

Episode 226 - Cicero's On The Nature of The Gods - Epicurean Section 01 - Introduction

Post by “Joshua” of May 16, 2024 at 12:24 AM

[Cassius](#) has asked for a clear refutation of the [Ontological Argument](#) and I have promised to attempt it. First, here is a syllogism of the argument as presented on the Wikipedia page.

Quote from Wikipedia

In Chapter 3, Anselm presents a further argument in the same vein:[23]

1. *By definition, God is a being than which none greater can be imagined.*
2. *A being that necessarily exists in reality is greater than a being that does not necessarily exist.*
3. *Thus, by definition, if God exists as an idea in the mind but does not necessarily exist in reality, then we can imagine something that is greater than God.*
4. *But we cannot imagine something that is greater than God.*
5. *Thus, if God exists in the mind as an idea, then God necessarily exists in reality.*
6. *God exists in the mind as an idea.*
7. *Therefore, God necessarily exists in reality.*

End Quote.

Let's look at these individually.

- *First Premise - By definition, God is a being than which none greater can be imagined.*

This premise establishes our major terms;

1. *God*: a being than which none greater can be imagined.
2. *Being*: an existence either imagined or real.
3. *Greatness*: an attribute of a being. Only one being can embody the superlative of this attribute, *Greatest*.
4. *Imagined*: Existing in the mind as an idea, but not exclusively; an *imagined* existence may also be a *real* existence.
5. *Real*: Existing outside the mind, but not exclusively; a *real* existence may also be an *imagined* existence.

- *Second Premise - A being that necessarily exists in reality is greater than a being that does not necessarily exist.*

"Necessarily" has a precise meaning in logic. *Necessary* conditions are often contrasted with *sufficient* conditions. e.g. A square is a parallelogram with four equal sides and four right angles. Having four sides is a necessary but not sufficient condition for being a square--all quadrilaterals have four sides but not all of them are squares. Having four sides is a necessary *and* sufficient condition for being a quadrilateral.

My commentary on the second premise:

This premise is a bare assertion, and to that extent is fairly weak. *Why* is a being that necessarily exists in reality greater than a being that does not necessarily exist? Let me offer the following syllogism as a counter;

1. *By definition, God is a being than which none greater can be imagined.*
2. *A being that has the power to choose whether to exist in reality or not is greater than a being, either real or imagined, that does not have this power.*
3. *Thus, by definition, God either exists in reality or does not according to his will.*
4. *It is not possible for us to know whether God has decided to cease existing in reality in any given moment.*
5. *Therefore, it is not possible to know whether God exists in reality.*

Can it be demonstrated that St. Anselm's second premise is truer than my second premise? Remember, they cannot both be true; a being that *necessarily* exists in reality cannot choose *not* to exist in reality. However, they can certainly both be false.

To be continued...