

# [Ontological argument](https://assignbuster.com/ontological-argument/)

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The ontological argument was put forth by eleventh century monk and philosopher Anselm of Canterbury. It was written at first as a prayer to strengthen the faith of believers but has transformed over time into a substantial argument for the existence of God. However there are many weaknesses with the argument. Anselm uses existence as a predicate which was criticised substantially in later eras. Immanuel Kant claims that the way in which existence is being used in the Ontological argument is wrong.

In his ‘ Critique of Pure Reason’, he claims ‘ Existence is obviously not a real predicate. ’ What he meant by this claim was that to use existence as a predicate of God didn’t actually tell us anything new about him. Like saying that a predicate of God is all-powerful tells us something which is useful and expands our concept of God in some way. When we add the predicate of existence to God is doesn’t actually augment our understanding of God.

It’s like for example talking of the features of a coffee: liquid, bitter, brown and if we were then to add ‘ existence’ as part of its features, it doesn’t actually magnify the understanding we have of the coffee, so it is not used correctly and doesn’t actually have any meaning. The existence predicate which could be added doesn’t make any evident distinction to our previous understanding of the coffee.

If it was a true and genuine predicate, then when I think of it as existing, the idea would be different from the idea of it not existing. For example the concept of a beautiful Island which exists, is the same as the concept of a beautiful Island which doesn’t exist, the basis, the concept of both is still the same. If we were to add sandy as a predicate, it would add a descriptive aspect to it which would change the concept of it in my mind. As it doesn’t add anything descriptive to the idea, and so this cannot be a genuine predicate.

So if we cannot add existence as a predicate of God’s perfection, as existence is not an actual predicate then the Ontological argument falls on its foundations, as it is fundamental to Anselm that existence is a predicate of God, as this is paramount and integral to the argument. Twentieth century philosopher Bertrand Russell also agrees with Kant in also saying ‘ Existence quite definitely is not a predicate’, as Russell also claims that existence is not an actual predicate as it doesn’t provide a description of the subject, the subject being God or any other thing.

Gottlob Frege another modern philosopher agrees with Kant and Russell. As Frege argues that exists merely indicates that there are some things in this world which it corresponds to, like saying monkeys exists is just saying that there are certain things called monkeys which this concept corresponds to, this is not saying that monkeys have a distinct property called existence like they tails for example, which is a distinct predicate of a monkey.

This is a major weakness in the Ontological argument, as it requires the use of existence as a predicate and a possible perfection however it has been criticised and has been shown to be an odd way and a wrong way of using existence as a predicate of not just God but anything. So Anselm is in fact using the word ‘ existence’ in a wrong way in the first place.

Without the use of existence as a predicate the Ontological argument fails, as that is one of its foundations. Another weakness of the Ontological argument is the fact that Anselm jumps from a definition to existence, he defines God into existence which is a very peculiar way of doing such; as we first discover something and confirm its existence then define it however Anselm seems to do the opposite. Immanuel Kant first pointed this out.

He temporarily accepts that existence could be part of the meaning of God, and is an analytic statement which we can understand just by knowing the definition of the word God. But what Kant is claiming is that the jump from the analytic proposition of God exists to the fact that he actually exists in real life is not plausible, as the dimension of definitions and ideas and concepts is completely different from the dimension of reality and you cannot merely jump from one to the other.

So Kant believes it is perfectly plausible to accept a proposition like for example dragons can fly, and we can know from the definition of dragons that they can fly, but we can still deny that there is anything in the world in which the idea of dragons corresponds to. Like for example, from the definition of a square we know it has four sides, this is an analytic statement. And so from the definition of dragons are flying creatures, this doesn’t entail that it must exist, the most we can actually deduce from that is if dragons do exist in reality then they necessarily can fly.

So in the case of the proposition that God exists, we could accept that the necessary existence that Anselm talks of in his Proslogion 3 is part of the definition of God, as its one of His possible perfections, but this doesn’t entail that He actually exists in reality, and corresponds to anything in the world. At most we can infer from this is that if God was to exist in reality he must necessarily exist and not in any other manner. As Kant believed nothing in the realms of definition can reach out and tell us what must exist in reality as they are distinct forms.

This disproves the claim that God must necessarily exist just from the definition. This is another substantial weakness in the Ontological argument, as what it does is jump from definition to reality which has been disproved as a plausible way of arguing and can be seen as absurd in a way, as it puts the cart before the horse, as the definition comes before existence here which is an unheard of and almost ridiculous way of defining things.

The aforementioned weaknesses of the Ontological argument have a considerable impact on the credibility of the argument, as Anselm uses a strange type of argument, by defining things into existence, which was criticised heavily by Kant, and also his use of existence as a predicate is also criticised profoundly. These two form the basis for his argument but also seem to be major weaknesses in his argument.