An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion Eduqas AS Knowledge Organiser:

Theme 2C: Deductive arguments: Challenges to the ontological argument

Key concepts:

- There are two phases to the challenges on challenges on the ontological argument.

- The challenges from the French monk **Gaunilo** on Anselm.
- Gaunilo, a contemporary of Anselm, was a monk in France.
- Gaunilo pointed out that understanding in the mind is very different from any understanding of God that we could have as this would be unlike any other understanding we possess.
- Without this special understanding through faith the definition Anselm offers is no more than words.
- Gaunilo then used the principle of '**reductio ad absurdem**' to demonstrate that Anselm's definition was weak.
- Gaunilo argued that the definition TTWNGCBT could equally be applied to an island – a **most excellent island** but it would be considered nonsense if this excellent island were argued to exist because one could always think of an island that was more excellent.
- Anselm did reply to Gaunilo and pointed out that a 'most excellent island' indeed is in no way similar to God; God can have **no intrinsic maximum**.
- Therefore, the ontological argument applies only to God; an 'island' simply cannot be compared with 'God.'

- **Immanuel Kant** challenged the ontological argument as presented by Descartes in two ways:
- Firstly, the premise is only **hypothetical**. He referred to Descartes' triangle analogy to argue that although it is a logical necessity for a triangle to have three angles it is not a logical necessity for the triangle to exist. You can accept the triangle has three angles and that it does not exist. This is the same for God.
- In other words IF God existed then God would be TTWNGCBT.

- Secondly, he challenged the notion that 'existence' is not a '**predicate**' (defining characteristic) of God.
- This attacked Descartes idea that existence in both mind and reality is greater than just existence in the mind. Kant used the example of 100 real thalers (a currency used in Kant's day). 100 thalers that exist in both mind and reality does not contain any more coins than 100 imaginary thalers.
- The **value** is the same and 'exist' does not add anything more meaningful to our understanding of the nature of a subject when we say it 'exists'.

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates
Anselm demonstrated it is absurd to not believe in God; many feel Kant demonstrated that it was absurd to make this statement.

The key area of debate appears to be defining existence using *a priori* reasoning.

Key questions
Is the notion of an intrinsic maximum a plausible argument?
Does Kant challenge to Descartes demonstrate that the ontological argument is just full of hot air?

Key quotes:

"According to Gaunilo, if Anselm is correct then it is not only God's existence that can be established by reasoning akin to Anselm's." (Brian Davies)

"You cannot doubt that this island that is more excellent than any other lands truly exists..." (Gaunilo's reduction of Anselm's argument)

"To posit a triangle, and yet to reject its three angles, is self-contradictory; but there is no contradiction in rejecting the triangle together with its three angles." (Immanuel Kant)

"...a determining predicate is a predicate which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it." (Immanuel Kant)

"...'being' is obviously not a real predicate." (Immanuel Kant)

Key words:

Gaunilo	different	understanding	mind
faith	reduction ad absurdum	most excellent island	intrinsic maximum
Kant	triangle	logical necessity	hypothetical
IF	predicate	thalers	