

Philosophy 302

Mediaeval Philosophy

Lecture 3

Aristotle's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

Accepted facts about the world



To

The Existence of God

Aristotle's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

The accepted fact that there is motion



To

The existence of a first unmoved mover

Aristotle's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

Accepted Facts



To

The Best Explanation

Because Aristotle's Proof for the Existence of God argues from accepted facts to their best explanation. It is

An argument to the best explanation

It is sometimes called a

Cosmological Proof

Because it argues from facts that we know about the world to the reason for these facts its is called an

a posteriori argument

The reasons that the facts hold are prior to those facts and the facts are posterior to the reasons. So the argument moves from what is posterior to what is prior.

Anselm's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

"God is that than which no greater can be conceived"



To

The Existence of God

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (c.1133-1109)

Anselm gave two proofs of the existence of God.

(1) In his *Monologion* (= speaking alone)

(2) In his *Prosologion* (= speaking out)

Anselm wrote his *Proslogion* in order to present a single simple argument to prove:

(1) God exists

(2) God is the Supreme Good

(3) God has all the features which Christians believe him to have

Anslem's Motive

To Understand What He Believes

FAITH SEEKING UNDERSTANDING

(The original title of the *Proslogion*)

A hint of what is to come:

“Enter the inner chamber of your mind shut out all else except God and whatever is of aid to you in seeking Him; after closing the chamber door, think upon your God.”



The Fool has said in his heart, There is no God (Ps 14:1)

Anselm's 'Single Argument'

(2.1) God is that than which nothing greater can be thought.

(2.2) When the Fool hears the words 'that than which nothing greater can be thought,' he understands what he hears.

(2.3) What the Fool understands exists in his understanding

(2.4) So the Fool is convinced that than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding.

(2.5) If that than which nothing greater can be thought existed only in the understanding, it would not be as great as it would if it also existed outside of the understanding

(2.6) Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be thought existed only in understanding, then would not be that than which nothing greater can be thought.

(2.7) This is impossible

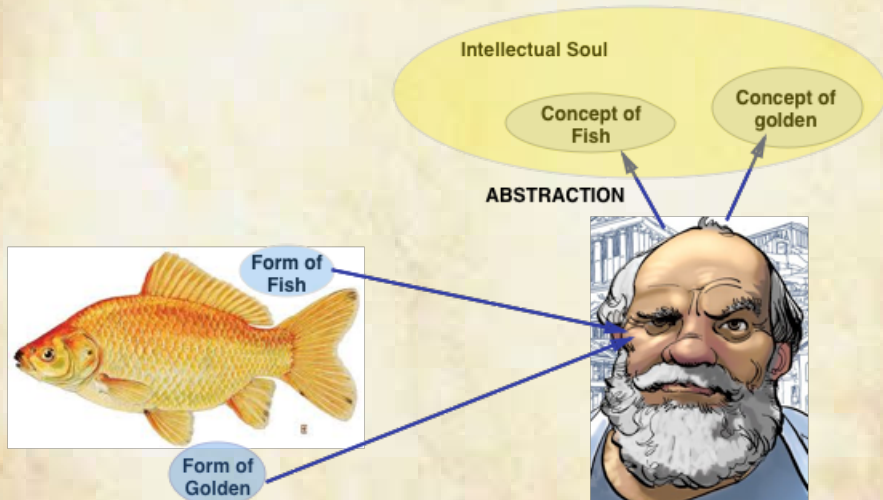
Therefore

GOD EXISTS

(both inside the understanding and outside of it)

A detour through Aristotle's Theory of Meaning.

Aristotle's Theory of the World and Knowledge



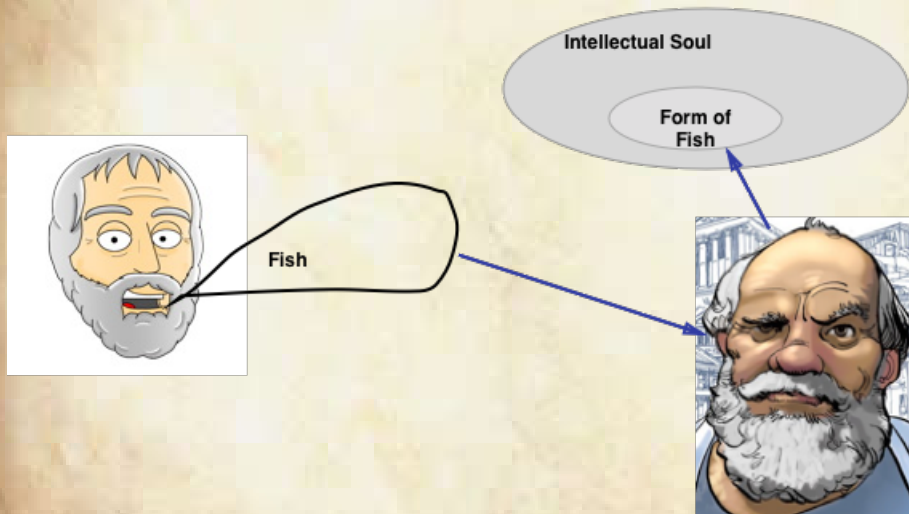
A fish is the composite of the matter of fish and the form of a fish.

The concept of a fish is the form of the fish in the understanding.

Aristotle: "...spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul, and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of affections of the soul are the same for all; and what these affections are likenesses of - actual things - are also the same."

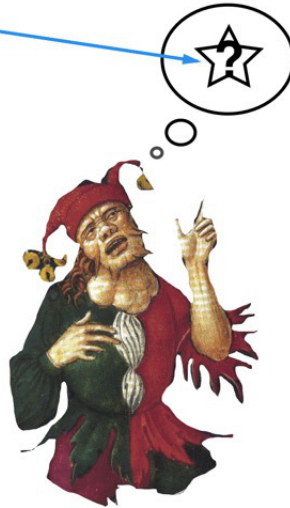
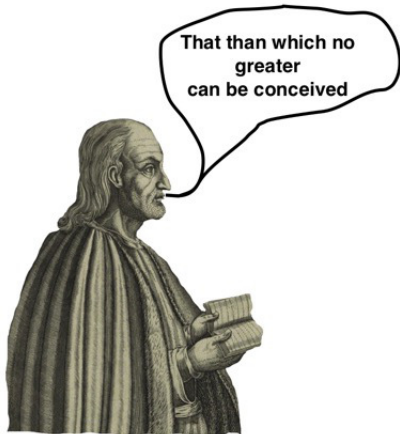
Boethius: "This affection comes about as the impression of a form but in the way in which such things come to be in the soul. For the proper form of a thing inheres in it in one way and is transferred in another way into the soul."

Aristotle's Theory Language



When Socrates hears the word 'fish' the form of fish is generated in his understanding, it comes to exist in his understanding.

"That than which no greater can be
conceived" (T)



How Aristotle's Theory Applies To The Fool

A Reconstruction of Anselm's Ontological Argument

Let T = that than which no greater can be thought

(O1) God satisfies the description 'T'

(O2) Someone understands the description 'T'

(O3) What is understood is in the understanding

(O4) Therefore what 'T' describes exists in the understanding

(O5) If what 'T' describes existed only in the understanding it would not satisfy the description 'T'

(O6) Therefore T exists in the world as well as in the understanding

(O1)-(03) Seem to rely on Aristotle's theory of meaning

The meaning of a name '*N*', or a description '*D*', is a FORM which:

(a) In the extra-mental world in combination with matter causes a thing to be an *N*, or *D*.

(b) Exists in the mind separated from matter

But Aristotle's theory of meaning does not in general support (04)

There is a difference between a fish and the form of a fish

Anselm's argument only works for something that exists in the extra-mental world in just the same way as it exists in the mind.

That is for something which exists in the world without matter

So for Anselm's argument to work God
must literally be in our minds

Corollary - Chapter 3

T cannot be thought not to exist.

Proof:

(3.1) We can conceive of something, X , whose non-existence is inconceivable

(I.e. we can conceive of something which we describe as ‘that which cannot be conceived not to exist’.)

(3.2) X is greater than anything whose nonexistence is conceivable.

Therefore: (3.3) If T could be thought not to exist, then T would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought.

Which is impossible

Therefore

WE CANNOT THINK THAT GOD DOES NOT EXIST

Problem: How does the Fool manage to do this?

Solution: There are different kinds of thinking

((a) Thinking the word - saying the word 'T' to oneself.

So 'T' exists in the understanding.

(b) Thinking of the thing itself.

So T exists in the understanding

Note the quotation marks!

But if the Fool only manages (a)

Anselm's Argument Fails

Anselm can't get God out of the Fool's mind if He's not in there!

Gaunilo's Objections

(G1) The Existence Problem:

There are many things in the mind which do not exist in the world.

Difference Principle:

The thing understood is different from the real thing

The Form of Gaunilo's First Objection

Suppose someone claims that God
= That which must exist ($G=M$)

So anyone who understands G understands M

G is M and M is that which must exist

Does this prove that G exists?

NO!

It proves that if G exists, then G must exist

But this misses Anselm's point - his argument is very clever

Anselm argues:

(A1) God exists somewhere, i.e. in the Fools mind.

(A2) if God exists in a mind, then God exists everywhere
in the extra mental world.

(G2) The Semantical Problem [Against (A1)]:

We are not acquainted with God

So we have no clear understanding of the meaning of ‘God’

Or of ‘that than which nothing greater can be conceived’

(G3) The Logical Problem (The Lost Islands) [Against (A2)]:

What is wrong with the following argument:

Those Islands than which no greater island can be conceived
exists in the understanding.

Therefore:

Those Islands than which no greater island can be
conceived exists in reality.

Anselm's Replies to Gaunilo's Objections

(AR1) [To (G1)] Gaunilo misunderstands the argument

(AR2) [To (G2)] Think of something great then think
of something greater.

(AR3) [To (G3)] If Gaunilo can produce the Lost Islands
he can keep them.

Anselm's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

"God is that than which no greater can be conceived"



To

The Existence of God

Anselm's Proof for the Existence of God

Argues From

A concept



To

The Existence of God

Because Anselm's Proof for the Existence of God argues from a definition expressing the concept of God. It is called an

A priori argument

It is sometimes called an

Ontological Proof