

## Essay Topic: Ontological Argument

Present, explain, and evaluate the *reductio ad absurdum* version of Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence.

Be sure to read the Study Guide on this topic before you begin, and review your lecture notes.

### OUTLINE:

- A. Explain the *reductio ad absurdum* strategy.
  1. If an assumption leads to a logical contradiction, one can be sure that the assumption is false. The *reductio ad absurdum* argument uses this to show that the opposite of the assumption is true. Thus, if the assumption that God does *not* exist in reality leads to a contradiction, it must be true that God *does* exist in reality.
- B. Present the argument
  1. A being is God only if is the greatest conceivable being. (This is taken to be part of the definition of "God.")
  2. God exists in the mind, but not in reality. (This is the assumption made for the *reductio ad absurdum* strategy. This will lead to a contradiction, and the argument will conclude that its opposite is true. Something is said to exist in the mind if we can understand it.)
  3. Existence both in reality and in the mind is greater than existence in the mind alone.
  4. We can conceive of a being that is like God but that also exists in reality.
  5. Thus, we can conceive of a being that is greater than God.
  6. Thus, we can conceive of a being that is greater than the greatest conceivable being. (This is a contradiction, and it follows from the assumption made in premise 2.)
  7. Thus, premise 2 must be false.
  8. Thus, God exists in the reality as well as in the understanding.
- C. Evaluate the argument
  1. Present and explain Gaunilo's Isle of Perfection Argument (see study guide).