

QUESTION

IS IT POSSIBLE TO PROVE GOD'S EXISTENCE?

Mankind has surely come a long way. From cave-dwellings to Mars exploration and from a food-gathering society to modern agri-business. Yet at the point where modern technological society has reached the pinnacle of success, we have become remarkably uncertain-uncertain about the future, about our own being, and about the existence of God.

The Christians are no less plague by these questions than the non-believers. Many Church members live their everyday life as practical atheists, restricting their religious ties to special sacred occasions. I have heard yet, many Christians questioning the ambiguity in the idea of a God who gives human beings free will in order for them to choose whether they are going to be sinful, in order to have to offer redemption, in order to avoid punishment. Many questioned the idea of an existing creator who allows the gassing of seven million Jews, or children dying of hunger in Africa, or the horrors of that incurable disease (AIDS). Thus the fundamental questions concerning the reality of God gain prime importance.

Among the various ways used to obtain a 'proof' of God's existence through the centuries, five of it seem to have gained prime importance in the attempt to verify intellectually the ground of faith. Many among Philosophers and Theologians, have spent considerable efforts to demonstrate through the power of human reason that God does exist. They have produced principles designed to show that reason could reach justified conclusions about matters much beyond the range of immediate experience, and above all that reason could reach a justified conclusion about the existence of God.

Anselm of Canterbury proposed what is known as the 'ontological argument'. He asserted that God is "something than which nothing greater can be thought". Proceeding from this definition he claimed that such a being cannot exist in understanding alone. It must also exist in reality or otherwise it would not be the most perfect being. Anselm therefore affirmed: "You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is as it should be, for if some intelligence could think of something better than You, the creature would be above its creator-and that is completely absurd". This is the point where most of the criticism set in against Anselm. In his 'On Behalf of the Fool' Anselm's contemporary Gaunilo of Marmoutier among many others, objected that such a procedure is illegitimate.

Next is the 'cosmological argument', and prominent among its proponents is Thomas Aquinas. Four of his five ways to prove God's existence is devoted to the cosmological argument. The first and most obvious way according to him is based on change. He argues that, for every motion, there is a cause. The world is in process of change and that everything that changes is changed by something else. Thus he concludes that God and nothing else is the original cause of the changes in the world.

In his second argument, Aquinas claims: "In the observable world causes are found to be ordered in series; we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible." He assumes that such a series of causes and effects must stop somewhere where it reaches a first cause, for if there were no first efficient cause, there could be no intermediate causes and thus no causation at all. Again he equates this first cause with God.

The third argument is based on the distinction between what must be by necessity and what need not necessarily be. "He argues that a being comes into existence because something which already exist by necessity brought it into being". According to him, this necessary thing cannot owe the necessity of its existence to something else, but owe it to itself and thus in turn causes other things to be. Again he equates this first necessary cause of existence with God.

His fourth argument is based on the gradation observed in things that brings about the use of comparative terms such as, the best, the truest, the noblest and so on. "He argues that there must be something which is in itself goodness, truth, and nobility, and that this brings into being our ideas of best, truest and noblest". The origin of this idea, Aquinas suggests, is God, who is their original cause.

The fifth of Aquinas argument falls under the third type of argument called "Teleological argument" which runs like the cosmological argument though in the opposite direction. Its conclusion is that from the beauty, harmony, and expediency of the world, one must admit the fact that there must be a highest intelligence that once arranged the world so perfectly and still governs it this way. It is on this background that Aquinas based his fifth argument when he notes that, the world shows obvious traces of intelligent design that couldn't have being without an external factor. This factor he concludes to be God.

Another way that was used to obtain a proof of the existence of God is through the 'Moral argument'. Among the proponents of this theory are David Hume, Kant in his 'Critique of Practical Reason' and Raymundus de Sabunde (a Spanish theologian). Raymundus in his 'Theologia Naturalis Sive Liber Creaturarum' (1434-1436) argues that, man is a reasonable being. Yet he can neither reward nor punish himself. Thus there must be someone higher who assumes the role of distributing reward and punishment. If such ultimate retribution did not exist, human life would make no sense, since in one's personal life good and bad would not balance out.

The fifth and the last type of argument is known as the 'Historical argument'. Its basis is on common consent. Having observed that all peoples at all times worship deities or higher beings of some kind, the conclusion is then reached that there must be a reality behind this common attitude of mankind. It is note worthy however, that there is no single one of the arguments and theories for the existence of God that has not attracted criticism from other philosophers and theologians all through the centuries.

If one should judge from the way that these theologians and philosophers criticise one another, one would realise that there is deep scepticism about the power of reason to reach a justified conclusion about the existence of God. Apart, it is clear to me in the end, that none of these varieties of views about God's existence is correct. The reality of His existence cannot be made comprehensible for the frame-work of our thinking.

One may argue that the existence of the universe, its conformity to order, the existence of animals and men, men having great opportunities for co-operation in acquiring knowledge and moulding the universe, the pattern of history and the occurrence of religious experiences, are good enough reasons to accept that there is God. I must conclude on this note that, 'he is in error who thinks that mere theory is sufficient to prove His existence'.

He is really existing, not merely in our remembrance or our conception or imagination. God's existence is life itself, and is immediately noticeable. His reality challenges our response: faith and trust. It immediately gives something to the person it affects: new life. To this John's words refer: "He who has the Son of God has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life." However, it is my belief that the acknowledgement of people's doubts can go some way in stimulating the Churches to develop their faith with still deeper insights in its truth

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