest people, but also that in philosophy there is often not a right answer, which is very different to science. I find this scary and exciting, as I find myself agreeing with opposite views and struggle to understand why quite often a simple argument can encompass so much within it and produce so much conflict that seems both right and wrong at the same time.

I have been deeply interested in theology for about 6 years, particularly in its philosophical aspects. When I came across the ontological argument for the existence of God I thought it could not be right as it seemed so simple, but it also appeared very convincing to me. It seemed to be the embodiment of what I find so compelling about philosophy and theology and I have been fascinated with it since then.

The idea of God and our ultimate fate is probably the most fundamental and important question that applies to anyone and the ontological argument is based only on God and not on His creation and therefore seemed to be the ideal focus of my study.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The ontological argument for the existence of God is the only argument from pure reason. It does not rely on scientific advancement and changing theories about the universe and our place within it. It is something that anyone from anywhere in the world, with any background at any time could read, think about and form an opinion on.

Not many people are aware of the ontological argument, and it seems that the very idea of it to reason the existence of God goes against the much-used sentiment that faith is required, rather than reason to believe in God.

1.3 Research Objective/Aim

The aim of the research was to find out what versions of the ontological arguments there were, their strengths and weaknesses and resources available about them.

I wanted to look at the changes in the understanding of the universe and any impact it has on the argument since its conception.

I wanted to understand where the ontological argument fitted in with other arguments for the existence of God and what assumptions were made in the arguments and about God.

My main goal was to explore the ontological argument to find out if it seemed possible that it could prove, or more likely persuade, that there was an existent God.

1.3.1 Specific Objectives

These were:

- To understand the argument in its different forms and present them in their strongest forms.
- To try to have an open mind and treat the topic in a neutral manner so that I did not add my bias to the results.
- To critique them to the best of my ability relying on whatever sources I could find to back me up or challenge my thoughts.
- To explore the idea of God to try and make the strongest case for the ontological argument.

- To explore all aspects of the ontological argument and use the widest possible interpretations of the structure and meaning of the argument to strengthen it where I could.
- To bring my findings together in a conclusion and to consider if there was any scope left for it.
- To determine if the ontological argument developed from just reason, or did it depend on observations.

1.4 Research Questions

My initial examination of the ontological argument showed that it was popular in the sense that there were a lot of videos, books and papers about the argument in its different forms. I also quickly found out that it was not something that many people (notably in Britain) had heard of or knew about. I did not think that I could get unbiased or useful opinions on the subject without explanation and then giving subjects time to reflect. I found many books and videos about it including many that had interlocutors discussing the subject. I also found many resources on the areas impinging on the argument, such as development of philosophy, science and the meaning of words.

The particular questions I was interested in were:

- What are the different versions of the argument?
- What are the main objections to the success of the argument?
- What are the main areas of support for the argument?
- How has the argument developed?
- How has the progress of humanity both culturally and in areas such as philosophy, theology and science affected the argument?
- Do many people find the argument convincing and why?
- What reasons do people have for not finding the argument convincing?
- Does there, or could there exist a form of the argument and definition of God that is convincing?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The subject probably covers the most fundamental question for most humans and the different interpretations of God have significantly shaped the history of the human race on a global scale.

The ontological argument is 'not the only game in town' when considering the existence, characteristics and magnitude of God, but it is possibly the purest, 'rational' argument for God. It seeks to be available to anyone and is not obviously dependent on education, culture or knowledge.

I have not been able to find a study on the argument that covers all the areas that this thesis proposes to go into.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study will focus initially on the Christian God and classic examples of the ontological argument. It will expand to consider the other 3 broad understandings of the Abrahamic God and then consider other ideas of God.

All aspects of the ontological argument will be considered and examined in light of the attributes of the known universe and meanings attached to them.

Considerations will be given to possible scenarios based on philosophical and scientific theories to see if the argument can be strengthened or weakened incorporating them.

Any areas of possible impact on ontological arguments that arise in the research will be considered and examined.

1.7 Organisation of the Study

The study will begin by finding the different versions of the ontological argument and noting differences, and relevant strengths and weaknesses of each so that this can be used to try to build a stronger form of the argument.

Literature about the argument will be found by looking for relevant texts and using videos and their sources to find more material.

The other main arguments for the existence of God will be briefly examined and consideration given to their impact on the argument of its ability to persuade people of its goal.

The main ontological arguments will be detailed with critical examination of them as well as considering if they can support any weaknesses in other versions.

Significant changes in knowledge since the origin of the argument will be looked at to see if they affect the nature or scope of God and the effectiveness of the arguments.

Scenarios will be considered to extend the argument where possible, that might include particular assumptions about things in the universe or of God along with examining the meaning behind the words in the arguments.

Consideration will then be given to the argument in its entirety, given everything that has been explored as well as summarising the effectiveness of the broadest argument and any likely future developments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first words of chapter 1 of Nigel Warburton's book 'Philosophy the basics, Fifth Edition' published in 2013, are "Does God exist? This is a fundamental question, one which most of us ask ourselves at some time in our lives." (Warburton, 2013). This is a book on philosophy and the very first question in it for philosophers is about the existence of God. This helps to demonstrate the importance and thought given to God's existence. The first chapter is titled 'God' and deals with arguments for the existence of God and criticisms of those arguments. Warburton (2013) quickly went on to state, "The starting point for most philosophy of religion is a very general doctrine about the nature of God, known as Theism. This is the view that one God exists, that he or she is omnipotent (capable of doing anything), omniscient (knows everything), and supremely benevolent (all-good). Such a view is held by most Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike".

Warburton (2013) explained the ontological argument as "an attempt to show that the existence of God necessarily follows from the definition of God as the supreme being". He added "Because this conclusion can be drawn prior to experience, it is known as an *a priori* argument". He followed this up with "According to the Ontological Argument, God is defined as the most perfect being imaginable; or, in the most famous formulation of the argument, given by St. Anselm (1033-1109), as 'that being than which nothing greater can be conceived'. One of the aspects of this perfection or greatness is supposed to be existence. A perfect being would not be perfect if it did not exist".

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy stated that ontological arguments "are arguments, for the conclusion that God exists, from premises which are supposed to derive from some source other than observation of the world - e.g., from reason alone. In other words, ontological arguments are arguments from what are typically alleged to be none but analytic, *a priori* and necessary premises to the conclusion that God exists." (Ontological Arguments, 2024).

Under the title 'Ontological Argument for the Existence of God' in The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, New Edition, Honderich (2005), stated that it is "A line of argument that appears

to appeal to no contingent fact at all, but only to an analysis of the concept of God. The argument is that this concept (unlike many others) is necessarily instantiated".

In 'Understanding Anselm's Ontological Argument' Jackson (2023) examined St. Anselm in historical context, his life, work and the formulation of his ontological argument. He looked at the premise, structure and conclusion of the argument and concluded that "the crux of Anselm's argument lies in the transition from the conceptual realm to the ontological realm, asserting that the very concept of the greatest conceivable being entails its existence". Jackson looked at Gaunilo's perfect island criticism and Anselm's response that his argument only applies to necessary beings and not to contingent ones. He also examined Kant's primary objection and stated, "Kant's challenge that 'existence is not a predicate' strikes at the heart of Anselm's argument, questioning whether existence can enhance the greatness of a being." (Jackson, 2023).

Jackson (2023) also looked at contemporary considerations of the argument and its philosophical and theological implications. He observed that "Anselm's ontological argument, despite its criticisms, remains a profound meditation on the nature of God and the limits of human understanding, inviting continuous reflection and debate".

'The Ontological Argument from Descartes to Hegel' by Kevin J. Harrelson (2009) detailed the evolving ontological arguments from Descartes through to Hegel, showing the arguments' development and its place in philosophy. The book showed Descartes' argument culminates in the assertion that "God's existence as self-evident as mathematical truths" (Harrelson, 2009). Harrelson then moved on to Baruch Spinoza's version of the argument that argued God is the substance that makes up reality and existence is an essential part of the substance. He stated, "Acceptance or rejection of [Spinoza's] ontological argument involves the acceptance or rejection of an entire philosophy". After examining Leibniz's refinement of the argument, it is stated in the book that "Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason demands an explanation for why there is something rather than nothing, leading inevitably to the necessity of a foundational, necessary being." (Harrelson, 2009). After considering Kant's criticism that existence is not a predicate, the book finished with Georg Hegel's complex revision of the argument. While analysing this argument he stated, "Hegel cannot demonstrate the existence of God in any sense of 'demonstrate' that involves convincing someone who initially rejects the conclusion". He summed up the argument with "The ontological arguments of Descartes, Hegel, et al. stand and fall with a fairly well-defined

set of metaphysical, psychological, and theological claims to which the arguments are wedded." (Harrelson, 2009).

In Jordan Sobel's book, 'Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God' (2004) he examined philosophical arguments about the existence of God. He looked at classical and contemporary arguments and used probability theory along with logic to rigorously analyse the arguments. Along with the ontological argument he examined the cosmological and teleological arguments as well as more modern arguments based on probability. Sobel (2004) stated that the ontological argument's "reliance on a priori reasoning to establish the existence of a supremely perfect being is both its strength and its Achilles' heel". He started by stating "Anselm's argument proceeds from the premise that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived,' and concludes that such a being must exist in reality, not merely in the understanding". He concluded with "Anselm's argument fails not because of any simple logical error, but because it depends on a contentious modal principle that is not obviously true". He further stated about St. Anselm's argument that "the move from the conceptual realm to actual existence is fraught with difficulties that have been pointed out by many critics over the centuries". Sobel then turned to the modal versions and stated, "Plantinga's modal ontological argument asserts that the possibility of a maximally great being implies its necessity, but this hinges on the acceptance of certain modal axioms". He examined the assumptions behind the argument and stated, "The modal ontological argument's leap from possible existence to necessary existence is far from trivial and requires modal commitments that are not universally accepted." (Sobel, 2004). He also stated that when considering the modal ontological argument, it "remained controversial whether the argument successfully bridges the gap between possibility and actuality".

Sobel (2004) further stated, "one critical issue is whether existence can be considered a predicate or a perfection in the same way as properties like omniscience or omnipotence". He summarised with "the notion that one can deduce the existence of God from mere concepts challenges our usual understanding of how existence claims are justified". He then evaluated it with "The strength of the ontological argument lies in its bold attempt to prove God's existence from purely a priori premises. Yet, its reliance on contentious premises about the nature of existence and the concept of a greatest conceivable being has led many to question its soundness".

When considering the criticism of the ontological argument, Sobel defended Kant's position and stated, "Kant's critique that existence is not a real predicate effectively undermines the ontological argument by challenging the coherence of defining something into existence." (Sobel, 2004). This has considerable backing as discussed in this thesis, but he also backed Gaunilo's criticism using his perfect island analogy "Gaunilo's perfect island parody shows that the structure of the ontological argument could be used to 'prove' the existence of any perfect entity, leading to absurd conclusions". This is more contentious because God, by most definitions, is perfect and perfection is entailed in God, whereas more mundane things like an island, a meal, and a film have their merits critiqued subjectively. For example, is a film too long, too short, too violent, too boring etc or an island too hot, too small or does it have too few animal species on it.

Sobel thought that the ontological argument has an ingenious construction and historical significance but fails to be a convincing proof for the existence of God. "The ontological argument, though historically influential and philosophically stimulating, does not withstand rigorous logical scrutiny and fails to demonstrate the existence of a necessary being" (Sobel, 2004). He concluded that the ontological argument fails because of inherent issues with 'controversial' modal principles and logical flaws. Sobel had a sceptical stance towards theistic arguments, which is consistent with his critic of them in his book. "While the ontological argument remains a fascinating exercise in philosophical reasoning, it ultimately falls short as a definitive proof of God's existence." (Sobel, 2004).

Graham Oppy's 1996 book, 'Ontological Arguments and Belief in God' highlights challenges and logical flaws in the ontological argument but does acknowledge that there might be a rational belief in God on other grounds. He stated that "Ontological arguments are distinctive in that they rely solely on logical relations between concepts rather than any contingent facts about the world". He provided details of the "long history" of the ontological argument from St. Anselm to Alvin Plantinga. He also discussed criticisms of the argument including the often-considered idea about the nature of existence, "Kant's critique—that existence is not a predicate—poses a fundamental challenge to ontological arguments by questioning the very logic that underpins them." (Oppy, 1996). Oppy described Plantinga's modal ontological argument as "a sophisticated attempt to revive the ontological argument using the tools of modern modal logic".

Oppy (1996) ultimately found ontological arguments to be questionable and stated, "while ontological arguments are intellectually interesting, they ultimately fail to provide a convincing case for the existence of God, as they rest on dubious premises and logical sleights of hand". A main conclusion in the book is that ontological arguments are not persuasive enough to have much impact on the debate between theists and atheists about the existence of God.

In his book, "The Ontological Argument" by Jonathan Barnes, the author looked at the historical context of the argument and focused on St. Anselm's original version along with Descartes' version. He looked at the argument in the broader context of philosophy of metaphysical and religion. Barnes (1972) stated that the ontological argument is "a testament to the audacity and ingenuity of medieval thought". He explored how it is treated by more modern philosophers and found varying opinions on it from "compelling" to "sophistry". Barnes (1972) summarised St. Anselm's argument as "if God exists in the understanding, He must exist in reality, for existence in reality is greater than mere existence in the understanding" and also stated, "Descartes' argument is essentially a restatement of Anselm's: the existence of God follows necessarily from the clear and distinct idea of a supremely perfect being". Barnes' work looked into various critiques of the ontological argument, notably the 'existence is not a predicate' objection by Immanuel Kant.

In 'Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response', (2006) its author, Daniel A. Dobrowski told the reader that in Neoclassical theism, God is viewed as dynamic and relational instead of immutable and impassible. "Neoclassical theism seeks to reconcile the classical attributes of God with the dynamic nature of the divine as seen in process philosophy." Dobrowski (2006).

Dobrowski looked at St. Anselm's original Ontological Argument and emphasised its logical structure and philosophical merits. Dobrowski (2006) stated, "Anselm's definition of God retains its cogency, inviting us to reconsider the depth of his insight into the nature of the divine". He further stated, "the objections by Gaunilo and Kant, while significant, fail to dismantle the core of Anselm's reasoning when properly understood". He used process philosophy to suggest that God's existence can be thought of as inherently dynamic and evolving. "Process philosophy enriches the Ontological Argument by presenting God not as a static being, but as an active, evolving presence in the universe." (Dobrowski, 2006).

Dobrowski also used modal logic to look at the possibility that God's existence means that He actually exists. "Modal logic provides a robust framework for understanding the necessity of God's existence, transforming possibility into actuality." (Dobrowski, 2006). He further stated that using a neoclassical reformulation of the Ontological Argument underlined "the relational and dynamic nature of God, bridging the gap between necessity and possibility".

Dobrowski's book suggested new ways of thinking about God and His relationship to the world and gave a different interpretation of the ontological argument, blending classical insights and modern philosophical ideas. "Neoclassical theism offers a revitalized approach to the Ontological Argument, presenting a persuasive case for the existence of a dynamic, relational God." (Dobrowski, 2006). The ideas of Neoclassical theism and process philosophy are discussed in the main body of this thesis.

'Ontological Arguments' is a book by Tyson Goldschmidt published in 2020. The book is a comprehensive examination of the ontological argument in a number of its forms. It covered the history of the argument, as well as a reasonably balanced view of objections and counter arguments.

The book looked at St. Anselm's argument and it stated, "Anselm's formulation of the ontological argument has been both celebrated and criticized for its audacious leap from concept to reality." (Goldschmidt, 2020). In the same book, he also looked at Rene Descartes' version from his rationalist perspective and examined more recent arguments including Alvin Plantinga's modal argument, of which Goldschmidt stated that his argument "rejuvenates the discourse by introducing possible worlds semantics, lending the argument a new logical structure." (Goldschmidt, 2020).

Goldschmidt carefully considered criticisms of the arguments and covered the relatively famous 'perfect island' objection by Gaunilo and Immanuel Kant's criticism that existence is not a predicate as well as other objections. Goldschmidt quoted defenders of the argument, emphasising the logical sense of a maximally great being, God, as well as the well-structured modal arguments.

Goldschmidt's book also investigated broader philosophical implications of the ontological argument. He looked at its impact on issues in philosophy of religion and metaphysics as well as epistemology.

In the book, Goldschmidt further stated that "the ontological argument continues to fascinate and perplex, offering a unique blend of metaphysical audacity and logical subtlety" (Goldschmidt, 2020). He also stated what he thought the main reason was for the argument's longevity with "Anselm's assertion that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' remains a cornerstone of the argument's enduring appeal". Goldschmidt (2020) had this insight about the broader reach of the argument, "Beyond its theological implications, the ontological argument invites us to explore the limits of conceptual analysis and the nature of reality itself".

'God, Reason, and Theistic Proofs' (1997) by Stephen T. Davis particularly focused on the rationality for believing in God by examining the classical arguments for the existence of God, including the ontological argument. The aim of Davis's book was to justify a rational belief in God. Davis started by looking at religious belief and what role reason has in faith, and then critically examined the major arguments. For each of these arguments, including the ontological argument Davis engaged with criticisms raised by non-theists. He proposed counterarguments designed to show that these proofs, although not conclusive, support theistic belief.

Focusing on reason and faith, Davis (1997) stated, "Faith and reason are not antagonists; they are allies in the quest for truth. Faith seeks understanding, and reason helps to clarify what is believed" and particularly, on the ontological argument, "The ontological argument, though abstract and challenging, remains a profound exploration of what it means to conceive of God as a necessary being". The book showed the link between religion and philosophy, giving a well thought out perspective on the rationality of believing in God.

Baruch Spinoza was a 17th-century philosopher who wrote the book 'Ethics', which was first published in 1677. According to Wikipedia (n.d.), 'Ethics' "includes the assumption that ideas correspond to reality perfectly, in the same way that mathematics is supposed to be an exact representation of the world". In his book, Spinoza tried to promote his idea of reality and how to live ethically. It covered God and how humanity fits in with the world. The work was republished in Penguin books in 1996.

As Spinoza was a pantheist, he believed God was linked to reality and that they were essentially a single substance. A pantheist is someone who believes that God and the universe are the same thing; this is expanded on in the main body of the thesis. In 'Ethics' (1677) he stated, "By God, I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance

consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence". As Spinoza thought there was only one substance that was God and the entire universe, he theorised that God necessarily exists. "God, or substance, consisting of infinite attributes, of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality, necessarily exists." (Spinoza, 1677). He further stated, "God's essence and his existence are one and the same". He also stated, "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God". He also wrote that happiness can "be found in the intellectual love of God" (Spinoza, 1677).

Spinoza does not specifically defend the ontological argument, but because of his world view he thought that the existence of God was self-evident and necessary as the universe exists.

In summary, most books by sceptics that looked at the classical forms of the ontological argument concluded that there were strong logical doubts that perfection is a predicate. This would mean that the arguments were not convincing, and that the logic works well until the point that it claims that a supreme being, God, must exist in reality, after the argument had previously been about God existing in the mind. Those authors that seemed to believe in God tended to find the argument reasonably compelling. This is an interesting reflection on how the argument is generally viewed by atheists and theists. The authors that considered modal logic and process philosophy thought that these were stronger arguments, and the ideas of Neoclassical theism and pantheism are interesting additions to the argument. Almost all the book considered a God that would be recognisable to most Christians.

A quick look at online critiques of the ontological argument produced a couple of interesting and balanced points about it. The GotQuestions Website weighed up the ontological argument when it stated it "is neither as powerful nor as useless as extreme views might suggest. It has little practical value, especially for skeptics or non-believers. Like Pascal's Wager, the ontological argument sometimes gets a bad rap: it's not simplistically arguing that "conceiving" of something is sufficient to make it real. However, the more one tries to untangle it, the more the ontological argument digs in and refuses to be disproved." (What is the Ontological argument for the existence of God?, n.d.). The site made the observation that "It's much easier to say, "The ontological argument doesn't work for me," than it is to say, "The ontological argument is false because—." It's an interesting example of arguments for God's existence, and an important one, even if it's not held in high regard by many

people". These views on the argument seem to be quite common, which perhaps shows why it is still so widely talked about.

Cedarville University (n.d.) succinctly summed up the ontological argument with "Unlike most arguments that start with an observation about the world and work back to a Creator, the ontological argument starts with the idea that based on the meaning of the word "God," there has to be a God. There are many ways to make this argument, but the simplest way is this: If it's possible that God exists, then God exists".

The published philosophical view seems to be that the ontological argument for the existence of God cannot convince doubters, but it can make them more open to the idea, so that it can be one of a number of reasons why someone might change their mind about the existence of God.

METHODOLOGY

The ontological argument has been developed to need only pure reason to pursue it to its conclusion. This does not give an obvious starting point for examining the argument. Some subjects require background knowledge for instance multiplication makes more sense and is more easily understood once addition is understood.

For this reason, the first investigation was of the ontological argument itself. It seemed a reasonable proposition to start with the first ontological argument and then to proceed by examining later arguments in a reasonably chronological order. The original ontological argument is generally regarded to be from St. Anselm, so the initial investigation started with this version. St. Anselm's ontological argument is also probably the most abundant in literature and many later arguments have this as a base or rephrase it.

To understand the argument more fully, when it was examined and its conclusion considered, it was appropriate to consider criticisms of the argument and defences of these criticisms or of the argument. Some of these were produced soon after the argument was published, notably Gaunilo's 'marvellous island' objection to St. Anselm's original argument.

From this point, literature in books as well as online articles were sought and studied. This naturally led to the expansion to other ontological arguments, their criticisms and defences as many books would focus on more than one ontological argument; these were often the most well-known versions. From this, an understanding of the main developments of the arguments were formulated along with philosophical developments that allowed them to be devised. The format of many of the books and articles examined the ontological argument with other logical arguments for the existence of God.

The ontological argument is a deductive argument, and the next step was to examine these other arguments, which can support the ontological argument in allowing someone to decide if they believe in God or not. They also allow appreciation of the unique nature of the ontological argument and to contrast it with the inductive arguments given for whether God

exists or not. There are many publications, philosophers, commentators and authors who have delved into a number of these arguments for the existence of God, including the ontological argument. This has meant that it has been able to get views on these arguments from some of the same sources, which would make for more consistent analysis of different arguments.

The original ontological argument was proposed to prove the existence of the Christian God and to justify the argument it seemed necessary to research God's attributes and consider whether they were similar for other understandings of God.

Ontological arguments are philosophical arguments following rules of logic and philosophical frameworks. As philosophy is a developing subject along with the meaning of words, and the understanding of nature and science continue to improve, all aspects of the ontological arguments were examined to see if they affected it. Developments in any of these areas were examined to see if they gave scope to reinterpret the argument or to redefine God to see if He would make the argument more compelling than in His more traditional form.

The ideas of God, reality and constraints were considered and developed to examine extremes of the arguments to gauge their effects on it. These were explored with reference to the original arguments and taken as far as they could be. The impact of these ideas was considered and in particular whether they changed the fundamental nature of the ontological argument from deduction to induction, particularly with changing understanding of the universe and continuing developments in science.

The idea behind this thesis was to explore all aspects of the ontological arguments in its various forms. This allowed for research into areas that were not considered when the thesis was conceived. During an investigation into an aspect of the argument including philosophy, science or theology, if something that seemed like it might be able to enhance the study, develop or strengthen/weaken the argument was found then it would also be investigated. Often these would not prove useful and discarded, but sometimes they seemed to add to the understanding or more likely a different understanding of the argument and so the ontological argument was examined given these possible developments.

Once the research foundations were complete and new possibilities identified they were compared to existing versions of the ontological argument and modifications proposed. These were normally put forward with caveats with the intention that they would indicate the existence of God under these imposed conditions.

There were no interviews conducted for this thesis. This is because outside of theology and philosophy the ontological argument is quite niche and to make the interviews work it seemed reasonable to think that there would need to be an explanation and time to think and question aspects of the argument. It does not seem reasonable that answering questions could not influence the interviewee's opinion or train of thought. Videos of interviews, discussions and presentations were watched that were created by Christians and atheists, often by famous apologetics or leading popular atheists. Nothing was found that was not available in the articles and books that were previously researched or then sought out and studied. Limited research was carried out to find out if this small sample could be representative.

There were no answers to the question "How many people in Britain know what the ontological argument for the existence of God is?" when searched for on Google. The closest found was Quora which had a question "Am I wrong to think 99% of people do not even understand the ontological argument?". This was posted in approximately 2017, but with very basic access to the site, no date was actually given. Answers that actually addressed the question were usually that it was thought that most people have not heard of the argument. Asking the same question to AI on Google gave the answer "While it's a topic in philosophy and theology, it's unlikely to be widely understood by the general public in Britain". The same question on Grok gave the conclusion that "a reasonable estimate might be 100,000–200,000 people in Britain who have at least a basic awareness of the ontological argument—roughly 0.15% to 0.3% of the population". It also stated, "For a more precise figure, a targeted poll would be needed, which doesn't currently exist".

This thesis on the ontological argument that was devised to prove the existence of God through pure reason has been approached in a similar way, through reason. There has been specific research in an inductive way, but the process came out of thinking about the argument and then logically delving into it, its various formats and aspects.

The argument has been around and developed for centuries, and many leading philosophers have examined it, criticised or developed it. This thesis tried to understand the history, where it fits in with other arguments for God and to give the best interpretation of the argument as possible. It also uses modern scientific theories, speculation and understanding to view them critically. Finally, it has tried to add some original content or at least critique, that could possibly be considered 'fanciful' but given the subject of the thesis and the current scientific consensus that there are many things we know that we have incomplete or possibly incorrect theories about, it seemed legitimate to consider them.

CONTENTS AND RESULTS

Overview of the Ontological Argument

Why Examine the Ontological Argument

This thesis will attempt to examine something of a contradiction. It will look at rational arguments for something that a large proportion of people would consider an act of faith. In particular it will delve into whether the existence of God can be inferred or even proved by an act of logical thought without examining what we know of the physical universe, it will consider the ontological argument for the existence of God.

It will look at what is meant by 'God', mostly within the context of the main Abrahamic religions, and particularly Christianity, which is the basis for most of the ontological arguments. The thesis will consider other ideas of God or what could constitute a God. It will briefly look at other arguments for and against the existence of God before examining the ontological argument in greater detail.

Throughout this thesis 'God' will be referred to as 'He', which is how the 3 Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam refer to their God. This is done to make the thesis scan more easily and follows convention. The main bulk of the thesis will be discussing a God that would be familiar to a follower of the Abrahamic faiths, but other interpretations will be introduced.

This thesis will break down the aspects of the ontological argument and examine them. It will also consider different approaches to the argument. It will delve into the structure of the argument and consider if there are any ways to strengthen it by looking into philosophical principles and differing philosophical views. Alternative, but reasonably justifiable definitions will be used to probe the merits and weaknesses of the argument. An obvious one, is that the original ontological argument and many afterwards are about the Christian God, so

alternative ideas about God from other religions and recognised belief systems will be considered.

The question of the existence of God is something that people have discussed and thought about for hundreds, if not thousands of years and is an important philosophical topic. This will be demonstrated in the main body of the thesis through the study of the different arguments presented and how some of them have developed over time.

Some philosophers thought that this was the most fundamental question, including Saint Anselm of Canterbury in *Proslogion* (1078), who argued that the existence of God is the most fundamental question in philosophy. He asserted that God is "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" (Anselm, translated by Deane, 1962). Similarly in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), René Descartes thought the existence of God was a crucial step in his quest for certain knowledge. He argued for God's existence as necessary for guaranteeing the reliability of clear and distinct perceptions. "I have always considered that the two questions respecting God and the Soul were the chief of those that ought to be demonstrated by philosophical rather than theological argument" (Descartes, translated by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, 1911).

Other philosophers thought that the existence of God was not the most important question in philosophy, including Bertrand Russell who in 'The Problems of Philosophy' (1912) emphasised the significance of questions and stated, "The value of philosophy... lies chiefly in its uncertainty. For the philosophy raises questions and opens new vistas, challenging us to reconsider our assumptions and beliefs". In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1781) focused on questions concerning human reason and the limits of knowledge. He argued that some questions, such as those about the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul, are out of the scope of empirical knowledge and should be considered as belonging to the realm of practical reason. Kant (1781), translated by Guyer and Wood (1998) stated, "Thus I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith".

There are undoubtedly some people who define themselves by their faith/religion more than by characteristics such as nationality, social position or job. This is clear given that over the centuries people have killed or sacrificed their lives in the name of religion including Thomas

More who was convicted of treason and executed in 1535 for his refusal to take the oath of supremacy recognising Henry VIII as head of the Church. At his execution, he was reported as saying "I die the King's good servant, and God's first" (Wikipedia, n.d.). There were also the crusades, most notably between 1095 and 1291, fighting over the Holy Land between Christians and Muslims. A total of those killed is unknown but on the Knights Templar Website (n.d.) they estimated 1 million deaths, although they stated that "this number is likely much higher because many incidents went unreported and casualties were never properly documented or recorded".

More recently the attacks in the USA on September 11th, 2001, which according to Wikipedia (n.d.) were "commonly known as 9/11, were four coordinated Islamist suicide terrorist attacks carried out by al-Qaeda against the United States in 2001".

There are many examples where religious beliefs have at least some part in violence and death including between Israel and Hamas, notably following the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7th, 2023; crudely Jews against Muslims. The Center for Strategic & International Studies Website stated, "The Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, will go down as one of the worst terrorist attacks in history." (Byman, McCabe, Palmer, Doxsee, Holtz and Duff, 2023).

There was also 'the troubles', which according to the Britannica Website was a "violent sectarian conflict from about 1968 to 1998 in Northern Ireland between the overwhelmingly Protestant unionists (loyalists), who desired the province to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic nationalists (republicans), who wanted Northern Ireland to become part of the republic of Ireland." (Wallenfeldt, 2019).

The Holocaust, mostly during the early 1940s, was in a simplistic form, the Nazi's persecuting the Jews. Germany at the time was a Christian country. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) "Nazi Germany was an overwhelmingly Christian Nation".

These examples have other influences impinging on them, which can include politics, nationalism, greed and fear, which may be linked in some form to religion. It might be

impossible to find a significant conflict that is purely about religion, but these examples have religious ideology as a reasonably significant contributing factor.

The Pew Research Center (2012) stated, “The demographic study – based on analysis of more than 2,500 censuses, surveys and population registers – finds 2.2 billion Christians (32% of the world’s population), 1.6 billion Muslims (23%), 1 billion Hindus (15%), nearly 500 million Buddhists (7%) and 14 million Jews (0.2%) around the world as of 2010”. With such large numbers of people with different religious beliefs as well as differing experiences, cultures and problems it is not difficult to understand why differences in viewpoints and societal ideas can lead to tensions and even conflict. There are more people in the world now than ever, but a greater percentage of people held religious beliefs in the past. According to Soapboxie (2022), “We have seen a significant decline in religious belief in most developed countries”.

Religious beliefs have always been an important influence on people, particularly as many members of religions believe that their eternal fate depends on how faithfully they worship the God they believe in. These were often grouped by region or countries, initially in areas where they were developed. For example, Islam started in Mecca and spread outwards from there. The Britannica Website (1998) stated, “From the very beginning of Islam, Muhammad had inculcated a sense of brotherhood and a bond of faith among his followers, both of which helped to develop among them a feeling of close relationship that was accentuated by their experiences of persecution as a nascent community in Mecca”. As people travel more, religions become more mixed by location. Religious beliefs and dogma are often passed on from generation to generation. The Wikipedia page titled ‘Religion and children’ (n.d.) stated, “children often acquire religious views approximating those of their parents”.

Belief in God can therefore be a very important part of someone’s self, how they fit into their surrounding culture, how they identify themselves to others and can lead to alliances or areas of disagreement with others they do not even know. Nationality can also impact on these same areas as can other factors including someone's job or school or even what football team they support. In all of these instances such beliefs and prejudices would depend on how much they value these aspects of their lives. Simple examples of the above in practice are wars between nations, cliques at work, rivalries between schools and

antagonism between supporters at football matches, particularly in matches between two local teams.

An interesting point about this for adults, is that these areas range from things completely out of a person's control, such as where they were born, moving through to likely partial choice in deciding which school they went to, through to almost full control in the job they do. There are jobs that people are not qualified for, or do not have the ability to do; an obvious example is someone that cannot walk could not be an active firefighter physically rescuing people from blazing buildings. This will limit the choice of work or vocation open to them, but, particularly in more modern times in liberal countries with the advance in technology there are many areas that a person can devote their working lives to for the vast majority of the population.

Theoretically a person can choose which football team they support, although where they were born, the teams their friends and family support and which teams are doing well at the time they become more aware of football will probably have a reasonable or even a significant influence on who they support. This could be particularly true if, for example, their dad takes them to watch his favourite football team when they are relatively young children. This is similar to choosing one's religion.

The ontological argument can be applied to any of the Abrahamic Gods or any 'all powerful' God in a monotheistic religion.

Introduction to the Ontological Argument

"Truly there is a God, although the fool hath said in his heart. There is no God". This is quoted from 'Proslogion' by St. Anselm as written in *Philosophy of Religion: The Big Questions*, (Stump & Murray, 1999).

According to Wikipedia the ontological argument was "explicitly in the writings" of Xenophanes of Colophon in Greece (c.570 – c.478 BC) (Ontological argument, n.d.). However, it can be argued the mainstream opinion is that the ontological argument has been around for almost 1,000 years and was first clearly proposed by St. Anselm of Canterbury and was written in his work, 'Proslogion'. It has been a live topic for much of its history and is still debated today by modern philosophers and theists, although the argument has been

reformulated by different philosophers. It is an argument from pure reason, *a priori*, and not from observation or experience, which makes it a particularly fascinating and still relevant argument. It is based on reason and examining it takes no more than a keen intellect. The advances in the argument are not down to scientific discovery or acquired knowledge about the universe, although acquired knowledge over time has allowed for more versions and challenges to the argument, so in some ways it is as pure as it always has been and may always remain so.

In 'The History of Philosophy', Grayling (2019) stated that the argument "seeks to prove God's existence from the mere thought of God" and revealed that it has been "known as the 'ontological argument' since Immanuel Kant's criticism of it in the eighteenth century".

According to 'The Philosophy Book', Buckingham et al. (2011), St. Anselm is quoted as saying, "We believe that You (God) are that which nothing greater can be thought".

There have been many arguments that claim to refute the Ontological Argument over the years, but as the argument is still debated, the numerous refutes have not appeared to have been conclusive.

In 'The Story of Philosophy', Garvey and Stangroom (2013) stated, "The argument has an energetic history, and almost a thousand years later, it still won't lie down". They went on to explain "The argument in all its forms, attempts to secure the existence of God with reflection just on the idea of God".

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2019) stated, "Ontological arguments are arguments for the conclusion that God exists, from premises which are supposed to derive from some source other than observation of the world".

Catholic Answers stated, "Ontology refers to the study of being, so the ontological argument claims that because God is the kind of being who must exist, therefore, he does exist." (Horn, 2020).

The ontological argument states that if God can exist then He has to exist. This is reasoned by the attributes of God, that He is the supreme being, with perfect attributes and there can be no other that is greater than God. The argument states that God would not be supreme if He did not exist, otherwise something that did exist would be greater and could therefore be defined as 'God' instead.

One of the main rebuttals that tends to be used by atheists, is either very disingenuous or uses a straw-man argument rather than steel-manning the argument to give it the respect a 1,000-year-old and still debated argument deserves. This argument tends to go something like ‘theists insist we can imagine the perfect God and therefore He exists, but I can imagine the perfect Island, cup-cake, job, statue or anything else, so that must exist too’. When this is first considered it could look as if it is not unreasonable, but theists argue that considering and comparing the ordinary objects or ideas that exist with an omniscient, omnipotent and all loving God that created the Universe is not similar enough and is therefore not comparable. This could be considered as something akin to theists who use the design argument, or Teleological argument, comparing watches to human eyes, sometimes referred to the Divine Watchmaker argument, as detailed in William Paley’s book, “Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity collected from the Appearances of Nature”. In this book, Paley (1802) concluded that “Every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater or more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation”. It is similar to the straw man argument for a perfect ordinary object in as much as it was understood how to make a watch, but the intricacies of the structure and working of a human eye was unknown to people then. It is not uncommon for many people to have experience of jewellers or watchmakers using their expertise to make watches and all manifestations of watches were the product of human intervention; and there is no suggestion that it requires divine intervention. It was also clearly understood that all humans were born and so the eyes were not designed and made by a craftsman. They share common traits, but they have many differences and the things they have in common are, with the increase of knowledge and understanding, not obviously the most relevant characteristics required to justify this argument.

Since 1859, when Charles Darwin first published ‘On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life’ there has been a more robust theory of how the human eye developed, with all its imperfections, through evolution by natural selection. Darwin’s famous book covered much more than just the human eye in its revolutionary scientific theory. “One general law, leading to the advancement of all organic beings, namely, multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die.” (Darwin, 1859). This scientific theory has been constantly found to be accurate through fossil records, historical documents, observations and scientific developments and

is almost completely indisputable with the recent examinations of DNA. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Website stated, "Myoglobin, which stores oxygen in muscles, consists of a chain of 153 amino acids wrapped around an oxygen-binding molecule. The sequence of amino acids in myoglobin varies from species to species, revealing the evolutionary relationships among organisms". It also stated, "Species that diverged longer ago have more differences in their corresponding proteins, reflecting changes in the amino acids over time" and "The evidence for evolution from molecular biology is overwhelming and is growing quickly" (NIH, 1999).

Peacock (n.d.) stated that "All cells on Earth, from our white blood cells, to simple bacteria, to cells in the leaves of trees, are capable of reading any piece of DNA from any life form on Earth. This is very strong evidence for a common ancestor from which all life descended".

This thesis will explore the ontological argument, as proposed by St. Anselm as well as looking at some more modern and well supported versions of it and will consider genuine criticisms of them. By treating the various versions of the argument in their strongest form it will attempt to see how pure reason alone can support or even prove the existence of an Abrahamic God.

Initially this thesis will provide five quotes from published sources for and against the ontological argument.

Defending the Ontological Argument:

"God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived." (Anselm, St., 1965).

"Existence is a perfection." (Descartes, R., 1641).

"God, by definition, is that being than which none greater can be imagined. To exist only in the mind is to not be as great as a being who exists both in the mind and in reality. Therefore, God must exist." (Plantinga, A., 1974).

"The very concept of God necessitates existence. If God is defined as the greatest conceivable being, then existence must be a part of that greatness." (Malcolm, N., 1960).

"Anselm's argument hinges on the notion that existence is a defining predicate of God; to deny God's existence is to misunderstand the concept of God altogether." (Kant, I., 1781).

Opposing the Ontological Argument:

"The ontological argument rests on the equivocation between existence in thought and existence in reality." (Hume, D., 1779).

"The concept of a 'perfect being' is too vague and subjective to serve as a foundation for a sound argument for God's existence." (Mackie, J. L., 1982).

"The ontological argument presumes that existence is a property, which is a controversial and unsubstantiated assumption." (Russell, B., 1948).

"If existence were a property, then we could imagine the most perfect island or the most perfect unicorn into existence. This *reductio ad absurdum* demonstrates the flaws in the ontological argument." (Kant, I., 1781).

"An argument that derives existence from mere concepts lacks empirical grounding and fails to provide compelling evidence for the existence of God." (Smith, Q., 2008).

These quotes offer differing viewpoints on the validity of the ontological argument. The quotes defending the argument mostly rely on the premise that existence is greater than non-existence and therefore God exists. The opposing arguments mostly claim that existence in reality cannot be derived in trying to substantiate a perfect being from logic.

Many of the ontological arguments use the word 'God' in definitions and throughout the logical arguments in attempting to prove His existence. Alvin Plantinga's argument is a notable exception, where instead of God, Plantinga uses 'being'. It is not always clear what the meaning or interpretation of 'God' is. The arguments list properties of 'God' or 'being' and the ones that are arguing for 'God' rather than a 'being' state that God is a being. Dictionary.com principally defined 'being' as "the fact of existing; existence". Therefore, from a statement similar to 'God is the supreme/perfect/greatest being' that is used to describe what God is, it is already claiming existence for God. This is a circular argument in that the conclusion is contained in the assumption. The Website gave further definitions of 'being' and under a philosophical banner it defined one use of 'being' as "that which has actuality either materially or in idea". It also defined the capitalised 'Being' as "God". In most versions of the ontological argument, 'being' is not capitalised, but the use of the word not necessarily as a material entity, but that it could just be in an idea, would be more appropriate in the argument. Examining the difference between 'material' and 'idea' brings the reader closer

to the aim of the argument. This 'idea' is the initial definition, and the 'material' is close to being existent although usually God is not just described as 'material' and it is usual to consider that God consists of more than material parts, if any parts of God are considered to be material.

What are the Uses of Ontological Arguments

The ontological argument, along with arguments in general, is intended to establish a point of view, understanding or persuade someone or a group of people. Dictionary.com gives a definition of 'argument' as "a discussion involving differing points of view; debate". The person or people that the argument is aimed at will be the target of the argument. Legitimately it could be a number of groups:

1. Atheists/agnostics - to persuade them.
2. Theists - to strengthen their beliefs of God or to give them a way to help convert others to believe in God.
3. Philosophy or Theology students - to give them an example to dissect and learn from.
4. Philosophers - to analyse, refine, improve and critique the argument.

Those in group 2 already have the desired belief and groups 3 and 4 will be more interested in the structure and validity of the arguments, premises and definitions used in the argument rather than the outcome. Therefore, this thesis will examine the argument based on the supposition that it is used to persuade atheists and agnostics that there is a God with similar properties to versions of the Abrahamic God.

A Posteriori Arguments

Difference Between *a priori* and *a posteriori* Arguments

An *a priori* proposition is one that is known independently of experience and an *a posteriori* proposition is based on experience. An example of an *a priori* proposition is 'all squares have 4 sides' and an example of an *a posteriori* proposition is 'the door is open'. "The terms 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' are used primarily to denote the foundations upon which a proposition is known." (Baehr, n.d.). There is a difficulty in clearly defining what is an *a priori* proposition or argument because it is unclear if any experience is allowed in an *a priori* proposition, an example is knowing that people die. "The major sticking-points historically have been how to define the concept of the 'experience' on which the distinction is grounded, and whether or in what sense knowledge can indeed exist independently of all experience." (Baehr, n.d.).

There is a further point when considering the ontological argument and other arguments for the existence of God. Apart from the difference of *a posteriori* arguments coming from observations first and *a priori* arguments coming directly from thought, there is another major difference. Both atheists and theists will acknowledge structure and complexity in the world and will also recognise that causes have effects and that everything that is familiar has a cause, even if it is not known exactly what that is.

These agreements mean that theists and non-theists can discuss teleological and cosmological arguments with an agreed understanding and acceptance of these things. The situation is different with ontological arguments as theists and non-theists do not necessarily agree on whether a 'supreme/perfect being' or a 'being that none can be greater than' can be conceived of. On some versions of the ontological argument there can therefore be a disagreement on the indirect subject of the premises of the argument. Even if these 'supreme' terms are not used as a general description of what can be conceived, the ideas of conceiving omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence etc. can be problematic to non-theists.

The *a posteriori* Arguments

The ontological argument is one of the philosophical arguments that claim to prove or at least demonstrate the existence of God. It relies on pure logic, whereas most of the arguments are *a posteriori* and start “from particular instances to a general principle or law; based upon actual observation or upon experimental data.” (Dictionary.com). For example, by stating “I cannot see to the end of my garden so it must be foggy”. This example could be a valid statement, but then again it might not. The reason “I could not see the end of my garden” could possibly have been because it was dark, or I was not even at home. As *a posteriori* arguments are based on experience or research or actual situations they cannot be certified as 100% true, as an observation could theoretically contradict previous experience.

To contextualise the ontological argument and compare it to other arguments a brief outline of some of the most well-known and discussed *a posteriori* arguments will be included here. These could all be combined to make a more persuasive argument, and the Five Ways argument, put forward by Thomas Aquinas, attempted to do this. The arguments might overlap or support each other and could stack probabilities up in someone’s mind so that individually each argument is not persuasive enough to convince them of God’s existence but put together they could make a stronger case.

The Kalam or cosmological argument has many supporters and has had so since its inception, a few of these are quoted below. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “One of the earliest formulations of the cosmological argument in the Islamic philosophical tradition comes from Al-Ghazali, who writes; “Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning; now the world is a being which begins; therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.””. The Website further stated that “Between the 9th to 12th centuries, the cosmological argument developed as a concept within Islamic theology. It was refined in the 11th century by Al-Ghazali”.

Five quotes supporting the argument from different sources are:

"The first and most manifest way is the argument from motion... Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God." (Aquinas, T., 1947).

"We can be sure that every being which has a beginning in time owes its existence to another cause than itself." (Leibniz, G. W., 1714).

"The universe had a beginning, therefore, it must have a cause." (Craig, W. L., 2008).

"The laws of physics themselves point to an intelligence behind the universe." (Davies, P., 1983).

"The universe is the way it is because it was created by a personal, intelligent, and rational being who designed it to be that way." (Plantinga, A., 1974).

Five quotes opposing the argument from different sources are:

"The universe might simply be the ultimate brute fact, with no need for a cause beyond itself." (Russell, B., 1948).

"Positing a first cause doesn't solve the problem but merely shifts it: if everything needs a cause, then what caused God?" (Hume, D., 1779).

"The notion of causality may not apply at the quantum level, where particles can spontaneously appear without a cause." (Krauss, L., 2012).

"The idea of an eternal, uncaused, and necessary being is inherently contradictory and incoherent." (Mackie, J. L., 1982).

"Invoking God as an explanation for the existence of the universe only raises more questions than it answers, leading to an infinite regress of explanations." (Smith, Q., 2008).

The main debate could be summed up as everything we experience is caused by something else so unless the past regresses infinitely something outside the universe must have started it. This might be defined as God, but not necessarily the Abrahamic God or even a theistic God, who interacts with the universe. A criticism of this is that it adds a layer of complexity, namely God and what created God. Theist would answer this by stating that God was eternal. There are other theoretical explanations such as an oscillating universe

that contracts into a big bang and then expands infinitely often or quantum physics, which does not follow this rule. It could be that just because everything in the universe has a causation, the universe does not necessarily need to have a cause as the universe is not contained in the universe.

The teleological argument is also known as the argument from design, and it seeks to demonstrate the existence of a designer based on apparent order and purpose in the universe. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "Abrahamic religions have used the teleological argument in many ways, and it has a long association with them. In the Middle Ages, Islamic theologians such as Al- Ghazali used the argument". It further stated that "Later, the teleological argument was accepted by Saint Thomas Aquinas and included as the fifth of his "Five Ways" of proving the existence of God".

Five quotes supporting the argument are:

"When we see a complex biological mechanism such as the eye, we cannot help but be struck by its apparent design, which suggests the existence of a designer." (Paley, W., 1802).

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." (Psalm 19:1, New International Version).

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Matthew 6:26, New International Version).

"In a universe that is filled with so much order and beauty, it is reasonable to infer the existence of an intelligent designer." (Collins, F. S., 2007).

"This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being." (Newton, I., 1687).

Five quotes opposing the Teleological Argument:

"The apparent design in the universe can be explained through natural processes such as evolution, without the need for a designer." (Dawkins, R., 1986).

"The teleological argument commits the fallacy of anthropomorphism, attributing human-like intentions and purposes to natural phenomena." (Hume, D., 1779).

"The existence of imperfections and instances of apparent 'bad design' in the natural world undermines the idea of an all-powerful and benevolent designer." (Mackie, J. L., 1982).

"Even if we grant the appearance of design, it doesn't necessarily lead to the conclusion of a single, omniscient designer; it could be the result of multiple designers or natural forces." (Russell, B., 1948).

"Invoking a designer to explain the complexity of the universe is an example of the God-of-the-gaps fallacy, where gaps in scientific knowledge are filled with divine explanations." (Smith, Q., 2008).

The supporting arguments mostly come for a plea to ignorance in that the universe is complex and very little is known about it, so it must be the creation of a supernatural being. Even though there are many unknowns, the amount that has been discovered in the last 200 years means that huge progress has been made, such as evolution by natural selection, quantum mechanics and the nature, size, age and makeup of the Universe. The arguments against this can point to having a false dichotomy of either a single God or nothing, viewing the argument from a human perspective rather than scientifically objectively, and these opposing arguments have increased over time with continuing scientific discoveries.

The fine-tuning argument proposes that certain physical constants and conditions in the universe are finely tuned to allow for the existence of life. This is a more recent argument than the Cosmological and Teleological arguments. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "In 1913, the chemist Lawrence Joseph Henderson wrote *The Fitness of the Environment*, one of the first books to explore fine tuning in the universe." and "In 1961, physicist Robert H. Dicke claimed that certain forces in physics, such as gravity and electromagnetism, must be perfectly fine-tuned for life to exist in the universe".

Five supporting quotes:

"The fact that we live in a universe that is finely tuned for intelligent life has been recognized for a long time. This fine-tuning is evidence for a transcendent creator." (Craig, W. L., 2009).

"The precise values of fundamental constants and physical parameters allow for the possibility of complex chemistry, and thus life." (Davies, P., 2007).

"There are multiple independent parameters in the universe that require precise values for life to exist. The probability of all these parameters aligning by chance is astronomically low, pointing towards design." (Collins, R., 2007).

"Fine-tuning is evident in the precise balance between gravitational forces and the expansion rate of the universe, allowing for the formation of galaxies and stars." (Polkinghorne, J., 1987).

"The fine-tuning of the universe points towards the existence of a designing intelligence beyond the natural realm, providing evidence for theism." (Swinburne, R., 2004).

Five Critical Quotes:

"The fine-tuning argument relies on the assumption that life could only arise under specific conditions, which may not be accurate given our limited understanding of life and its potential forms." (Stenger, V. J., 2011).

"The universe doesn't need to be fine-tuned for life to exist; it simply needs to permit life to exist, and we have no idea how broad or narrow that permission might be. The apparent fine-tuning might just be a reflection of our ignorance about the possible forms life could take." (Carroll, S., 2016).

"The multiverse hypothesis provides a naturalistic explanation for apparent fine-tuning by positing the existence of a vast ensemble of universes with different properties." (Tegmark, M., 2014).

"Fine-tuning arguments often fail to consider alternative explanations within physics, such as future developments in theoretical physics or the possibility of a deeper underlying principle." (Krauss, L. M., 2012).

"The fine-tuning argument faces challenges from the problem of evil, as it raises questions about why a supposedly benevolent creator would allow for natural disasters and suffering." (Schellenberg, J. L., 1993).

This is a stronger version of the teleological argument, using scientific discoveries that have tended to weaken that argument and enhance the foundations for this one. Proponents supporting the fine-tuning argument mostly point out there are a significant number of fundamental values that need to be almost exactly what they are for life or even matter to exist. The arguments against are mostly relating to unknowns and hypothetical unknowns. There is also the weak anthropic cosmic argument that the universe has to be set up so that intelligent life can form to observe it; any universe without such conditions would not have intelligent life to notice it. The Philosophy Dungeon Website (n.d.) stated, "'Anthropic' means to do with humans. The Anthropic Principle is the idea that the universe seems particularly suited to bring about and support human life". Some criticisms of it state that there are other possible hypotheses that are not considered.

A counter against the fine-tuning argument is that if God is all-powerful there would be no need for Him to create such precise constants and balances to make the universe as it appears now with intelligent life in it. An all-powerful God could just make the universe do whatever He wanted and has no need for fine mathematical balances.

Douglas Adams created an explanation as to why the universe seems perfect for human life, which is summarised on Wikipedia (n.d.) as "If you imagine a puddle waking up one morning and thinking, 'This is an interesting world I find myself in — an interesting hole I find myself in — fits me rather neatly, doesn't it? In fact it fits me staggeringly well, must have been made to have me in it!'".

The moral argument proposes that there exist objective moral values which point towards the existence of God as a moral lawgiver. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2022) stated, "Probably the most influential versions of the moral argument for belief in God can be traced to Kant (1788 [1956]), who famously argued that the theoretical arguments for God's existence were unsuccessful but presented a rational argument for belief in God as a "postulate of practical reason". Kant held that a rational, moral being must necessarily will

"the highest good," which consists of a world in which people are both morally good and happy, and in which moral virtue is the condition for happiness".

Five quotes defending the Moral Argument:

"If there is no God, then everything is permissible." (Dostoevsky, F., 1864).

"The existence of objective moral values points towards the existence of a transcendent moral lawgiver." (Craig, W. L., 2008).

"Without God, there can be no objective basis for morality." (Lewis, C. S., 1943).

"The moral law points us beyond the natural order towards a supernatural source." (Plantinga, A., 2011).

"Our sense of moral obligation suggests that there is a moral lawgiver who has imbued us with a conscience." (Adams, R. M., 1987).

Five quotes opposing the Moral Argument:

"Morality can be explained through evolutionary processes and social norms without the need for a divine lawgiver." (Dawkins, R., 2006).

"The Euthyphro dilemma challenges the idea that moral values are grounded in God's commands: Are things good because God commands them, or does God command them because they are good?" (Plato, 1961).

"The existence of moral disagreement and changing moral standards across cultures suggests that moral values are subjective rather than objective." (Mackie, J. L., 1977).

"The concept of an all-good, all-powerful God is inconsistent with the existence of moral evil in the world." (Hume, D., 1779).

"The idea of objective moral values is untenable without empirical evidence to support it; it is simply a projection of human preferences onto the universe." (Smith, Q., 2008).

The arguments in favour of the moral argument for God rely on the idea that there is an objective 'good', a correct and universal code of morals. The arguments against tend to either propose that morality is subjective or that the scientific theory of evolution by natural selection explains a shared morality without the need to invoke God.

The personal experience argument has possibly been around since people first believed in a God similar to the Abrahamic versions of God. The Religions Wiki Website (n.d.) stated, "The argument from personal experience, also known as personal revelation, refers to the sensation of a direct experience with God or the supernatural. This can be a feeling of divine presence, creative inspiration, the experience of a vision, or could even be in the form of a conversation". The Website further stated that "This argument is particularly common among certain branches of Christianity where things like possession and levitation have been reported". However, it should be noted that many believers do not experience personal revelations and have other foundations for their beliefs.

Five arguments defending the Personal Experience Argument:

"My faith did not come to me through rational arguments but through personal encounters with God." (Swami Vivekananda, 1968).

"For me, God is not a hypothesis derived from logical assumptions, but an immediate insight, self-evident as light." (Gandhi, M. K., 1927).

"I met God. There is no denying that He touched me and changed me, and I am still feeling His effects." (Mother Teresa, 1995).

"I experienced God's presence in my darkest moments, and that encounter transformed my life." (Lewis, C. S., 1956).

"My personal relationship with God is the most important aspect of my life, and it's based on countless experiences of His love and guidance." (Pope Francis, 2013).

Five arguments opposing the Personal Experience Argument:

"Personal religious experiences are subjective and cannot serve as reliable evidence for the existence of God." (Dawkins, R., 2006).

"The diversity of religious experiences across cultures and individuals suggests that personal experiences are more likely to be influenced by cultural and psychological factors rather than divine intervention." (James, W., 1902).

"Personal experiences of encountering God are often indistinguishable from experiences of other psychological phenomena such as euphoria, confirmation bias, or wishful thinking." (Smith, Q., 2008).

"If personal experiences of God were genuine evidence, then we would expect a greater consensus among individuals rather than the wide diversity of religious beliefs and experiences we observe." (Mackie, J. L., 1982).

"Invoking personal experiences as evidence for the existence of God is an example of the argument from ignorance fallacy, as it relies on gaps in knowledge and understanding." (Hume, D., 1779).

If someone believes they have had a personal experience of God, then this (argument) is probably very persuasive. If not, then the testimony of someone that is trusted can possibly be very convincing. Arguments against it tend to focus on conflicting experiences, a lack of critical thinking and ignore the possibility that there can be other explanations and that the human mind is easily tricked. Psychology Today stated, "For decades, psychological research has supported the presence of inherent bias in human perception." (Millett, 2014).

Aquinas' Five Ways are philosophical arguments that try to demonstrate the existence of God through reasoning based on observations and analysis of the natural world. Each argument starts from something familiar in the world and leads to the conclusion of a transcendent, necessary, and intelligent being, which Aquinas identifies with the classical Christian God.

While introducing quotes for the teleological argument, a Wikipedia entry was quoted stating that Thomas Aquinas included this argument as the fifth of his "Five Ways" of proving the existence of God. The "Five Ways" are:

- First: Motion.
- Second: Efficient Cause.
- Third: Possibility and Necessity.
- Fourth: Gradation.
- Fifth: Design.

Lander University summarised the five ways as:

“The Argument from Motion. (Thomas argues that since everything that moves is moved by another, there must thereby exist an Unmoved Mover.)

The Argument from Efficient Cause. (The sequence of causes which make up this universe must have a First Cause.)

The Argument to Necessary Being. (Since all existent things depend upon other things for their existence, there must exist at least one thing that is not dependent and so is a Necessary Being.)

The Argument from Gradation. (Since all existent things can be compared to such qualities as degrees of goodness, there must exist something that is an Absolutely Good Being.)

The Argument from Design (Also named “The Teleological Argument”— The intricate design and order of existent things and natural processes imply that a Great Designer exists.)”

Five quotes defending Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways:

"Aquinas' Five Ways provide a robust philosophical framework for understanding the existence of God, grounding the arguments in empirical observations and logical reasoning." (Craig, W. L., 1997).

"Aquinas' Five Ways offer compelling demonstrations of the existence of God, providing rational support for the intuitive belief in a transcendent, necessary, and intelligent being." (Kreeft, P., 1990).

"Aquinas' Five Ways continue to be influential in contemporary philosophy of religion, providing a solid foundation for further exploration of the existence and nature of God." (MacIntyre, A., 1981).

"The Five Ways of Aquinas serve as a cornerstone of classical theism, offering cogent arguments for the existence of a necessary and uncaused first cause, which is identified with God." (Copleston, F., 1975).

"Aquinas' Five Ways offer a holistic approach to understanding the existence of God, integrating metaphysical, cosmological, and teleological considerations into a coherent philosophical framework." (Pieper, J., 1951).

Five quotes criticising Thomas Aquinas' Five Ways:

"The Five Ways of Aquinas have been subject to criticism for their reliance on Aristotelian metaphysics and outdated scientific understanding, making them less convincing in light of modern advancements." (Russell, B., 1946).

"Aquinas' Five Ways, taken as a whole, fail to establish the existence of a single, omnipotent, omniscient God; they rely on outdated Aristotelian physics, conflate different senses of 'cause,' and at best suggest a multiplicity of unexplained principles rather than a unified divine being." (Kenny, A., 1969).

"The Five Ways of Aquinas have been accused of committing fallacies such as begging the question and affirming the consequent, undermining their validity as proofs for the existence of God." (Hume, D., 1779).

"Aquinas' Five Ways have been criticized for their anthropomorphic assumptions and reliance on analogical reasoning, leading to unwarranted conclusions about the nature of the divine." (Hume, D., 1779).

"The Five Ways of Aquinas have been challenged for their failure to consider alternative explanations for the observed phenomena, such as naturalistic explanations rooted in empirical science." (Dawkins, R., 2006).

Aquinas's Five Ways Argument is usually defended by emphasising the broad, holistic approach where all arguments point towards the conclusion that God exists. Criticisms of the argument often refer to it being out of date compared to the sum of scientific knowledge now available. It has also been criticised for committing philosophical fallacies such as not considering other options, commonly known as the 'either or fallacy' or alternatively of 'begging the question' also known as arguing in a circle, where the conclusion is assumed in one of the arguments' premises.

Examining God

Defining God

Everyone will probably have their own idea of what God is or what they think God should be like if He existed. In the major religions God is unseen to all but a few people in history, and the God of the major Abrahamic religions is believed to have created the entire Universe including time. This means He is either outside of space and time or he is greater than all of space and time, which would, as an understatement, make it difficult for anyone to actually be able to see the whole of God.

In monotheistic religions, including the Abrahamic religions, God is often conceptualised as the supreme being, who is the creator and ruler of the universe. He possesses attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnibenevolence. There are, however, various interpretations and beliefs about God's nature, role, and relationship with humanity across different faith traditions.

The 3 main variants of the Abrahamic faith have differing interpretations of God. Even though the Christian Bible contains the Torah which was described on the Web site of the CSUN University Library (2017) as “a sacred book of the Jews. The word ‘Torah’ originates from the Hebrew root of YRH that means, “teach.” The text, which is hand written in Hebrew by a scribe, contains the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy”. The Encyclopedia.com Website (n.d.) stated, “According to this scholarly opinion, the Torah, or “Book of the Law of Moses,” was brought by Ezra, a Jewish scribe and an official of the Persian government, from Babylon to the Jewish community of Jerusalem, newly returned from exile, about 450 B.C.E.”. The Learn Religions Website (2019) stated, “the first widespread edition of the Bible was assembled by St. Jerome around A.D. 400. This manuscript included all 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament in the same language: Latin. It further stated that this is “commonly referred to as The Vulgate”. The Website also clarified that “in 382 A.D., the Council of Rome finished the process of determining the 73 books of the Bible”.

The Augusta Chronicle stated, “the Torah and the Bible as revealed by God. In chapter 3, verse 3, God says in the Quran, “It is He (God) Who has sent down the Book (the Qur’an) to you (Prophet Muhammad) with truth, confirming what came before it. And he sent down the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel)”. According to the Website Al Islam, the Holy Qur’an “is the Holy Book or the Scripture of the Muslims”. It stated that the Qur’an lays down the law and commandments, as well as codes for their social and moral behaviour.

There is a considerable difference between the protestant bibles and the Catholic ones. They both contain the same New Testament, 27 books, but the Catholic versions have more Old Testament books than the Protestant versions, 46 to 39. There are different translations of the Bible which are known by different names, but none of the three Abrahamic sacred texts were written in English, so these variations do not apply to the above links between the Torah, Bible and Qur’an, as when the Qur’an was written there was only the Catholic version as the protestant reformation started around 1517 CE. The History Website (2009) stated “Historians usually date the start of the Protestant Reformation to the 1517 publication of Martin Luther’s “95 Theses.””. This was approximately 900 years after the Qur’an was written. The Britannica Website stated, “According to conventional Islamic belief, the Qur’ān was revealed by the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad in the West Arabian towns Mecca and Medina beginning in 610 and ending with Muhammad’s death in 632 CE.” (Ringgren and Sinai, 2017). From a more secular scholarly perspective, “The rise of the revisionist school of Islamic studies in the 1970s offered a newfound challenge to the conventional dating of the canonization of the Quran to the mid-7th century, placing it instead in the late-7th century, based on some reports found in the hadith literature.” (Wikipedia, n.d.).

An example of the definitions of God for the 3 Abrahamic religions are given below: -

Christianity:

“God is understood as the supreme, eternal, and omnipotent being who created the universe and governs it with divine providence. Christians believe in the Trinity, comprising God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as central to their faith.” (McGrath and Alister, 2010).

Islam:

“God, known as Allah, is the sole deity, transcendent and omnipotent, beyond human comprehension. Allah is believed to have revealed his will through the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad, serving as the ultimate authority in the Islamic faith.” (John L., 1998).

Judaism:

“In Judaism, God, referred to as Yahweh or Adonai, is the creator of the universe and the covenantal deity of the Israelites. Jews believe in monotheism, emphasizing God's oneness, righteousness, and involvement in human history through revelation and divine commandments.” (Neusner, J, 2006).

The three definitions above are representative definitions, which will vary depending on the source, but there are similar themes in each one and these are consistent with the above lineage, supporting that the Qur'an (also sometimes written as Koran) follows the Bible and the Torah, and that the Torah is included in the Bible.

There are many other religions and faiths and ideas about God, but they will not be central to this thesis although any religions that believe in a creator of the universe who is all powerful will be covered by the arguments and in particular the ontological argument. This is because, as already stated, the ontological argument was first formulated in the western world, which at the time was highly Christian, by Saint Anselm of Canterbury in his 1078 work, Proslogion. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2019) stated, “The first, and best-known, ontological argument was proposed by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century C.E. In his Proslogion, St. Anselm claims to derive the existence of God from the concept of a being than which no greater can be conceived”.

The Merriam - Webster dictionary main definition of God is:

God: the supreme or ultimate reality: such as: the Being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness who is worshipped (as in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism) as creator and ruler of the universe.

The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines God as:

(in Christianity, Islam and Judaism) the being or spirit that is worshipped and is believed to have created the universe.

The attributes ascribed to God will be central to the ontological argument and the relevant attributes will be discussed in detail in this thesis. There are varying lists of attributes that are attributed to God in different publications, some more thorough than others. The Attributes of God Website has published a list of the attributes of the God that is specifically described in the Bible. This might include attributes that were not demonstrated in the Torah, but, if accurate, include His attributes claimed in the Torah. As the God is claimed to be the same God in Islam that was in the bible and Torah, most attributes should apply to the Islamic belief although there could be a few omissions and a few additions as there are contradictions between the Qur'an and the Bible/Torah. An example to show a contradiction is verse 9:30 of the Qur'an which stated, "And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of Allah, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah. That is their saying with their mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. Allah (Himself) fighteth against them. How perverse are they!". This is the Pickthall English translation according to Quran.com (n.d.). On the Reddit Website (n.d.) it stated, "Here Allah says that the Jews believe Ezra (Prophet Uzayr) is the son of Allah", but research contradicts this and that no sect of Jews ever believed this. From Islamic sources, the only instance presented is that a small sect of Arabian Jews from Hejaz used to hold this belief but there is no further information about this claim". The Judaism Islam Website (2012) refuted that Jews believed that Ezra was the son of God and posted several similar replies to this question and included a clear answer which stated, "Jews do not think Ezra is the son of God". It further stated, "In Judaism we do not believe in anyone being the son of God".

The Attributes of God Website (n.d.), which is under the Blue Letter Bible brand and clearly a Christian Website stated that "the following is a list of some of God's known attributes. Since we cannot fully comprehend God completely, we can know what He is like through the verses in the Bible that reveal those attributes". These are listed on the Website as:

Infinitude of God - God is Infinite (limitless). God is not limited by anything outside of His character. This applies to all of God's attributes. (Example: The goodness of God means God is infinitely good, God is also infinitely just, infinitely immutable, etc...)

God is Personal - God is a self-conscious Being capable of thought, will, and interaction with His creation.

Creator - The whole of creation came into existence through the will and power of God.

Life Giver - All of life was and is created by God and is dependent on Him.

Immateriality of God - The state or quality of being immaterial. God's existence is non-physical and is distinct from His creation.

Self-Existence of God - God has always existed. God does not have a beginning.

Self-Sufficiency of God - God has no needs, cannot improve and does not change. We, on the other hand, as created beings rely completely on God for our every breath.

Omnipresence of God - God is present everywhere at all times.

Omnipotence of God - God can do all things that are consistent with His character. God is all powerful.

Omniscience of God - God has all knowledge.

Sovereignty of God - God created everything and therefore all things are under His sovereign control.

Eternality of God - The Eternality of God refers to his timeless nature. God had no beginning and will have no end.

Immutability of God - The Immutability of God means He cannot change in His nature, Character or dependability.

Perfection of God - God is completely flawless, lacks nothing and has no moral imperfection.

Holiness of God - God is set apart from His creation.

Wisdom of God - (omnisapience) By His omniscience, God perfectly knows all possibilities and what would happen if they came to pass. By His omnisapience, His wisdom is perfect so that He knows which course of action is the best.

Wrath of God - God's moral Character leads Him to judgement and punishment of unrighteousness.

Grace, Mercy and Love of God - God's dealing with His people are based on His goodness, compassion, concern and generosity; instead of what we truly deserve.

Impassability of God - God is without passions. He is not overwhelmed by any emotion, he is not incapacitated or weakened or stifled by any event or any amount of grief or love. Rather, God is totally self-controlled. While God does grieve, and does passionately love, he does so completely on purpose.

God is Truth - Absolute truth has its foundation in God Himself, because God is truth.

Justice of God - All of God's judgments are infinitely and perfectly just.

Freedom of God - The freedom of God, also called divine freedom, designates that God is free and "not constrained by anyone other than himself. He does what he pleases and therefore he is always free... He is not bound to the dictates of anyone else. He does make promises, to be sure, which obligate him to do certain things, but he makes those promises voluntarily."

Jealousy of God - Throughout the bible, from Genesis to Revelation God always draws his people's attention to himself - not to personal holiness or social justice or any of the other good things that follow from a good relationship with God, but to himself. When his people's attention wanders from him, he's quick to draw them back. This attribute of God is known as his "jealousy". We usually think of jealousy as an ugly emotion, as when we want the success or money that someone else has. But there is also an absolutely right kind of jealousy [sic], and that is the reluctance of someone to allow others what is rightly his and his alone. The classic example is of a husband and wife - each of them is, in the right sense, jealous for the other. Neither will share the other with anyone else: the very idea is abhorrent to them. In the same way, God will not accept the idea that he has to share our passion and affection with anyone or anything else.

Simplicity of God - The simplicity of God means that God is a unified being, without parts, – He is one essence. God is not composed of a variety of substances. In this sense he is different from humans who are made up of matter and spirit. Jesus is not an exception to this truth. While he took a human body while here on earth he is still absolute spirit in his essence.

Goodness of God - There is such an absolute perfection in God's nature and being that nothing is wanting to it or defective in it, and nothing can be added to it to make it better.

Solitariness of God - There was a time when creation, even heaven, didn't exist, but God's glory did because He is from everlasting. There was a time when angels, nor humans were praising Him and He was still altogether wonderful. He is self-contained, self-sufficient, and self-satisfied. He was under no compulsion to create out of necessity or deficiency. He created all things simply to display His glory. God could've very well chosen not to create and He still would be The Perfect One.

Veracity of God - This is that perfection of God in virtue of which He is true in His inner being, in His revelation, and in His relation to His people. He is the true God over against the idols, knows things as they really are.

Decrees of God - The decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things.

Foreknowledge of God - The fact is that "foreknowledge" is never used in Scripture in connection with events or actions; instead, it always has reference to persons. It is persons God is said to "foreknow," not the actions of those persons.

Patience of God - the Divine patience is the power of control which God exercises over Himself, causing Him to bear with the wicked and forbear so long in punishing them. In Nahum 1:3 we read, "The Lord is slow to anger and great in power,"

Immanence of God - The literal meaning of the immanence of God is "to be within" or "near" in relation to God's creation. Immanence is closely related to God's omnipresence, in that God is always present within the universe, though distinct from it. God is 'within' the universe in that God is its sustaining cause. God is active within His Creation.

The Majesty of God -Sovereign power, authority, or dignity. It is also a reference to greatness or splendor of quality or character.

Many of these attributes are showing different ways that God is 'all loving' or 'totally good'. These include the patience of God, His veracity, goodness and mercy. Other qualities refer to his all-encompassing qualities, omniscience, omnipotence, omnisapience and omnipresence including His sovereignty, eternity and self-existence. There are two qualities stated above that might be seen to question the attribute of 'all loving', these are his jealousy and wrath.

Many of the ontological arguments use the word 'God' in definitions and throughout the logical arguments in attempting to prove His existence. Alvin Plantinga's argument is a notable exception, where instead of God, Plantinga uses 'being'. It is not always clear what the meaning or interpretation of 'God' is, but the important characteristics of God for each argument are defined within it. The arguments list among the properties of 'God' that of 'being'. Dictionary.com defines 'being' as "the fact of existing; existence" and the Merriam-Webster dictionary similarly defines 'being' as "the quality or state of having existence". As the definitions are very similar and are essentially stating that 'being' means existence. If

this is the meaning of 'being' and God is a being, then Plantinga's and other ontological arguments that use the word 'being' are a tautology, and therefore meaningless, since the 'fact' of God's existence is in the premise of the argument. This will be explored further in this thesis.

The Definition of 'God' in Ontological Arguments

The ontological argument defines 'God' in differing ways. The objective of the argument is to prove the existence of such a 'God'.

St. Anselm defined God as 'That than which nothing greater can be conceived', while Rene Decartes used 'A supremely perfect being'. Other definitions include Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's definition of God as 'A being with all perfections' and Alvin Plantinga's definition being 'A maximally great being'. Normal Malcolm defined God as 'An unlimited being' and Kurt Godel defined God as 'A being possessing all positive properties'.

These various definitions of God centre around a being who has the highest possible greatness or perfection. The ontological argument is structured in a way to demonstrate the logical necessity for the existence of such a being, thus making God a necessary being.

These definitions do not have to equate to an Abrahamic God and have no dogma from any of these religions' scripture. In some variations of the ontological argument the key qualities of the Abrahamic Gods, omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence are introduced, which can muddy the water logically, for instance the seeming conflict between omniscience and omnipotence as well as the problem of evil. If these potential conflicts are ignored, the definition is mostly, but not exclusively that of an Abrahamic version of God. For instance, Sikhism has many of the Abrahamic attributes for God including omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Kohli (2000) stated, "He is All-Powerful and Omnipotent", "He is called All-Pervading and Omnipresent" and "He has another form as the Primal Guru and this Form of His is there within us, known as 'kindly Light'". Singh (2019) stated that Sikhs believe there is one God who is "all good, all knowing, and embodies truth. He is eternal and the sustainer of all things".

With these definitions, the questionable ethics of the 3 variations of the Abrahamic God can be ignored, as they are not mentioned, for example promoting slavery and some extreme

punishments. This is a stronger form of the argument, without having to explain recognised scripture. Examples on slavery include Exodus 21:20-21 (New International Version) as quoted on the Bible Gateway Website (n.d.), “Anyone who beats their male or female slave with a rod must be punished if the slave dies as a direct result, but they are not to be punished if the slave recovers after a day or two, since the slave is their property”. The same Website, Bible Gateway (n.d.) quoted the NIV passage 2 Kings 2:23-24 about a punishment from God, “From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some boys came out of the town and jeered at him. “Get out of here, baldy!” they said. “Get out of here, baldy!” He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the LORD. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the boys”.

Belief in God

Belief in God is older than recorded history. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “the exact time when humans first became religious remains unknown, however research in evolutionary archaeology shows credible evidence of religious/ritualistic behavior from around the Middle Paleolithic era (45–200 thousand years ago)”. It has been around ever since, and ‘God’ is an answer that can be given to almost any important question of why things are the way they are. There is some research that stated that significant atheism has existed in the western world for centuries. Whitmarsh (2016) stated, “early societies were far more capable than many since of containing atheism within the spectrum of what they considered normal”. He also stated that “believers talk about atheism as if it’s a pathology of a particularly odd phase of modern Western culture that will pass, but if you ask someone to think hard, clearly people also thought this way in antiquity”.

There have been hundreds and probably thousands of ‘Gods’ that people have believed in. In popular culture, Ricky Gervais (2015) stated on Twitter that “there have been nearly 3000 Gods so far but only yours actually exists. The others are silly made up nonsense. But not yours. Yours is real”. With a plethora of different ‘Gods’ and atheism all being around for thousands of years, it is apparent that there is not a linear way to interpret beliefs. Pandey (2023) when discussing “The world's departure from organized religion” stated that “the trend is gaining momentum across the world”. This would mean that the world is becoming more secular, which, with an increase in the amount and availability of knowledge, particularly science, is probably not a surprise. Some religions are increasing the number of

followers, for example, Islam, which according to Wikipedia (n.d.) “is the fastest-growing religion in the world”. It also stated that “according to a study published in 2011 by Pew Research, what little information is available may suggest that religious conversion has no net impact on the Muslim population”. However, it explained that the increase was caused by Muslims having more babies than the number of Muslims dying. It stated, “according to a 2017 Pew Research Center survey, between 2010 and 2015 “an estimated 213 million babies were born to Muslim mothers and roughly 61 million Muslims died, meaning that the natural increase in the Muslim population – i.e., the number of births minus the number of deaths – was 152 million over this period”. In this case, which is not unique, the main way that religions get new members is through having children. Cooperman (2023), while citing a 2019 survey, stated, “82% of Protestant parents had teens who also identified as Protestant, 81% of Catholic parents had Catholic teens, and 86% of religiously unaffiliated parents – those who described themselves as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular – had teens who were also “nones.””. He also stated that “35% of U.S. parents said it was extremely or very important that their kids grow up to share their religious views”.

The last paragraph assumed that babies born to parents with a particular religious belief are automatically part of that religion. This is patently not true. Newborn babies are not born with a knowledge or belief in a deity any more than they are born with a belief in custard, ponies, nuclear fusion or fairies and Father Christmas. The paragraph was demonstrating that most of the babies born to parents with a particular religious belief will be educated about or indoctrinated into that religion while they are growing up. Most of these children grow up and are treated as members of their parents’ religion from when they are born. An obvious example is of male circumcision for those following Judaism and Islam. The BBC Website (2014) stated, “Male circumcision is compulsory for Jews and is commonly practiced among Muslims”.

This leads to the conclusion that logic is not the most influential element in determining a person’s religion. The ontological argument, along with the *a posteriori* arguments probably has less effect on someone’s religious beliefs than their upbringing. Amber (2022) stated, “children are most impressionable during the first three years of life”. She also stated, “During the first seven years of a child’s life, his or her brain is growing and developing more than at any other time in life. This is a time of great opportunity for learning. The experiences

a child has during these years help shape the brain and determine how it functions for the rest of his or her life”.

If one of the religions' God was real then the others could not logically exist, in this universe, anyway. If this scenario was true, then it is logical that there would be one true God (from the correct religion) and all other 'flavours' of God would be false. If God existed, but He was not one of the Gods from any of the world's religions, then there would still be one true God, and one more false God than in the first scenario. Truth, and therefore correct reason, would not be very successful in increasing the number of followers of the real God, unless God intervened and willed it. Instead, it would be much more down to the number of the religion's followers who had children. This shows, in practice, in the world as we know it, the ontological argument alone could not persuade most people to believe in the true God (if such a being existed). It can also be inferred that it would not persuade a significant number of atheists or agnostics that God existed. It is often claimed that Mark Twain famously said, "It's easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled." (Goodreads, n.d.). This quote is not fully accepted to be from Mark Twain by everyone, but the quote exists and represents the idea that people will follow their early beliefs through into adulthood and it is not necessarily easy to change someone's mind about a childhood or long held belief, even with good evidence.

This situation does not mean theological arguments for the existence of God, and notably for this thesis, the ontological argument, cannot be effective. It demonstrates there are inertia factors that are inbred from an early age to resist arguments that do not follow the narrative of a person's upbringing. This shows that even if the argument is sound and the premises and assumptions are correct that it might not persuade someone who is considered 'level-headed' and rational.

Given that an argument may be logical and reasonable, but not effective, through outside, earlier influences, raises a question about whether some people are not swayed by the argument because of a weakness in the argument or because of previous entrenched beliefs. This realisation may demonstrate why a number of good arguments, that might have to be repeated or evolved over time, are required to change someone's mind about the existence or non-existence of God. This shows that the approach of Thomas Aquinas, with his 'Five Ways' argument, or the involvement of other arguments, such as the Kalam Cosmological Argument and the Fine-Tuning Argument could influence someone's belief

about God, even if they find the ontological argument convincing. While this does not academically affect the validity of the argument, it could explain its' effectiveness or the reaction of people after seeing it, and whether it influences the success of one of the main objectives of the argument, which is to convince people of the existence of God.

Five of the ontological arguments that are explored in this thesis have the word 'being' in them. Examples of these are:

St Anselm: By definition, God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived.

Rene Decartes: God is a supremely perfect being.

Alvin Plantinga: A being has *maximal greatness* if it has maximal excellence in every possible world.

Al-Ghazali: God is a necessary being.

Malcolm: God is a being a greater than which cannot be conceived.

As these all use the term 'being' for defining God or the word 'being' is substituted for God in the case of Plantinga's argument. If these similar definitions are used and given that the definition of 'being' essentially means 'existing', these definitions are stating that God exists at the beginning of the argument and then proceed to argue the same conclusion. The arguments can be reformulated by replacing 'being' with something that does not mean 'existing', although terms such as legendary and mythological have connotations of not being real. Perhaps 'being' could be replaced with 'possible being', which is required as a premise as this is what the argument is trying to prove, whether God is a being or not, although this does cause an issue. The argument does not just try to prove God is a being, but a necessary being, and this is a central part of the argument.

If 'being' is used as it currently is in the argument, then the best the argument can prove is that a being that exists (God) is a necessary being, and not contingent. St. Anselm's original argument follows the statement about "God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived" with the statement "I can conceive of such a being", which could be interpreted as it is the conception that actually makes the being exist, although whether the being can

be conceived does not actually affect whether the being is real or not. The statement that 'God is a being' means God exists.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary does introduce a secondary definition of 'being' which is "something that is conceivable and hence capable of existing". If this definition is assumed, although not the most popular or most understood of the word 'being' then the argument does not necessarily start with the assumption that God exists. For the ontological arguments, this definition of 'being' will need to be used to stop the arguments from being circular.

Gorbatova (2014) cited Dragalina-Chernaya as looking "for a new approach to the treatment of the Ontological Argument" that she called "a middle way". Gorbatova stated that Dragalina-Chernaya concluded that "it is a performative proof". This is an interesting view as a performative proof is not a way of starting with a true statement and concluding with another one, but "a transition from some sound action to another". It transfers from logical reasoning to volition, using the power of one's will or "the power of choosing or determining" (Merriam-Webster dictionary). This way of thinking implies that if someone tries to think hard enough, they will come to the conclusion that God exists and that a non-believer probably has not tried hard enough. This is an interesting view and is similar in some ways to 'the power of prayer' and the idea that following a religious lifestyle and behaving as if you believe in a God will eventually lead to the conclusion that you actually do believe in God. This approach is not a satisfactory logical exercise and does not lead to the logical proof in God that the ontological argument is trying to achieve, but it does link the argument to the idea that faith can have a bearing and dependency on 'logical' thought. As the ontological argument is an *a priori* argument it is purely to do with thought and therefore the idea that thinking more deeply will produce the desired result that you are convinced by your thoughts is interesting. One reaction is that thinking more deeply means that your thoughts are better as you are thinking about it for longer and considering more details and perhaps more nuances. A different reaction is that the ontological argument is designed to be sound and clearly demonstrates that God exists, so thinking more deeply in this context of trying to persuade oneself is not required.

Attributes of God

God is usually described by His attributes, e.g. omniscience, omnibenevolence and omnipotence. There is less discussion about the temporal and physical characteristics of God. For believers in an Abrahamic God, it is generally agreed that God created space and time. The Answers in Genesis Website stated, “Many people don’t think about God creating empty space, but He did!” and “God created time, too” and Bible passages are referenced as evidence, notably John 1:3, which stated, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (New International Version (NIV)) and Genesis 1:1 “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (NIV). The Answers in Genesis site also references special relativity with “Einstein showed that space and time are interdependent” (Lisle, n.d.).

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy gave various ideas, and it concludes with “While philosophers often come to conclusions that are reasonably settled in their mind, they are wise to hold such conclusions with an open hand.” Ganssle (n.d.). The article explored different views on the nature of God and time, from God being timeless, i.e. outside of time to the other extreme, being eternal and temporal, meaning that God always existed and always will but that He will experience time. It also explored other intermediate views. As Lisle stated above, space and time are interdependent and following this and without controversy, God’s relationship with space would mimic these views, i.e. God is outside of space or God is outside of space but can react with it. The view that God is outside of space and does not interact with it is a deistic view, rather than theistic. If God experiences all of space at once, then this is compatible with an omnipresent God; a popular view by a large number of theists, notably those that worship the Abrahamic religions.

If God has the quality of omnipresence, it could mean two different things, depending on whether God is timeless or not. If He is temporal or has temporal characteristics, e.g. He experiences His own time, or became temporal when He created the Universe, then this is consistent with the Abrahamic God. Even if God is Timeless then this is still consistent with the Abrahamic faith in that although God experiences everything at once, the Universe does not.

Photons, which are the quantum of light or other electromagnetic rays, do not experience time. According to Stutter (2022), “Photons are fundamental subatomic particles that carry the electromagnetic force - or, in simpler terms, they are light particles (and so much more)”.

According to the Forbes Website if you were travelling at the speed of light “you will not experience the passage of time; your entire journey will appear to you to be instantaneous” (Siegel, 2016). This is similar to the idea that God is timeless and everything in the Universe happens simultaneously for him.

The Website phys.org stated, “One of the most striking predictions of quantum physics is that matter can be generated solely from light (i.e., photons), and in fact, the astronomical bodies known as pulsars achieve this feat.” (Osaka University, 2023). Given this understanding of quantum physics and the fact that photons in ‘some way’ do not experience time or distance theoretically means that something separate to the universe could have created it or at least created matter. Matter would ‘normally’ be expected to be found in space-time, as matter warps space-time according to Einstein’s theory of general relativity. Space.com stated, “As he worked out the equations for his general theory of relativity, Einstein realized that massive objects caused a distortion in space-time” (Dutfield, Tillman, Bartels, 2023). When considering extra dimensions above the three for space and one for time, it is possible that something can exist outside of space-time. String theory speculates that there are more than the four known dimensions. Space.com stated, “The five different string theories had a few commonalities. For one, they all involved strings. They also all required our universe to have 10 total dimensions: the usual three spatial dimensions, one for time and six more compact dimensions that are tiny and curled up on themselves at submicroscopic scales” (Stutter, 2020). This cursory analysis of an aspect of quantum theory does have some similarity with God, being outside of time and creating the universe. This does not necessarily link the Universe to the possible existence of God, but it does offer a similarity between physics and divine creation as it does not make the existence of God any more unlikely.

Interpreting Holy Scripture

The main sources of information about the three versions of the Abrahamic God are from the Torah, Bible and Qur'an, which were written centuries ago and have probably all been modified at different times. There are also commentaries on these different sources, which are important to their respective religions.

Torah - According to the Talmud, which is the main source of "Jewish theology", the Torah was "written by Moses", except the "last eight verses" which were written by Joshua (Wikipedia, n.d.). Wikipedia also stated that the current academic understanding is "that the Torah has multiple authors and that its composition took place over centuries".

Bible - There are many versions of the protestant Bible. According to Parke (2024) "about 50 versions of the English Bible are in circulation, with revised versions well into the hundreds". These include the King James Version (KJV), New International Version (NIV), English Standard Version (ESV) among others that are titled with the word 'version'. These are not including the Catholic Bible which has a different number of books included in the Old Testament. Throughout most of the history of Christianity the Catholic Church was the acknowledged expert in understanding the bible and could push their interpretation of it onto their followers. There are now other authorities that claim that right, including the Church of England. Parke (2024) stated, "The modern Protestant Bible consists of 66 books with two distinct sections: The Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books)". Parke further stated that the "Catholic canon contained 73 Bible Books". There are other Christian denominations, some of which have a different number of bible books in their canon. An example is the Ethiopian Bible that has 81 books. "The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has 46 books of the Old Testament and 35 books of the New Testament that will bring the total of canonized books of the Bible to 81" (The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, 2003).

Qur'an - There is the modern standard Islamic narrative that the Qur'an has never been changed, but there are different variants around in the early twenty first century, notably the Warsh and Hafs. Reddit (n.d.) stated, "When we compare the Hafs version to the Warsh version it becomes obvious they are not identical". There are commentaries on the Qur'an by many scholars and have been since it was written. There are also hadiths which according to Britannica Website are "the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muhammad,

revered by Muslims as a major source of religious law and moral guidance” (Sayeed, 2024). There are 4 grades of hadiths. According to the Islamic Awareness Website (n.d.) these are “Sahih (sound), Hasan (good), Da`if (weak) or Maudu` (fabricated, forged)”.

There are other scriptures and sources of information about the three main versions of the Abrahamic God, but it is not relevant to examine them to consider the truth and validity of the ontological argument. There are human authorities, such as various churches, the Vatican and Mullahs, clerics and Imams in Islam, clergy, priests and bishops in Christianity and Rabbis in Judaism. There are also academics and scholars that interpret scriptures. There are many disagreements with schisms in each of the religions, the main ones include Catholic and Protestant versions of Christianity, Sunni and Shia versions of Islam and Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism. There are also more minor differences of opinion, and many views change over time, including official doctrine from major institutions. All of these views tend to be about details below the characteristics of God, which are very consistent within each of the religions.

Other non-Abrahamic religions have holy books and scriptures. World Atlas (n.d.) stated that “Hinduism has a vast collection of sacred texts and written collections, including the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and more” and that “The Vedas are the oldest and most important texts”. World Atlas (n.d.) stated, “Buddhism has various sacred texts, the most important of which are the Tripitaka and the Mahayana Sutras”. It added that “The Tripitaka is the primary holy text for Theravada Buddhists, while Mahayana Buddhists revere the Mahayana Sutras”. World Atlas (n.d.) stated that significant texts in Taoism “include the Tao Te Ching, the Zhuangzi, and the Daozang”. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “The principal Sikh scripture is the Adi Granth (First Scripture), more commonly called the Guru Granth Sahib. The second most important scripture of the Sikhs is the Dasam Granth. Both of these consist of text which was written or authorised by the Sikh Gurus”.

All the major religions have their own scholars who try and interpret texts to meet the expectations of the existing times and claim mistranslations or actually mistranslated words and meanings deliberately. This was notable in the Christian world when homosexuality among men became acceptable to most western people. “In 1998, the 13th Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops passed a resolution “rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture”.” Wikipedia (n.d.). It added the following with some ambiguity

that “In England and Wales, civil partnerships are permitted for clergy” and followed up with “The Church of England requests that clergy in civil partnerships vow to remain sexually chaste”. Wikipedia (n.d.) also stated that in the wider Anglican Communion “Some followers believe that heterosexuality or celibacy is required of Christians”. In Islam the same Arabic word, ‘nur’ or ‘noor’ is used to describe light from the Moon and also metaphorically describes Allah and Mohammad. In some English translations instead of just putting the ‘light of the moon’, it is translated as ‘reflected light of the moon’. There are many discussions about this on Islamic Websites, for example on the Website Answering Islam which stated the following by Katz and Campbell (n.d.)

“Sura 71:15-16, states:

See ye not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another,
and made the moon a light (noor) in their midst,
and made the sun as a lamp (siraaj)?”

An example of ‘nur’ being used to describe Allah is given as “In the Quran, God is stated to be “the light (Nūr) of the heavens and the earth” (Verse of Light).” Wikipedia (n.d.).

These are just two examples that spark considerable debates. There are many others, perhaps, notably attitudes to slavery and the treatment of women.

The main conclusion is that in all of these religions many people make money and gain influence from interpreting scriptures in a way favourable to authorities and their followers and these ideas change over time. There are many apologists who claim that their holy book is miraculous and scientifically accurate and must be the word of or inspired by God. These arguments and considerations do not materially affect the ontological argument though.

These do not directly reflect on the ontological argument, but show that if there is some aspect of God or scripture that someone is unhappy with, then there are likely to be others who reinterpret the meaning of these aspects. Therefore there could be differing interpretations of the argument arising even though it has been robust, if not generally accepted, by everyone over the many centuries since it was formulated.

Different Ontological Arguments

St Anselm's Original Ontological Argument

As already stated, it is popularly believed St. Anselm of Canterbury who, according to Britannica Academic was “(born 1033/34, Aosta, Lombardy [Italy]—died April 21, 1109, possibly at Canterbury, Kent, England; feast day April 21)” (Kemp, J. A., n.d.), proposed the first ontological argument in the 11th century A.D. In ‘Proslogion’, he claimed to determine that God existed from the idea of a “being than which no greater can be conceived.” (Ontological Arguments, 2024). While continuing to refer to St. Anselm’s argument, which is still the best-known version, ‘The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Ontological Arguments’ (2024), reasoned, “if such a being fails to exist, then a greater being—namely, a being than which no greater can be conceived, and which exists—can be conceived. But this would be absurd: nothing can be greater than a being than which no greater can be conceived. So a being than which no greater can be conceived exists. And, very plausibly, if that than which no greater can be conceived exists, then it is God and so God exists”.

“Anselm’s argument is set out in the form of a *reductio ad absurdum*, that is, it begins with an assumption which is then shown to be false by showing that something contradictory would follow if it were true. In this case, the assumption that God, the greatest possible being, does not exist.” (Stump & Murray, 1999). Princeton University (n.d.) stated that Anselm’s “aim is to refute the fool who says in his heart that there is no God (Psalms 14:1)”.

If someone came across the ontological argument for the first time, even in its 1,000 year old form, then it would certainly be possible that it would cause them to pause and consider it, like the supposed and famous paradox that no one could ever catch anyone in a race no matter how slowly or fast each of them moved. This is because the person behind would have to first travel half the distance, in which time the person in front would move on a bit, then another half the distance, etc. By this logic the person in front would never get caught, even if the other person was travelling much faster than they were! The original version of this ‘paradox’ was by Zeno, a Greek philosopher from the fifth century BCE and is detailed in ‘Paradox: The Nine Greatest Enigmas in Physics’ by Jim Al-Khalili. In it Al-Khalili (2012) stated, “It is known as the Paradox of Achilles (or the Problem of Achilles and the Tortoise)”.

The ontological argument does not rely on understanding scriptures, translating or deciphering contentious passages about God and the nature of God or even any scientific understanding of the Universe. Instead, it relies on deductive reasoning, which, if valid, is stronger than inductive reasoning in that it is irrefutable, whereas inductive reasoning can give very strong confidence, but never an absolute proof. In 'The Philosopher's Toolkit A Compendium of Philosophical Concepts and Methods', second edition Baggini and Fosl (2010) described deduction as "the most rigorous form of argumentation there is, since in deduction, the move from premises to conclusions is such that if the premises are true, then the conclusion must also be true". An example of inductive reasoning could be every tiger ever seen has stripes; therefore, all tigers have stripes. The more tigers that have been seen, especially when approaching the total known tiger population, the stronger the argument, but it cannot be conclusive, as it is theoretically possible that someone might see a tiger without stripes, thus disproving the argument. On The Website Got Questions, the article 'What is the Ontological argument for the existence of God?' (n.d.) postulated that "Those who encounter the ontological argument for the first time typically react in one of two ways. For some, it's abstract enough that it makes no sense. Most others find it unconvincing, whether or not they can articulate a specific reason. A few people find it compelling, perhaps after long study, but this is not a common response. Even those who reject it, however, have a difficult time explaining exactly why it is wrong".

In The alevelphilosophy.co.uk Website, Lacewing (n.d.) included a handout with the following summary of Anselm's Ontological Argument. It stated that the argument relies on 'conceivability':

1. By definition, God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived.
2. I can conceive of such a being.
3. It is greater to exist than not to exist.
4. Therefore, God must exist.

This (deductive) argument is valid in that if the 3 premises are true then the conclusion is also true.

Several atheists and some theists follow the rebuttal, which according to 'The Philosophy Book' was first put forward by "One contemporary of Anselm's, Gaunilo of Marmoutiers", who said, "that we could use the same argument to prove that there exists somewhere a marvellous island, greater than any island that can be thought." (Buckingham et al., 2011). This could appear to be a criticism of a strawman version of St. Anselm's argument which, as mentioned earlier, deals with ordinary, material things, which cannot really be regarded as greater than any other similar thing that can be conceived. It would also be very difficult to define and agree the attributes that the greatest of a particular thing would possess. The greatest king, for example, if it was agreed that there was a greatest king, could have had a better understanding of his people and others' plights, or perhaps spend more time helping his subjects and the greatest bookmark could be more valuable or slightly thinner, longer etc. with many of these attributes valued differently by people with different priorities, tastes or needs at that moment.

There is a case of special pleading in arguments for the existence of God from several atheists. This can be seen particularly in respect to the Kalam Cosmological Argument, which stated that everything has a cause and works back to God being the initial cause of the universe. However, given that the God that is meant in these discussions is put forward as the creator of the universe, it follows that God is not a typical thing to be compared to, like a toaster, or planet, milkshake, or star etc. The description of God as a being greater than which cannot be conceived, can be used as those who believe in God certainly believe that there is none greater than God, although 'greater' is a vague term that could have subjective qualities included within it.

Philosopher Alvin Plantinga (born 1932), among others, described God as being "omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good" (Ontological Argument, n.d.). There are several arguments that state logically that a being cannot be omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, including the famous, could God create a boulder so heavy that He could not lift it (omnipotent), and can God know everything that has happened, is happening and will happen, yet still intervene and change things (omnipotent and omniscient). A more conceptual issue is that if God knows everything across all time and He was omnipotent, He would have created everything (the universe) as He wanted it to be, and if He is wholly good, then there would be no reason to change anything; He would in effect, make Himself impotent rather than omnipotent. There is an argument that as God created the universe to

His perfection then He has proved His omnipotence even though it could be given that He has no use for it after the universe was created. This is making the assumption that God would not want to make another universe at some time. An interesting side note is that if God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent then prayer could be pointless, as there is no conceivable circumstance when a wholly good God would change his perfect universe because of a prayer. There are arguments that can support this sort of prayer that are based on culture, community or religious beliefs. These can be more to align people together, or to show that someone belongs to a group and identifies with their beliefs. From a Darwinian viewpoint, considering the theory of evolution by natural selection, the security and protection of being part of a group, as well as the more certainty of expectations, would be a beneficial trait when considering hazards including other tribes and potentially predators. If the person praying felt better by praying then it would do them some good, but would have no effect outside of that.

There is also the argument that looks at evil; can God erase evil? If not, then God is not omnipotent, if God can prevent/erase evil and does not then He is clearly not wholly good. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, third edition, claims “Most theists dismiss objections to omnipotence that require God to do what is logically impossible (e.g., create a square circle in two-dimensional space).” (Audi, 2015). This could apply to the boulder objection, above, but then there might be a question about the invalidity of logic, that presumably was created by God? This argument, if valid, might not cover the contradiction about God knowing everything, but still being all powerful to change things, and does not address the question of such a God failing to erase evil. This is different to the question of why God created evil, which was addressed by St Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE) who believed “that although God created everything that exists, he did not create evil, because evil is not a thing, but a lack of deficiency of something.” (Buckingham et al., 2011). This is just one view though.

Interestingly, the bolder objection, as detailed above, ‘could God create a boulder so heavy that he could not lift it’ seems to be a valid objection, even if one had to ignore the seemingly logical impossibility. If, however, this were examined more closely, the logic breaks down into either a) God can make a boulder that he cannot lift, or b) God cannot make a boulder he cannot lift. If the answer is a), then God would not be omnipotent, or all powerful as He could not lift such a boulder. If the answer is b) however, God could not create a boulder so

heavy that he could not lift it, and although this appears to show a failure in omnipotence, a rewording of it might cast some doubt. If the structure of b) is reworked as 'if God can make a boulder, then God can lift it'; which is logically consistent to b) and if 'God' was replaced by 'god1' for the maker and 'god2' for the lifter, where god1 could potentially be god2, we have 'if god1 can make a boulder then god2 can lift it'. If the limit of god2's strength was to lift a boulder of 100kg and god1 could create a boulder of 100 kg then this would be true. On the other hand, if god2 was God then God could lift a boulder of infinite weight (strictly mass), as God is omnipotent. If god1 was also God, so god1 and god2 were the same being; God, then god1 (God) could create a boulder of infinite weight (mass) and the fact that god2 (God) could also lift it would not put a limit on the mass of the boulder God could create, as both are infinite. Therefore 'God could not create a boulder so heavy that he could not lift it' does not deny God's omnipotence despite appearing to.

In Anselm's argument along with those of Descartes, Plantinga etc. the case is made that God is the greatest/best/most perfect being that can be imagined. If this is considered in the light that Muslims define Islam as the religion of peace and Christians define their God as all loving despite scriptural evidence that both these claims are false given general and popular understanding of these terms, then this claim might need to be accepted. Simple examples of each of these contradictions to the secularly and generally understood defined terms are punishment for apostasy in Islam and the genocide of flooding the earth in Christianity/Judaism; there are many others. If a distortion of these adjectives is not accepted, and we are to use words and arguments as they are defined outside of the sacred religious texts then there is a possible argument that imagining a God with the attributes of being omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good does not represent a definition of God in any of the Abrahamic faiths. This is because if someone could imagine this 'God' then they could imagine a similar, but greater God that has not created Hell, does not allow the Devil to exist or alternatively does not allow the Devil to cause harm and does not allow evil; arguably this could be greater than the imagined Abrahamic God? God could also have created humans to be 'better', to use biblical language, more in His image, if he was wholly good. These criticisms of imagining the greatest being possible as being God only applies to Gods of man-made religions, particularly the Abrahamic ones. Although this image of God was the image used behind the Ontological Argument, it does not need to be addressed to consider the argument valid for the idea of a non-Abrahamic God. The argument is not affected by this criticism of the goodness of a wholly good being if that being is able to be imagined.

Whether the Abrahamic God is the greatest conceivable being or it is another 'version' of God, for this argument for God to be taken seriously, this 'God' needs to be agreed to have the quality of being all loving.

The second premise 'I can conceive of such a being' (God being the greatest being), is usually not challenged. For example, the alevelphilosophy.co.uk Website stated, "The second premise says that this idea – a being greater than which we cannot conceive – is coherent." (Lacewing, n.d.). The 'I' in the premise is Anselm originally, but for the argument to be valid the premise must hold for others who make the argument. Can a human conceive of a being that nothing can be greater or more perfect than? A being that is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good? Is it even possible for a human to conceive a much more tangible concept of a lightyear? A light-year is roughly 10,000,000,000,000 kilometres, or ten trillion kilometres; can a human mind begin to conceive this distance? According to The Nine Planets Website, if the universe is not infinite, then several scientists think the universe could be "at least 7 trillion light-years in diameter" (How Big is the Universe?, 2020). This is approximately 70,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 kilometres, or 70 trillion, trillion kilometres. It is at least arguable that humans cannot imagine such a distance, and this unfathomable number does not include imagining the vast number of stars, planets, atoms, etc, in the universe, and by premise 1, does not include the being capable of creating this universe.

The third premise stated that it is greater to exist than not exist and this is the premise that gets most of the attention by opponents of the ontological argument. In 'Philosophy the Basics', Warburton (2013) quoted Immanuel Kant, "Listing existence as a further essential property of a perfect being is making the mistake of treating existence as a property rather than as the precondition of anything having any properties at all". 'The Little Book of Philosophy', by various authors, stated, "Kant's book Critique of Pure Reason is arguably the most significant single work in the history of modern philosophy." (DK, 2018). A strong rebuttal that existence is a property came from Gottlob Frege being summarised in the quote "The word 'existent' is illegitimate; if an object falls under a concept, the concept says no more when it exists than when it does not." (Frege, 1919/1956).

St. Anselm's argument is partly definitional, in which the meaning of some vocabulary is introduced in the definition. In this argument the first step is "By definition, God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived". Following this with the claim that it is greater to

exist than not, means that 'God possesses all perfections including existence' is a valid statement in the argument, but this does not lead to the conclusion that God exists in the real world. This is detailed elsewhere in this thesis when considering the difference between *de re* and *de dicto* language.

This argument also conceived of a being, so it is partially a conceptual argument. There are often two distinct types of reading of these sorts of statements. An example of the first, which is taken at face value, but does not assert a truth is 'Jane believes that fairies live in many forests'. An example of the second type, which 'begs the question' is 'Jane thinks about fairies'. This statement can only be true if fairies exist, otherwise there would be no fairies for Jane to think about. So, the second step "I can conceive of such a being" referring to the initial statement of "God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived" if read the first way is not arguing for the existence of God, just 'conceiving/believing' in God. If read the second way, then it begs the question and is not reasonable from a non-theist's point of view. A non-theist would possibly deny or at least doubt that there is an existent being that no greater being could be conceived and so have doubts about whether someone could think about this being.

There is a distinction between entertaining the idea of something that can be conceived and it being true. To use the idea of a unicorn, which is used more than once in this thesis, the idea of, for example, the smallest, bluest or roundest unicorn can be conceived. This does not mean that a unicorn must exist, just the imagined 'unicorn' and then objective or even subjective qualities can be attributed to it. Examples of qualities for a unicorn could be cutest, fiercest or friendliest. These are at least partially subjective because these are understood ideas, but not necessarily easily measured empirically and subject to taste or pre-determined ideas. Whereas to measure something like volume or height is a simple scalar quantity, cuteness is mostly subjective, although many people will have a similar view because of the use of language and common values.

In the 'Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy', it is stated that "as Bertrand Russell observed, it is much easier to be persuaded that ontological arguments are no good than it is to say exactly what is wrong with them. This helps to explain why ontological arguments have fascinated philosophers for almost a thousand years." (Ontological Arguments, 2011).

Another consideration for the argument is to look more at the idea of a concept. A 'being' inside a mind is a concept rather than a 'thing' or being. A God inside the mind is a concept not a being, it is a representation of something, not the thing itself. For example, the concept of blue football is not blue, it is just a concept of the colour. God in the mind would be the greatest concept that is conceivable, not the greatest being. Dictionary.com defines 'concept' as "an idea of something formed by mentally combining all its characteristics or particulars; a construct". From this logic, God does not exist in the mind, the thought of God exists in the mind.

Thoughts cannot exist outside of the mind and things cannot exist in the mind. The premise that it is better to exist in reality and in the mind is problematic because categorically there could not be an entity that would exist both in the mind and in the real world; there would need to be a fallacy of equivocation to attempt to conceive this. This is when a word or phrase is used with different meanings in an argument, which makes it invalid. "The fallacy of equivocation refers to the use of an ambiguous word or phrase in more than one sense within the same argument. Because this change of meaning happens without warning, it renders the argument invalid or even misleading." (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

In the premise, God is described as greater than any other being. This is an assertion, taken as a truth, but 'greater' is not actually defined and can be vague. This assertion might not be true given that the argument stated that 'I can conceive of God being greater than anything else'. The argument was for the existence of the Christian God, but if someone can conceive of the Christian God, then it seems reasonable they could conceive of something almost the same as the Christian God except He does not commit genocide or infanticide. This argument could possibly be raised about all the varieties of the Abrahamic God but does not make it a problem for an obviously benevolent God. This would not define 'greater' but would make it less problematic and more consensual.

By steel manning this problem and considering an Abrahamic God who is greater than anything by virtue of being God and 'mysterious' so that humans cannot understand His actions we therefore have to suspend judgement and indeed our understanding of 'greater'. In this instance, something would be greater if it were more like God. Using this understanding the argument becomes 'existing is more God-like than not existing, which begs the question, making it a circular argument for the existence of a being where this definition includes existence.

Rene Descartes' Version of the Ontological Argument

Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), was a supporter of the ontological argument and reformulated it. On the A Level Philosophy Website, Lacewing (n.d.) stated, “Descartes’ version of the argument relies on perfection alone, not conceivability: It is certain that I... find the idea of a God in my consciousness, that is the idea of a being supremely perfect: and I know with... clearness and distinctness that an [actual and] eternal existence pertains to his nature... existence can no more be separated from the essence of God, than the idea of a mountain from that of a valley... it is not less impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is wanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection, than to conceive a mountain without a valley”. The language used is simple and the imagery within the description is probably used to enhance the argument rather than to draw accurate comparisons. The metaphor of a mountain and valley being linked like existence and God does not stand up to scrutiny for a few reasons. One reason is that mountains and valleys both exist, and no one doubts them, there are many physical examples that can be seen, touched and experienced. Also, existence cannot be separated from them otherwise they are not an actual mountain and valley. Another is that they are physical things, and the ‘essence of God’ is a much more nebulous concept. The word ‘eternal’ is linked to time. Dictionary.com defines ‘eternal’ as “without beginning or end; lasting forever; always existing” and the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘forever’ as “for a limitless time”. Eternal then lasts for all time, but God needs to exist outside of time, as according to theists, He created everything, including time.

The A Level Philosophy website also lays out Descartes’ argument as:

1. I have the idea of God;
2. God is a supremely perfect being;
3. Existence is a perfection;
4. Therefore, God must exist

Descartes, with all his perceived shortcomings and faults, thought that as he could contemplate a clear and distinct image of God, the supremely perfect being, the thought of God must have come from God. The initial conclusion when reading this could be that Descartes thought his imagination was not good enough to imagine such a being as God. It

is probably impossible to know what actual idea Descartes had of God as stated in his argument above. The stated perfection of a supremely perfect being as the creator of everything seemed to Descartes to be too impossible for him to imagine and so he theorised that God put the idea of Himself innately into humans. It is obviously true that humans have limited imagination, which will depend on many influences including knowledge, cognitive ability, stimulus, experience and influence. Humans want to understand their environment. We can see this from the many hundreds of creation stories throughout history. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "Creation myths have been around since ancient history and have served important societal roles. Over 100 "distinct" ones have been discovered". This does not disprove Descartes belief that God is responsible for giving him certain knowledge of God, but as there are over 100 "distinct" myths then at best, it might seem that this 'knowledge' had not always been so clear.

A criticism of Descartes' argument, as just stated, above, is that, like Gaunilo's perfect island rebuttal of St. Anselm's version of the ontological argument, a different thing could be substituted for 'God' and logically it would still be true. There are many examples of this including in the 'Philosophy of Religion: The Big Question', which uses as an example a "negmount" (Stump & Murray, 1999). The criticism is essentially to define something that is clearly not real in anyone's experience and state that it is existent as part of its definition, i.e. for it to be such a thing it must exist. It follows that the made-up concept of, for example, a 'Taalman' which, for this thesis, is defined as an existent 50-metre-tall green man with eight arms and four legs, exists by its definition; it is something that most people can imagine, but in reality, there is no such thing (on Earth anyway). The rebuttal shows that it does not follow that by defining the concept or idea as existing that it necessarily exists.

Steel manning Descartes' ontological argument by substituting 'necessary existence' for 'existence' in premise 3 i.e. 'Necessary existence is a perfection' makes it a stronger argument. In a one world view, which is implied in Descartes's argument, rather than in many worlds, 'necessary' means that something is not contingent. If someone believes everything is determined, then there is a case for the argument that everything that exists is necessary. Those people who believe in free will, would argue that some things are necessary, and others are contingent. In The Philosopher's Toolkit, second Edition, Baggini and Fosl (2010) gave examples of these. Firstly, "As an example of necessary truth, consider any mathematical truth, say, $2 \times 2 = 4$ ". Secondly, as a contingent truth they give an historical

example, "George W. Bush was the president of the United States from 2001 to 2009". They claim this to be an example of contingent truth because "Had a few things gone differently in Florida before, during and after the US presidential elections of 2000, it would have been Al Gore who entered the White House as president".

By changing premise 3 of Descartes' argument above, it becomes 'necessary existence is a perfection'. Kant's objection to existence being a quality of something would still need to be dealt with. However, by doing this, God would not exist by chance or depending on other things because otherwise He could therefore logically come in and out of existence. "Instead of saying 'God has necessary existence', which suggests existence is a property, we should say that 'it is necessarily true that God exists'. The 'necessity' applies to the claim: 'God exists' must be true. Of course, we need an argument to support the claim, but at least it makes sense." (Lacewing, n.d.).

Premise 2 can have two meanings, and this is where doubt can come in. Premise 2 stated that 'God is a supremely perfect being.' The two ways of interpreting this are that firstly there is an actual God and He is a supremely perfect being, or that secondly, the concept of God is of a supremely perfect being, but that He does not necessarily exist in the premise. If the first understanding of premise 2 is taken then the argument is a tautology, in that the argument for the existence of God has a premise that states God exists, namely premise 2. For the second interpretation, although it looks correct, it does not really make any more logical sense; there is still the same evidence against the conclusion in that a supremely perfect being can be conceived and so exists, which is no different to the made up negmount or Taalman.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's Ontological Argument

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 -1716) was a German polymath. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) he was a "mathematician, philosopher, scientist and diplomat who invented calculus in addition to many other branches of mathematics, such as binary arithmetic, and statistics". It further stated that he has been referred to as the "last universal genius".

Leibniz asserted that there is nothing contrary about God. He examined the problem of evil; why would an all loving, all knowing and all-powerful God allow evil, and thought that if he

could show that if this is “the best of all possible worlds” (Wikipedia, n.d.) then it would demonstrate that God was perfect and had no contradictory qualities. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated that Leibniz’s argument for the best of all possible worlds concluded that a wholly perfect God would create the optimal universe with “this is the cause for the existence of the greatest good; namely, that the wisdom of God permits him to know it, his goodness causes him to choose it, and his power enables him to produce it”. Wikipedia (n.d.) also explained Leibniz’s belief that it might not seem that we have “the best of all possible worlds” because “no matter how it may intuitively appear to us from our limited point of view, any other world – such as, namely, one without the evils which trouble our lives – would, in fact, have been worse than the current one, all things considered”.

Dunne (2023) summarised Leibniz’s argument as:

- (1) God is perfect.
- (2) Existence is a perfection.
- (3) Therefore, God exists.

He then criticised it, when he stated, “it is a deceptively simple argument. Why deceptively? Well, for a start, the second premise is doing a lot of work without much justification”.

Dunne (2023) also stated that St. Anselm thought that “it is better for something good to exist than for it not to exist” and therefore “existence should be counted as a perfection”. He also theorised that existence might not be deemed a perfection as it did not have the superlative of other perfections like “the most”, as in the most loving, most wise etc. He further stated, “Leibniz believes that *prima facie* this might be a contradictory idea, not least because none of us – no matter how committed a believer we might be – have the ‘idea’ of God, meaning that we cannot know that a perfect being is even conceivable”. This is discussed elsewhere in this thesis, how can a mortal begin to comprehend, or even imagine an all-perfect being.

The argument that Leibniz makes for existence being a perfection is that a most perfect being with only positive qualities would be most perfect if He existed, otherwise all the positive qualities would not exist in reality, and therefore the being would be less perfect. Similarly though, for an opposite, all-negative being, existence would be more negative. Balancing these two opposites would imply that if true, existence was both a positive and

negative quality and could possibly cancel each other out, so it could have the same net effect on the universe. Dunne (2023) quoted Leibniz, “it is also clear that existence is a perfection” showing that he believed that Leibniz thought that only a truly positive, perfect being existed and a negative one did not. Positive and negative attributes are discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

Alvin Plantinga’s Possible Worlds Ontological Argument

Alvin Plantinga and others considered the ontological argument through the lens of possible worlds. The expression ‘possible worlds’ refers to worlds that are logically possible. The Website All About Philosophy (Ontological Argument, n.d.) stated the “logic of the ontological argument is formally summarised by philosopher Alvin Plantinga as follows:

1. A being has maximal excellence in a given possible world W if and only if it is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good in W; and
2. A being has maximal greatness if it has maximal excellence in every possible world.
3. It is possible that there is a being that has maximal greatness. (Premise)
4. Therefore, possibly, it is necessarily true that an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being exists.
5. Therefore, ... it is necessarily true that an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being exists.
6. Therefore, an omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good being exists.”

The argument is again a valid argument and does not rely on the premise that existence is a desirable attribute, something that Kant questioned. The first premise giving the definition of a being having maximal excellence again contains the questionably contradictory attributes of omnipotence and omniscience and the Christian belief that God is wholly good. If the Christian belief is held that God is wholly good then this is part of the definition and is therefore not a separate attribute; but if it is ‘good’ as understood and defined as most rational human beings define it, e.g., no genocides, slavery, torture, murder etc. then this seems to contradict many of the actions of the God of the Bible. A common definition of

good in this sense is 'that which is morally right, righteous'. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines the noun 'good' as "behaviour that is morally right or acceptable".

'Excellence' is defined as 'The quality of being excellent' in the Cambridge Dictionary, and 'Excellent' is defined in the same dictionary as 'Extremely good', with similar definitions in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary – 'Very good'. The initial premise therefore defines a being of maximal goodness being wholly good, along with the qualities of omnipotence and omniscience; this is a tautology. It also does not necessarily follow that for a wholly good being to have maximum excellence it has to have omnipotence and omniscience. It could be reasonable to conclude that a being having maximal excellence should be omnipotent and it would be able to have the power to produce maximum good, but there is arguably no reason that being would need omniscience as it does not follow this being needs the knowledge to distinguish between good and evil, or good and not good as it is maximally good by definition and therefore could only act for good.

A similar view is expressed in the article on the Website Got Questions, (What is the Ontological argument for the existence of God?, n.d.) which stated, "The main drawback of the ontological argument is logical: it's not clear how concepts such as "greatness" and "existence" apply in a purely logical setting. It would be circular and illogical to simply say, "God by definition exists; therefore, He exists." Still, adding the stipulation that God is the "greatest possible" being doesn't seem to do much to break that circle".

Perhaps an overlooked premise in this version of the argument is premise 3, "It is possible that there is a being that has maximal greatness". Is this a justified assumption for a premise? At first glance, it seems that such a being is possible in a logically possible world, but this should be considered more carefully. The definition of 'maximal excellence', in premise 1, i.e., omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good can be taken to be consistent when looking at premise 3, as any criticisms of this would be dealt with by considering the merits of premise 1. By the definition of 'maximal greatness' in premise 2, a maximally great being exists if it has 'maximal excellence' in every possible world. It is logically possible that a maximally excellent being can be conceived of as not existing in a logically possible world, maybe more so than it is possible that such a being exists that has the definition in premise 1.

It seems possible that there could be a 'committee' of Gods that created the Universe as is claimed the single God that is defined in the argument, did. This would mean a polytheistic creation rather than monotheistic. Given that the argument is for a maximally great being to exist, then it could be argued that having another maximally great being is even better, then a third, fourth etc. The concepts of omniscience and morally perfect could have questions when considering more than one being with these attributes, such as knowing the others' thoughts and intentions and a possible conflict and the unnecessary quality of more than one morally perfect being. The concept of omnipotence presents the most contradiction when considering more than one of these beings. One being's actions could limit another and if this happened then it would mean that they cannot all be omnipotent.

Premise 3 stated that 'It is possible that there is a being that has maximal greatness.', which does not preclude the possibility of more than one. There is also the logical possibility that such a being did create the Universe, but as the being was, and could 'always' be outside time, He does not exist now in the Universe. The Universe as humans understand it has clear entropy showing time exists, as well as our experience of time. It is a further question as to whether 'exists' can be thought of at all in any philosophical or scientific way if there is no time: this does not seem to easily satisfy the definition of a logically possible world.

Plantinga's argument is a modal argument, claiming the possibility and necessity of God's existence and His attributes. Modal arguments from a theistic perspective have two premises:

- God exists in a possible world.
- God exists in all possible worlds if He exists in any of them.

A non-theist would claim that God does not exist in at least one possible world and could put forward the two premises:

- God fails to exist in a possible world.
- God fails to exist in all possible worlds if He fails to exist in any of them.

These two differing arguments appear to be equal in reason and therefore in themselves would not logically support theism or non-theism any more than the other one.

Another criticism of the model ontological arguments is that of begging the question, or circular reasoning. The premise that 'It is possible that there is a being that has maximal greatness.' is assuming that such a thing could be true, and according to this criticism, the rest of the argument adds definitions to this premise and concludes that if the premise is true then it is true. The statement from premise 4, "Therefore, possibly, it is necessarily true that an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being exists." it is argued, is just defining necessary existence for such a being with these maximal qualities.

Al-Ghazali's version of the ontological argument

Looking outside of Christianity, probably the most well-known version of the ontological argument was from an Islamic polymath who was a prominent philosopher and theologian, Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali lived between circa 1058 and 1111 CE. He was a Sunni Muslim from Persia (now Iran). Al-Ghazali thought that epistemology (the study of knowledge) and metaphysics (the study of reality) were very important. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2020) Al-Ghazali was "one of the most prominent and influential philosophers, theologians, jurists, and mystics of Sunni Islam".

Al-Ghazali did not set out a formal ontological argument like St. Anselm's, but did concentrate on attributes of existence and the nature of God. In his book, 'The Incoherence of the Philosophers' he stated, "It is impossible that what exists necessarily should not exist, and it is impossible that what does not exist should exist. Thus, existence is a necessary perfection and non-existence is a defect." and "The Necessary Existent is a thing whose nonexistence is inconceivable and whose existence is self-evident." (Al-Ghazali, 2002). If God is defined as a necessary being, then he argues for God's existence. He also defended the monotheistic view of a singular God with the words "the necessary being must be single, for if there were two necessary beings, each would limit the other, and this would entail imperfection".

On the Imam Ghazali Website (n.d.), there is the quote "Like all other Muslim scholars, we know that al-Ghazali adhered to an Islamic academic foundation in his theistic and theological writings", making it clear his belief in the Islamic God.

From the book 'The Incoherence of the Philosophers' the elements that make up Al-Ghazali's ontological argument are:

- God is a necessary being.
- existence is a perfect attribute of God.
- the concept of God as a necessary being is clear and obvious.
- God transcends the realm of contingency beings.
- the points raised help to cement the idea of a single, transcendent God reinforcing the idea of the monotheistic Islamic God.

These elements are taken from 'The Incoherence of the Philosophers, 2nd Edition' translated by Marmura (2002).

These points/arguments that Al Ghazali stated assume God is a necessary being and that existence is an attribute of perfection. Al Ghazali, probably like St. Anselm, started from his belief in God as he thought the Islamic God existed. He theorised God's characteristics from the Islamic teachings of the time and he would have used them in his reasoning. These ideas are very similar to St. Anselm's ontological argument and many of the same supportive and critical observations of St. Anselm's argument can be applied to Al Ghazali's work about the nature and existence of God.

Gödel's Ontological Argument for the Existence of God

Kurt Gödel (1906 - 1978) was a mathematician, philosopher and logician. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) he was thought "to be one of the most significant logicians in history". Although Gödel was baptised, he did not consider himself a Christian but believed in a monotheistic God. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "according to his wife Adele, "Gödel, although he did not go to church, was religious and read the Bible in bed every Sunday morning".

Gödel developed a mathematical 'proof' through modal logic for the existence of God. According to Marks and Haug (2021) he "offered a mathematical proof that God exists". They added that "Gödel's proof shows the existence of God is a necessary truth". Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "in its most succinct form, is as follows: "God, by definition, is that for which no greater can be conceived. God exists in the understanding. If God exists in the

understanding, we could imagine Him to be greater by existing in reality. Therefore, God must exist.”.

As stated by Wikipedia (n.d.), “A proof does not necessitate that the conclusion be correct, but rather that by accepting the axioms, the conclusion follows logically”. This is because even though the logic may be flawless, an assumption in the proof might not be true.

Gödel’s (mathematical) ‘proof’ of God is shown below:

- Ax. 1. $(P(\varphi) \wedge \Box \forall x(\varphi(x) \Rightarrow \psi(x))) \Rightarrow P(\psi)$
- Ax. 2. $P(\neg\varphi) \Leftrightarrow \neg P(\varphi)$
- Th. 1. $P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \Diamond \exists x \varphi(x)$
- Df. 1. $G(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall \varphi(P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \varphi(x))$
- Ax. 3. $P(G)$
- Th. 2. $\Diamond \exists x G(x)$
- Df. 2. $\varphi \text{ ess } x \Leftrightarrow \varphi(x) \wedge \forall \psi(\psi(x) \Rightarrow \Box \forall y(\varphi(y) \Rightarrow \psi(y)))$
- Ax. 4. $P(\varphi) \Rightarrow \Box P(\varphi)$
- Th. 3. $G(x) \Rightarrow G \text{ ess } x$
- Df. 3. $E(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall \varphi(\varphi \text{ ess } x \Rightarrow \Box \exists y \varphi(y))$
- Ax. 5. $P(E)$
- Th. 4. $\Box \exists x G(x)$

There are 5 assumptions or axioms. These are labelled Ax and if any of these are not true then the conclusion could be false. Df stands for definitions and Th for theorems. Theorems are steps built on axioms and definitions that advance the argument. Bischoff (2022) stated that “in a preprint study first posted in 2013 an algorithmic proof wizard checked Gödel’s logical chain of reasoning—and found it to be undoubtedly correct”.

Given that logically the proof is valid, this thesis will examine the axioms which the proof is derived from. Axiom 1 is written as Ax.1, above and axiom 2 as Ax.2. etc.

Axiom 1 is concerned with positive properties and states “if a positive property always causes another property, that second property must also be positive”. Marks and Haug

(2021). It does not specifically define what a positive property is or the set of positive properties that can be caused.

Positive and negative can be subjective traits, e.g. some people would usually like to be in a busy, noisy environment that they find stimulating and others prefer to usually be alone and quiet. It would probably be unbelievable if someone claimed they always want to be in a noisy environment with others and do not value some quiet time for resting, sleeping, bathing etc.

Axiom 2 states that there are either positive or negative properties, no properties are neutral, “lacking a positive property is the same thing as having a negative property” (Marks and Haug, 2021). It is not immediately obvious if the colour orange is a positive or negative property and properties such as soft and hard can sometimes be considered positive and sometimes considered negative. Examples are a soft bed and a hard wave breaker on a beach. Some people would prefer a harder bed to others, so this is not universal.

Axiom 3, $P(G)$ states that Godlike (G) is a positive property (P). This is from Gödel’s definition of ‘Godlike’ as possessing all positive properties and no negative ones.

Axiom 4 states that a positive property always remains a positive property, or to put it in terms of the argument, a positive property is necessarily a positive property.

Nuclear fusion causes heat and light (energy) to be produced as well as the change of matter in the reaction. It is also the fundamental process for creating all elements apart from hydrogen and hence life as we know it. Heavier elements are normally created by neutron capture, but these are formed after the lighter elements, up to iron, have been created by nuclear fusion. In an article titled ‘Neutron Capture’, Chemeurope.com (n.d.) stated, “Neutron capture plays an important role in the cosmic nucleosynthesis of heavy elements” and “By neutron capture, nuclei of masses greater than 56 can be formed that could not be formed by thermonuclear reactions, i.e., by nuclear fusion”. Barbarino (2023) stated, “Nuclear fusion is the process by which two light atomic nuclei combine to form a single heavier one while releasing massive amounts of energy” and that “The sun, along with all other stars, is powered by this reaction”. In many circumstances, energy is a positive property allowing for our existence, but too much heat will kill living beings. Heat will cool under the second law of thermodynamics. Wikipedia (n.d.) while discussing the second law

of thermodynamics stated, “A simple statement of the law is that heat always flows spontaneously from hotter to colder regions of matter (or 'downhill' in terms of the temperature gradient)”. This implies that heat and energy will become uniform and will ultimately not support life as it is currently understood.

Nuclear fusion can also be viewed as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ within the same example, e.g. the atomic bombs that were dropped in Japan towards the end of World War 2. These two bombs killed many people, either straight away or through injuries and radiation poisoning. “On 6 and 9 August 1945, the United States detonated two atomic bombs over the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively. The bombings killed between 150,000 and 246,000 people” (Wikipedia, n.d.). It did bring an end to the war and might have saved more lives than if the fighting had continued. “It was the deployment of a new and terrible weapon, the atomic bomb, which forced the Japanese into a surrender that they had vowed never to accept.” (“Japan Surrenders!”, n.d.). These are subjective views that people could hold with some justification but could probably see the argument from the other side, as well. This is not necessarily enough to negate axiom 4 that positive properties always remain positive, as for this to be true it needs to be an objective standard and therefore cannot be subjective. It does, however, highlight a possible difficulty in defining all properties as either objectively positive or not.

Axiom 5 P(E) states that necessary existence is a positive property. God existing could be defended as positive and therefore existence is a positive property, but it might not be so easy to defend the devil's existence as being positive.

This is similar to the assumption that existence is a predicate, that it adds meaning to the thing being described. This goes back to Kant's main objection to St. Anselm's original argument. This is contained in Df.2. (definition 2), but existence is not required to define something, like in the example of a unicorn, or Robin Hood, so unless the axioms are necessary then this objection has not been dealt with.

To refute Gödel's proof the axioms need to be shown to be not true or to allow them not to be true. One of the criticisms that can be brought against this argument/proof is that there are no arguments demonstrating the axioms are true. On their page “Gödel's ontological

proof", Wikipedia stated that Sobel argued that "if the axioms are accepted, they lead to a "modal collapse" where every statement that is true is necessarily true" (Wikipedia, n.d.).

Gödel did not define what a positive property is, and therefore did not advance the assertion that God is simply the supreme being (everything good, but nothing bad). He also did not give any arguments for why the universe can be divided into good and bad or positive and negative.

In general, when considering the axioms Gödel promotes, it is not clear that they are all true. There is still the questionable assumption that existence is a predicate and other possible examples have been given above. In considering whether properties are positive, negative or neutral for this argument, it is worth considering two properties of a theoretical ball. If this ball is yellow, it has the property of being yellow and the property of being round (spherical) rather than square (a cube). While, for a ball, it can be argued that being spherical is better than being a cube for example in playing a game, rolling the ball and having other ball-like qualities, being yellow is much more neutral, instead of being e.g. either blue or red.

For the universe and indeed humans etc. to exist, matter is required. Is matter therefore positive, and if so, is antimatter negative? Are they both neutral? If it were not for an imbalance of matter and antimatter in the universe, then it would not exist in the same form as it does. This seems like an easy question to answer, but an atom of hydrogen consists of a proton (positive charge) and electron (negative charge). "A hydrogen atom is an atom of the chemical element hydrogen. The electrically neutral hydrogen atom contains a single positively charged proton in the nucleus, and a single negatively charged electron bound to the nucleus by the Coulomb force." (Wikipedia, n.d.). Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "the antihydrogen atom is made up of a positron and antiproton" and "In theory, a particle and its antiparticle (for example, a proton and an antiproton) have the same mass, but opposite electric charge".

It appears that Gödel's ontological argument, while logically impressive, makes a number of assumptions that have been highlighted above, without providing suitable, if any, justifications. It looks like an imposing argument, backed by impeccable logic, but like other versions of the argument, it is not sound because although it is valid the assumptions cannot be taken as true, except on Gödel's say so.

DISCUSSION

Considerations Around the Ontological Argument

Modal Logic

Modal logic is concerned with possibility and certainty/necessity. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2023) stated, “A modal is an expression (like ‘necessarily’ or ‘possibly’) that is used to qualify the truth of a judgement”. This logic is often used in ontological arguments, very notably in the argument from Alvin Plantinga's and Norman Malcolm's version, which is explored below. Modal logic is concerned with expressions like ‘it is possible that’ and ‘it is necessary that’.

A crucial step in the ontological argument is to go from the possibility of God existing to the claim that God necessarily exists. This is done using the argument that it is greater to exist than not to exist, implying existence is a predicate.

Modal Realism

David Lewis's theory on Modal Realism is a metaphysical theory detailed in his 1986 book titled “On the Plurality of Worlds”. In it Lewis postulated that possible worlds are as real as the actual world, not just ‘what might have been scenarios’. In this theory, ‘actual’ is a term that depends on where it is used. In this scenario, all possible worlds consider themselves the actual world. Rather than identical things being in other possible worlds, the theory states they are counterparts, very similar, but not completely the same.

Modal realism helps to explain things that could happen in a possible world using a robust framework. “To be is to be a part of a world. Other worlds are other, but they are not nothing” Lewis (1986). In the same book, he also stated, “there is no absolute actual world; ‘actual’ is like ‘I’ or ‘here’ or ‘now’” and “Modal realism helps us to understand modal truth. A proposition is necessarily true if it is true in all possible worlds, and possibly true if it is true in some possible world”.

Modal realism allows a way of analysing counter/other 'facts'. If something else happened than what we see, then there would be/is a different consequence. An example would be if it had been raining rather than sunny on Saturday the cricket game would not have taken place then.

Lewis (1996) defended his theory by stating, "Modal realism is philosophically useful. Its benefits outweigh its costs". This is not universally agreed, however. The theory has been criticised as it does not seem to be the simplest explanation; this idea that the simplest explanation is probably the best is commonly known as Occam's Razor. This is because it creates a seemingly infinite number of 'real' worlds, rather than just the single real/actual world and the possibility of worlds that could have been.

There is a quantum theory of 'many worlds'. This was first described by Erwin Schrodinger, whose equations did not make 'the wave function collapse'. Gribbon (n.d.) described this and stated, "Schrödinger pointed out the ridiculousness of expecting a quantum superposition to collapse just because we look at it". He also stated, "It was Hugh Everett who introduced the idea of the Universe "splitting" into different versions of itself when faced with quantum choices, muddying the waters for decades". The many worlds theory states that all the possible worlds exist whenever a quantum event happens a new world is created, "Every quantum transition taking place in every star, in every galaxy, in every remote corner of the universe is splitting our local world on Earth into myriad copies of itself" (Gribbon, n.d.).

Lewis' modal realism theory therefore has backup from this quantum physics theory and the mathematical equations. There is not a straightforward and easily understandable solution to the idea of many worlds that is within the grasp of humans. There is not much in quantum mechanics that seems reasonable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two reasonably well-known quotes from notable quantum physicists are "Quantum mechanics makes absolutely no sense" by Roger Penrose and "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics." by Richard Feynman. Both of these quotes are from the AZQuotes Website.

This has a link with the ontological argument where 'it is possible to conceive a supreme being'. It is relatively easy to pay lip service by saying 'I can conceive of an omnipotent, omniscient, all loving being' knowing the definitions of these words without trying to think deeply what this entails, given that this being created such a vast, complex, unimaginable

universe. For a being to create something, that being logically must be more complex than the thing it created. This imagining exercise is not completely dissimilar to trying to comprehend the many worlds theory in quantum mechanics.

Quantum Indeterminacy

Quantum indeterminacy in basic language is the idea that in quantum physics, the physical description of a system is not complete. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) “Quantum indeterminacy is the apparent necessary incompleteness in the description of a physical system that has become one of the characteristics of the standard description of quantum physics”. It further stated, “Quantum indeterminacy can be quantitatively characterized by a probability distribution on the set of outcomes of measurements of an observable”. By considering Quantum Indeterminacy and the many worlds interpretation, everything that could possibly happen in the universe, will happen in an alternate universe. Thus, it seems as if a universe created by a God could be an alternative reality, and by ontological theory, that if a God exists in one possible world, He exists in all of them as He is the supreme being. This is still based on the assumption that existence is greater than non-existence and still does not dismiss the problem of whether existence is a predicate, but it does place God in a possible world. This is assuming that ‘God’ is possible and that is not certain. For there to be the one God, the God of all universes must be the same and He needs to be outside of all of them, which aligns with the idea of an Abrahamic God. This God is seen as interacting locally with people, but this is more problematic when considering the possibility of life in other parts of the universe and other universes. The simplest ‘fix’ would be that God exists, but He has other interests other than just a planet, or when the Holy scriptures were written, a part of the Middle East. This is completely speculative, but given that quantum indeterminacy cannot be ruled out, it gives some credence to the many worlds’ theory.

Mathematical Platonism and the Ontological Argument

Mathematical Platonism is “the metaphysical view that there are abstract mathematical objects whose existence is independent of us and our language, thought, and practices. Just as electrons and planets exist independently of us, so do numbers and sets” (Linnebo, 2023). This theory thinks of mathematics as existing in a real sense. It means that there are

mathematical rules that exist as fundamental parts of the universe which people can work out. This is similar to discovering that stars give heat and light through the process of nuclear fusion. This is summarised by Linnebo (2023), as “Mathematical truths are therefore discovered, not invented”. Linnebo further defined mathematical Platonism using mathematical objects, and it is necessary that they “exist”, are “abstract” and “independent of intelligent agents”.

In short, if this idea is applied to the ontological argument, it could imply that God existing is similar to the existence of mathematical truths. Both are necessary and completely independent to the universe that can be explored. If God is essentially the independent mathematical objects, then this is not much of a theistic God, and certainly not the Christian God. With embellishments, He could possibly be the creator of the Universe and is present today, as the mathematical objects are, and so this concept of God would be eternal, but not able to have a personal relationship with anyone.

If mathematical Platonism is true, then God could be a separate being who created these fundamental truths along with the physical universe. The creation of mathematical objects would seem to make the Universe more likely to be habitable as it has allowed the universe to form with precise mathematical properties, particularly of fundamental constants in subatomic particles. This goes some way to benevolence and potency. As these objects are necessarily and universally true, presumably for all time, it has a link with omniscience.

Theistically, if God existed then He would have created mathematical rules or independent objects, as these ‘rules’ exist and are fundamental to the universe, whether they are discovered, or invented to explain the way the universe works. Any civilization in the universe would come to the same mathematical truths through discovery or invention, and the same with scientific discoveries and inventions, depending on local conditions.

This idea does not directly state that there is a God and certainly does not indicate that an Abrahamic God exists. If it is true, it means that there is something that exists outside of the normal physical universe that we can investigate. Whether these are purely mathematical objects, or whether they are part of something more can be speculated upon. These objects could have been created by God, or actually be part of God, as they can be theorised as eternal. This is not theorised through observation, *a posteriori*, but by pure thought, *a priori*.

De Dicto and De Re within the Ontological Argument

De dicto and *de re* are two interpretations of phrases. *De dicto* refers to the words and *de re* refers to an actual thing. Wikipedia stated, "The literal translation of the phrase *de dicto* is "about what is said", whereas *de re* translates as "about the thing"". An example of a sentence that could be interpreted either way is 'Mary wants to marry someone'. Reading this and interpreting it *de dicto* a similar sentence could be 'Mary wants to get married'. In the *de dicto* understanding the word 'someone' is not specific. Reading the sentence '*de re*' it could be rewritten as 'There is a particular person that Mary wants to marry'. Another example is 'I saw the fattest man in the village'. The *de dicto* interpretation is that I saw whoever the fattest man was in the village at that time. The *de re* interpretation is I saw a particular person who I think is the fattest man in the village. For this example, his name is Fred, even if a fatter man had just arrived that I did not know about, I would still be referring to 'Fred'. These examples give an idea of the practical differences between these two types of interpretations.

According to Wikipedia (n.d.), in modal logic the difference between *de dicto* and *de re* is one of "scope". It further stated that "In *de dicto* claims, any existential quantifiers are within the scope of the modal operator, whereas in *de re* claims the modal operator falls within the scope of the existential quantifier". Mindtools (n.d.) stated that modal operators "are words like must, should, can't, have to, mustn't, can, will and indicate possibility or necessity. There is a big difference between doing something because you feel you have to and because you want to". According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary an existential quantifier is "a quantifier (such as for some in "for some x , $2x + 5 = 8$ ") that asserts that there exists at least one value of a variable". The modal operators in the two examples above are 'wants to' and 'saw' and if read as *de dicto* the existential quantifier of 'the person Mary wants to get married to' or 'the fattest man' are not named individuals. If these are read as *de re* then they refer to a particular person, whether these are actually the person she wants to marry or the fattest man they are a definite entity rather than necessarily completely fitting the description of them in the sentence.

When considering the ontological argument and in particular a modal ontological argument, such as Alvin Plantinga's or Malcolm's version of St. Anselm's argument, where there is a claim that God either necessarily exists or He does not exist at all and that as God's existence is possible, God's existence is necessary, it is important to distinguish between

de dicto and *de re* interpretations. To put this another way, the *de dicto* reading is that something may necessarily exist or not exist at all and if this something's existence is possible then it is necessary. Without defining the 'something' there is no way of knowing if this is true. If the something were a 'platypus' then the statements would not be consistent, but if the something was 'a triangle with 3 sides' then they would be consistent, if redundant, as it is commonly known that triangles with 3 sides exist.

Normal Malcolm (1911 - 1990) was an American philosopher, who according to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (n.d.) "produced a controversial new modal version of the Ontological Argument for the existence of God".

The PEPED Website uploaded an article in 2020, headed 'Norman Malcolm's Version of the Ontological Argument', in which it stated, "Malcolm did not offer his own version of the ontological argument. He claims that he just paraphrases Anselm in the language of contemporary philosophy" (Gorbatova, 2014). Gorbatova further stated that Malcolm's main idea was that "while existence is not perfection, a necessary existence is".

The argument was laid out by Gorbatova as:

- 1) God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived. Df
- 2) God is an unlimited being. Df
- 3) The existence of a being is impossible iff the being is contradictory. Axiom
- 4) God is not a contradictory being. Assumption
- 5) A being which came into existence either was caused to come into existence or has happened to come into existence. Assumption
- 6) A being which either was caused to come into existence or has happened to come into existence is a limited being. (5)
- 7) If God does not exist He cannot begin to exist. (1, 2, 6)
- 8) If God does not exist He necessarily does not exist. (7)
- 9) If God exists then He cannot neither begin nor cease to exist. (2, 6)
- 10) If God exists He necessarily exists. (9)

11) God's existence is either necessary or impossible. (8, 10)

12) God necessarily exists. (3, 4, 11)

Point 4, above, is an assumption; there is a question about how valid this assumption is. Dictionary.com defines contradictory as "asserting the contrary or opposite" and contradiction as "assertion of the contrary or opposite; denial". In attempting to validate this statement that 'God is not a contradictory being' again brings the issue of whether a being possessing omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence is logically possible. This is dealt with elsewhere in this thesis, but this argument also creates another logical issue.

The modal argument is *de dicto*, it argues up to point 11 that God's existence is necessary or impossible, and the preceding logical arguments are about the validity of the sentences but point 12 changes to the *de re* understanding that "He/God necessarily exists", meaning that 'He/God actually exists'. Glottopedia (2021) explained the difference by stating, "The terms *de re* (Latin: "about the thing") and *de dicto* (Latin: "about what is said")". The argument is about the logical validity of the statements until the conclusion, which is not about the statement, but about the 'thing', i.e. God. So, although it looks like a valid logical argument, it is not because the modality changes from *de dicto* to *de re*.

In some ontological arguments 'God can be conceived', could it be more persuasive if 'God can be conceived to exist? The first line of St. Anselm's argument is "God is a being greater than which cannot be conceived". This is clearly in the mind rather than in reality and the argument tries to convince the reader that existence can be proved. If God was instead 'a being greater than which cannot be conceived to exist' then this seems to push the strength of the whole argument towards accepting existence.

If this is considered, then a starting point might be that if a quality or an object can be conceived then the object must possess that quality, or the perception is false. An example could be for something to appear to be blue, like a cupboard, it must possess 'blueness'. This is not certain, as 'conceived' is a product of the mind and is not exactly the same as 'appears to be', although 'blue' is only recognised in the mind, with what the mind understands to be 'blue'. Conceiving something comes from the mind and the appearance, feel or size of something is interpreted by the mind to have certain qualities, but this raw data comes from the thing in question. This touches on the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* reason and if the stimulus to the mind can be considered to be similar enough.

Continuing with this logic, if God can be conceived to exist then God possesses existence. The question is whether stating that God can be conceived to exist and concluding that God exists is a circular argument. If the example of blueness is followed, then the initial premise is stating that God exists and therefore it is a circular argument and does not change the argument using *de dicto* logic and ending with a *de re* conclusion that 'God exists'.

Process Philosophy

Process philosophy considers the universe as a continually changing, non-static place and postulates that God is in many ways similar. The philosophy focuses on 'becoming' rather than 'being'. Everything is evolving and this evolution is the fundamental building block of the universe, it is not made up of static things. In "Process and Reality" (1929), Whitehead argued that the basics of the universe are not static, but rather "occasions of experience" or "actual occasions". Whitehead further stated, "The actual world is a process, and that process is the becoming of actual entities". Process philosophy emphasises the interconnectedness of everything.

In process philosophy God is seen as dynamic and is involved in the evolution of the universe and is not separated from it as an isolated creator. A central idea is that God both influences and is influenced by the changing universe, "God is the fellow-sufferer who understands." (Whitehead, 1929). God is not understood to be omnipotent and to have created the finished universe ex-nihilo, but rather He influences it, making it more complex and ever evolving, without taking away the freedoms of the creatures He created. The universe could be conceived as the body of God and as God works to improve himself, He improves the Universe. Another important tenet of process philosophy is creativity. "Creativity is the ultimate principle by which God is characterized, for God is the source of all possibilities and the creator of all actualities." (Whitehead, 1929).

Through the lens of process philosophy, God is not viewed as omnipotent or omnipresent, He is involved in continually shaping the universe through engagement and interactions throughout it.

Neoclassical Theism

Neoclassical theism is linked to process philosophy in that it keeps the idea of God as the supreme being, but He is considered to change and develop and does not have the absolute perfections of the classical theistic God. Mullins (2022) stated, "Classical theism is a model of God that affirms divine simplicity, timelessness, immutability, and impassibility" and he contrasted this with Neoclassical theism, which he stated, "rejects one or more of those four claims while also maintaining exhaustive foreknowledge". Neoclassical theism can be more nuanced than process philosophy.

Considering the idea of a God of Neoclassical theism and process philosophy in relation to the ontological argument leads to a problem that a classical God does not have. In this instance if it is possible to imagine God then it might be possible to imagine the classical God, which could be considered to be greater than a Neoclassical God as He would be omniscient among all other perfections. The ontological argument is therefore not as strong for a Neoclassical God or one consistent with process philosophy and really only argues for the existence of a classical God.

Free Will

Many people believe humans have free will, including many, or probably, more accurately, most Christians. The NIV version of the Bible stated, "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19). Haynes Jr (2023) stated, "We have free will to decide who we will serve".

There are, however, people who believe that free will does not exist. For example, the cosmological argument stated that everything that happens has a cause, and God was the first cause. Logically this means that everything that has happened and will happen follows from something that happened before and if there is no choice looking backwards, then there is no choice looking forwards. If God is omniscient, as is central to the ontological argument then He knows everything that has happened and everything that will happen. Logically this means that the universe is completely determined, it always has been and there is no free will.

Major philosophers were split regarding the idea of whether free will exists or not. Waxman (2016) stated, “In essays by world-renowned philosophers such as Aristotle, Philo, Aquinas, Spinoza, Descartes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, and Kant, there is little support for the claim that human beings possess free will. However, in the writings of Epicurus, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Herbart, Schopenhauer, and James, there are compelling arguments that lend support (or limited support) to the notion that the Will is free”.

Free will presents a problem when considering the ontological argument for an Abrahamic God, as in these scenarios God is omniscient. If God knows everything that will happen then humans cannot have a choice to do something other than what God knows they will do. This is not a problem when considering a God who is omnipotent, omniscient and, if stated, omnibenevolent, as long as free will does not exist.

Positiveness and Negativeness

In general language as well as in scientific language being positive and being negative are thought to be opposites. For example, in mathematics, performing the mathematical operation of +2 and -2 in any order will leave the original number unchanged. Positive and negative numbers are often drawn on a number line with ‘0’ in the middle, the negative numbers on the left and the positive numbers on the right, with the modulus increasing equally as the numbers move further away from 0.

An example using whole numbers would be:

-5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3, +4, +5, often written as -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.

Other familiar uses of the terms positive and negative include magnets where positive and negative poles (commonly known as north and south) attract the opposite type but repel the same type.

Character traits are often labelled as positive and negative. Baker (2023) characterised some of them as follows:

- Positive character traits include integrity, compassion, courage, and humility.
- Negative character traits include conformity, apathy, greed, and condescension.

Emotions are also often characterised as positive and negative. Ackerman (2019) stated “Positive emotions are emotions that we typically find pleasurable to experience” and that “negative emotions are those that we typically do not find pleasurable to experience”. These are again colloquially opposites.

Similarly to the idea of good and evil being opposites, positive and negative attributes are also opposite. Taking generally held views of these attributes to the conclusion, it might not be as clear. The generally understood ideas of ultimate good, or omnibenevolence could be difficult to distinguish from ultimate evil, if one of these attributes is possessed by God. This attribute would be defined as ‘good’ simply because it was one of God’s attributes, no matter what it was.

An example is that it is probably the majority view that it is good to be born and from a theistic point of view that humans have been created and come into existence by being born. Ignoring death in childbirth, still born babies, pain and the long-term physical effects on some mothers, the antithesis is dying, which is usually treated as something bad happening. These are both part of human existence, often along with happiness, sadness, grief and joy among other things. If God exists then He created the universe so that humans are born, a usually positive, good occurrence, and they die, usually a negative, bad occurrence. If being in heaven is the ultimate good thing that can happen to anyone then is it evil of God not to create everyone in heaven and not have them suffer (by comparison) life on Earth first? Smith (2020) stated, “In heaven, Christ will lead you into ever-increasing joy” and that “This joy will go on increasing forever!”. If human existence is real, which is assumed for this part of the thesis, then it is clear that humans do not only exist in a Christian or Abrahamic heaven, if they do exist in heaven, but live on Earth first, with all the challenges and problems that are associated with the human life cycle and experience.

Returning to the example of positive and negative numbers, each number has two attributes, the modulus and the sign (+ or -). Both +3 and -3 have the same modulus (amount), although they are opposites on the number line. This means that although they are opposites in one attribute, they are the same in another. The other examples show a similar result, and when considering human understanding and feelings the distinction does not always appear apparent. It is a reasonably common expression to state that someone is ‘crying with happiness’, for example at a wedding.

Sin

Possibly the most common understanding of 'sin' is 'to go against God'. Sin in religion is described by the Britannica Website as 'moral evil'. Sin is regarded in Judaism and Christianity as the deliberate and purposeful violation of the will of God. Hendren (n.d.) stated, "The biblical definition of sin is found in 1 John 3:4: "Sin is the transgression of the law" (King James Version). To sin is to transgress, or break, the law of God". If God is unequivocally omnibenevolent then sin is definitely bad. Hendren also stated, "The Bible says a lot about sin. It tells us that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that sin leads to death (Romans 6:23)". As discussed in this thesis, among other things, the Abrahamic God, through the Bible, Quran and Torah committed genocide, killed people, subjugated women, promoted slavery and condemned homosexuality among men. By these morals, it is wrong and a sin to treat women as equal to men, condemn some types of slavery and not to punish men who have indulged in homosexual acts.

Examples are for genocide, Exodus 17.14 from the Bible, the New International Version (NIV), "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven"". The NIV Bible also stated, "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves" Leviticus 25:44 and "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads." Leviticus 20:13. An example of women being subjugated is from the Quran, Surah 4.3 "Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth".

For those who believe in an Abrahamic God these examples are worth considering when thinking about sin and whether it can be equated with doing something evil or whether sin is going against scripture, whether the particular scripture is considered good or bad. As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the omnibenevolence of God is the least valuable of the three main attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence to the ontological argument for an Abrahamic God. This does raise an interesting point of whether the understanding of good and evil is a human creation, or a God given standard. If God exists then many millions, probably billions of people have had a different idea of good and evil from what is written in the holy scriptures.

Atheists would clearly argue that good and evil have been developed and have evolved as humans and society have matured. This addresses the issue of these standards changing over time. It is not as easy to explain how a perfect God would evolve these over time, without resorting to the expression that 'God moves in mysterious ways'. This does not damage the ontological argument for God but does add a questionable layer to the ontological argument for the existence of a Christian or Abrahamic God.

Pantheism and Panentheism

Pantheism is the idea that God and the universe are one. The Britannica Website stated that pantheism is "the doctrine that the universe conceived of as a whole is God and, conversely, that there is no God but the combined substance, forces, and laws that are manifested in the existing universe" (Reese, 2024). Reese further stated, "the cognate doctrine of panentheism asserts that God includes the universe as a part though not the whole of his being".

As the followers of pantheism believe that God and the universe are the same, with the laws of physics determining how the universe/God develops, they do not believe He is a personalised God to worship.

Panentheists believe that God is greater than the universe, similar to theists. A panentheist does not need to believe that God is personal, but they could, depending on their interpretation. If a panentheist believes in a personal God, then this God would be the supreme being, of which nothing greater can exist, so the ontological argument for God, but without some of the Christian or other Abrahamic attributes, would equally apply to the panentheistic God. As discussed elsewhere, it does not matter if they believe that God is wholly good or not to make the argument more or less persuasive.

Panpsychism

Panpsychism is the idea that consciousness is possessed by everything, not just living things. Hossenfelder (2023) stated, "Panpsychism suggests that consciousness isn't something special to humans or animals, but a fundamental feature of the universe". This includes fundamental particles and inanimate objects, such as stones.

This philosophical theory, which is supported by David Chalmers who in his 1997 book, 'The Conscious Mind' wrote "We can accept the existence of consciousness and understand it as a fundamental feature of the universe". He also stated, "If consciousness is fundamental, it might be spread throughout the universe, possibly in forms we do not yet recognize" (Chalmers, 1997).

This theory is currently untestable in science and therefore a philosophical theory. Hossenfelder (2023) stated, "We don't know how to test panpsychism, and until we do, it remains in the realm of philosophy, not physics".

This idea is that everything has some form of consciousness, and fundamental and inanimate objects have very little consciousness, with plants having more, animals even more and humans a high level. Consciousness is an important and contentious subject with no clear scientific theories on its fundamentals. Hossenfelder (2023) stated, "Consciousness is the most important thing we have, and yet we can't explain it".

Under panpsychism everything in the universe will have consciousness. Given this, then it seems possible that the universe itself has consciousness. This is not a given because under current best theories, information, like everything else, cannot travel faster than light. The American Museum of Natural History (n.d.) stated that the speed of light is "300,000 kilometers per second (186,000 miles per second)". These are round number approximations, so not completely accurate, but sufficient for this thesis. This means that any information would take approximately 100,000 years to travel from one side of the Milky Way Galaxy to the other. Brennan (2019) stated, "Our galaxy probably contains 100 to 400 billion stars, and is about 100,000 light-years across". The universe is possibly 1,000 times as wide or even larger, so timely, meaningful information transfer could not happen at the speed of light across the whole universe or even significant fractions of it.

There are some aspects of the universe as it is understood that could make this less of an issue. The American Museum of Natural History (n.d.) stated, "In the Special Theory of Relativity, Einstein determined that time is relative—in other words, the rate at which time passes depends on your frame of reference". The impact of time can appear to be different depending on the size of the object. Examples are oak trees, which according to Woodland

Trust (n.d.) “may live for 1,000 years, although 600 may be more typical on many sites”. They do not move much compared to house flies, which live for only a small fraction of that time and are much smaller. According to Orkin (n.d.) “An average house fly lives about a month” and clearly moves around more during that time.

In addition to these considerations are the enormity of things in the expanding universe that are not fully understood or remain largely a mystery. These include black holes and the possibility of wormholes. “Wormholes connect two points in spacetime, which means that they would in principle allow travel in time, as well as in space” (Wikipedia, n.d.). According to Gohd (2023), a “strange phenomenon that a traveler would observe close to a black hole is something called time dilation, in which time passes slower closer to the black hole than further away”. Given that these two specific features along with other observed and theoretical phenomena, many that might not even have been discovered yet, leave questions to be answered about the effects they could have on time. According to the theory of special relativity, light does not experience time, which leaves enough room for doubt about the certainty of the latest knowledge about time in extreme circumstances, whether distance, size, velocity and acceleration. “From the perspective of a photon, there is no such thing as time.” (Cain, 2014).

There is no evidence that the universe is conscious, but there are enough grey areas to make ruling it out less than certain. If the universe has consciousness, then this could be the closest non-theistic theory about a consciousness of God. This would be particularly true in pantheism, in which it is believed that God and the universe are the same thing. It is not much more of a stretch to consider that this potential consciousness could permeate the universe and extend to God if He enclosed it as proposed in panentheism.

These ideas do not match that of an Abrahamic God, nor do they agree with the idea of God in other major religions but given that the universe exists there is no scientific contradiction as both these views do not affect the continually developing scientific understanding of the universe.

From the perspective of an ontological argument, the existent universe, if created by ‘God’ would have a God worthy of the mantle of an ‘all powerful’ creator and be the greatest being.

It seems reasonable that following a general ontological argument, this God would be the ultimate being and should therefore necessarily exist. This is true even without the attributes assigned to an Abrahamic God as He created everything, and humans live within it and are totally dependent on His creation to exist at all.

This does not necessarily follow though, as the universe and therefore this idea of God might not be considered to be perfect. Claims that He is and always was and will be omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, among other attributes associated with an Abrahamic God would not be justified unless it is claimed, and accepted, that the universe is perfect. If it is accepted that the universe is not perfect, and even that God is not perfect then it can be argued that the human idea of perfection is meaningless because we just do not understand the universe and its creator. This is because for all creation, for all its existence, it would be the most perfect actually possible rather than a theoretical perfection imagined by flawed, mortal humans.

The background understanding of the wonder of creation and nature would not differ for the ontological argument for an Abrahamic God or a pantheistic or panentheistic God.

An ontological argument backed by belief that the universe is God or is contained in God and has consciousness akin to panpsychism could be laid out as follows:

Assumptions:

- 1, God is the supreme creator of the universe which is fully within Him.
2. The universe and therefore God has consciousness.
3. Time exists at least while the universe and therefore God exists.

Conclusion:

As the universe exists, a thinking creator, God exists and will continue to exist for all time.

There is no need to claim necessary existence, nor perfection, and the conclusion follows from the 3 assumptions.

This is only given within the philosophy of panpsychism.

If a non-pantheistic and non-paenentheistic view of the universe were held along with the belief that panpsychism is true then God would not necessarily be part of the 'thinking' universe, but its creator. In this scenario, God could have once existed, but no longer or would need to be justified to necessarily exist as in the original argument from St Anselm. This argument becomes less persuasive than St Anselm's argument because although a possible God would be the greatest being ever, He would not necessarily have the perfections of the Christian God.

Faith

Faith is seemingly integral to religion. The word 'faith' appears hundreds of times in the bible. "The word "faith" appears 336 times in the King James Version" (Reference.com, 2015). Also "The word(s) "faith" appears 108 time(s) in 99 verse(s) in Quran in Mohsin Khan translation" (SearchTruth.com, n.d.). Faith is not part of the ontological argument but seems to be important to many followers of religions. "Faith is the bedrock on which you base your life" (Family Christian, n.d.). As faith is not mentioned in the ontological argument, the argument may not appeal to many people who believe in God. An example mentioned in this thesis is that of Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. "Gaunilo (flourished 11th century) was a Benedictine monk of the Marmoutier Abbey near Tours, France, who opposed St. Anselm of Canterbury's ontological argument for God's existence" (Britannica, n.d.).

James (2020) stated, "The average person on the street believes that faith is the opposite of logic". He added that "In the Bible, faith is never defined as "an irrational belief" or "belief contrary to the facts."" and concluded his article with "Faith is not the opposite of logic. It is the highest expression of logic". James was writing on a Christian Website and used passages in the bible to help justify his conclusion. Keegan (2015), writing on another Christian Website stated, "Faith is the opposite of logic. In all the Bible stories where there was great faith, logic was disproved". She argued that faith was superior to logic and "God succeeds where logic fails".

Tavani (2008) stated, "Many scientists, as well as some theologians and philosophers, have argued that religious faith and logical reason are not compatible", but also "some scientists (as well as many philosophers and theologians) have argued that faith and reason are indeed compatible". Perhaps a fair representation of many views would be this quote; "Faith

is not logical. But it isn't illogical either. Faith is theological. It does not ignore reality; it just adds God into the equation." (Batterson, n.d.).

While there are opposing views about the compatibility of faith and logical reasoning, there are certainly a number of serious theologians who do see at least a link between them and do not regard them as completely antagonistic to each other. While the structure of the ontological argument does not rely on faith to the detriment of reason, the first ontological argument started with assuming God's existence and a fool questioning it. Sansom (2013) stated, "Anselm begins Proslogion chapters 2 and 3 with the "Fool" saying, "There is no God."". St Anselm's argument started with his belief in God and attempted to prove it to be true, i.e. that the Christian God existed. Therefore, faith and logic both have their place in the origins of the ontological argument.

Does *A Priori* Knowledge Exist?

The Philosophy A Level Website (n.d.) gives an expanded version of Descartes' ontological argument, shown below:

1. I have the concept of God
2. My concept of God is the concept of something infinite and perfect
3. But I am a finite and imperfect being (finite reality)
4. The cause of an effect must have at least as much reality as the effect
5. So, the cause of my concept of God must have as much reality as what the concept is about
6. So, the cause of my idea of God must have as much reality as an infinite and perfect being (i.e. must have infinite reality)
7. So, God exists

The Website further stated that "This argument is called the 'trademark' argument because Descartes argues that concept of God (premise 1) is like an innate 'trademark' placed in our minds".

Descartes stated in premise 2 that his "concept of God is the concept of something infinite and perfect" and in premise 3 he stated that he was "a finite and imperfect being". He then argues through 4, 5 and 6 that his idea of God could not come from him and must have

come innately from God. If this argument is sound logically, as well as it being ideally compelling as it avoids the deductive process, it makes a stronger case for it being a purely a priori argument. This is not obvious and there is a questionable statement in line 4 and the link between 3, 4 and 5 is not completely robust because it is all in the mind rather than reality. There is also the change from *de dicto* statements up until line 6, and line 7, the conclusion is *de re*.

If Descartes' concept of an infinite and perfect God, is innate then the argument would be a *priori*, but if his acquired knowledge from his life influenced his concept of God then it might not be considered to be a pure *a priori* argument.

A central point in this expanded version of Descartes' ontological argument is that he, a finite being can have a concept of an infinite being. Descartes argues that this is only possible if God gave him the innate ability to do such a thing. According to Collins dictionary "Something that is infinite has no limit, end, or edge". These are generally well understood words and concepts, and the definition is simple.

If Descartes and other humans can truly imagine an 'infinite' being, then there could be a strong case for assuming that this knowledge was somehow given from such a being. If someone's idea of an infinite being was something that had no limits, no edge and no end and they verbalised this, then this would demonstrate an understanding of the meaning of the word infinite. This is not the same as being able to begin to imagine or even actually comprehend it. For Descartes' ontological argument, infinite would need to be larger than the known universe, which although huge was much smaller than it is thought to be today. Over 300 years after Descartes' death, in 1919, the universe was thought to be about "300,000 light years across" (The Imagine Team, 2017). Even this size is unimaginable, but it is not too difficult to imagine something like a halo around a swirl of stars like the Milky Way, as seen in photos. Descartes' could have seen all the visible night sky from one horizon to another and thought of the idea of an invisible, perhaps glowing, celestial blanket around it. Although this is a wondrous thought, it does not appear to need a divine creator to allow its conception.

To summarise this, the argument, like all ontological arguments, has its challenges. In this case with, for example, the argument starts as *de dicto* and ends up with a *de re* statement; this is covered elsewhere in this thesis and mentioned above. Descartes does address the criticism of some ontological arguments, that existence is not a predicate in premise 4, which

is “The cause of an effect must have at least as much reality as the effect”. Premise 4 could be argued to be a *posteriori* knowledge based on his experience, although, theoretically, it could be reasoned. This does not affect the legitimacy of the argument, but it does solve the often-criticised issue of whether existence is a predicate, as it refers to a concept, which only exists in the mind, it does not directly address existence in reality.

The argument does not change if it is thought that it is not a fully *a priori* argument but might diminish its status among certain people. There are innate, mathematical truths, e.g. $1 + 2 = 3$. This can be learned by adding an apple to a pair of apples, or a cup to 2 more cups etc., but $1 + 2 = 3$ is always true, even if there was no one around to know it.

This can be explored in more detail by considering empiricism and rationalism. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defined empiricism as “a theory that all knowledge originates in experience” and rationalism as “a theory that reason is in itself a source of knowledge superior to and independent of sense perceptions”. The Philosophy A Level Website (n.d.) explained the practical difference between these two views with:

“Empiricism says all a priori knowledge is of analytic truths (i.e. there is no synthetic a priori knowledge).

Rationalism says not all a priori knowledge is of analytic truths (i.e. there is at least one synthetic truth that can be known a priori using intuition and deduction)”.

Analytic truths are true because of what the words mean, an example of an analytic truth is ‘squares have 4 equal sides’. Synthetic truths are about the world, an example of a synthetic truth is ‘horses have four legs’.

The Philosophy A Level Website (n.d.) stated, “Analytic truths cannot be denied without resulting in a logical contradiction” and “Denial of a synthetic truth does not lead to a logical contradiction”. It also stated, “Most of the time, empiricism holds true”. Quintana (2018) stated, “While empiricism poses that we owe all of our knowledge to our perceptions of the outside world, rationalism characterizes at least some of what we know as innate”.

Rey (2022) stated that ‘analytic’ sentences have “historically been characterized as ones that are true by virtue of the meanings of their words alone and/or can be known to be so solely by knowing those meanings” and the truth of ‘synthetic’ sentences also depends upon “knowledge” of the subject.

Descartes' ontological argument, using what he considered to be a rational argument, assumed that the statement "God exists" is a synthetic truth, derived from deduction. This is different to the idea that Descartes derived his concept of God from his life experience up to that point, or whether it was innate. The argument requires deductive thought to work and 'prove' the existence of God.

If it is valid that even *a priori* knowledge can only come from the accumulated general knowledge learnt by living then it would mean that empiricism is correct. This would mean that Descartes' ontological argument was not an *a priori* argument as the concept of God would need to come from *a posteriori* knowledge. Further, this would be true for all ontological arguments as they all have assumptions about perfection, positiveness, maximality, greatness or similar attributes that can only be contemplated with the existing knowledge that a person has.

There are conflicting views about whether humans are born with innate knowledge. As discussed, Rene Descartes believed humans were born with it as did Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Samit (2019) stated that Descartes "suggests at one point that ideas may be in the mind innately in the way that gout may run in a family" and notably for this thesis "Reason can mine this innate endowment to arrive at an *apriori* understanding of things". He also stated that Leibniz was "the other important Rationalist defender of innateness".

Samit (2019) looked back to the ancient world and stated that Plato believed "that all learning is recollection, that everything we will ever learn is already in us before we are taught". He further stated that "Socrates supports this view".

Rockwood (n.d.) stated, "Both early modern rationalist and empiricist philosophers accept *a priori* knowledge. For example, they agree that we can have *a priori* knowledge of mathematics. Rationalists disagree about what we can know *a priori*". He discussed the view of John Locke and stated, "Locke thinks we can have synthetic *a priori* knowledge of mathematics and morality" but that "Locke denies that we can have synthetic *a priori* knowledge of the properties of material objects".

Samit also considered critics of innate knowledge including John Locke and David Hume. Samit (2019) stated, "The modern debate about innateness really begins with Locke's polemic against innate principles and innate ideas" in the opening chapters of his Essay Concerning Human Understanding. He further added that this polemic "happens to also be

the founding document of modern Empiricism". He also stated that "Hume, perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, tells us that the innateness debate is totally wrong-headed and that as he sees it, all our impressions are innate, in that they are original to the mind".

Immanuel Kant had a more nuanced approach and in his Critique of Pure Reason (1781) stated, "Though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience".

There is no clear agreement from philosophers whether humans are born with innate knowledge or not. If they are not, then an *a priori* knowledge can only come from experiences that people learn from, which, no matter how informally they 'pick things up', it must be deduced. This goes against the straightforward definition of *a priori*, and in this case, possibly the only way to redefine an *a priori* argument/knowledge would be to not observe or analyse direct things about the subject. In the case of the ontological argument this would mean ignoring cause and effect, not studying the nature of objects, animals and plants or studying astronomy etc.

If rationalism is true, then the ontological argument is possibly an *a priori* argument. This is because the concept of God is based on almost, if not, completely unimaginable characteristics and is therefore not based on a rational deduction process, but it could be based on intuition or innate knowledge. If rationalism is not true, but empiricism is correct then no arguments would be *a priori*, they would all be *a posteriori*. This would be because there would be "no *a priori* synthetic knowledge" (Philosophy A Level, n.d.).

Logically it does not make a difference either way whether the ontological argument is actually *a priori*. Either way the argument has the same strengths and weaknesses, and this distinction does not change anything about how the argument should be approached or any of the variations of the argument. It probably doesn't even matter about the special place it holds as the only philosophical *a priori* argument for the existence of God. The level of discussion and differences of opinions of leading philosophers that has occurred throughout the hundreds of years it has been around would not resonate with the vast majority of those who come across the argument. Also, those who even engage with it and form a conclusion of whether or not it proves the existence of God would be more concerned with the argument itself rather than whether it was an *a priori* argument. It still stands out among other arguments as it does not engage with the deductive process of the behaviour of the universe

that the other arguments follow both logically and emotionally from a personal or learned experience. It focuses only on what is God.

Valid Arguments

“A deductive argument is said to be valid if and only if it takes a form that makes it impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion nevertheless to be false.” (Validity and Soundness, n.d.). Ontological arguments, along with other arguments can be logically valid but not true. An example of a logically valid argument is ‘All dogs are mammals, Fido is a dog, therefore Fido is a mammal’. Another example is ‘All fish are mammals, Splashy is a fish, therefore Splashy is a mammal’. While the premise of the first one is true, the premise that fish are mammals is false, so while the first argument is valid and sound, the second is only valid, it is not sound and therefore not true. “A deductive argument is sound if and only if it is both valid, and all of its premises are actually true.” (Validity and Soundness, n.d.). Ontological arguments need to have accurate premises and assumptions as well as valid logic to meet the objective of proving or at least demonstrating that God exists.

Looking at an ontological argument where the premise is ‘A supreme being is possible’ followed by ‘God is the supreme being’ concluding with ‘therefore God is possible’ is a valid argument and is only sound if it is true that a supreme being is possible. This is the first part of an ontological argument which states that a supreme being (God) is not impossible. This is a precursor to then justifying that God must be necessary as detailed in the arguments. Assuming, uncontroversially, that God can be defined as the supreme being, the soundness of the argument depends on whether a supreme being is possible.

This is looked at in some detail in the thesis, and seems reasonable, given that it can be human limitations that cannot define a supreme being and that God being the ‘supreme being’ with all ‘supreme being’ qualities is taken on trust. This cannot be certainly stated without a clear understanding of what a supreme being is, which for most of the ontological arguments is a Christian God. Again, the attributes and logical sense of these attributes are detailed elsewhere in this thesis.

Modus Tollens and its Implication for the Ontological Argument

Modus tollens is a classical logical argument and is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: “a mode of reasoning from a hypothetical proposition according to which if the consequent be denied the antecedent is denied (as, if A is true, B is true; but B is false; therefore, A is false)”. An example would be If you can see then there must be light, but if there is no light then you cannot see.

This type of logical argument can be considered when looking at the ontological argument. Considering an abbreviated version of St Anselm's argument, this could be written as:

If I can conceive of the idea of God, then God necessarily exists. If God does not necessarily exist, then I cannot conceive of the idea of God.

In this instance ‘A’ would be ‘I can conceive of the idea of God’, and ‘B’ would be ‘God necessarily exists’.

‘God’ could be substituted for ‘supreme being’ or ‘perfect being’ or something similar with the attributes that it is understood such a God would possess that are found in these arguments and in the understanding of the nature of the Abrahamic God.

This argument is not necessarily valid or sound as the first part might not be true, but a form of this argument needs to be for the ontological argument to be able to prove the existence of God.

If this argument was treated as sound, then the modus tollens implication is that if God does not exist then He cannot be conceived. This seems to strengthen the argument as in the ontological arguments it is asserted that God can be conceived. This is a core assumption, and it is mentioned elsewhere as possibly not being true. Considering the modus tollens logic though, this becomes the central part of the argument, rather than the questionable point brought out by many critics of the argument that existence is not a property of a thing. This cannot be dismissed, but there have been many people who thought and think existence is a predicate. Therefore, it is worth reviewing the validity of this simplified argument.

The two objections to the modus tollens version are therefore whether the 'A' and 'B' make a valid argument and whether 'God' can be conceived and not whether existence is a property of God.

This simplified version that is being examined here is "I can conceive God, therefore He exists" implying "if God does not exist then I cannot conceive Him" takes out steps that might be unnecessary in the argument. It just relies on the conceivability of such a being. If this is given, then the modus tollens argument seems valid.

The principal issue therefore is whether 'God' can be sufficiently conceived. This premise has already been considered, in this thesis looking at the sheer magnitude of God, and the ability of a human mind to comprehend such vast numbers necessary to look at the scale of God. This might be disingenuous considering the view of a personal God being the important criteria. This means that the all-loving, personal, all-powerful aspects are sufficient to conceive of God rather than the trouble conceiving light years or the number of stars in the galaxy.

The possible relationship between humans and God should therefore be considered and whether such a thing is logically possible. This is assuming God is similar to the Abrahamic God that has relationships with some people who believe in Him. The scale of parts of the universe has already been considered. According to Wikipedia (n.d.) the distance from the Earth to the edge of the observable universe in any direction is "46.5 billion light-years or 4.40×10^{26} m". It also stated it contains "2 trillion galaxies" and "as many as an estimated 10^{24} stars". They point out that there are more stars than "all the grains of beach sand [sic] on planet Earth". It also estimated that there are " 10^{80} hydrogen atoms" in the universe. These incomprehensible numbers and many more are so large, or small, e.g. the size of a quark, estimated in Wikipedia (n.d.) as "less than 10^{-19} metres" that they are incomprehensible for anyone to even imagine them.

All the atoms and their components that make up all the elements that again make up all matter in the Universe were created by and are known to the Abrahamic God. Even given the latest understanding of virtual particles and the seemingly random or immeasurably complex nature of quantum mechanics, the nature of God means that He knows where every one of these particles are, where they have been and where they will be and when.

He also knows about all the photons, when any quantum particles will come into existence and when, tiny fractions of a second later they will be absorbed. He also knows everything about all the stars, planets, plants, lifeforms, molecules etc. across the whole of the Universe throughout all of time to the smallest possible measurement. He also understands it all completely and created everything in all its complexity.

This gives a small indication of God who according to the 3 major Abrahamic religions created all of this, so that for a brief period, an imperceptible fraction, of time compared to the time the universe has existed, in a miniscule amount of space, in a small region of a tiny planet in a probably mediocre galaxy. He would have a personal relationship with a few billion, or at most, a few trillion people. It is not that God could not have a relationship with a few trillion people, even at the same time, it is that it is so inconsequential and insignificant to God, who is so far above humans in every respect that it would be far more absurd than to think of a human having a personal relationship with a microbe. Conversely, the microbe could have no comprehension of a person, much less a person any understanding of God. It seems like there could be nothing to link the two vastly different beings in any way that any kind of relationship could conceivably be thought of.

The above points apply to any flavour of God that created the Universe, and specifically for an Abrahamic God, which was the focus of the ontological argument. The praising of such a God would be as meaningless as a relationship with Him, for there could not be any benefit or effect on God. By considering the modus tollens argument and simplifying the ontological argument down to the conception of God and ignoring any other objections, the seemingly impossible magnitude of God shows that such a conception does not appear possible. It forces anyone looking at the argument to actually consider the logical plausibility that any such a relationship could ever exist. This is aimed particularly at the Abrahamic God, but the same logic would apply to any God which has a personal relationship with any beings imaginable.

Reason

From the original ontological argument for God by St. Anselm to later ones, the common factor is that they are *a priori* arguments. This means that they are based on reason and not on observations or measurements/experiments. Discovered 'knowledge' throughout the centuries has been used to back up the existence or not of God, but it is not part of the ontological argument.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *a priori* as "relating to or derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions" and follows up with "*A priori* is from Latin *ā priōrī*, which means literally, "from what is earlier." *A priori* knowledge is knowledge that comes from the power of reasoning based on self-evident truths; *a priori* usually describes lines of reasoning or arguments that proceed from the general to the particular, or from causes to effects".

The Merriam-Webster dictionary has a few definitions of reason, with "proper exercise of the mind", which is linked in their entry with intelligence and sanity being the most relevant to the ontological argument. The minds of people have not changed significantly in the last thousand years from an evolutionary perspective, but many different and contrary things were firmly believed throughout that time and in different parts of the world.

The Collins English Dictionary gives 3 definitions of 'Reason'. These are:

- The reason for something is a fact or situation which explains why it happens or what causes it to happen.
- If you say that you have reason to believe something or to have a particular emotion, you mean that you have evidence for your belief or there is a definite cause of your feeling.
- The ability that people have to think and to make sensible judgments can be referred to as reason.

These are all relevant to the ontological argument. The first one, is 'the reason for God'; the second 'the reason to believe in God'; and the third 'making a sensible judgement that God exists, as opposed to the view of 'the fool' in St. Anselm's version.

Christianity, on which the initial and most of the interpretations of God in the ontological argument, is still a popular religion, but many critical aspects have changed. An example is about the heliocentric nature of the solar system from an article in the Washington Post on October 31st, 1992. It stated, "The Roman Catholic Church has admitted to erring these past 359 years in formally condemning Galileo Galilei for formulating scientific theories it considered heresy." (Montalbano D., 1992). The article further stated, ""This subjective error of judgment, so clear to us today, led them to a disciplinary measure from which Galileo 'had much to suffer.' These mistakes must be frankly recognized," Cardinal Paul Poupard, the commission chairman, told the pope."

There are many other doctrinal changes, including non-rejection of the theory of evolution by natural selection by the Catholic Church. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "The Catholic Church holds no official position on the theory of creation or evolution" and that "all humans, whether specially created or evolved, have and have always had specially created souls for each individual". This is contrary to the literal reading on Genesis and 'original sin' which does not allow for evolution. "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1.27 NIV, n.d.). "Original sin is the Christian doctrine which says that because of the sin of Adam and Eve, original innocence is lost and all subsequent human beings are born into a state of sinfulness. The doctrine states that human beings do not commit this sin but rather contract it from the Fall of Adam and Eve" (Weldon, 2010).

Also, Wikipedia (n.d.) discussed the First Vatican Council (1869-70), and stated, "Not only can faith and reason never be at odds with one another but they mutually support each other, for on the one hand right reason established the foundations of the faith and, illuminated by its light, develops the science of divine things; on the other hand, faith delivers reason from errors and protects it and furnishes it with knowledge of many kinds". This was approximately 10 years after Darwin's 'On the Origin of Species' was published in 1859.

Another change in doctrine from the Catholic Church has been their stance on who was responsible for the death of Jesus. According to Hooper writing in The Guardian on March 2nd, 2011, "The pope has written a detailed and personal repudiation of the idea that the Jews were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus". He also stated that the Pope was "Dismissing the centuries-old interpretation of St John's assertion that it was "the Jews" who

demanding Barabbas's release and Jesus's execution, the pontiff asks: "How could the whole people have been present at this moment to clamour for Jesus's death?"

The Catholic Church has also softened its stance on its historic opposition to homosexuality. It does not condone buggery, and Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "The Catholic Church condemns same-sex sexual activity and denies the validity of same-sex marriage. While the Church opposes "unjust" discrimination against homosexual persons, it supports what it considers "just" discrimination in the employment of teachers or athletic coaches, in adoption, in the military and in housing". However, the article also stated that on September 25th, 2023, Pope Francis "signalled the Church's openness to blessings for gay couples as long as they did not misrepresent the Catholic view of marriage as between one man and one woman".

Other western Anglican religions have also changed their stance on similar issues to various degrees. It is interesting that these changes reflect the changes of views in society in general. Whether society always follows the church's views, whether the church bends towards changing societal norms or whether they happen together or influence each other can be a subject of debate, but that they both change almost always in the same direction seems clear.

One of the most discussed topics in the 2020s is that of slavery. None of the Abrahamic religions core scriptures condemns all slavery and supports it in at least some circumstances. There are caveats to slavery in some holy scriptures such as that Muslims are not meant to take other Muslims as slaves, and similarly those that follow Judaism have restrictions on owning Jewish slaves, compared to the chattel slavery that is allowed if their slaves are not Jewish. Most western civilised people do not support slavery, although it is estimated that there could be more slaves now than ever. The Anti-slavery Website (n.d.) repeated information from Walk Free in 2022, which stated that "according to the latest Global Estimates of Modern Slavery", "49.6 million people live in modern slavery – in forced labour and forced marriage". It seems that although almost everyone in the western world professes to be against slavery, there are still plenty of people on the planet who have no problem with it and who practise it. Rosenfeld (2000) stated, "Jews may have Jews as indentured servants and may subjugate Jews who behave illegally, but may not own Jews as slaves". Similarly in Islam, Ali (2004) stated, "The enslavement of war captives is regulated, along with the purchase and sale of slaves. While it is not permissible to enslave

other Muslims, the jurists clarify that if a non-Muslim converts to Islam after enslavement, he or she remains a slave and may be lawfully purchased and sold like any other slave”.

While Christians and Jews do not condone slavery, it is less certain about all Muslims. It seems that scholars in Christianity and Judaism either ignore this topic or play down the condoning of slavery in certain circumstances of non-Jews in the Torah, or Old Testament of the Bible. This is less common in Islam and Islamic countries did not easily give up slavery and there are instances of Islamic slavery even in the early twenty-first century. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “Slavery (as defined as the total subjugation of one human being over another) is absolutely unacceptable in modern Judaism”. Wikipedia (n.d.) also stated that although “Most Muslim scholars consider slavery to be inconsistent with Quranic principles of justice” that “certain contemporary clerics still consider slavery to be lawful, such [sic] Saleh Al-Fawzan of Saudi Arabia”. Nikkel (2024) stated, “According to the most recent Global Slavery Index estimates, the Arab States have the highest prevalence of slavery per capita in the world. Just over 10 people per 1,000 in the Arab States are trapped in some form of labor trafficking, sex trafficking, or forced marriage”. These are just examples of how the idea of what is reasonable has changed over time, particularly focussing on religious ideas. This is probably true in most areas, with the development of different civilised societies throughout history. Mobarak (2023) stated, “It is undeniable that the vast majority of the Arab world — 93% — is Muslim”.

The main takeaway for the ontological argument from these examples is that opinions change over time, both within the church and outside of it. Therefore, what is considered reasonable will change over time, and as ‘within reason’ is very similar to ‘reasonable’ what is considered within reason for at least some subjects will change over the years.

Some religious doctrines have changed over time. Of the Abrahamic religions, the Christian religions have probably changed the most in the last one thousand years, with the formation of the Anglican churches from the reformation in Europe during the sixteenth century as well as changes to existing, specific doctrine over time including the examples given. Judaism and Islam have probably not changed doctrine as much, particularly Islam, where the Qur’an is generally believed to be the actual words of God. On their Website, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (n.d.) stated, “Muslims believe that the Qur'an contains the literal words of God, which were spoken in Arabic”. The Lumen Website (n.d.) similarly stated, “Islam is a

monotheistic and Abrahamic religion articulated by the Quran, which is considered by its adherents to be the verbatim word of God (Allah)".

Along with religious, and in particular, Christian, changes, unsurprisingly, there have been significant developments in all areas of study. As the ontological argument is a philosophical argument and 'reason' is a term significantly used in philosophy, it is worth noting, not only that developments in philosophy have impacted on the evolving and differing versions of the argument, but also if the understanding of 'reason' has varied. Borghini (2019) stated, "The early modern period was one of the most innovative moments in Western philosophy". He followed up with "figures such as Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant published books that would shape our modern understanding of philosophy".

The scientific understanding of the universe has changed far more over that time. From the sixteenth century, with the start of the scientific revolution, the pace of scientific understanding grew quickly. Discoveries were not always completely correct, but the scientific method meant that discoveries and proposals were questioned and tested so that over time the theories became ever more robust. Cartwright (2023) stated, "the Scientific Revolution (1500-1700), which occurred first in Europe before spreading worldwide, witnessed a new approach to knowledge gathering – the scientific method".

A few examples of scientific leaps and impact that it had on the Catholic Church at the time have been outlined above. If the focus is only on around 10% of the time since the first ontological argument, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, the developments through science and engineering had been unmatched throughout history. A famous example is powered flight. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "Several aviators have been claimed to be the first to fly a powered aeroplane. Much controversy surrounds these claims. It is generally accepted today that the Wright brothers were the first to achieve sustained and controlled powered manned flight, in 1903". If this is taken as the first powered flight then the details are that there were four flights and that "The last flight, by Wilbur (Wright), was 852 feet (260 m) in 59 seconds, much longer than each of the three previous flights" (Wikipedia, n.d.). In less than 70 years Apollo 11 famously landed on the moon and two astronauts walked on the surface of the moon, before all 3 astronauts safely returned to Earth, a distance, through space of around a quarter of a million miles each way. National Geographic (n.d.) stated, "On July 20, 1969, millions of people gathered around their

televisions to watch two U.S. astronauts do something no one had ever done before. Wearing bulky space suits and backpacks of oxygen to breathe, Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin became the first human beings to walk on the moon”. This was less than 10 years since the first person went into space. National Geographic (n.d.) also stated, “It wasn’t until 1961 that a person went to space”. When referring to the Earth and the moon, Urrutia and Sharp, (2022) stated, “The average distance between the blue planet and its only natural satellite is about 238,855 miles”.

DNA was discovered during the twentieth century and the first electronic computer was built, both of which allowed a step change in human understanding. Williamson (2023) on the LiveScience Website gave a brief history of the development of computers including, “1936: Alan Turing, a British scientist and mathematician, presents the principle of a universal machine, later called the Turing machine” following this with “according to Chris Bernhardt's book "Turing's Vision" (The MIT Press, 2017). Turing machines are capable of computing anything that is computable”. The PBS Website (n.d.) stated that Watson and Crick “had in fact discovered the structure of DNA, the chemical that encodes instructions for building and replicating almost all living things”.

The consensus on the size of the universe tends to increase over time. Brian Resnick, Amanda Northrop, and Byrd Pinkerton (2023) stated, “In the early 1900s, the universe seemed to be a much, much smaller place. Back then, astronomers believed the Milky Way galaxy was all there was”. The Milky Way galaxy is “about 100,000 light years across” (Brennan, 2019). “The observable universe is about 93 billion light-years in diameter” Sottosanti (2024). In 1900, Newtonian mechanics was still considered as the rulebook for a ‘clockwork’ universe. This is where everything was predictable and no matter what the speed difference, acceleration or distance, the universe would behave the same as our understanding of movement and distance on the Earth, i.e. they would not change relative to one another unless a physical force changed them. Then in 1905, Albert Einstein published the theory on Special Relativity followed in 1915 with his theory of General Relativity. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “special relativity and general relativity, proposed and published in 1905 and 1915, respectively”.

Quantum mechanics, or more broadly, quantum physics was initially developed in the 1920s. This was a non-intuitive explanation of the universe. Webb (n.d.) stated, “At a basic

level, quantum physics predicts very strange things about how matter works that are completely at odds with how things seem to work in the real world". The theory of quantum mechanics prompted Albert Einstein's famous quote about God not playing dice. The Britannica Website (n.d.) stated in 1926 as a response to Born's "probabilistic interpretation" of the theory, "Albert Einstein wrote to Max Born that "[t]he theory produces a good deal but hardly brings us closer to the secret of the Old One. I am at all events convinced that *He* does not play dice"".

These milestones in the twentieth century could have been seen as being against common sense, or reason. This is particularly true of quantum mechanics. Richard Feymann, according to the AZQuotes Website (n.d.) famously said "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics". This is a profound statement. If people cannot understand the scientific theory that has passed many tests proving that counter intuitive and nonsensical things happen then does this mean that reason is not reasonable? There is a famous expression that has been used for quite a while, that 'God moves in mysterious ways', like quantum mechanics, perhaps. If the universe is impossible to understand. Given the ever-increasing complexity in our understanding of the universe, particularly in the quantum field, it is possible then that it should not be expected that our understanding of reason can be applied to God. Without reason the ontological argument would be meaningless, so although the meaning of 'reason' might change it cannot be thrown out as meaningless.

With all these significant changes as well as the societal changes brought about by globalisation, improvements in living standards, easier access to information and other cultures, increased free time and longevity, it might be considered surprising if the understanding of 'reasonable' and 'reason' did not change.

Many words evolve to mean different things over time. An example of such a word is 'gay', which meant happy originally, but it mostly means 'homosexual' at the time of writing this thesis and is usually applied to men. Hiskey (2010) stated that the word "'Gay's original meaning meant something to the effect of 'joyful', 'carefree', 'full of mirth', or 'bright and showy'". He further added that "By 1955, the word gay now officially acquired the new added definition of meaning homosexual males". Similarly, if someone in Britain said they had a 'mobile', then most people would think of a mobile phone, and probably a smartphone. The

Cambridge Dictionary has a definition of 'mobile' as "a mobile phone mainly UK". However, before mobile phones were invented, a 'mobile' was, also according to the Cambridge Dictionary "a decoration or work of art that has many parts that move freely in the air, for example hanging from threads", which is still a valid definition.

The scientific method is generally acknowledged to be the best way to determine if something is objectively true. Harris (2021) stated that the scientific method "provides an objective, standardized approach to conducting experiments and, in doing so, improves their results". Wikipedia (n.d.) described the scientific method as being "an empirical method for acquiring knowledge that has characterized the development of science since at least the 17th century". According to the Sciencebuddies Website, the six steps involved in the scientific method are "1) asking a question about something you observe, 2) doing background research to learn what is already known about the topic, 3) constructing a hypothesis, 4) experimenting to test the hypothesis, 5) analyzing the data from the experiment and drawing conclusions, and 6) communicating the results to others".

The scientific method and the steps involved ensure the most accurate understanding given the known general knowledge and facts at that particular time. It was used to 'prove' Newtonian mechanics. It was also used to prove that this was not the full explanation of mechanics when it was again used to 'prove' relativity and quantum mechanics. It is probable that there is more to quantum mechanics, such as a theory of everything, that will prove that our current understanding of these scientific theories is not 100% correct.

An expression that is currently common circa 2025 is 'my truth'. Strangely to many people this is seen by a significant number of other people as being more important than 'the truth' or can actually replace 'the truth'. Fled (2016) stated that sometimes people "turn an opinion into their truth" and that "they justify their behavior by holding onto their truth". He concluded with "in many of these situations, individual critical thinking goes out the window". His view is that he embraces "the idea of seeking the truth" and he challenges "everyone to think harder about what the truth actually is" instead of just holding "on to your truth to justify your perspective".

The idea of 'my truth' seems completely unreasonable compared to 'the truth', particularly when society collectively knows of the advances in the modern world from pursuing the truth.

There can be no reasonable grounds for stating that scientific truths are not the best we have with our understanding and level of knowledge. Without following these truths, even though they may be refined in the future, most if not all the modern things we value, e.g. smart phones, flying, computers, medicines would not exist or be inferior.

The reason behind this seemingly wilful blindness is an interesting topic to research. Among possible reasons for this are that it could have influences akin to religions or cults, it possibly could be partly due to reduced education standards. It could also be that it is a delusion some people try to hold onto so they can seem to be 'progressive' and like the benefits that come with it by not having to face up to their responsibility and own shortcomings. Another reason could be that it could simply be a rebellion against 'old' wisdom, and to reclaim the latest generations for themselves or to identify with them as an 'ally', to use a current term.

Perhaps similarly, in the early 2020s there seems to be more disagreement about what a woman is. During the generations before this, it seemed like an easy question to answer, but early in the third decade of the twenty-first century, many people will not or cannot answer this question, others strongly disagree with each other. Whether this is similar to the use of 'my truth' because of social pressures from others, a muddying of education, a move forward with genuine understanding that not everyone is ready for, or some other explanation might not be agreed for many years.

Perhaps the idea of 'my truth' and 'your truth' being as important as the truth is a fad and will go out of favour and be looked back on as a mass delusion by future generations. The Salem Witch Trials of 1692 was a deadly example of a mass delusion. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "the Salem witch trials were a series of hearings and prosecutions of people accused of witchcraft in colonial Massachusetts between February 1692 and May 1693". It went on to state "the episode is one of colonial America's most notorious cases of mass hysteria".

With the changes to knowledge, understanding and society over the last 1,000 years, it would probably be a surprise if the meaning of 'reason' had not changed over that time and may have fluctuated over the period so that what one generation believed was reasonable would change for a significant number of years, but then might return to something very similar. This can be to do with evolving language or evolving knowledge and understanding. It is at least possible that the understanding of 'reason' will change, and has changed, so

the persuasiveness of the ontological argument might have fluctuated over time and might do so again in the future.

The Origin of the Universe

Throughout history there have been many beliefs about the origin of the universe. The philosophers behind the ontological arguments, believed the universe was created by an omnipotent God. There are other religious beliefs about the origin of the universe including Hinduism. The Hindu belief is that the universe goes through repeated cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction for eternity. These cycles are overseen by Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. According to BBC Bitesize (n.d.), “Brahma is the creator god who works with Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva to maintain an unending cycle of universes. All three are aspects of Brahman”.

There were other differing ideas about the creation of the universe involving various concepts of gods or mystical creation from Ancient Egypt, Norse Mythology, Ancient Greece and Rome to indigenous Americans, Africans, Australians and Aztecs, to name a few.

There is also a theory, famously believed by Aristotle, that the universe was eternal, having no beginning or end, and that it was governed by natural laws. “The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle argued that the world must have existed from eternity” (Wikipedia, n.d.). The same article also stated that Aristotle argued that “matter must be eternal”. This is somewhat similar to the steady-state theory, which was introduced in 1948 and then developed by Sir Fred Hoyle to counter the alternative big bang theory. In the steady-state theory, the universe “has no beginning or end in time, and from any point within it the view on the grand scale—i.e., the average density and arrangement of galaxies—is the same. Galaxies of all possible ages are intermingled” (Britannica, 1998). The article goes on to state that after studying the cosmic microwave background, “which was predicted by the big-bang model”, there has been considerable “evidence contradictory to the steady-state picture and have led scientists to overwhelmingly support the big-bang model”.

The overwhelming scientifically supported theory for the creation of the universe is the Big Bang theory. “The Big Bang Theory is the leading explanation for how the universe began” (Howell and May, 2023). They further stated the theory postulates that “the universe as we

know it started with an infinitely hot and dense single point that inflated and stretched” and that it developed “over the next 13.7 billion years to the still-expanding cosmos that we know today”. This then leads naturally to the question, what came before the big bang?

It is not known what came before the big bang, if anything, or even if that question makes sense, as time started with the big bang. The Wonderopolis website stated, in reply to its own question, “what caused the Big Bang?” that “the short answer is, we don’t know. And we likely won’t know for a long time”. There are a number of theories and ideas including bouncing universes that start, expand and then contract to a singularity before starting again as either an exact replica or a different universe, which is similar to the Hindu understanding of the universe. Other people think that the universe was created by God. This ties in with the Kalam Cosmological argument where God is the primary cause of the universe as well as the ontological argument. This idea fuses faith and science, using God to create what is known and what people using scientific principles and advanced equipment can examine and work out answers for.

The Size of the Universe

The age of the universe is measured in billions of years and the size in billions of light years. Trillions of stars have been found, and planets theorised, and by logical extraction there is probably life on millions of these planets. It would seem scientifically probable that there is almost a certainty that life exists elsewhere in the universe or at least has in the past and is likely to do so in the future.

The ontological argument is Christian centric but can quite easily be applied to the other Abrahamic faiths and other monotheistic faiths. One of the central themes of the Abrahamic religions is that God created humans to worship Him and to have a special or personal relationship with Him. None of these religions mention aliens from other worlds but similarly do not state that there are no other lifeforms in the universe that are/were not native to the Earth. Kershner (2024) stated, “maybe there are 60 billion planets in our galaxy alone that could potentially harbor life”. She further stated that the “best guess researchers have” is that there are “50 sextillion” planets in the universe that are in habitable zones. 50 sextillion possible habitable planets mean there could be fifty thousand million million million planets

that could have some form of life on them. “YouGov data shows that half of Britons (50%) believe aliens exist” (Nolsoe, 2012). These estimates are not referring to conscious or intelligent life, but equally life on Earth has been around for approximately “3.7 billion years” according to the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (n.d.) and so has had enough time to significantly evolve. These estimated figures do not damage the ontological argument but might damage particular religions that were first derived when people thought the universe was much smaller than it is and the Earth was at its centre. The ontological argument is *a priori* and the fundamental, omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent attributes of God are not affected by the size of the universe or number and range of living beings. It is only the specific details of the religions that are questioned by the latest scientific analysis of the universe. An example is treating the Earth as a special place with a special species on it. This almost background understanding of a really old, large and complex universe again brings into question whether the ontological argument is really *a priori* and whether any truly *a priori* argument can exist.

The timescale of and timings within the universe are not straight forward. At quite large distances anything that is seen from Earth is from the past, when the light left the event/object. This means that it is difficult to agree what it means for two events to be happening at the same time. According to General Relativity all moments from the past, present and the future are equally real. “There is no clear distinction between past, present and future, but that they all coexist in spacetime.” (Cortesi, 2024). Therefore, in reality there is not a ‘now’ that can be agreed upon to be universal. This is because different observers cannot be in exactly the same space and time and will probably be moving at different speeds, even if these are very similar. It would not be noticeably different in terms of anything on Earth but as distance increases, time and velocity will change and it will be more apparent that they do not have the same view of ‘here’ and ‘now’. At larger distances observers might disagree on the order of events and at very large distances might not even observe the same events. According to general relativity, all their perspectives would be equally valid. There can therefore be no universal “now” when it could be said that all things are happening.

So, concluding this section, if an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God existed, He might have an extra, almost or an actual unthinkable number of beings that He created to have a relationship with, love, fear or worship Him in some way, compared to just those

humans on Earth. These Earth creatures are all the creation that those philosophers who developed ontological arguments have previously envisaged, but the hugely increased scale does not logically affect the argument. There are different magnitudes of infinite. Matson (2007) stated, “As German mathematician Georg Cantor demonstrated in the late 19th century, there exists a variety of infinities—and some are simply larger than others”. He further detailed this by comparing natural (or whole) numbers, with real numbers, that can have infinite decimal places. If God is infinitely powerful then His level of infinite would just need to match the level of infinite for the universe, so it does not seem to be a logical problem.

Expanding Traditional Ontological Arguments

General Modal Ontological Arguments

It is worth looking at modal ontological arguments in more depth. This is because the meaning of the words can be interpreted in different ways and these differences can throw new light on the meaning of the argument. The general modal ontological argument consists of 2 definitions and an axiom. The definitions are:

1. A being has maximal excellence in a possible world if and only if it is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good.
2. A being has maximal greatness if it has maximal excellence in every possible world.

The axiom is that possibly necessary implies necessary.

The argument is:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being exists.
2. There exists a possible world in which a maximally great being exists.
3. A maximally great being exists in every possible world (from the axiom).
4. A maximally great being exists in our world.
5. A maximally great being (God) exists.

Taking these in order, the first is definition 1, which is 'A being has maximal excellence in a possible world if and only if it is omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good'. This can be looked at with a critical view and by examining what is actually meant by these characteristics. Ignoring whether 'being' implies existence, which is considered elsewhere in this thesis, the first of the 3 characteristics is omnipotence. This can be interpreted in a few ways. Initially, it could be defined as being able to do anything, but the idea of making a square circle does not make logical sense, so it would be better to define omnipotence as the ability to do anything that is logical. In this case such a contradiction would be disqualified from the definition of omnipotence.

It is worth considering the much-used point of an irresistible force acting on an immovable object. This considers 2 logically possible things, but either the force can move the object, or it cannot, so there would be an issue if being omnipotent included this kind of power, where 2 logical possible things become logically impossible. This brings up Russell's paradox, which "arises within naïve set theory by considering the set of all sets that are not members of themselves. Such a set appears to be a member of itself if and only if it is not a member of itself. Hence the paradox." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020). In this instance, does the ability to do anything that is logically possible fit into the set of the ability to do things that are logically possible. For God, both the force and object fit into the set of things that are logically possible and are therefore contained in the set of logically possible actions, but then does the ability of being able to do both fit into the set? If it does then it becomes not logically possible, so the ability to do anything that is logically possible is not a member of the set of the ability to do anything that is logically possible. This is a philosophical idea that shows how these 2 seemingly logical things can not be logical if put together. There are possible resolutions such as something happens to one of them and it is transformed or destroyed. Another is that the force could pass through the object and finally they could be defined in specific terms. These all seem dubious to some extent, and could be seen as resolving through word play, or tenuous possibilities.

There is a response to this, known as ZFC set theory. The 'Russell's paradox' page in Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "In ZFC, given a set A, it is possible to define a set B that consists of exactly the sets in A that are not members of themselves. B cannot be in A by the same reasoning in Russell's Paradox". This variation of Russell's paradox shows that no set contains everything. This is from 'The Axiom of Restricted Comprehension', which requires sets can only be defined as subsets of existing sets. This philosophical dive into set theory shows the contention with the issue of God creating a boulder so heavy that He cannot lift it. It postulates a logical issue in set theory that also affects less impressive claims than the power of God and raises questions about whether seemingly contradictory premises are actually contradictory. This is proposed through axioms, which are propositions or statements that are accepted to be true. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Axiom as "a statement accepted as true as the basis for argument or inference". Another possible alternative resolution of omnipotence and whether God can create something He cannot lift,

like the irresistible force and immovable object, is discussed when considering St. Anselm's Original Ontological Argument elsewhere in this thesis.

The next level is something like omnipotence is the ability to do anything that is in essence with its own nature, if this definition is used then essentially it is stating that God could do what God can do. Unfortunately, if this is the definition then omnipotent would apply to everything, for instance a grain of sand can do everything that is in its nature. A grain of sand would not move unless other forces impact on it, that is the nature of the inert grain of sand. This argument then basically states that everything is omnipotent and therefore the word is meaningless.

The next characteristic is omniscience. Again, the highest definition is knowing everything. This means that if God does exist, He knows everything about Himself. He would therefore have complete knowledge of everything about Himself in minute detail that lasted for all time and any existence God has outside time. This clearly means there is no free will in the universe, or even an element of chance. This does not mean that there could not be an illusion of free will for some beings, humans as an example. If considered carefully, it implies that God has no free will as He knows everything He will do, think, feel etc. This again negates omnipotence and does not seem to add anything to God.

The tier down from this would be that omniscience means knowing everything that is knowable. This would mean defining what is knowable. If this is given or even if it is not clear, then omniscience means knowing a lot, an absolutely incredible amount. In isolation this is a positive characteristic, although it does question the understanding of prayer for Abrahamic faiths, or indeed any faith that believes in a God that is omniscient.

The last of these characteristics is wholly good. Theists consider everything that God does to be good and anything against God is not good. This defines good to be whatever God does and more widely the morality of God behind His actions.

If the above logical 'compromises' are accepted then this means that a maximally excellent being can do everything it can do, knows all it knows and is consistent with its morality. This can be agreed without having to consider any of the Abrahamic or indeed other Gods. Therefore, stating that a maximally excellent being exists can be accepted without the need to invoke a supernatural being.

Definition 2 is "a being has maximal greatness if it has maximal excellence in every possible world". A definition may not be true. For example, locker 76 in Birmingham railway station could be defined as the locker in Birmingham station with '76' written on the front containing a copy of the complete library of ancient Babylon in microfilm and a lump on rock from a planet over 10 lightyears away. While locker 76 in Birmingham railway station might have number 76 written on the front it is very unlikely to contain the microfilm and the rock. The definition itself is therefore not correct. A definition is a somewhat arbitrary phrase someone gives to mean something, it does not make it true or define reality, for a relevant example a definition cannot define a being into existence.

In modal logic a possible world does not mean a parallel universe, it means something that is possible, but not necessarily in the world that we actually live in; that there is a logically consistent set of circumstances where it could be true. An example is that in a possible world Adolf Hitler died in infancy. Necessary means that it is true in all possible worlds. If something is necessary in a possible world it means that it is necessary in all worlds including the real world. An example of a necessary truth is the $1 + 2 = 3$. Unless the definitions of these characters are changed it will always be true because the truth follows from the definitions and axioms that are made about them.

Considering the argument itself and ignoring any other objections that have arisen, this thesis will look at each of the lines.

Starting with the first line, which is 'It is possible that a maximally great being exists'. This is hard to logically refute, no matter how highly unlikely it might seem to someone. It would be very difficult given the scale of the universe as it is known now that anything (at least logically possible) could not exist somewhere. As examples, a unicorn, tooth fairy, or a hundred headed pink fluffy creature with halitosis could possibly exist in a distant galaxy. These are

trivial examples compared to a maximally great being, but even stating that a maximally great being exists somewhere cannot be easily dismissed with complete confidence.

The second line is 'There exists a possible world in which a maximally great being exists'. This seems very similar to the first line, but it is not identical and there is a distinction. Mathematical truths, such as $1 + 2 = 3$, as mentioned above are necessary truths. This means they are true in all possible worlds, including this one. 2 plus 1 does not equal 1, 2, 4, 5 or any other number, it always equals 3. If we are considering a necessary truth/being, then stating that it exists in a possible world implies that it exists in our world. If it was assumed that $2 + 1 = 4$ in a possible world, then by implication, as a necessary fact, $2 + 1$ would equal 4 in this world.

Similarly, an ignorance of the fact of whether a maximally great being exists in a possible world, which from definition 2, would imply that if it did then it would exist in all possible worlds, including this one, is not that same as possible existence as it is claiming it exists in all possible worlds. Summarising this point, it is possible, given the knowledge of even the most knowledgeable human, that a maximally great being exists, but it is logically impossible for this being to exist in a possible world if it does not exist in our world. It is possible given limited knowledge that a maximally great being exists, i.e. it is possible epistemically, but it is not possible logically, unless it actually does exist, so there is a clear, if subtle difference.

As the first two lines of the proof are referring to different uses of the word 'possible' the argument is guilty of a false equivalence fallacy.

The final 3 lines from the argument are valid if the first 2 lines are valid, but the second line, although it seems valid, does not strictly follow the rules of a valid modal argument due to the failed equivalence fallacy.

By considering the definition of 'necessary existence' in modal logic which means that something exists in all possible worlds, it is possible to abbreviate the main objection to the ontological argument. For something to be necessarily true it must be true in all possible worlds, which means that there would be a contradiction if it were not true in a possible world. To use the same mathematical example, $2 + 1 = 3$ is true for all possible worlds,

because for example, $2 + 1 = 4$ cannot be true and contradicts the meaning of 4. Something is necessarily true if there would be a contradiction if it were not true.

To state that the existence of God is necessarily true, or God exists necessarily implies that there would be a contradiction in the denial of this, i.e. God does not exist would imply a contradiction. This does not follow logically, there is not a contraction like $2 + 1 = 4$ in stating God does not exist (in all possible worlds). If the definition of the meaning of God is a being that is all powerful, all knowing and all loving then to state that God does not exist is not a contradiction to any part of the description/definition. If the controversial quality of necessary existence is added to the list, then there would be a contradiction, so it could not be falsified and therefore the statement God exists would be valid. This though creates the circular argument that an existent being exists and therefore has no logical or useful argument. It is just a premise that God exists leading to the conclusion that God exists.

Peter van Inwagen when considering the modal ontological argument came up with the idea of a 'Knowno'. According to the University of Colorado Boulder (n.d.), he defined a Knowno as "A being who knows that God does not exist".

Unlike the idea of a 5-sided square, it seems that there is no contradiction in the definition of a Knowno. If this is the case, then there exists a possible world in which the Knowno exists. This means that God does not exist in this possible world, because otherwise the Knowno could not know that God does not exist, because if God did exist there the Knowno would be mistaken and it would just think that God did not exist, which contradicts the definition of a Knowno.

Following the ontological argument, it would therefore mean that God did not exist in all possible worlds and therefore did not possess necessary existence. The conclusion is either God could possibly exist and therefore necessarily exist, which would mean the Knowno would not exist, or the Knowno exists, and God does not. The University of Colorado article summed up this situation with "In short, the claims <A knowno is possible> and <God is possible> are incompatible. They cannot both be true. So, then, how do we decide between these two claims? Van Inwagen concludes that we cannot". This is a similar argument to the assumption that 'it is possible for God not to exist in a possible world' being equally valid as assuming God exists in a possible world.

The Ontological Argument in a Simulation

Another scenario about the universe that is quite a popular source of discussion is the idea that we are living in a simulation, like a computer simulation popular in gaming. This is particularly true since the film, 'The Matrix' was released in 1999. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated that "the film was a box office success, grossing over \$460 million on a \$63 million budget". This scenario is not easy to prove or disprove. Some scientists consider this a credible theory and Melvin Vopson from the University of Portsmouth "believes he has evidence" (Orf, 2024). Orf quoted Vopson and stated, "everything is based on the laws of physics". He further quoted from Vospon, who stated that as the universe is a closed system, "we know the universe is expanding without the loss or gain of heat, which requires the total entropy of the universe to be constant". Vospon argued that since through the second law of thermodynamics, entropy is increasing, another type of entropy which must be decreasing, "information entropy" is required "to balance the increase" (Orf, 2024). Orf again quoted Vospon, "a super complex universe like ours, if it were a simulation, would require a built-in data optimization and compression in order to reduce the computational power and the data storage requirements to run the simulation".

If this idea, that our universe is a simulation were true, then the 'maximally great being' could be akin to the programmer of a computer game. This theory questions the nature of reality that most people believe, but if true then it seems logical that there must be something, or somethings that created the simulation. An analogy is of a programmer or a team of programmers. This seems neat, except, who or what, if anything, created 'the programmers'? In one sense, it takes the idea of the supreme being, i.e. God up a level to who or what created the programmers?

The idea that simulated universes can or do exist can seem persuasive to people who are scientifically literate and rational, in the sense that they would question religious doctrine and not necessarily believe what they are told at face value. This is because if someone is familiar with Moore's law and its continuing relevance then it could seem inevitable that technology and computing power will increase until such a realistic simulation of the universe is created. Tardi (2024) stated, "Moore's Law states that the number of transistors on a microchip doubles about every two years with a minimal cost increase". She followed this statement with "Almost 60 years later, we still feel the lasting impact and benefits of Moore's Law in many ways". There is then the inevitable question that if one universe could be

simulated then so could others and some of these, if not most, would be created by a simulation rather than the real universe. Given enough time it could seem logical that many, many simulated universes would be created, and they would be sufficiently advanced that the intelligent beings in them would not know if they were in a simulation or not.

An interesting thought is that this seems to suggest that if simulated universes existed, then the chance of this universe being real would be vanishingly small as there are so many simulations. Assuming that a 'chain' of simulated universes is possible from a real universe, i.e. someone/team/civilisation creates a simulated universe then this develops and creates one of its own, and that then develops and creates its own simulated universe and this pattern continues. It then seems likely that over time there could be a very large number of simulated universes and only one real universe. It could be tempting and seem logical to conclude that there would be a miniscule chance of this universe being the real universe. In this particular scenario, with no other data, the chance would actually be 50%. This is because 'we' have not created a simulated universe, so we are either at the end of the chain, or at the beginning and have not developed enough to create the first realistic simulated universe yet.

If it is possible to create a simulated universe, then it is highly likely that it is possible to create more than one, a lot more! Therefore, there could be many simulated universes created in the real universe and each of these could produce many simulated universes themselves. This does not seem a large leap of faith or logic from creating a single simulated universe. In this, probably more likely scenario, there would still be the one real universe, but many 'latest' universes that have not developed simulated universes of their own. This means that although there could be a very small percentage of simulated universes that have not developed their own simulated universe, there would only be one real universe. That one 'real' universe might not have developed a simulated universe yet, as is currently the case on Earth, assuming this is the real universe. If this universe is a simulation, then it would mean that this is probably a minority universe, compared to the likely large number of universes that could have created simulated universes. It would either be a small fraction of what is likely to be a very large number of simulated universes or would be the real universe in which case the chance of it being the real universe could be very small against the possible myriad 'end' universes in each of the chains.

This idea of 'programmers' creating simulated universes has similarities to the many worlds or multiverse theory. In a multiverse, did 'God' create this universe and all others, or just this one? If 'God only created this universe and there are other universes not created by this God, then is this our understanding of the 'greatest being'? If so, then there are others, and what created them, if anything? This could give rise to speculation that although God created this universe, there are other universes and other Gods that simply do not coexist in any way that Interactions are possible. This challenges the common view of God as omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, unless we are restricting 'omni' exclusively to our universe, which is the understanding in the classic forms of the ontological argument. If there were a multiverse then there is a question of whether God created it all or just our universe. This is perhaps easier to think about in terms of the universe and possibly other universes being simulations. In this scenario, it is clearer that the 'programmers' do not fit the normally held understanding of God, and they would likely have shortcomings and vices, although they would seem to be omnipotent and omniscient to us. There is also the very clear question of who created the programmers, whether they are a simulation above ours, or in the 'actual' world.

A Contingent God?

The ontological argument is unique among arguments for the existence of God because it is an *a priori* argument. It does not rely on observation or discovery. If it is proved to be false and proved God does not only not necessarily exist but necessarily does not exist, then all the *a posteriori* arguments would not be able to negate it. *A priori* arguments are deductive and if premises are correct and the logic is sound it follows that the conclusion must be true. *A posteriori* arguments are inductive, which is not as strict, which is discussed elsewhere in this thesis.

If God existed but did not necessarily exist then there would still be a God, although unprovable using modal ontological arguments. Similarly, as many philosophers agree, existence is not a property of an object. If someone stated they thought there was a black cat in their garden', then it would be just as descriptive as whether the cat in the garden actually existed or not.

If a being existed that created the universe we are in as we understand it and was recognisable as the God of Abraham, then would this God be any less worthy of worship than if He necessarily existed?

Assuming that the universe is not fully deterministic, which is not certain, then contingency could be considered as making something special. Everyone on the planet is a contingent being, they did not have to be born, but it is questionable whether this fact makes anyone less special or worthy. The fact that everyone is contingent, and might not have existed at all, or maybe only had slight differences to how they could have been, for example a different sperm impregnating the egg, does not make them less worthy. This could make someone slightly different biologically to how they could have been, and could affect their whole life, as well as others, but they would still be a human being and subject to the same status as everyone else. It seems that a contingent being could therefore be considered as special as a necessary one, so to consider that an existent God is not worthy of praise because He is not necessarily existent seems counterintuitive. If the universe was fully determined, then nothing contingent would exist.

Even if the ontological argument cannot prove God, it does not mean there is no God.

Would a Flawed Universe Require a Perfect Creator?

One point that does not have easily accessible critiques in mainstream literature is the idea that God needs to be a supreme and perfect being as He would need to be to create the Universe. This is perhaps unsurprising if the Universe is considered to be perfect; the perfect creation, but is this a given?

There is the issue of evil and suffering. Apart from the often-quoted view that 'God moves in mysterious ways' and humans cannot begin to comprehend His reasoning, there seems little justification of why an omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent God would create suffering and evil.

The Universe is staggeringly complex and relies on incredibly exact constants, mathematics and subatomic particles/waves as well as forces and structures that could be thought to

point to an almost infinitesimally small chance of it occurring without design. This is used to promote the fine-tuning argument for the existence of God. This will not be covered further here as the focus is on the Ontological Argument, but the perfection of such a universe could be seen as supporting evidence for a supremely perfect creator, God.

If the Universe did not seem to be perfect then would it mean that the creator, if one existed, did not have to be perfect? This supposition certainly weakens the argument for the existence of a necessarily all-perfect God. From observations on Earth, it appears that the Earth is not perfect, although it is an amazing 'Goldilocks' planet that has just the right conditions for life. The more we learn about the Universe, the more this seems to be true, including, for example, the position and size of Jupiter that protects the Earth from comets as detailed on the EarthSky Website, which stated, "Without Jupiter nearby, long-period comets would collide with our planet much more frequently" (Byrd, 2015). According to the Christian God and God of Judaism, which have the same origin, man (referring to our species in non-scientific terms) was created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26 declared that 'God created man in His image' and this is generally thought to mean that we resemble God in some ways. This is often thought to be spiritual rather than physical as God clearly does not have a physical body that can be recognised. This is assuming that even given the existence of Jesus as described in the Bible, God existed outside of Jesus' body even when Jesus was alive. There are not many people that consider humans to be perfect in thoughts, deeds, appearance or spirit, given the concept of violence, hate, jealousy and intolerant beliefs, the drawbacks of evolution as detailed by blind spots and other shortcomings, original sin and individual sins. The bbc.com Websites stated, "Our eyes are wondrous things, but they have fundamental limits" (Hadhazy, 2015). It seems human beings are flawed and the Earth needs protection, and will be consumed by the Sun, according to many scientists. This is postulated on the Website space.com that stated, "The most recent simulations suggest that Earth will end up being swallowed by the dying sun." (Hsu, 2010). Following on from these thoughts, it might not necessarily follow that the Universe is perfect and requires its creator, if it had one, to be perfect.

As stated earlier, the ontological argument usually refers to the Christian God; perhaps because most, but not all of the proponents of the argument since St. Anselm were Christians. A premise of most versions of the Ontological Argument is that a supreme being can be conceived, and the conclusion is that God exists. Logically, God is either within time,

which means that time must have existed before God, which does not make God the creator of the Universe, outside time or both within and outside time. The theistic ontological argument therefore calls for God to be both within and outside time, as omnipotence necessitates those changes are caused in time. If God, however, was outside of time, then He could still create the Universe, just not be able to interact within it, which aligns more with deist beliefs. Deism is the belief that a supreme God exists, but could be uncaring and might not interfere, whether God exists within time or not. Dictionary.com has a definition of deism as “belief in a God who created the world but has since remained indifferent to it”. This idea of a deistic God existing only outside of time is possibly refuted as much by the Ontological argument as is the case for God not creating the Universe, because God would not exist within the Universe and therefore not exist in a possible world. A deistic God, could in this argument, however, exist within time as easily as a theistic God and could make more logical sense if He is omniscient. God would not need to intervene as He would have created the Universe to be perfect and wholly good according to Himself as God would be omnipotent and omnibenevolent. This view eases the logical problems of defining God to be omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good as these are not required within the Universe but were fundamental in the creation of it.

There is perhaps a false choice between the deistic God and an omnipresent God like an Abrahamic God. Consideration could be given to an omnipotent, all loving God that no longer exists, or will cease to exist in the future. This is not the Abrahamic God and considering this God in terms of the ontological argument, a greater being could be imagined, i.e. a being that always exists, but is otherwise consistent with one of the Abrahamic definitions. This version of God is therefore not required to be considered in examining the ontological argument.

The Attributes of God Website listed 22 attributes that God possesses and are detailed previously in this thesis. Not all of these have been used in the ontological argument, which relies on God being the most perfect, supreme or greatest being. These attributes will be included in the Christian definition, but God might be distinguishable from the Christian God. An example would be whether He needed to create Jesus as ‘His Son’ which did not happen according to the definition of the supreme God of Judaism or of Islam. These are supposedly

the same God, but there are differences in understanding, although in all three, God is the greatest conceivable being.

There is some doubt by what the attribute that “‘God is Personal’ - God is a self-conscious Being capable of thought, will, and interaction with His creation” covers. It could be interpreted as God interacting with all His creations including fish, insects, flowers and even rocks or indeed atoms. However, the root of the word ‘personal’ is person, so ‘personal’ tends to apply to people and does not include, for instance tigers or salmon. It follows that this could limit this ‘Supreme God’ as ‘I could conceive of a God that could interact with tigers, salmon or anything else’.

Similarly, the “‘Wrath of God’ - God’s moral Character leads Him to judgement and punishment of unrighteousness” might only apply to humans or maybe other creatures such as animals. There are passages in the Bible such as Ecclesiastes 3.18-21 (NIV), “I also said to myself, “As for humans, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the human spirit rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?””. Luke 3.6 has differing translations with the KJV and NIV versions contradicting each other, as detailed on BibleRef.com: KJV - “And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”; NIV - “And all people will see God’s salvation.”. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines ‘flesh’ as “the soft parts of the body of an animal and especially of a vertebrate”.

From these examples the definition of God, particularly His attributes, can be open to interpretation, even just using the Christian understandings of God. The ontological argument does not have to have these points defined or even agreed when considering if the argument is valid. The important point is that God is the supreme being that can possibly be conceived, not what those qualities are. This is true if there is a general understanding of better and worse. E.g. it is better to exist for longer, better to have more power or know more and worse to be mistaken instead of right. The first attribute that was listed, the “‘Infinitude of God’ - God is Infinite (limitless). God is not limited by anything outside of His character. This applies to all of God’s attributes, (example: The goodness of God means

God is infinitely good, God is also infinitely just, infinitely immutable, etc...) and is relevant for the ontological argument, defining God without limits".

It seems at least a possibility, that if it is acknowledged that the universe is not perfect, then it would not take a 'perfect' God to create it. It would almost certainly appear to humans that God would be perfect, rather than extremely powerful, knowledgeable etc. From an ontological argument, if a human could imagine this God, it might not be impossible for someone to imagine a truly all powerful, supreme being. As humans probably could not tell if God was truly all powerful, then maybe this would be the ultimate being conceivable, and the error would be human rather than that of God, so possibly the argument could be just as valid as imagining a perfect, supreme God, if God was truly eternally perfect.

If God followed the ideas in neoclassical theism or process philosophy, then by the definition of a 'growing' God in these theories, God would, at least, not be perfect, yet. The universe is also growing with God, so would be flawed. This has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, but is relevant to the idea of an imperfect God creating the flawed universe.

Given these musings, about considering the universe and maybe God as not perfect, as it would be if created by an omniscient, omnipotent omnibenevolent God, certainly does not add any strength to the ontological argument and might weaken it.

The Relevance of 'Wholly Good' in the Ontological Argument

According to Answers in Genesis, a Christian Website, "God is perfect and just, and He must punish sin, which is our rejection of Him." (Is God really good?, 2007). It also stated, "if there is no God, who is the standard of goodness, then there is no basis on which to say an action (or a life) is good". These views agree with part of the first premise of the ontological argument that God is "wholly good". This point has been mentioned above, but is it necessary or even meaningful as part of the ontological argument?

Reformulating Alvin Plantinga's argument without the need for God to be wholly good we get:

1. A being has *maximal excellence* in a given possible world *W* if and only if it is omnipotent and omniscient in *W*; and
2. A being has *maximal greatness* if it has maximal excellence in every possible world.
3. It is possible that there is a being that has maximal greatness. (Premise)
4. Therefore, possibly, it is necessarily true that an omniscient and omnipotent being exists.
5. Therefore, ... it is necessarily true that an omniscient and omnipotent being exists.

The only difference is that the first premise does not contain the part of the definition of a being with maximal excellence as a being who is wholly good. There does not appear to be any loss of logic to remove this condition as a maximally excellent being is still defined as omnipotent and omniscient. Therefore, according to this revised argument an omniscient and omnipotent, but not necessarily wholly good being exists.

Interestingly the logic is just as strong if the maximally excellent being is wholly evil. This is assuming that as God is the maximal standard, then maximally evil is God's nature and the interpretation of this would be that goodness is a negative concept, or it would mean that humans have an incorrect understanding of what is evil. Applying this to the Christian, or any Abrahamic God would not seem to be a problem because of the genocides, murder, slavery and subjugation of women, for example. These would not have to be excused, with something like 'God moves in mysterious ways' which would be more applicable in this scenario regarding things such as 'you shall not kill' and 'you shall not steal'. These are 2 of the 10 commandments according to Spiewak (n.d.).

Another interesting thought, which is not completely relevant to the ontological argument, but is usually included in defining God in later versions of it, is about the meaning of good and evil as one of the criteria for God in the first premise is that He is wholly good. This seems to follow a definition of good and evil in the religious sense, at least for Abrahamic religions, and seems to be defined as 'good' being what God wants and 'evil' or 'sin' being the opposite; God is wholly good! There are examples in sacred texts of different religions calling for actions that not everybody would agree were wholly good. These include the following, as well as other questionable actions; slavery (example Qur'an 47:4), massacres (example 1Samuel 15:3), rape (example Qur'an 4:24), conquest (example Revelation 3:21), murder (example Qur'an 8:16), torture (example Qur'an 22:19), subjugation of women

(example Ecclesiastes 7:27–28), punishments for homosexuality (example Leviticus 18:22) and severe punishments for disobeying or not instantly obeying God, no matter what. An example of this is Job's wife being turned into a pillar of salt for looking back at the destroyed cities of Sodom and Gomorrah as told in Genesis 19:26. These actions do not follow most rational peoples' understanding of 'good', which has previously been mentioned in this thesis. This is another reason why 'wholly good' is not helpful in the first premise of Plantinga's argument; it just seems to be stating that God is as good as God is.

If God is defined as wholly good, then there is a question of whether God is wholly good, or whether wholly good is defined as 'what God does'. The latter definition is consistent with it being an attribute of God, particularly with the Abrahamic idea that anything God wants or does is good, rather than the generally accepted western, secular definition.

Examining the 4th premise, that if it is possible that a maximally great being exists, then it necessarily exists; this means it exists in every possible world. If a being did not exist in every possible world, then it would be contingent rather than necessary. For example, it is possible that unicorns could exist in a possible world, or that anteaters do not exist in a possible world. Similarly, in another possible world, it is possible that if Joe Frazier's corner did not throw in the towel in his third boxing contest with Muhammad Ali in 'The Thrilla in Manilla', after the fourteenth round then Ali probably would have quit, as he had allegedly told his corner to cut is gloves off and Frazier would have won. This is described on the Thrilla in Manilla Web Page on Wikipedia (n.d.).

Logically, if something necessarily exists in a possible world and someone in that world knows it necessarily exists then they know it exists in every possible world and therefore it exists in the real world, even if that world is not the real world. This seems to be a persuasive point supporting the many worlds ontological argument, as laid out by Plantinga among others. The same logic shows that if someone in a possible world knows that a supposedly necessary being does not exist in their world then it does not exist in any possible world including the real one: note here, possible worlds still refers to any world that is logically possible. Peter Van Inwagen, in his book, 'Metaphysics, 1993, concluded "if we cannot show that a necessarily existent individual thing is possible, then we certainly cannot show that a perfect being is a being that is a necessarily existent individual thing", (Stump & Murray, 1999). This conclusion is summarised on the All About Philosophy Website "The conclusion

of the ontological argument, as formulated by Alvin Plantinga and others, depends on a form of modal axiom S5 (which contends that if the truth of a proposition is possible, then it is possible in all worlds). This axiom also contends that, if it is possible that a proposition is necessarily true (that is to say, it is necessarily true in some possible world), then it is necessarily true in all possible worlds.” (Ontological Argument, n.d.).

Of the three standard attributes of the Christian God of omnipotence, omniscience and being wholly good (omnibenevolence), the first two denote supreme power and knowledge, which are not judgemental terms. Being wholly good is more subjective as ‘good’ can be thought of as subjective, if it is not just taken from the definition of God, i.e. anything God wants is good and anything He does not want is not good, and probably bad. There is an argument that if there was a God that His behaviour would be wholly good virtually by definition and ‘good’ would therefore be defined and objective. This cannot apply to the ontological argument as it relies on the existence of God to then define a quality that demonstrates the existence of God. Taking ‘good’ as subjective would then mean that God would be wholly good, but that goodness exists outside of the definition of God. It also implies that if people have different and perhaps even contradictory views of what is good then God would have to be different to different people. This is fine for individual concepts of God, but not for an existent God. If ‘good’ was defined in terms of God’s will so that ‘something is good’ is what God determines then this will make logical sense even though some people will disagree and have their own version of what it means. This would be consistent with the ontological argument but does not further it.

Using omnibenevolence as a characteristic of God in the argument pushes that argument for a God to being an argument for God who promotes the morality of the arguer’s religion. Without it the argument would equally apply to a God like the Abrahamic god, but without a specific religion’s values.

The Christian God is defined with the characteristic of being wholly good. On the Desiring God Website Paper (n.d.) it stated, “The core essence of evil is preferring anything more than God”. As God is defined as omnibenevolent, it follows that ‘evil’ is against God. With the pain and suffering endured by everyone, the comparatively very short lifetime of anyone and all lives ending in loss and death it is possible that individuals could attribute evil to a deity, and it follows from the non-secular definition given that anyone who does not worship

the Christian God is evil. As evil is presented as the opposite of good, wholly good and wholly evil are both maximal, as previously stated, and either could be used in the ontological argument without any logical loss of validity.

The Cambridge Dictionary defined evil as “morally bad, cruel, or very unpleasant”. There are many passages in the Bible where it seems that God has committed acts of evil, as viewed through a modern, particularly western, lens. An example according to the Bible (King James Version), is from Genesis 6.7 which stated, “And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them”. Another example is of God killing Onan in Genesis 38:8-10 KJV, “And Judah said unto Onan, Go in unto thy brother's wife, and marry her, and raise up seed to thy brother. And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground, lest that he should give seed to his brother. And the thing which he did displeased the LORD: wherefore he slew him also”. There are many others including 2 bears mauling 42 boys for jeering Elisha and calling him ‘baldy’ as detailed in Kings 2.23-24.

These examples demonstrate that the idea of a Christian ‘all loving God’ could be seen as problematic. It is a common view of many Christians that humans cannot begin to grasp God’s motives, and, in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 2.11 (New International Version) stated, “For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God”.

If it is assumed that God exists, omniscient and omnipotent as in the Christian God then given mortal understanding of the ‘mind’ and will of God it is plausible that things that humans consider evil are actually good as decreed by God and vice versa. It follows that as the ontological argument for the existence of God is a human argument then it does not matter if God is wholly good or wholly evil, only that He is maximal, perfect or supreme in every aspect. Taking the human view of good or evil is either subjective or defined as whether it aligns with God, so it is not a necessary attribute to refute or substantiate the ontological argument for the existence of God.

A Different Idea of God

Is it possible to define God in such a way that He would be recognised as God and would make the ontological argument more persuasive? This would not be the Abrahamic God but should meet a significant number of people's expectations of what 'God' should be. Perhaps the simplest definition would be to define God as the creator of the universe. The simplest form of this God would be one that does not interact with His creation. This would be consistent with the deist view of God rather than the theist view of God.

Examining this 'simplest' form of God produces the following premises:

1. God exclusively created the universe.
2. God does not or cannot interact with the universe or things in it.
3. God might not exist in space-time.

Assumptions are:

- a. The universe exists.
- b. The universe had a beginning.

If the assumptions are true and an argument can be made for the existence of a God from just examining the above premises, then this would give an *a priori* justification for the belief in this definition of God.

The NASA Science Website stated that "The universe is everything. It includes all of space, and all the matter and energy that space contains. It even includes time itself and, of course, it includes you". There are several theories about 'our universe' with some postulating that we might be 'brains in a glass container' or part of a simulation. This detail should not affect the argument above.

The assumptions are relatively basic compared to many theistic Gods. Even if the 'universe' is very different to the current scientific understanding of the universe, it can be said to exist if it is defined as space-time where with quantum mechanics, matter can come into existence, even if for extremely short durations. If the universe does not exist, then neither does this thesis, so logically there is no point in considering this assumption further.

If the universe did not have a beginning, then it has always been in existence and would therefore not need a God to create it. The steady state theory was first put forward by Bondi, Gold and Hoyle. According to the Britannica Website (n.d.) steady state theory is “a view that the universe is always expanding but maintaining a constant average density, with matter being continuously created to form new stars and galaxies at the same rate that old ones become unobservable as a consequence of their increasing distance and velocity of recession”. There is still the question of the origin of the matter that is being continually created, and there is significant scientific evidence that this theory is not correct, and that the Universe was created by the Big Bang. Probably the most compelling of this evidence is the prediction of the cosmic microwave background within the big bang theory. This is also stated in the Britannica Website article which concluded that the cosmic microwave background has persuaded “scientists to overwhelmingly support the big-bang model”.

An interesting point is that, assuming that the big bang theory is broadly correct, was there any time before the big bang? If there was no matter, energy, waves, or anything at all, would time have meaning or even be able to exist? This is a complex scientific question, and there is not a clear consensus.

According to Schilling (2023), “British physicist Julian Barbour, for one, has argued that time doesn’t even exist, except as an illusion in our minds”. Schilling also stated, “According to others (including Stephen Hawking), time came into existence together with the Universe, rendering the whole concept of the word ‘before’ meaningless”. He concluded with “Then again, we simply don’t know whether or not there was time before the Big Bang”.

Hawking and Hartle theorised what happened before the big bang. They thought about going back in time to the extremely high energy, dense state at the beginning of the universe and thought about the subatomic level of the universe then. They proposed that “once you get to such a tiny, detailed level -- where particles spontaneously pop up and disappear, space becomes separated from time. In essence, time loses the meaning we traditionally assign to it” (Spoon, n.d.). This is not as clear as the understanding in General Relativity. In an article titled, ‘What is a Singularity?’, the Universe Today Website (n.d.) stated, “According to the Penrose Singularity Theorem, which he proposed in 1965, a time-like singularity will occur within a black hole whenever matter reaches certain energy conditions. At this point,

the curvature of space-time within the black hole becomes infinite, thus turning it into a trapped surface where time ceases to function”.

There is not an agreed answer to whether time existed before the big bang, unless the universe is one of a cycle of universes, or in a multiverse, in which case, it is much more likely that time existed prior to the big bang.

The two assumptions are almost exclusively non-controversial, particularly the first one that states that the universe exists. If the second one were not true, then the idea of God would not be tenable. This does not mean that a supreme being could not exist, but this being could not have created the universe, which is the first premise in the argument.

The first premise is the key premise in the argument as premise 2 and premise 3 make it easier to demonstrate that God created the universe. Premise 2 means that the proof of God probably does not and cannot rely on a *posteriori* argument without extremely detailed scientific knowledge that might one day strongly indicate that the universe could not have been created naturally. This could potentially be by examining some particles, atoms or molecules in incredible detail and the result could be scientifically impossible, for example, if in some instances, negative charges were attracted to each other, which would seem to contradict a core scientific principle. Until then, any proof of God must be *a priori*, unless scientists could do what they always have and reinterpret and reformulate their understanding of the universe. Premise 3 further lightens the burden of proof as the question of God's continued existence will not affect the argument.

A significant issue in this argument is being able to define aspects of God, as the premises are very nebulous, with the only specification that 'God' created the universe.

Considering a fundamental characteristic of the Universe as it is almost universally understood by everyone; that there is matter in the universe, could give an aspect of the God that is being considered. The simple question of where the matter came from is not completely different, and could possibly be very similar from how the universe was created. Einstein famously created a formula linking mass and energy. The Website for the American Museum of Natural History under the title $E=mc^2$ (n.d.) stated, “The implications of $E=mc^2$ are profound. For centuries, scientists had considered energy and mass to be completely distinct and unrelated to each other. Einstein showed that in fact, energy and mass are

different forms of the same thing". This means that explaining where matter came from also shows where energy comes from.

One scientifically recognised aspect of the universe is that along with matter, antimatter exists. Antimatter is like matter, but with the opposite charge, e.g. an anti-electron, also known as a positron, has the same characteristics, such as mass, as the electron, but that the charge is positive instead of negative (with the same magnitude). The Live Science Website stated, "Antimatter is the same as ordinary matter except that it has the opposite electric charge" (Mann, 2021). Mann (2021) also stated that "antimatter is rare in today's universe, and scientists aren't sure why". Eklund (2020) stated there is a "known asymmetry" between matter and antimatter and also stated that "one of the greatest puzzles in physics" is why is there less antimatter than matter in the universe. If there were the same amount of matter and antimatter in the universe then neither would exist. Eklund (2020) stated, "if antimatter and matter are truly identical but mirrored copies of each other, they should have been produced in equal amounts in the Big Bang". He continued with "the problem is that would have made it all annihilate. But today, there's nearly no antimatter left in the universe".

Could this be the essence of God, making an imbalance between matter and antimatter? From an atheistic point of view, it is another 'God of the gaps' argument, where because there is currently no scientific explanation, theists will immediately say that therefore God must have done it. There may be some validity in this argument, and it has been used over the centuries, but many of these arguments have been debunked, particularly in the modern era, notably with evolution by natural selection, electrodynamics, relativity and quantum mechanics. Science is possibly approaching a hypothesis on abiogenesis, the creation of life from inanimate sources. Rogers (n.d.) stated Abiogenesis is 'the idea that life arose from nonlife more than 3.5 billion years ago on Earth' and showed advances in this field with comments such as it has been demonstrated that "organic molecules can form from abiogenic materials under the constraints of Earth's prebiotic atmosphere".

The matter/antimatter imbalance being attributed to God could be considered to be not just another 'God of the gaps' because seemingly logically and scientifically there should have been the same amount of matter and antimatter at the beginning of the universe and similarly it seems logical that they should have been equally destroyed. This imbalance, if found in

an experiment, would possibly have been put down to some interference as it might be seen to be the most logical explanation.

It is not likely that antimatter exists in great quantities in the universe (created from a big bang). Naftilan (1999) explained, “there is a strong argument against the possibility that matter, and antimatter exist in equal numbers in our universe but are for some reason separated” and “it seems impossible that matter was separated from antimatter on scales the size of clusters today”. Naftilan does admit that this theory is not certain.

Other considerations for this ‘God’ are setting constants in the universe and the standard model. The constants like the size of electrons, their charge, the gravitational constant are indicators of God’s existence according to the fine-tuning argument and rely on observation, not an *a priori* argument. In this definition of God, we are not looking at the numbers, just that the universe exists and in order of it to exist, matter needs to exist, which is partly the matter/antimatter issue, but also the fact that matter forms more complex structures like humans, so the ontological argument can be thought about.

The Standard Model in particle physics is almost universally assumed not to be complete as the issue of quantum gravity has not been solved; quantum mechanics operates at an incredibly small scale and relativity at a large scale, with seemingly no meeting in the middle. Even if we accept that the Standard Model is not correct, and there are more fundamental elements or forces then it still does not affect the theory of a standard model throughout the universe. Is this what God created to make the universe? According to the CERN Website (n.d.) “The Standard Model explains how the basic building blocks of matter interact, governed by four fundamental forces”. This is an *a posteriori* argument through observations and experimentation, but we are just interested in the fact that the universe exists, our prime assumption.

If there is a standard model, the precise sizes of interacting particles, universal constants and the asymmetry between matter and antimatter are just possibilities of God’s creation or part of it. They are not necessarily created by God, maybe one of them could be or maybe it is something completely different. From an *a priori* argument it is enough that a complex universe exists and did not always exist that indicates the possibility of the existence of God. With scientific advancements since the enlightenment in Europe, from the seventeenth

century onwards, humans are aware of complexities, absolutes and patterns that they were unaware of in the past. A few are mentioned, but it is the creation of the universe, no matter whatever the actual precise details are required, including the question of dark matter and dark energy that needs to be explained, not the actual distances or numbers.

Can 'God' be legitimately defined as fundamental constants, or the setting of them, or the annihilator of antimatter? The universe would probably look exactly the same if antimatter had destroyed matter to the same ratio. We would call positive what we now call negative, but it is the amount left that is important, and critically that they are not both destroyed. As these fundamental constants are seemingly constant throughout the universe, it would be difficult to change any of them without waiting for a new universe, if there could be another. The question is whether these are always the same or could some or all of them possibly be different in a perhaps very, very different universe. If so, could the change be defined as God, as it would happen at the beginning of the universe or outside of it? If there is or has been/will be other universes, are the sizes and nature of the fundamental forces always the same, could there be a different number of them with different characteristics or are they somehow eternal and necessary? This is the sort of language that is used when describing God.

There is a significant difference between the idea of the Christian God in St. Anselm's ontological argument and the fundamental building blocks of the universe that has been discussed in this section. It seems that this version of 'God' is much more likely, if not certain in this universe because of the abundance of matter, a form of standard model and the cosmological 'fine tuning' constants that could be the result of the standard model, once fully understood. This is an *a posteriori* argument, with knowledge of all these scientific phenomena, but without such knowledge and just considering creating an astoundingly large, complex universe there is no theory with scientific consensus. In this idea of God, there is however, no personal relationship with this God, or even any interference from God in the unfolding of the universe. This last point does fit in with an 'all knowing God' that is 'powerful' enough to create a universe in which sentient beings exist, and notably for the ontological argument, that humans exist on Earth.

A possibility not mentioned, if the two assumptions are given, is creation ex nihilo, or creation out of nothing. This is like the idea that particles can be created out of 'nothing' and then

quickly annihilate each other a few nanoseconds later, but the scale would be 'infinitely' larger. If this is true, then there would logically be no need for a God to create the universe. This question is not as simple as it may first appear. The actual makeup of the universe is not really an issue, as long as it exists, the problem is defining 'nothing'.

Particles and waves can sporadically be created in a quantum vacuum. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, "According to quantum mechanics, the vacuum state is not truly empty but instead contains fleeting electromagnetic waves and particles that pop into and out of the quantum field". Scientifically, in quantum field theory, 'nothing' "is the quantum state with the lowest possible energy" (Wikipedia, n.d.). Given that this is as close to nothing as science can get, it means that scientifically the universe was not created ex nihilo, but possibly from a state that strongly resembles nothing. This is not a completely satisfactory answer and leaves doubt as to what was before the quantum vacuum state, if anything.

The big bang is hypothesised to start from a singularity, a point of infinite density, or if not, it expanded from an extremely hot and dense state, again this is not completely nothing. There is no scientific theory that the universe was created out of absolutely nothing, if that can have any meaning.

Defining God as the 'rules' of the universe does make God more likely and the overwhelming number people throughout history would recognise rules, or norms. Some basic examples in everyday life are day and night and their repetitive nature, hunger and eating, heat from the sun, water from the rain, birth and death and what things are likely to cause death and injury.

This does not mean that science would not discover an answer to some or all these questions in the future. Throughout history scientists have continually made breakthroughs that were completely unexpected and changed the view of the universe. Two obvious examples were general relativity and quantum mechanics. These were less than 30 years after Albert Michelson, who was a Nobel Prize winning physicist, stated, "it seems probable that most of the grand underlying principles have been firmly established and that further advances are to be sought chiefly in the rigorous application of these principles to all the phenomena which come under our notice." (4 gravitons Website, 2016).

This different idea of God is not proven considering the ideas presented here. There is nothing that has been presented that is more likely or cannot be defined as 'God'. God could be seen as the rules that make the fundamental particles, the catalyst for the big bang, the mathematical rules or constants or a combination of these without any hint of an intelligent being. This though is the main problem.

This God could be considered all powerful, if He had been the cause of the universe to come into existence, but there is no reason to believe that all these things or a single something caused the universe to be created, it could have been a combination of different things. God could therefore be a combined event. While it is probably easy to define a God in this way, there is no way at the moment of telling what specifically this event or combination was. From an ontological perspective, the details need to be discarded, the idea of a cause that created the universe can be described as God. Unfortunately, it does not infer a being that can be legitimately described as a recognisable God is the highly likely cause of the universe. This is, unless God can be classed as an unthinking event or mathematical rules and constants, which does not fit well with even the simplest idea of God in an ontological argument.

Although this argument can seem compelling, it just defines God as whatever created the universe. Apart from it being argued that this being, event or cause was omnipotent in that the universe was created by 'Him', 'He' does not need to have or most likely does not have any of the qualities recognised as the God of any ontological argument. God cannot be distinguished from a 'natural' creator of the universe, like for instance the collapse of another universe by gravity and then an expansion from the singularity.

The Ontological Argument in The Modern Universe

There are competing ideas in the early twenty-first century about the nature of reality, as there have been throughout history. As people build on other people's work in the past there is both more and less certainty about the dimensions, nature, makeup, size, age, past and future of the universe and its place in eternity. A number of these discoveries have been mentioned in this thesis including general relativity, quantum mechanics and evolution by natural selection. The equipment that has been built has enabled scientists to see further

out into the universe, which means also further back in time as well as observing smaller particles, which has led to increases in knowledge that impacts on our understanding of the fabric of the universe including gravitational waves. Albert Einstein predicted gravitational waves from his theory of general relativity, and Einstein concluded that they must “propagate with the speed of light” in 1916 according to Wikipedia (n.d.) and that “on 11 February 2016, the LIGO-Virgo collaborations announced the first observation of gravitational waves”.

Relativity has been explained and makes sense to many people, but quantum mechanics is mostly counter intuitive and almost impossible to make sense of. Before this, up until the end of the nineteenth century, most scientists thought they had a clear understanding of the rules of how the universe worked. Rules that had been established around three hundred years before in the form of Newtonian mechanics. Evolution had made a very significant development in the understanding of science, but not the fabric of the universe, which was considered to be much more manageable and comprehensible in size and complexity than it was in the early twenty-first century. The understanding of God, or at least the comprehension of His creation is much greater and more wondrous than before. There have been periods of scientific advancement, notably the Greeks, the scientific revolution following the enlightenment and then the seismic developments since the early twentieth century. In early history and the dark ages there was much less evidence for going against the narrative of the religion that a person was brought up with. Through developments in the understanding of the universe and the availability of information to the masses there has been more opportunity and reason to doubt doctrines of organised religions.

Given the scientific turmoil of the early twentieth century, which is still resonating over one hundred years later, it could be conceived that accepted scientific theories have less claim to understanding the essential elements of the universe than they did in 1900. Science is not about trusting the latest theories, it is about challenging them and given the universally agreed contradictions between quantum mechanics and general relativity, most scientists in these fields believe that either, at least one of these theories is incorrect or needs, at best, refinements to make it more accurate. Scientists know their best theories about the universe are not correct. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated, “the Standard Model is believed to be theoretically self-consistent” but also that it “falls short of being a complete theory of fundamental interactions”. As it is known that ‘the science’ is not correct, does it imply that God can be

recast, or re-evaluated in the enlightenment of current uncertainty, and could the given uncertainty about the truth as known, affect the burden of proof about the existence of God?

The structure of the ontological argument does not change given the uncertainty about how the universe works, nor does the burden of proof; what could be an influencing factor, is that if it is assumed that the universe really exists, then there are more uncertain alternatives than there were before the dawn of the twentieth century. There is also more scope to 'expand' the understanding of God into areas that were not really considered until the early twentieth century. At the fundamental quantum level there is no certainty, only probability. If this is the true nature of the universe, then God needs to be considered in these terms.

In the modal ontological arguments, God is considered to exist in a possible world. This is in the current universe, but in a possible interpretation of it. It is then argued that as God is the supreme being, He necessarily exists in all possible worlds, and hence the actual world. This is different to the idea of the many worlds' interpretation of quantum mechanics or the idea of a multiverse. In both of these hypotheses the universe exists among others, and potentially an infinite number of universes. If there are infinite universes then it would suggest that anything is possible in at least one, or by extension, an infinite number of them. If this is the case then if it is at all possible for God to exist then He would exist in some universes, but not necessarily this universe. Using the ontological argument that states that as God is the perfect, supreme being, He would exist in all possible worlds, would at best lead to the same criticisms of His necessary existence in the classic arguments. It would probably be even more questionable because if there were infinite universes (worlds) then everything that is possible will exist in some of them, then by the same logic, in some of them there would be no life, no matter and no God.

Considering this in a bit more detail shows that assuming multiverses exist or at least could exist then this can be thought of as similar to the possible worlds' scenario. To say that possible worlds exist is not a statement of fact. We all only experience and can interact with one world, even given that we do not know what will happen in the future.

There is therefore similarity between the possible worlds as described in Plantinga's version of the ontological argument and one of the multiverse interpretations of reality. Ra (2023) stated, "theoretical physicist Brian Greene categorized nine types of multiverses that are

theoretically viable based on their characteristics and mechanism of creation". According to the ontological argument, if God exists in one of these possible worlds or multiverses then He exists as He is the 'greatest being that can be conceived' and therefore necessary. This has been discussed in detail for the possible worlds scenario and the criticisms could be applied to the multiverse interpretations.

There is also another layer of either doubt or confirmation. If God existed in one of the universes in the multiverses, He does not have to exist in all of them, as He would necessarily exist in that universe, which is what the ontological argument was trying to prove. In its original form, and for centuries afterwards, only one universe was considered possible and therefore only this universe was being discussed in the argument. If this idea of multiverses was accepted, then it would be strongly intimated, if not proved that God existed as an infinity of universes would exist. It does not add any extra proof that God exists or existed in this universe.

While considering the possibility that God exists in a multiverse reality it is worth considering what is meant by supreme being and other such perfections that God entails. If as discussed, God is the God of a single universe, while He would be the perfect being and creator of that universe, He would not need to exist in the other universes. At the moment, a multiverse is pure conjecture, and without any proof or even justifiable reason to believe in a multiverse it should be enough to acknowledge that a supreme being that created this universe is the supreme being.

If God is considered to have created one or a finite number of universes, but not all of them, then this is assuming that a multiverse exists, and God can be defined as the creator of this universe, but not the entire multiverse. This is not necessarily a problem, as He is still the supreme being of everything that exists that anything in this universe can interact with. If there were an infinite number of universes and God created an infinite number of them, but not all of them, then the magnitude of His power would be significantly greater than the creator of a finite number of universes in a multiverse consisting of infinite universes. If God created all the multiverse, whether finite or infinite, then He would be the ultimate, supreme being, perhaps being able to be described as the God of Gods. If some other Gods created parts of the multiverse, then God would have had to have created them first.

All of these scenarios do not change the basic ontological argument for God. The scale of God's supreme existence would change, but it would still be the supreme existence, certainly of this universe. This thesis questioned the ability to begin to imagine a fraction of the universe and therefore the magnificence of God. Therefore, the idea of a multiverse and the possibility of a creator of the multiverse probably do not make a difference to actually being able to imagine such a being, and words such as 'infinite' and 'multiverse' merely replace 'all possible worlds' and 'universe'.

Time is considered a dimension in the theory of Relativity, so along with length, width and depth, there are a total of 4 dimensions in the universe. There are theories that postulate more dimensions, including string theory. Debczak (2023) stated, "String theory states there must be at least 10 dimensions of space plus one dimension for time". Debczak also stated that "according to Bosonic string theory" there are "26" dimensions. These possible 'extra' dimensions are not able to be detected, at least not yet. As these are postulated in cutting edge scientific ideas it is not impossible to think of extra, undetected dimensions. This means that in these theories there are dimensions we cannot detect, perhaps like God cannot be detected. This sounds a bit like the 'God of the gaps' argument that is known to most atheists when refuting God's existence. It could be argued to provide a theoretical scientific place for God to be that is not able to be detected yet. This is not a theory, but a demonstration that just because God is not detectable, it does not mean that He does not exist. This probably does not advance the ontological argument, but it certainly does not harm it.

These current theoretical frameworks about the nature of the universe, time and number of dimensions leave a doubt about whether they enhance the ontological argument for God or instead are new arguments for the existence of God outside of the ontological argument. As they are based on theories from observations, and observations from theories, they are not based purely on *a priori* thinking. There are, however, some pure theoretical ideas without observations to firmly back them up, including the idea of a multiverse, and it is accepted that the standard model is not correct because gravity cannot be neatly explained with quantum mechanics.

Taking a step back, knowing that there are unknowns and the 'best' theories about the universe are not correct, the only way to proceed is with thought experiments or rational

deduction. In this way, the modern theories can be contemplated with the ontological argument fitting around them to an extent. This might seem disingenuous, but the original argument, and all others, used intellect that had an understanding of the world, even if this was not explicitly expressed.

To consider God as the 'supreme/ultimate/perfect', all powerful being, it is implied that He created the world and the universe in all its complexity. If the universe was not complex, then God would not need to be so powerful and wonderful. St. Anselm and the others that followed him had an understanding of the changing of the seasons and the growth of food, water for drinking and natural shelter, or materials for shelter for protection. This can, at least, be ascribed to the omnibenevolent characteristic of God, in the argument.

Throughout history, humans have developed and learnt about the universe and many thanked God for it. It is required as a basis for all arguments for the existence of God. This is true even for the ontological argument, which has as its base, the existence of the wondrous universe, even if the understanding of the universe continually evolved. Without having some understanding that a world exists, and that life can flourish, particularly intelligent, human life, the ontological argument would be meaningless.

As time went on, scientific understanding of the universe has improved. In normal use, a theory is a guess about the nature of something, without any evidence, but "for scientists, a theory has nearly the opposite meaning. A theory is a well-substantiated explanation of an aspect of the natural world that can incorporate laws, hypotheses and fact" (The American Museum of Natural History, n.d.). Lewis (2021) stated, "A well-supported evidence-based theory becomes acceptable until disproved. It never evolves to a fact, and that's a fact".

There would have been 'theories' about the world in the 12th century. Without them, there would have been no development. Humans advanced by observing, copying, discovering and inventing things. That people believe they have a better understanding of the universe than previous generations is no surprise, but although the nature of reality has not changed, understanding of it has. In the 12th century, people believed water was wet and was needed to live. This belief is still held, but since the late 19th century it has been known, by some anyway, that a water molecule is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. When discussing water the Imperial College London Website (n.d.) stated, "in 1871

Cannizzaro established the formula to be H_2O ". This example shows that knowledge increased, but not that the knowledge of the existence of water and its most important use changed. This is background knowledge, establishing that God, if He exists, could perhaps be more technical than previously thought.

The reason that the ontological argument was chosen for this thesis is because it is the only *a priori* argument for the existence of God. As briefly discussed, humans have some understanding and theories about the world and always have had. This normally improves over time, but not necessarily. Wikipedia (n.d.) stated that the dark ages is a term for the early Middle Ages "which characterises it as marked by economic, intellectual, and cultural decline". The article explains that when the Roman period ended a lot of knowledge was lost. The Knowledge Website (2014) stated, "after the fall of the Roman Empire, medieval Europe was in a period of comparative stasis (certainly in relation to the rate of change with the Renaissance and Enlightenment)". Philosophers and all other people have an understanding of how to live, what they need, what they should avoid, what to do if they are thirsty or cold as well as phenomena such as seasonal changes - particularly those living in a temperate zone. It is obvious that the ontological argument cannot be derived without some understanding and education, particularly, as stated, with the ability to reason.

Colloquially, it is reasonable to think that if you touched something very hot it would burn you and cause you pain. Similarly, if you did not eat for a week, you would be weak and very hungry. It is warmer to stand in sunlight than in the shade. There are myriad other examples particularly with less generic obvious instances that are pertinent to an individual's personal life, for instance, almost always preferring coffee hot, with quite a lot of milk and no sugar or preferring it weak, black and with 3 sugars.

These examples have little to do with considering the existence of God, particularly personal preferences. These are examples of knowledge that people have, even if they are the only one who knows about something very personal. All of these philosophers would have a knowledge of some language and how to use and understand it.

Reason must be based on knowledge and experience, and probably wisdom. Prinzing (2017) stated, "Taken literally, "philosopher" refers to a lover of wisdom". Prinzing further stated that Psychology Today "says that wisdom, "involves an integration of knowledge,

experience, and deep understanding””. He also stated that “it’s not at all clear to me what the distinction is between knowledge and understanding”. He stated that he would “defend” his interpretation of the definition of wisdom, which he stated as being “Wisdom is knowledge of how to live well, and the disposition to act appropriately on that knowledge”.

The title of Roberts 2024 article on Shock Logic “Shocklogic Values: Wisdom is Knowledge Applied” summarised succinctly the article’s brief exploration of the difference between knowledge and wisdom. In the article, he also quoted Charles Sturgeon with “Wisdom is the right use of knowledge”.

To summarise, wisdom is based on knowledge and experience, which is something everyone has in differing amounts, it is never exactly the same as anyone else’s and sometimes contradictory, but it frames their philosophical outlook.

This poses two questions. Firstly, given the nature of knowledge and how it is gained, can an argument really be just from pure reason, or *a priori*? This is assuming that people actually exist and are not just ‘brains in a vat’. If people were ‘brains in a vat (or jar)’ then the beings that put them there and keep them alive would presumably have the same opportunity to discover God through the ontological argument as humans, if they existed.

The second question, is if knowledge is required for the ability to reason, then can this be limited or defined in such a way so that an argument can be *a priori*?

Although knowledge must come from action or experience, it does not have to come deductively. The Britannica dictionary defined deduction as “the act or process of using logic or reason to form a conclusion or opinion about something: the act or process of deducing something”. It can seem reasonable that the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* needs to be based on deduction. An argument is *a posteriori* if an observation is made and this leads to deduction about it, whereas *a priori* is without considering observations and deducing facts about them, although many facts are known about many things, they are not used to work out the answer.

This is clumsy and along a spectrum of awareness about something, from completely unaware, to full understanding; both ends would be clear, with various shades of grey in

between. Perhaps it could be rephrased as 'not using the scientific principle of investigation or considering scientific 'facts', beyond the assumption of the existence of the universe'.

Interestingly, as stated earlier in this thesis, an *a priori* argument, like the ontological argument is a deductive argument and an *a posteriori* argument is inductive. The seeming contradiction is not about the argument, but what knowledge is brought to bear when considering it.

The Collins Dictionary gives a relevant definition of deduction as "the process of reasoning typical of mathematics and logic, whose conclusions follow necessarily from their premises" and induction as "process of reasoning, used esp in science, by which a general conclusion is drawn from a set of premises, based mainly on experience or experimental evidence. The conclusion goes beyond the information contained in the premises and does not follow necessarily from them. Thus, an inductive argument may be highly probable yet lead from true premises to a false conclusion".

If this idea about what can be classed as *a priori* knowledge for the ontological argument is accepted, then:

The ontological argument starts from an inducted knowledge base and then a deductive process is applied to the argument to try and prove the existence of God.

and

The other major arguments for the existence of God like the cosmological and teleological arguments start from deduced knowledge and then are subject to an inductive process.

This train of thought seems to lead to a conclusion that both deductive and inductive knowledge are required for any philosophical argument for the existence of God. As stated, this conclusion is clumsy, although an interesting thought. If this is accepted as true then it demonstrates that logically any philosophical arguments cannot lead to the firm conclusion that God exists, because there is always room for doubt. This is because even though the inductive part of the argument is persuasive, it cannot be conclusive. This is speculative,

however, and as discussed, it is very hard to ignore the often-significant role that faith normally plays in the belief of God.

CONCLUSION

Observations

The search for God or more specifically for this thesis the desire to prove God exists is still very popular. This could be an intellectual challenge for the proponent or defender of the argument but is more likely to justify their particular faith to themselves or others. The original argument, from St, Anselm, was based on his Christian faith rather than starting from an intellectually neutral position. The desire to disprove the argument is also still strong. This could be attributed to wanting to seek truth, or, in some cases could be the desire to refute the idea of God, or a flavour of God so that the interlocutor can justify their worldview. This is likely to be true of those who investigate the argument or even watch a video about it.

It appears that the ontological argument is still relevant, and it seems to be thought about and debated possibly as much as ever. On the 4th of October 2024, typing 'ontological argument' into the Google search engine produced "About 10,800,000 results". By searching YouTube, it showed that the most recent video specifically about the ontological argument was created 7 days prior and had 4,300 views. This demonstrates that many people are fascinated and still engaged with it, despite how long it has been around. There are also several versions of the argument, some of which have been put forward by very well-regarded philosophers. There has also been a significant number of criticisms of the argument in various forms from equally eminent philosophers. Many others have added to the weight of argument from both sides.

The original argument from St Anselm is usually discussed in many books and articles on this subject as can be seen in the literature review section. The other versions that often seem to be discussed are, in particular, Descartes', but also Plantinga's and to a lesser extent Leibniz'. Probably the most discussed objection to the ontological argument was that existence was not a predicate, that was first proposed by Kant followed by 'the most perfect island' analogy, originally from Gaunilo. A reasonably common objection to the ontological argument is that it is a *de dicto* argument most of the way through, but without justification changes to a *de re* statement claiming the existence of God.

The ontological argument is primarily used to attempt to prove the existence of the Christian God. This is within the understanding of the universe through a Christian lens. This view has developed over time for many Christians, but the basics, that the universe is real, and is finite in the sense that God is greater than the universe have not changed. There has not been as much consideration of the argument in other possible scenarios about the attributes of God or the nature of existence and the characteristics of the universe.

The ontological argument progressed along with developments in philosophy, most notably with the modal ontological argument.

The meaning of words and how they change or could be interpreted adds more complexity and nuance to the argument through a basic interpretation of the words making up the argument. An example used in this thesis is the meaning of the word 'reason' and how a changing understanding of the word impinges on the argument.

Whereas some *a posteriori* arguments have changed, surfaced or become less convincing over time, the ontological argument does not seem to have had the same influences affect it. St. Anselm's original argument is still the most popular one discussed. This makes sense because observations and deduction are continually adding to human knowledge. An example is the fine-tuning argument, which is a much more recent addition than the other arguments touched on in this thesis. "In 1961, physicist Robert H. Dicke claimed that certain forces in physics, such as gravity and electromagnetism, must be perfectly fine-tuned for life to exist in the universe. Fred Hoyle also argued for a fine-tuned universe in his 1983 book *The Intelligent Universe*" (Wikipedia, n.d.). It has been formulated because recently it has been possible to make incredibly precise measurements of particles and increase the accuracy of scientific constants. Scientists have also been able to create scenarios based on slightly modifying a number of these constants to determine the often-cataclysmic effect that this has on the universe.

Another example is the teleological argument, which has in some instances been superseded by the fine-tuning argument. A common argument for it was the complexity and wonderment of the human eye. After the theory of evolution by natural selection and developments in biology, it is known that the human eye has many flaws including limited light gathering power and can only see a limited range of frequencies of electromagnetic

waves, i.e. the 'visible spectrum' as detailed by the University of Rochester (n.d.). It also has a blind spot, "Everyone has a spot in their retina where the optic nerve connects. In this area there are no light-sensitive cells so this part of your retina can't see. We call this the blind spot." (American Academy of Ophthalmology, n.d.). There are many animals that have better eyesight than humans including Bald Eagles, which have the best distance vision, owls that have the best night vision and the European Robin that can see magnetic fields to name just a few. These were listed on the Lasik by Ocli Vision Website (n.d.).

This thesis has only touched the surface of the wisdom of the philosophers and theologians that have added the many contributions that have been made to the argument. The exploration of the literature and videos that have been captured has produced a number of ingenious claims and counter claims but has still left room for original thought. This might be due to some misunderstanding of the full arguments or lack of research in the right areas, but nonetheless, these at the very least, are not prevalent in mainstream ontological arguments for the existence, or not, of God.

Summary

The ontological argument has been around for hundreds, if not thousands of years and has evolved as philosophy evolved. Despite several highly respected intellectuals both supporting and denying that the argument is proven for as long as the argument has been around. It still generates significant interest and refuses to go away. It is one of a few well-known philosophical arguments for the existence of God but holds a special place as it relies purely on thought and not on observations.

In its most famous appearance, the argument from St. Anselm, the ontological argument was not presented to decide if God existed but was formulated in the firm belief that God existed with the aim to convince any doubters of their error.

The ontological argument particularly focuses on an Abrahamic God, notably the Christian God and most of the famous proponents of the argument were Christians. As well as non-Christian critics, there were also some Christians, who dismissed the argument, despite

believing in God; they thought the argument did not prove or sufficiently demonstrate the existence of God.

The argument in its different forms creates an intellectual challenge for people but often ends up in validating an individual's current beliefs, rather than shaping them. It is used as validation rather than a purely intellectual test. This is because there are ideas within the argument which themselves have different understandings within philosophy, for instance, whether existence is a predicate.

With recent developments in philosophy, science, cultural norms, language and society there has been an opportunity to look at the definitions of words used in the ontological argument as well as our current understanding of them and the effect that has on the argument. It is almost certain that these areas will continue to develop and may in some instances return to more classic views. Therefore, it is likely that fresh ideas and perspectives will continue to be brought to the ontological argument.

As the ontological argument is an *a priori* argument, it is reasonable to expect that it is not affected by the increasing wealth of knowledge about the universe that is available to people living almost a thousand years after the first ontological argument was proposed. This is certainly true compared to some other famous arguments for God, notably the teleological argument and the fine-tuning argument. However, some others such as the fundamental Kalam cosmological argument which postulates that the universe needed a creator, to stop a chain of infinite regression, have also not been greatly affected by scientific advances.

It seems that it is possible that in another thousand years the argument could still continue to be interesting, compelling, yet not convincing enough to persuade most people to change their minds about the existence of God.

Conclusion

Given the length of time that this argument has been around for and given the quality and quantity of intellects that have been working on it, there is no surprise that this thesis cannot definitively point to an answer to whether God exists by using the range of ontological arguments available. This thesis has examined the main arguments and has treated the arguments in the strongest form possible but has also questioned every aspect of them. Logically then, the conclusion must be that the ontological argument does not prove the existence of God.

Although many people, including famous thinkers and philosophers have fallen on one side or the other, there are a number who have completely dismissed the argument, but this seems harsh. Although the argument does not prove the existence of God, there are a number of aspects that have been mentioned that without very careful analysis seem to strongly point to the existence of God, even if they are not able to completely conclude it.

There is a philosophical question about whether the ontological argument is actually an *a priori* argument, but this does not have any bearing on the legitimacy of the argument. If, however, someone thinks it is not an *a priori* argument, it might not stand out as such a special argument compared to other arguments for the existence of God.

There are a few well-known *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God that when added to the ontological argument make a compelling case. These have not been comprehensively considered here. There seems to be a natural breaking down of the ontological argument and indeed for other arguments for the existence of God into two distinct parts, the proof of a divine creator and then showing that the divine creator is recognisable as the God of one of the major Abrahamic religions, usually Christianity. The argument uses major attributes of the Abrahamic God but can include other all-powerful Gods in the proof; these can be categorised as being 'perfect' or 'supreme' or something very similar. The more specific attributes associated with God are used to justify the 'most perfect being', which is used to justify necessary existence in the argument.

This thesis has examined a supposedly logical argument, but in examining different aspects of the argument it has discovered that belief is important in many of them. Faith and belief

are similar, but not the same. Haynes Jr. (2022) stated, “Belief is based on information, while faith is based on application” and “While they are related, they are not the same”. Faith is something that has a long association with religion and the acceptance or not of whether there is a God. Belief is the acceptance that something is true, so faith can lead to belief. Belief in an argument’s validity and reliability may be because of a purely logical conclusion, but any individual who examines the argument will approach it from their own understanding and background, which will evolve over time.

If there are no existing ontological arguments that meet the burden of proof for the existence of God, it does not mean that there could not be one developed in the future. There is still debate, philosophical thought and continued interest in ontological arguments and a number of developments in the last one hundred or so years have impacted on or at least provoked new thought about the argument. There is a good chance that other scientific, cultural or philosophical developments will add nuance or even more certainty about the effectiveness of the proof of God using the ontological argument.

Considerations

A reflection on perhaps the inevitable conclusion that the ontological argument could not prove the existence of God, certainly not the Christian or an Abrahamic God, after approximately 1,000 years of trying, is that perhaps a broader view is required. This thesis has scratched the surface of the ontological argument and has not pursued other arguments for God and has barely mentioned other spiritual or religious beliefs.

There are many examples, in science, and anecdotally, about people having different perceptions of and drawing different conclusions to the same thing. An example is whether Gravity is a force or not. Under Newtonian mechanics it was proposed to be a force, whereas under general relativity it is seen as the curvature of space-time. The Physics Classroom (n.d.) stated, “Isaac Newton compared the acceleration of the moon to the acceleration of objects on earth. Believing that gravitational forces were responsible for each”. On the ‘Discover’ Website it is stated that according to Einstein, “Gravity is not a force, but rather a

distortion of time and space” (Powell, 2009). With the question of quantum gravity, and the belief that general relativity will not give the answer to all questions, the nature of gravity is still uncertain. Space.com stated, “General relativity has passed all the experimental tests so far, but its applicability is expected to break down when [the] effects of quantum mechanics (the theory of the very small particles) should become dominant” (Dutfield, Tillman and Bartels, 2023). Another, non-scientific example could be different angles or views of the same situation/picture where, for example, it appears that someone is trying to steal from someone else, when actually they are trying to help them. People have their own, probably unique view on the world, the cosmos and everything in it. This will vary on upbringing, where they live, age, education and their tastes in beauty, music, fun, literature etc. There are probably people who have very similar perceptions, but it is very unlikely they would be the same and many would be widely different.

The telephone game is an example of how things appear to change. Players “have fun seeing how much it changed during the game” (WikiHow staff, 2021) over a short space of time, distance and repetition. In this case it is used for amusement. Religion and philosophy must surely change or be distorted over the centuries, and even in recent years scriptures that are hundreds of years old have been reinterpreted, sometimes with new scientific knowledge, but also through social pressure or just intellectual inquiry. For example, in 2015, Libby Lane was the first female bishop to be ordained by the Church of England, “Mrs Lane will be consecrated as the eighth bishop of the town at a ceremony at York Minster on 26 January.” (Reverend Libby Lane named as CofE's first female bishop, 2014).

It is very unlikely that there are even two people who have identical perceptions of God, what God has done and the way He has done it. This is probably true even if they sat next to each other in church for 50 years. They would not have identical memories of scriptures; sermons would be interpreted by their own backgrounds, beliefs, knowledge and understanding when listening to them, as well as their level of interest. When someone thinks of an omnipotent being, would they think of a being who could make everyone recite nursery rhymes at 9:03 PM every evening, or make every snowflake exactly the same? – Probably not. Similarly with God as a supreme being, would their grasp of iambic pentameter be paramount or ability to create ice cream that has a different and even more delicious flavour with every lick. These are just trivial examples of a vast number of different things an individual could ascribe to their image of God if they thought about it. An omnipotent God

could do all these things and everything else, but a mortal human would not consider them all.

This thesis mentioned logical inconsistencies in the attributes of God as described by followers of the Abrahamic faiths. These have not been used as critical flaws in the discussion of the ontological argument, but at a more fundamental level they should be addressed when considering the viability or attributes of God. Examples given include considerations of these absolutes as not necessarily being the absolute but having to be consistent with God's nature. There is also the seeming contradiction between omniscience and omnipotence; if God knows everything, He cannot then change it, otherwise he would have been mistaken. The attribute of omniscience also logically means that God has no free will, again because He already knows exactly what will happen to everything.

Of the Abrahamic faiths, Christians are particularly known for believing in free will and the power of prayer. Praying to an omnipotent God seems reasonable, if you believe that He wants to hear your prayers, but not to an omniscient God as He already knows everything, including what will be prayed for and the outcome He has chosen. This seems to contradict a belief system that firstly believes in free will and secondly believes that prayer will change anything. It would be consistent that an omniscient God will have known that a particular person would perform a particular prayer at a certain time. This means that there is no free will of the person doing it, but it is God who makes that person perform the prayer, while knowing what the outcome will be. This is inconsistent with the normal understanding of the Christian belief system.

In the Abrahamic religions, scriptures that were written by men, mostly many centuries ago, seem to show that God does not know the fundamental nature of the universe. Along with stated contradictions in these scriptures and instances of limits to God's power, questionable examples of God's wisdom and wholly good nature need to be put aside when considering the value of the ontological argument. This is why this thesis has started from the Christian arguments and proceeded to develop and consider stronger variations of the ontological argument, which do not have the baggage of ancient scriptures to conform to.

God and religion are open to interpretation by people, whether they are scholars, building on generations of thought, or children looking at the sky and wondering. It is unlikely that

there would be an exact consensus, even among those following the same religion, which might be purely through faith or probably belief caused by differing knowledge and ignorance, intelligence, background, culture, upbringing and personality.

Belief in God, or spiritualism in any form is a very important, or maybe the paramount belief for many people as it promises or threatens the most to gain or lose and is likely to be the main source, or at least a major influence, on someone's values. Ultimately humans believe many things, through unique perspectives, a favourite place, the most moving film, the scariest creature, a favourite song, the best division between state and individuals, family responsibility and most exciting sport, among others. These beliefs are valued through emotions as well as research and logic. Some might change as they grow and experience new things, but some might not, either through insufficient stimulus or understanding, or possibly through stubbornness.

Belief in the value of the ontological argument perhaps leading to a belief or not in God must be seen considering all these other beliefs, rather than just logic. Most people's faith, belief in God or spiritual beliefs largely depend on their upbringing and the people around them. This can be seen by the number of parents within any faith whose children are brought up being told that particular faith is true from the people they are most influenced by. According to Google Answers "about 2/3rds stay with the religion in which they were raised." (juggler-ga, 2003). The ontological argument often seems to succeed if it is convincing people who are looking for affirmation that God exists but does not seem to convince many people of the existence of God if they examine it without that precondition, although the logic might seem compelling.

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