

# UNIT 14: PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: ONTOLOGICAL AND MORAL ARGUMENT

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### **14.1 Learning Objectives**

After going through this unit you will be able to

- Explain ontological proofs for the existence of God.
- Discuss St. Anselm's View.

- Explain Descarte's view.
- Discuss critically ontological argument.
- Explain the moral argument for the existence of God.
- Discuss Kant's view.
- Discuss Indian Conception God (Moral Argument)
- Discuss critically moral argument.

## **14.2 Introduction**

For hundreds of years philosophers, scientists and theologians have been bringing forward arguments either to show that there is such a being as God or to deny His existence entirely. This is one of the problems in the philosophy of religion, because belief in God has always occupied a central position in religious faith and practice. We need at this point to make clear the close relation between the ideas of God, the nature of God and the types of arguments for His existence. One can have the ideas and nature of God only when one observes the relation of God and the world, religions of the world and the arguments for the existence of God.

Here we shall present certain traditional theistic arguments for the belief and existence of God.

## **14.3 Ontological Argument**

The ontological argument attempts to prove the existence of God from the ideas or human experience. This argument was first put forth by St. Anselm,

a medieval philosopher. The supporters of this arguments are St. Anselm, Rene Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hegel etc.

#### **14.3.1 St. Anselm's View**

Anselm said that we have an idea of perfect being, and that this is what we mean by God. The argument proceeds as follows:

“God is a being that which no greater can be conceived”

Now we have the idea of such a thing. But existence is necessary to the concept of such a being. If he didn't exist, he would not be as great as if did exist, and by definition he is the greatest being that can be conceived. Therefore, such a being exists. It is clear that by 'greater' Anselm means more perfect, and the highest and supreme. Instead of describing God as the most perfect being that there is, Anselm describes God as the being who is so perfect that no more perfect can even be conceived. In this ontological argument Anselm pointed out that the most perfect conceivable being must exist in reality as well as in the mind. He said that the God is necessary existence, so it is impossible to conceive of Him not existing. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist.

The sample version here is similar to that given by St. Anselm.

The concept of God is of a being no greater than which can be conceived;

But a being which exists is greater than a being which is merely conceived;

If God did not exist, God would not be a being no greater than which can be conceived;

Therefore, God exists.

We may sum up Anselm's ontological argument into the following points-

Firstly, being God an object of worship must be the highest or greater than whom nothing can be conceived.

Secondly, Existence is a state of the highest perfection that can be conceived as a predicate or a quality like omnipotence, omniscience.

Lastly, God is a necessary existence, which is enclosed in the idea of a being greater than which nothing can be conceived. We cannot ever be thought of the non-existence of God. To think God as non-existent is to lead self-contradiction. Therefore, God must exist.

#### LET US KNOW

St. Anselm: (1033/4-1109) Medieval philosopher and theologian. His two principal theological treatises are the Monologion and the Proslogion. The former contains versions of the "cosmological argument and argument from the existence of goodness to the existence of a supreme good. The later contains the famous "ontological argument for the existence of God. Anselm also wrote many dialogues concerned with particular problems in logic and theology

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Who first put forth ontological argument?

Q.2 Who are the supporters of ontological argument?

Q.3. Who is the writer of the book 'Proslogion'?

Q.4. "God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" who is the propounder of this view?

#### 14.3.2 Descartes' view

Descartes made some changes in this argument. He said that God must be the cause of this idea of an all perfect Being. Perfection means to him the attributes, power, goodness, knowledge and also existence. Hence anything less than God cannot be the cause of such an idea, which according to Descartes, is an innate idea.

Descartes tried to hold by saying that from the notion of God one can deduce His existence. Descartes deduce the existence of God from His perfection; the idea of God is that of a perfect being, is an innate idea which is clear and distinct that cannot be doubted. The idea of God is clear and distinct "innate in me".

According to Descartes, while one can have a clear and distinct idea of numbers or figures similarly, one can have an idea of God and as Descartes sees it, the idea of God is the idea of supremely perfect

being which also can be seen to have an actual and eternal existence,  
So, God exists.

According to Descartes, just as 'the angles of a triangles are equal to two right angles' follows from the definition of a triangle similarly, the existence of God follows from the very idea of Him. We cannot conceive God without existence, then it follows that existence is inseparable as of Him, therefore, He exists. Descartes notifies us that one can think of a will not to exist, but one cannot even think of God as non-existent. For Descartes, the existence of God, reality of God and unchangeability of God etc. can occurs from the idea of God. Therefore, undoubtedly God Exists.

We may sum up Descartes ontological argument into the following steps-

- a. The idea of God is a perfect Being.
- b. That lacks no positive qualities.
- c. Existence is a positive quality.
- d. Thus God's lacks no existence. God exists.

#### LET US KNOW

Descartes, Rene (1596-1650) French philosopher. Descartes's efforts to achieve certainty in the face of scepticism mark the origins of modern epistemology.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 5. "Descartes supports ontological argument for the existence of God" is it true?

Q. 6. What is Descartes ontological Argument?

### 14.3.3 Criticism of the ontological argument

The ontological argument for the existence of God i.e. the existence of God deduces from the idea of God has been criticized by many philosophers, like St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Ayer and others. Among the critics, Kant is remarkable. But his opinion against of both Anselm and Descartes is not reasonable, argued by Hegel and others. Criticisms are as follows:

- 1) Kant made seven criticisms to this argument. According to him we cannot reduce the reality of anything from mere idea of it. But if a thing is to exist it must be given in experience. This ontological argument ignores the proper distinction between thought and existence. Kant points out that from the idea of one hundred dollars in my mind I cannot prove their existence in my pocket. In the same way, we have the idea of God in our mind, it does not follow that, therefore, God really exists.
- 2) Gaunilon, a monk of France, claimed that Anselm's reasoning would lead to absurd conclusions if it is applied in other fields. He set up a parallel ontological argument for the most perfect island. He spoke of the most perfect conceivable island, but his argument

could be rephrased in terms of the latter idea. Given the idea of such an island, by using Anselm's principle we can argue that unless it exists in reality it cannot be the most perfect conceivable island. Similarly, if God does not exist in reality, it cannot be conceived as the perfect Being.

- 3) If existence is a 'perfection' and God is most perfect, then God's existence must be granted. But existence is not an attribute or quality. In order to have an attribute a thing must exist first. But his existence cannot be proved from his perfection.
- 4) Descartes' ontological argument claims that existence must be included among the defining predicates of God, just as the fact that the internal angles are equal to two right angles, which are necessary characteristics of a triangle. But Kant replies that the subject, with its predicates actually exists. What is analytically true is that if there is a triangle, it must have three angles and if there is an infinitely perfect being he must have existence. As Kant says, "To posit a triangle, and yet to reject its three angles, is self-contradictory; but there is no self-contradiction in rejecting the triangle together with its three angles. The same holds true of the concept of an absolutely necessary being." ( Kant, J., Critique of Pure Reason, tr. K.N. Smith, chap.3,Sec. 4.)
- 5) The definition of God describes one's concept of God, but we cannot prove the actual existence of any such being. We can utter the term like table, Rajeev, cow, house, etc. which implies all these things actually exist in the world. Similarly if we say 'Unicorn' or



Unicorn exists, or gold mountain exists, it does not ascertain its existence. Because in fact unicorn and Gold Mountain are negative existential statements, so they do not exist. Similarly God is negative existential statement and does not exist.

LET US KNOW

Kant: (1724-1804): German philosopher who revolutionised modern philosophy, in an effort to counter the sceptical arguments of Hume and provide a firm basis for human knowledge and morality. Kant used transcendental arguments to show that human beings apply synthetic a priori judgements as the preconditions for any possible experience.

LET US KNOW

Hegel, Georg W.(1770-1831): German philosopher who employed a dialectical logic (moving from thesis to antithesis to synthesis) and its corollary analysis of historical inevitability, in support of an idealism in which human culture is properly seen as a manifestation of the self-conscious of the Absolute.

LET US KNOW

Thomas Aquinas: Italian Dominican Philosopher and theologian.

LET US KNOW

AYER (1910-1989): English philosopher. After studying with members of the Vienna circle, Ayer published *Language, Truth and Logic*(1936), an excellent statement of the central views of logical positivism, including the use of verifiability as a criterion of meaning, the rejection of metaphysics and theology as meaningless and emotivist ethical theory. His later works include *Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*(1940), *The Problem of Knowledge*(1956), *Logical Positivism*(1966) and *The Central Questions of Philosophy*(1972)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 7. Who are the critics of ontological argument?

Ans:.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**14.4 The moral argument for the existence of God**

The moral argument for belief in God is based on man's moral nature and religious experience. This moral argument begins with Kant, who in his *Critique of Practical Reason* argued that the existence of God is a postulate of the practical or moral reason. In the critical philosophy of Kant the moral

argument occupies a very significant position. Kant severely criticised all arguments except the moral one. According to Kant God must exist if the moral order is to be intelligible. Thus, in Kant's philosophy this argument has a very special status.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 8. Who is the author of *Critique of Practical Reason*?

Ans:.....

#### 14.4.1 Kant's view

According to Kant the existence of God is a postulate, or presupposition of the moral life. Kant, in his theory of complete good, points out that it is impossible to conceive anything at all in the world, or even out of it, which can be taken as good without qualification, except 'good-will'. In short, it is our duty to promote the highest good, the *summum bonum*. For him, the existence of God is a priori of morality. Our moral consciousness demands that the virtuous must be rewarded with happiness. But the virtuous are hardly ever happy. Kant, for that reason argues that there must be a Supreme Being or God who will reward the virtuous with happiness in the next world. We can make ourselves virtuous, but we cannot make ourselves happy, because happiness depends upon outward favourable conditions which are beyond our control. But God can make the virtuous happy

in the next life, because He is the controller of the kingdom of spirits and nature.

**LET US KNOW**

Summum bonum: Latin phrase meaning 'highest good', Hence, that which is intrinsically valuable, the ultimate goal or end of human life generally.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q.9. Fill in the blanks:

- a) According to Kant the existence of God is a ....., or ..... of the moral life.
- b) It is our duty to promote the highest good, the .....

**14.4.2 Indian Conception of God (Moral Argument)**

According to *Nyaya* system religious actions produce merits and wrong actions produce demerits. Merits and demerits reside in the soul. These merits and demerits are called *adrishta*, which is unconscious. Hence it requires some conscious agency to govern it. The individual soul cannot be this agency because the souls are unconscious of the merits and demerits. God who is omniscient is the moral Governor, the Governor of the *adrishta*. He rewards the virtuous

with happiness and punishes the vicious with pain and suffering. Therefore it implies that there is God.

#### LET US KNOW

Nyaya: One of the six orthodox Hindu schools. The Nyaya school concentrates upon our knowledge of reality.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 10. "According to Nyaya system religious actions produce merits and wrong actions produce demerits." Is it true?

Q.11. "merits and demerits are called *adrishta*, which is unconscious" Is it true?

#### 14.4.3 Three general approaches of Moral Argument:

The moral argument for belief in God is based on man's moral nature and his sense of values. The argument has been stated from a number of points of view. We shall mention very briefly three general approaches which have been developed in philosophical literature.

- 1) One form of this argument is based on man's moral nature and his sense of obligation, or sense of duty. If man were merely an aspect of nature a command to obey nature's ways or to depart from them

would be meaningless. The sense of duty at one time may even lead man to deny the will to live. Man's sense of duty implies a God as its source and the guarantor of the significance of the moral life.

2) We may proceed to another version of the moral argument. Moral goodness and happiness should go together in a reasonable and just world. The man who is morally good should be happy and the man who is morally bad should be unhappy. But as a matter of fact there is no such co-relation. Therefore, there must be a God who will ultimately uphold all the moral values and will ultimately make the good man finally happy.

3) The third version of the moral argument is one of the most popular versions of it. This version of the moral argument is ultimately based on the notion of objectivity of values. Man and his values are part of the process of nature. They are not subjective. They have objective existence of their own. Man's moral standard develops within the process of evaluation. They are in fact expressions of the process of evolution. They are an aid to the survival and enrichment of life. In arguing that our activities of appreciation are responses to an intrinsic meaning and value established that this order is no less real than the physical order.

The moral argument is generally accepted as the strongest argument offered to establish the existence of God. Kant said that God must exist if the moral order is to be intelligible.

#### **14.4.4 Criticism of the moral argument:**

- 1) Moral life of a person does not necessarily depend on the existence of God as Kant has argued. The pre-supposition made by Kant that the good actions should be rewarded with good results will not hold good at all times. There is no necessary connection between highest good and 'God'.
- 2) Kant's summum bonum is possible and for its possibility God must exist as a moral and omnipotent Being. But what does 'possible' mean in this contest? It may merely mean 'logically possible'. But in fact Kant's argument demands that when we affirm the summum bonum to be possible we are affirming it to be factually ( and not merely logically) possible
- 3) According to moral argument the moral laws presuppose a law-giver, which cannot prove the existence of God, since we know that natural laws do not presuppose a law giver. If at all a law is necessary for us, then he may be a finite being like us; not necessarily He is God. All such conceptions of God as the natural law-giver or moral law-giver are rejected by scientists and thinkers.

- 4) Moral laws and values can prevail only in the world of moral order. In the world order we cannot expect moral or immoral activities. But we observe that gradually people are disregarding moral values and moral laws. So also if there is moral order created by God, then how there are evil and disorder?
- 5) The religious experience, miracles, prayers, worship and grace are purely psychological and man made. They do not guarantee the truth of the factual world. It may be some form of a hypnotism or magic which does not prove the existence of God.

#### **14.5 Let us Sum Up**

- The supporters of ontological argument are St. Anselm, Rene Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hegel etc.
- Anselm said that we have an idea of perfect being, and that this is what we mean by God.
- For Descartes, the existence of God, reality of God and unchangeability of God etc. can occur from the idea of God. Therefore, undoubtedly God Exists.
- Ontological argument is criticized by many philosophers, like St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Ayer and others.
- The moral argument for belief in God is based on man's moral nature and religious experience.
- According to Kant the existence of God is a postulate, or presupposition of the moral life.



- According to *Nyaya* system religious actions produce merits and wrong actions produce demerits.
- merits and demerits are called *adrishta*, which is unconscious

#### **14.6 Answers to Check Your Progress**

**Ans. to Q. No.1.** St. Anselm.

**Ans. to Q. No. 2.** The supporters of ontological argument are St. Anselm, Rene Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Hegel etc.

**Ans. to Q. No. 3** St. Anselm

**Ans. to Q. No. 4.** St. Anselm

**Ans. to Q. No. 5** True.

**Ans. to Q. No. 6.** We may sum up Descartes ontological argument into the following steps-

- a) The idea of God is a perfect Being.
- b) That lacks no positive qualities.
- c) Existence is a positive quality.
- d) Thus God's lacks no existence. God exists.

**Ans to Q. No. 7** Ontological argument is criticized by many philosophers, like St. Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Ayer and others.

**Ans. to Q No. 8.** Kant

**Ans. to Q. No. 9.** a) Postulate, presupposition.

b) Summum Bonum

**Ans. to Q. No. 10.** True.

**Ans. to Q. No. 11.** True.

## 14.7 Further Readings

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#### **14.8 Model Questions**

##### A) Very Short Question

Q.1. "God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" This is the view of teleological/ontological/cosmological argument.

Q.2. Name two supporters of ontological argument.

Q.3. Name two critics of ontological argument

Q.4. Who was regarded as the propounder of the ontological argument for the existence of God?

Q.5. Write the name of two critics of the moral argument.

## **B) Short Questions**

Q.1. Discuss two defects of ontological argument.

Q.2. Write short notes on:

- a) Ontological argument
- b) Moral argument
- c) *adrishta*,

## **C) Long Questions**

Q.1. What are the traditional arguments for the existence of God? Discuss.

Q.2. What are the traditional arguments for the existence of God? Discuss.

Q.3. What is ontological argument for the existence of God? Examine.

Q.4. What is moral argument of Kant? Is it satisfactory argument for the existence of God?

Q.5. What is the view of Kant for the existence of God? Discuss.

Q.6. What is the satisfactory proof for the existence of God? Explain and Examine.