

CAN THERE BE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN NYĀYA-VAIŚEṢIKA?

I

The ontological argument for Divine existence is quite a prestigious one in Western philosophical literature. No argument of such sort is found to be offered in Indian philosophical tradition. What may be the reasons for the difference? One might think that such an argument is not possible in Indian Philosophy. In this paper an effort will be made to show that an argument of the ontological sort should be possible for proving the Divine existence in Indian Philosophy, particularly in *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* system, if the relevant theories are reviewed carefully. To this effect I have presented a comparative study in order to show that there could be a fruitful dialogue between the East and the West. So far as this argument is concerned, I add thereupon some critical remarks.

II

The basic contention of the ontological argument for the existence of God is that the reality of God is involved in the idea of God. There is something, it is argued, unique in the idea of God and hence it cannot be an ordinary idea. St. Anselm has formulated this proof in the following way. He distinguishes two sorts of being *in re* and *in intellectu*, and of these the former is the superior to the latter. Now, that God exists both *in re* and *in intellectu*, nothing greater than God could be conceived of as existence. Therefore, that than which nothing greater can be conceived, must be existing *per necessitatum*.¹

St. Anselm's version of the argument² was accorded an ambivalent reception at the hands of St Thomas. He allows that the basic

proposition "God does not exist" is self-contradictory³. Hence, the proposition "God exists" turns out to be a self-evident one. But one has to distinguish between two senses of self-evidence; (a) self-evident in itself and (b) what may or may not be self-evident to this person or that. For St Thomas the proposition "God exists" is self-evident in itself, since its subject and predicate are identical, i.e., God is his own existence. Yet, he insists, *a la* St Anselm, on the distinction between what exists in reality (*in re*) and what exists only in thought (*in intellectu*).

It was in terms of this distinction that Kant unequivocally rejected the argument in *CPR* (A599/B627)⁴. To say that existence is not an ordinary or real predicate implies that it is presupposed by the categorical attribution of others. To say that something exists is to take it for granted that it has many other attributes. It would be a case of semantic solecism to claim if one says that "some tame tigers growl, and some do not", and means that "some tame tigers exist, and some do not". Hume's argument⁵ was the sharpest: To say that this or that being never existed may be a false proposition, but it is perfectly conceivable and implies no contradiction.

The debate on the ontological argument has left its mark on modern symbolic logic. Russell's *Principia* provides for a fundamental distinction between those propositions which assert existence and those which do not (e.g. $[(\exists x)$ and (x)]. The ontological argument from St Anselm to Descartes, fails to distinguish between *concept* and *object*. It is one thing to manoeuvre with the definition of a word (in this case, the term 'God'), and quite another, whether that word, however defined, does or does not have actual application.

A valid ontological proof must be prefaced by a demonstration that the relevant concept of God is itself legitimate and proper. That is, if God is possible, then God exists, corresponding to the modal theorem $Mp \supset p$ and not the other way round.

Descartes investigates into the nature of ideas. They are, for him, either *factitious*, or *adventitious*, or *innate*. The factitious ones, such as a barren woman's son or a square circle cancel themselves

out, or else, they are figments of the imaginations, such one like that of a winged horse. The adventitious ones are empirical ideas, such as those of predicates of objects of empirical knowledge. But exceptional are the innate ones, those that arise in the mind with the mere operation of thought. There are immune to misperception or perceptual errors like seeing a snake in lieu of a piece of rope. They are beyond any possible doubt. Their indubitable character is owing to their being *clear* and *distinct* ideas. Mathematical ideas such as that of a triangle is a clear *and* distinct idea. If an idea is clear, then its properties are cognizable without distortion, and when it is distinct, it can be spelt away from other ideas, as when we say that a triangle is not a square in virtue of its geometrical properties. Of the lot of innate ideas indubitability is the basic property.⁶ *Cogito* is one such paradigm idea. But what about the status of the adventitious ideas of the objects of knowledge obtainable or obtained by the *Cogito*?

Supposing that they are not concatenations proffered by a demon, they need be guaranteed by a veracious being. God is looked upon or thought of as a veracious person, i.e., one who does not delude us. A finite being such as I am cannot be a veracious person. Neither could the progeny nor the offspring of finite beings be veracious. God alone is veracious because he is infinite. And his veracity is a part of His perfection. And it is inconceivable that a Perfect Being does *not* exist. Hence, if God is a Perfect Being, He exists necessarily. All that it means is that the idea of God as a Perfect Being implies its own reality or existence.

If it is said that what we think is not necessarily real, all proofs and reasonings will be in vain. If thought cannot be valid of a reality which is beyond the thinker, we shall enter into a hopeless scepticism. If God is described as a Being who is the totality of all reality, it is difficult to assume that such a conception is a mere idea in mind. Because, thought has reference to being, without which it would be meaningless. If there were no being, there would be no thinking. The phenomenon of thinking corresponds to the being. The Ontological Proof represents an artificial way in which men sought to justify to themselves a faith.⁷

III

In Indian philosophical systems the Ontological-like argument

for the existence of God is not usually met with. But if the systems are carefully reviewed, the Ontological argument can be given for the existence of God from the *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* point of view. We shall try to show that *Nyāya* initiates a discussion into the possibility of the concept of God as modern logic requires.

In *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* God is described as *Paramātmā* which is a form of *Ātmā*, one of the accepted substances (*Dravya*), which is again included under category (*Padārtha*). That which is meaningful and existent is called *Artha* or *Padārtha*. That which is meaningful is accepted as existent to the ordinary human intellect. That which can convey meaning is in another way called *Padārtha*, which follows from the literal meaning of the term '*Padārtha*'. The *Naiyāyikas* and *Vaiśeṣikas* do not accept the entites like sky-flower (*Ākāśa-Kusuma*), barren women's son (*Vandhyāputra*) etc., as *Padārtha*, as they have no existence at all.⁸ It may be argued that the usage of such words carries a special significance as it indicates that they refer to "null-class". This is also rejectable to the *Naiyāyikas* and *Vaiśeṣikas* as they do not accept even the absence of those entities that are not *Padārtha* or meaningless or nonexistent objects. According to them, any type of discussion should be confined to those entities that in reality exist. To nullify something which is unreal is insignificant. The negation of an entity which really exists makes sense. To negate something which is '*Apadārtha*' or unreal is meaningless, because there is a scheme of seven *Padārthas* under which all existent objects are included. In order to schematise their system they have made such classification. The negation of an object, the *Naiyāyikas* observe, is possible if that object or absentee (*pratiyogī*) really exists in the world (*Prasaktasya pratiṣedhaḥ*). Hence, the absence of the entities like sky-flower etc (*ākāśakusumam nāsti*) cannot be regarded as an instance of absolute negation (*atyantābhāva*) as the absentee (*pratiyogī*) of this absence is unreal (*alīka*). This type of *Abhāva* is technically expressed by the *Navya Naiyāyikas* as *Alīkapratiyogitākābhāva*.⁹ Hence, 'there is absence of colour in air' (*vāyau rūpam nāsti*) is taken as an instance of *Atyantābhāva* by Annambhaṭṭa, because the absentee of this absence is 'colour' which is a real entity.¹⁰

Moreover, there is no proof as to the fact that there is no God. An absence may not be perceived if there is the non-

observation and imperceptibility of the *Pratīyogī*. The absence of the object which is not capable of being perceived is not perceptible.

It may be argued that, though the absentee (*Pratīyogī*) of the absence of hare's horn is not perceptible, the absence of it is perceptible. In the like manner the absence of God may be perceived, though He is not perceptible. What is to be understood by the term 'the absence of hare's horn'? Whether it means the absence of the hare's horn or it means the absence of horn in hare. The former is not true, as hare's horn is an absurd entity. Neither positive nor negative answers are forthcoming. Because, in the case of the perception of an absence of a jar, there is an argument in the form of *Tarka* in the form : 'If this were on the ground, it would have been perceived'. As it is not seen, there is the absence of jar. In the case of the perception of absence, the existence of the counterpositive is to be imposed. Hence, its presence is hypothetically assumed initially and afterwards its absence is perceived. The object which has no existence cannot be thought as existing and hence the absence of an absurd entity is not perceived. The second alternative that there is the absence of horn in hare is not also true.

The counter-positive of the absence of horn is 'horn' and the locus of it is 'hare'. The 'horn' (but not hare's horn) is capable of being perceived as it is found in cow etc. Hence, the absence of it is also perceptible. If counter-positive is not capable of being perceived, its absence cannot be perceived. In the light of this argument, it can be that as the counter-positive (i.e., God) of the so-called absence in the form, 'There is no God' is not an object of ordinary perception, the absence will also be the same. Hence, absence of God cannot be known through ordinary perception.

The absence of God is not also proved by inference. If it is proved by inference the *Sādhyā* and *Pakṣa* will be "the absence of existence" (*astitvābhāva*) and 'God' respectively. If God is considered as having the absence of existence, He (or he?) is to be described as an absurd entity (*alīka*). If *Pakṣa* is taken as an absurd entity, there would occur the fallacy called *Āśrayāsiddhi* or *Pakṣāsiddhi*. If 'non-existent God' is taken as *Pakṣa*, there would occur the same fallacy. In order to avoid this defect, if God is described

as nonabsurd, He will be existent, which would lead to the fallacy *Bādha* again. The *Pakṣa* as endowed with the absence of *Sādhya* is *Bādha*. Here, *Pakṣa* i.e., God is endowed with the absence of the same. Hence, the absence of God is not proved through inference also.¹¹

Following the same line of argument the *Naiyāyikas* can say that if it be asserted that 'there is no God', the statement automatically implies that there is a real entity which is God. It may be asked whether God is included under *Padārthas* or not. If God is counted amongst the *Padārthas*, then it follows that God is there. If not, God would be treated as *Apadārtha* or unreal entity (*alīka*) and hence, its conceptual nihilation is nonsensical. We may say with the *Naiyāyikas* that, if there is thought of an object, there is reality. The reality does not stand over against thought but it is immanent to it.

It may be argued that, though God is absurd (*alīka*), could be He the object of our knowledge? Hence, there is no harm, if an inference is drawn retaining 'God' in the place of *Pakṣa*.

This is not in order. For, an absurd entity cannot have qualificandness (*Viśeṣyatā*). In other words, if 'God' is really an absurd entity, He (or he?) will not have capability of being a substratum of the absence of existence. As an absurd entity is devoid of any character, it cannot be identified with the qualifier. Sky-flower, being an absurd object, cannot be introduced with the qualifiers like white, red, etc., as it is not capable of being known through these. In the same way, the property called qualificandness (*Viśeṣyatā*) may not remain in an absurd object. As an absurd entity is devoid of any character, no object is identified by it. If God is really an absurd object, He (or he?) cannot be the locus of the qualificandness in the form of substratumness (*āśrayatā*) of the absence in the form 'no God'. In other words, there cannot remain the substratumness of the absence of God due to His (his or its?) absurd character.¹²

The form of the ontological argument from the *Nyāya* stand point would be more firmly set if the following citation from the *Nyāyakusumāñjali* of Udayanācārya is made. The verse runs as follows :

"Ityevaṃ śrutinītisamplavajalairbhūyo-
 bhirākṣālite yeṣāṃ nāspadamādadhāsi
 hṛdaye te śailasārāṣayāḥ 1
 Kintu prastutavipratipatti
 vidhayo' pyuccairbhavaccintakaḥ
 kāle kāruṇika tvayaiva
 kṛpayā te bhāvanīyā narāḥ" ॥ 13

That is, "Iron-souled are they in whose hearts Thou canst find any place, though repeatedly washed by the inundations of ethics and sacred texts; still in time, O Merciful one, Thou in Thy goodness will save those people too, because even in going to controvert Thy existence they have earnestly meditated on Thee"¹⁴ If the Spirit of this *kārikā* is carefully pondered over, we shall notice an outline of the ontological argument. It is stated here that an atheist is found to have God's mercy even in going to controvert God's existence as he concentrates on God. As he engages to disprove God's existence, he keeps meditating on Him. The very act of meditating on God implies His existence. It is very much similar to Hegel's ideas in favour of Ontological argument. But if one avers with Kant that the existence is not the predicate of the content of the idea, we suggest the following consideration given by Hegel. The act of concentration or meditation on God involves His being. The act of concentration becomes meaningless if there is no actual being. The phenomenon of concentration involves the existence of the object concentrated upon.

If someone seriously wants to disprove the existence of God, he commits fallacies like *Āśrayāsiddhi* etc. as told earlier. If he does not want to disprove God with argument, he automatically admits his existence. If someone forwards some argument in order to prove or disprove something, it presupposes the 'real existence' of that object. Otherwise, it will turn into a meaningless activity. If series of arguments is given in favour of non-existence of an unreal object, it will be infructuous, Hence, if someone adduces some arguments in order to disprove God, he has to admit his existence in order to make himself free from the commitment of fallacy mentioned above. If he admits God, the denial of His being

should be meaningless and self-contradictory.

Moreover, the sentence 'Īśvaro nāsti' is not meaningful owing to the lack of *Yogyatā* (consistency), one of the criteria for a meaningful sentence. The consistency in meaning is called *yogyatā* (*arthābādho yogyatā*). If one wants to deny God's existence with the sentence mentioned above, the sentence shall not convey the intended meaning, as the sentence will lack consistency or *yogyatā*. As the sentence 'He is watering with fire' (*vanhinā siñcati*), is not a meaningful one owing to lack of consistency, the sentence mentioned above about God is also insignificant. If God exists, the denial of it is inconceivable, just as watering with fire is inconceivable.¹⁵

IV

It has been seen that Ontological argument for the existence of God is formulable in terms of *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* apparatus. If we have the idea of God, one of the *Padārthas*, it guarantees its existence. It is a remarkable fact that Descartes said that man's knowledge of God is due to God Himself and hence He is the sufficient reason of the idea of Himself.

Though Kant has said that the 'existence' is not the predicate of the content of ideas, he has a point to say thus because to his opinion it does not give any new information. If some one has the idea of God, it is meaningless to say that He exists or does not exist. The predicate of the content of idea is not possible as there is no actual predication. If something is predicated, it would lead us to the defect of tautology. Accordingly, Kant is right. The *Naiyāyika* believes in this issue. *Īśvara*, if admitted as a *Padārtha*, the terms 'nāsti' or 'asti' are superfluous and tautologous, when appended to the subject.

Yet, the standpoint in favour of the Ontological argument may not be ignored in the *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika* systems. Though the existence may not be the predicate of the content of the idea of God, yet it cannot perhaps be denied that the notion of God involves his being. Though it seems that there is no predication, yet careful thinking would reveal that there is really a 'predicate'.

as a notion of something cannot be entertained without its Being. The reality is not against thought, but is immanent to it.

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12. Also : K.K. Bandopadhyaya : *Nyāya-tattva-parīkramā* (in Bengali), pp. 156-163, Papiras, Calcutta, 1986.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Nyāyakusumāñjali*, 5th Stabaka.
15. Translated by E.B. Cowel.

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