

Rethinking God: Rethinking Ontological Arguments and Arguments Against It

Dr. Jitendra Ram

Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi

Abstract

This article is rethinking both the ontological arguments and arguments against it. It is rethinking ontological arguments of St. Anselm and Descartes because through subjective idea of God in mind of Anselm and Descartes to claim of the objective existence of God cannot be proved through ontological reasoning. It is rethinking the method of ontological arguments of Anselm and Descartes because the truth of existence of idea of perfect God (the existence of idea of God in which part of brain or minds) cannot be determined through reason.

Neurophilosophers claims that the truth of non-existence of idea of perfect God in mind or brain can be determined by through the objective scientific method in Evolutionary Biology of Mind, Genetics of Mind and Neuroscience of Mind. Since there is no idea of perfect God in mind, therefore perfect God does not exist.

Keywords: God, Ontological argument, St. Anselm, Descartes, Saunilo, Kant, Neuro Philosophy, Scientific method, Rethinking.

I. Introduction

Ontological arguments are philosophical arguments for existence of all perfect God. Ontological arguments are a priori arguments derived from reason alone.

Ontological argument was first proposed by St. Anselm of Canterbury in 11th century C.E. He in his book *Prologion* (literally means Discourse on Existence of God) derives the existence of God from the concept of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. He claims that such being exist both in mind and in reality.

One of the earliest criticism of Anselm argument is advanced by Anselm's contemporary Gaunilo in his book, *On Behalf of the Fool*. He claimed that similar ontological arguments can be used to prove the existence of perfect island and therefore ontological argument is absurd.

French philosopher Rene Descartes in his book *Meditation on First Philosophy* book V inferred the existence of God from a clear and distinct idea of a supremely perfect being. As the idea of triangle entails 180; the idea of perfect being entails God's existence.

Immanuel Kant in his book *Critique of Pure Reason* advanced influential criticism of ontological argument for existence of God. His criticism is primarily against Descartes and Anselm's arguments.

Kant claims that ontology argument wrongly assumes that existence is a real predicate of God. Kant says that existence is not the real a predicate of God. The argument proves real existing God from the mental concept of God. the argument infers the fact of God from the a priori idea of God, from thought of God to reality of God.

I think that the arguments of Anselm and Descartes should be rethought because, above reasoning for God's existence do not prove God's existence and the arguments are not based on evidence. There is no evidence of idea of God being in mind (Descartes) and in understanding (Anselm). The self evident intellectual evidence is not evidence at all. It does not prove God's reality.

I think even the arguments against the Ontological arguments for existence of God should be rethought because the arguments of Kant and Gaunilo is not based on positive evidence against God existence. Their criticism is based on reason. Their rejection of all perfect being, with all perfect qualities is not based on objective evidence or scientific evidence or empirical evidence accessible objectively to sense or accessible to experimental procedure or scientific method.

2. Ontological Arguments for God's Existence and Arguments Against it

The term ontological comes from Greek word *ontos* – which means – being which is in this writing I will disuses two most important ontological argument from existence of God:

a. St. Anselm's Ontological Argument

Theologian and philosopher Anselm develops his ontological argument in his book *Proslogion*, chapter two as follows:

"[Even a] fool, when he hears of ... a being than which nothing greater can be conceived ... understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding.... And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone."

St. Anselm, *Proslogion*

St. Anselm says that if a being exist only in understanding and doesn't exist in reality, then it is greater to exist in reality than existing in understanding. If maximally great being exist only in understanding, it would less than maximally great. It would be absurd if the great being exist only in under standing. Therefore such being exist both in understanding and in reality. This maximally great being is God.

b. Gaunilo's Argument Against Ontological Arguments of Anselm

Gaunilo the contemporary of Anselm proposed the earliest criticism of the argument of Anselm in his book on *Behalf of the Fool*. Gaunilo said that Anselm's argument is defective because he can use the argument of same logical form to prove the existence of an island than which none greater can be conceived. Gaunilo defines his argument as follows.

"Now if some one should tell me that there is ... an island [than which none greater can be conceived], I should easily understand his words, in which there is no difficulty. But suppose that he went on to say, as if by a logical inference: "You can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all

lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is in your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.”

Gaunilo, Behalf of the Fool

Gaunilo claims that Anselm's argument does not prove the existence of God.

c. Descartes Ontological Argument and Mathematician

French thinker and Mathematician Rene Descartes proposed ontological argument for existence of God in *Meditations v*. His argument follows geometrical reasoning. He reasoned that the existence of God can be deduced from the idea of His nature just as the fact of 180° is deducible from the idea of nature of a triangle. The property of 180° is inseparable or contained in the nature of triangle. The property of existence of God is contained or inseparable from the nature of God.

Descartes describes his argument as follows:

"But, if the mere fact that I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything that I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one that I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature."

Descartes, *Meditations V*

Descartes in the above argument claims that God's exist can be deduced from his nature. He assumes that the existence is a predicted of supremely perfect being.

d. Kant's Arguments against Ontological Argument

Kant develops influential criticism in his book *Critique of Pure Reason* (Transcendental dialect book II, chapter three, section 4) of ontological arguments for existence of God by Anselm and Descartes. Kant's criticism of ontological argument is based on distinction between analytic and synthetic proposition. The subject concept contains the predicate concept in analytic proposition. The subject concept does not contain predicate concept in synthetic proposition.

The defenders of ontological arguments claim that the idea of God the subject contain the real existence of God i.e. the idea of perfect God entails God's necessary existence. Kant says that ontological arguments wrongly assumes that existence is the predicate or attribute of the subject, God but Kant rejected that existence is predicate.

"Being is evidently not a real predicate, that is, a conception of something which is added to the conception of some other thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations in it. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgement. The proposition, God is omnipotent, contains two conceptions, which have a certain object or content; the word is, is no additional predicate-it merely indicates the relation of the predicate to the subject. Now if I take the subject (God) with all its

predicates (omnipotence being one), and say, God is, or There is a God, I add no new predicate to the conception of God, I merely posit or affirm the existence of the subject with all its predicates – I posit the object in relation to my conception." Kant, Critique of Pure Reason.

When the ontological arguments asserts that the idea of nature of God entails Gods necessary existence is the predicate. what it means is that if God exist, then God exists is empty tautology.

3. Rethinking Ontological Arguments for God's Existence

According to Neuroscientists and philosophers of mind the clear and distinct idea of God according to Descartes and existence of God in understanding according to Anselm is private state of Mind which do not prove existence of on objective God. The ontological argument for God existence is not based objective evidence.

4. Rethinking Arguments Against Ontological Arguments

I think that arguments against ontological arguments must be rethought and rejected because the arguments of Gaunilo and the arguments of Immanuel Kant against ontological arguments is based on reasoning. The reason alone cannot determine and disprove the non-existence of God. The reasoning of the above philosopher can neither prove the truth of existence of idea of God in mind nor disprove the truth of non-existence of idea of God in mind. The truth of non-existence of idea of God in mind can be found out only through objective scientific experiments on brain and mind. It is only the Neuroscience of mind, Genetics of minds, and Evolutionary Biology of mind that can determine and find out the non-existence of idea of God in mind. Philosophers of neuroscience or neuro-philosophers in general argue that there is no such idea of God in mind. The Kantian reason for non-existence of God must be rethought .

5. Conclusion

The method of ontological arguments for Gods existence is apriori reasoning in case of Anselm and method of ontological argument of Descartes is based on intuition and reason. But the method of both arguments mentioned above is not dependable because there is no objective evidence for proving God's existence.

The methods of arguments against ontological argument is not rational and the arguments for Gods non-existence is not based on objective empirical evidence. Therefore neither arguments for God existence nor arguments for God's non-existence is defendable and should be rethought and rejected. The Science of mind or neuroscience of mental state of God's existence does not proves God existence in reality and neuroscience of mental state of non-existence of God does not prove objective nonexistence of God. Therefore both arguments for God's existence and arguments for God's non-existence should be rethought and rejected.

References

1. F. Sutcliffe, (1968). *Descartes Discourse on Method and The Meditations*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
2. M. Charlesworth (ed.), (1965). *Gaunilo, On Behalf of the Fool*. Oxford: OUP.

3. M. Charlesworth (ed.), (1965). *St Anselm, Proslogion*, Oxford: OUP.
4. N. Kemp-Smith, (1933). *Critique of Pure Reason*, London: Macmillan.