ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibnitz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” *The Philosophical Review*, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

---

from what everyone used to understand by ‘ontological arguments,’ but also from the very words of the good Saint, which appear at the conclusion of his own deduction. “Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the
ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibnitz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

206

Philosophy and Phenomenological Research

cetypes, or the human soul is supposed to have a higher existence (imortal) than the ephemeral psyche of the fly. But here again premise (2) turns out to be true by definition, since we choose to give grade A to a necessary being, and grade B to contingent ones, remembering meanwhile
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein's injunction: "Don't ask for the meaning, ask for the use," was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm's ingenious defense of a version of Anselm's ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God's eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm's reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm's argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibniz's words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology - on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word 'ontology' and

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41-62. Later references are to this paper.

3. There aren't any necessary facts of existence.
   
   Conclusion: There cannot be a God, "the modern view makes it ungrammatical to speak of such a Being and attribute existence to him."

Malcolm's reply to Findlay (which is the crucial part of his paper) is the
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibnitz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

206

PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Assuming that Hume, Kant, and a host of modern philosophers are wrong in saying that there aren’t any necessary things, Malcolm goes on to say that Anselm’s second ontological proof [the first, he admits is unsound, since it rests on the false ontological proof] that existence (and not necessary
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument1 realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibniz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

1 Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD 211

merely senseless and that people simply do not know what they are talking about, when they do say such and such.

However, it seems to me that those who attributed such qualities to God, did not intend to subscribe to a mere tautology, but rather they meant to
ONTOSTICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibnitz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

\(^{1}\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 380, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

206

PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Following Frege, I argue that though the phrase ‘the greatest prime number’ has a sense in the logically true sentence, “the greatest prime number is greater than any prime,” it could be proved, via Euclid, that there is no such a number. Likewise the expression, “the series with the
ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibniz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

----

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibniz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

---

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

214 PHILOSOPHY AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

man on the street believes that necessarily every event is in need of a cause. So even if some people do as a matter of fact hold that ‘God is a necessary being’ in the sense of logical implications, this by itself neither shows that he is a necessary being nor a contingent one.
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND
HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD

Ever since Wittgenstein’s injunction: “Don’t ask for the meaning, ask for the use,” was taken by some as a new criterion of meaning (as indeed his older recommendation on verification was used by the Positivists as such) I was on the lookout for someone vouching for the significance of the fundamental theological concepts, on the basis of this recommendation. Norman Malcolm’s ingenious defense of a version of Anselm’s ontological argument\(^1\) realized my anticipation. I see now, how any weird theological concept, such as the doctrine of God’s eternity, or the doctrine of the divine creation out of nothing, could be regarded, not only as meaningful, but also as containing important truths.

Before evaluating the cogency of Malcolm’s reasoning, it is proper to ask three simple questions concerning Anselm’s argument. I think no fair analysis of the ontological argument is possible unless it provides a clear answer to the following questions: 1. Is the argument valid? 2. Are the premises true? 3. Are the premises tautologically true or factually true?

We shall accept any argument, as a sound one, if and only if, apart from being valid, the premises turn out to be not merely true but also factually true. On the other hand, if our premises turn out to be tautologically true, that is, if we find that they are, in Leibniz’s words, true in all possible worlds, then we argue that they are vacuously true, since they then do tell us nothing particular about our world.

We shall point out, moreover, that if the premises are tautology and the argument is valid, the conclusion will also be a tautology – on the ground that nothing follows from a tautology except a tautology. In this case we shall argue that the argument will turn out to be not an ontological argument, i.e., the argument which derives the existence of a being from premises containing only conceptual terms, but an exercise in deductive logic. However, what Anselm intended to show is not only that a certain conclusion follows deductively from his premises, but also that his conclusion is as a matter of fact true of the real world.

This is not to argue merely from the meaning of the word ‘ontology’ and

\(^1\) Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” *The Philosophical Review*, No. 389, pp. 41–62. Later references are to this paper.

ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND HOW AND WHY SOME SPEAK OF GOD 215

fact a discovery, on a par with Aristotle’s logical laws, though they superficially may sound as a disguised command, or a dogma.

At the conclusion of his paper Malcolm raises another issue. He asks: Why is it that human beings have ever formed the concept of a being a