Essential Philosophy
with Dr. David Schenk

Outline:

Review (0:00)
- Ontology—the study of being or the nature of existence
- Anselm's Ontological Argument 1—an argument for the existence of God, which proceeds from the nature of being

Main Objections to Anselm's 1st Ontological Argument (See Blackboard at 2:42)
- Gaunilo's Objection
  - ***Introduction to Gaunilo***
    - Gaunilo of Marmoutiers (994 AD-1083) was a monk and contemporary of Anselm.
    - Gaunilo's objection uses a form of argument called ***Reductio ad absurdum***, or "reduction to absurdity," in which a proposition is disproven by following its implications to an absurd or ridiculous conclusion.
  - ***Gaunilo's Perfect Island Argument***
    - In the Perfect Island argument, Gaunilo uses Anselm's same line of reasoning in a new context. He argues for the existence of Utopia, an island than which none greater can be conceived.
    - ***Gaunilo's Perfect Island***: Think of the perfect island in your mind—it exists in your understanding. If, as Anselm says, existing in reality is greater than existing in the understanding, and if Utopia is "maximally great," than Utopia must exist both in reality and the understanding. Using Anselm's logic, then Utopia must exist in reality. So, where is this Utopia?
    - ***Gaunilo's answer***: There is no perfect island that exists in both the understanding and reality—it is fantasy. Similarly, if Premise (5) of Ontological Argument 1 is false, but Anselm's reasoning leads to the truth of (5), then Anselm's reasoning and argument must also be false.
  - ***Standard Response Against Gaunilo***
    - Gaunilo's argument falls short because it confuses the nature of ***infinite beings*** and ***finites beings***. For example, islands are finite; by their very nature they can always be perfectible. So a perfect island than which no greater can be conceived is self-contradictory.
    - As Anselm's logic dictates, it is impossible to have anything finite than which none greater can be conceived. With infinite

beings (God) unconditional perfection exists. You cannot improve or add to infinite beings because all possible improvements are already there.

- Introduction to Kant and Russell's Objections (19:04)
  - o Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was a wildly influential German philosopher, while Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) was an influential British philosopher, logician, and atheist. Both Kant and Russell's objections to Anselm are the scary ones!
    - ▪ Kant and Russell both attack Premise (3) of Anselm's Ontological Argument: "Existing in reality is greater than existing in the understanding alone."
    - ▪ Remember, the *Hierarchy of Being* is Anselm's basis for defending Premise (3), as is the notion that *existence is a perfection which improves a thing*. Kant and Russell both deny that existence is a perfection.
- Kant's Objection (23:55)
  - o Why does Kant say that existence is not a perfection? Remember, a perfection is (by Medieval definition) a trait the possession of which improves a thing.
    - ▪ Kant argues that existence is not a kind of *predicate or property* that can change a thing's nature when you tack it on or take it away from a thing.
  - o *Kant's Response*
    - ▪ Existence, for Kant, is not a perfection, or a trait the possession of which improves the thing.
      - *The $100 bill example*: Picture a $100 bill fresh off the press—green and black ink, legal tender paper, and serial number. Now imagine this $100 bill changed to orange and black ink. Notice your mental image has changed by altering the color from green to orange! Now, change it back to green. Imagine the original $100 bill again. Now tear off existence. Imagine the bill and make it a nonexistent bill. Your image either doesn't change at all, or you lose everything. *Trying to tear off the concept of existence in no way alters your image of the bill*. The imagined $100 bill is not different in essence than an actual $100 bill.
      - For Kant, this means that tacking "existence" onto a thing makes no difference to its concept. Since the concept is not changed or improved, it is not a perfection. Since existence, then, is not a perfection—Anselm's Premise (3) must be false.

Note: Look for Russell's Objection in Dr. Schenk's next lecture.