

Block 2**Problem of Affirming God's Existence**

Block Introduction

The debate concerning God's existence has, of course, been going on for millenia. The believers have put forth some arguments that rationalize their faith to some extent, but the more one argues the more challenges they have to face from secular world. Atheism and agnosticism are two such positions that are posing challenges to religion. But religion has its own way of answering the challenges like the classical arguments: ontological argument, for instance, purports to prove the existence of a perfect being; the cosmological argument purports to prove the existence of a necessary or eternal Creator; the teleological argument purports to prove the existence of a Creator concerned with humanity. The whole discussion regarding the belief or disbelief in God takes another direction and asks the question, what is the God that I believe or not believe in? That is, what is the nature of the God that I believe or not believe in? This conflict between faith and religion has continued through the centuries even to this day. Modern day conflict has also erupted between science and religion.

This block includes five units, all dealing with the problems that one may encounter by affirming the existence of God.

Unit 1 is a study of the concept of theism, atheism, agnosticism, the different types of theism- polytheism, henotheism, ditheism, monotheism, pantheism, panentheism, deism. This unit also sketches the stages of development of different conceptions of god from polytheistic to monotheistic belief and tries to present the concept of immanence and transcendence.

Unit 2 familiarizes us with the Nature and Attributes of God. The concept 'God' is used widely and understood differently. This concept raises a number of philosophical and religious problems according to the way it is understood and misunderstood. Some of the attributes that are discussed here in this unit are God as creator, eternal, omnipresent, omniscience, simple and good, and the necessity of God.

Unit 3 highlights Traditional Arguments for God's existence, which have to some extent only rationalize one's belief in God. There is no attempt to prove the existence of God. The

arguments include the Ontological argument, the Cosmological argument, the Teleological argument, the moral argument and the argument from religious experience. The views of Augustine, Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus are also briefly discussed.

Unit 4 discusses one of the important problems in the philosophy of religion and theology; the problem of evil. The problem of evil as discussed by contemporary philosophers presupposes the idea of a single god which is all benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent. This presupposition gave the problem of evil its basic structure that we are going to discuss.

Unit 5 familiarizes us with the challenges of Atheism and Agnosticism; the two positions that negate the existence of God. Beginning by defining atheism and agnosticism, we will know the different forms they take, the way the proponents of these positions favour the non-existence of God. We will also examine critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics by positing arguments against their views by showing some of the inherent contradictions and inconsistencies regarding the non-existence of God.

This block will enable us to understand how the problem of believing in God unfolds itself and the various challenges that the believers have to face in order to defend their faith. But the question that both the believer and the unbeliever raise is: 'What kind of God is that one believes or does not believe?'

UNIT 6

GOD*

DIFFERENT CONCEPTIONS OF

Structure

6.0 Objectives

6.1 Introduction

6.2 Theism and its various types

6.3 Polytheism

6.4 Henotheism, Kathenotheism,, Monolatry

6.5 Ditheism

6.6 Monotheism

6.7 Deism

6.8 Monism

6.9 Pantheism

6.10 Panentheism

6.11 Autotheism

6.12 Atheism (Non- Godism)

6.13 Agnosticism

6.14 Let Us Sum Up

6.15 Key Words

6.16 Further Readings and References

6.17 Answers to Check Your Progress

* Dr. Preeti Rani, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Hansraj College, University of Delhi.

6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we propose to discuss different forms of theistic beliefs and the allied problems that proceed from such beliefs in an all-loving, all-good and all-powerful God, the ultimate source of the phenomenal world, the ruling and governing principle of the world. After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the concept of theism, atheism, agnosticism.
- Describe the different types of theism- polytheism, henotheism, ditheism, monotheism, pantheism, panentheism, deism.
- Sketch the stages of development of different conceptions of god from polytheistic to monotheistic belief.
- Differentiate between immanence and transcendence of god in the world.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Human being's belief in God/s is as old as his relation to the world. In his transactions with the world, he often finds himself so placed that his wishes, desires and activities, his coming into being and passing out of it, his good fortune and misfortune, his health and disease often seem to be beyond his control. Happenings in nature like wind, rain, flood, famine, earthquake and the changing of seasons of the year also appear puzzling and mysterious. These phenomenon create the conviction that human being is too small and helpless. He does come to believe in a power, which seems to control not only his own destiny but also that of the world at large. There lies an inherent urge in the human heart to find out 'one principle' among many, universal amidst the particular and something settled and permanent against the background of changeful phases of the finite objects in the temporal world. Many questions related to the existence of some higher divine Power or God come to the human mind. Theology (study of God) deals with all such questions: Is there a God? God is one or many? Do celestial beings - gods, angels, spirits, and demons exist? If there is a God then why does evil exist? Can man comprehend/know God? Can humans communicate with God? Atheism is the ideology which propagates the belief that there is no God/s or any divine reality to the universe. Agnosticism is the position where one claims not to know whether there is a God or not. Theism affirms the existence of God/s or any divine reality to the universe. Theists believe in a personal and self-conscious deity endowed with a profoundly loving and intimate nature and tending to bring the individual life in tune with the universal principle. Many

theologians believe that “God consciousness” is innate in the human mind. Some theologians in their study of the phenomenon of religion show that “God consciousness” in humans came first through experiencing fear. Here, fear can be seen as the sense of “the sacred”. In this search of the “sacred” theism emerged in the form of animism, then polytheism, then gradually into henotheism, and at last developed into monotheism. The theories like deism, pantheism and panentheism are known as metaphysical theories which show the relation between God and the world. On the other hand theism, atheism, agnosticism and naturalism have shown the problem of the existence of God. Polytheism and monotheism differ on the question of the number of Gods. In this chapter we will look at these different theistic theories in detail.

6.2 THEISM AND ITS VARIOUS TYPES

Theism is the belief that one or more deities exist. The term theism is derived from the Greek word ‘theos’ meaning ‘God’. The term theism was first used by Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688). Cudworth defines theists as those “who affirm that a perfectly conscious understanding being, or mind, existing of itself from eternity, is the cause of all other things”. Theists include all individuals who believe in one god or multiple gods. The majority of the world's population is theist. Theism is the core of most religions. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism are all theistic religions. The deity or deities they believe in and how each group of people practice their beliefs are different. It's important to note that someone who is theistic isn't necessarily a member of a certain religion.

Theism includes belief in either of the following views:

- Polytheism- belief in many Gods,
- Henotheism - belief in many Gods but worshipping one,
- Ditheism - belief in two opposed realities,
- Monotheism- belief in one God,
- Deism- belief in one or more gods who do not intervene in the world,
- Pantheism- belief that God and the universe are the same thing,
- Panentheism- belief that God is everywhere in the universe but still greater and above the universe.

Theism does not include:

- Atheism- belief that there are no gods and
- Agnosticism- belief that it is unknown whether gods exist or not.

6.3 POLYTHEISM

The term polytheism is derived from Greek words 'poly' which means 'many' and 'theos' which means 'God'. Thus, term polytheism is used where plurality of Gods is acknowledged and/or worshipped. Any individual God in a polytheistic system is considered as a member of a larger, coherent group called a pantheon rather than being totally separate and unrelated. Generally each individual God represents a unique value, personifies some aspect of humanity, and/or maintains stewardship over some facet of nature. Thus there are Gods of fertility, rivers, health, anger, sun, vegetation, life and death. Within polytheism, an adherent wishing to obtain something is expected to pray to that particular God rather than to others who do not have dominion in that area. Other structural considerations of a pantheon include the separation of authority. In some polytheistic systems one God is dominant in power and authority over the other Gods, but not supreme in a way that warrants special worship from humans. In some polytheistic systems the Gods themselves may be subordinate to other forces of nature or fate - just because they are Gods doesn't mean that they are supernatural or transcendent. Thus, polytheism commonly posits a division of labor and responsibility within the divine realm similar to that which we observe in the human world.

The polytheistic notion of Gods are traced in the Vedic lore's of India and in ancient doctrines found in Egypt, Rome and Scandinavia. According to the Greeks, the Gods not only maintained the law and order of the universe, they also held the moral order of the world. Although polytheistic systems postulate a coherent group, they also acknowledge the existence of Gods outside the religion's pantheon. There are usually three different responses regarding acceptance of Gods from other cultures and religions:

1. **Same with different names:** It is believed that some or all of the outside Gods are really the same as the Gods currently worshiped, just with different names. Any new aspects or powers are simply incorporated into the older Gods.
2. **New additions:** One approach is taking some of the new Gods and adopting them as new members of the pantheon. In this manner the pantheon can gradually grow.

3. **Acceptance but not worshipping:** In this approach one accepts that the other Gods exist, but not worship them in any active manner.

Because polytheistic systems are accepting the existence of Gods from other religions and cultures, polytheism has tended to offer more religious freedom than monotheism. Polytheistic belief promotes and assimilates all the indigenous and popular narratives. The idea of the “many” opens way for all forms of beliefs, worship and religiosity.

A modern scientific perspective tends to reject polytheism because of its incompatibility with understanding of natural laws. If there really were different, independent Gods in charge of all the different aspects of reality, then we shouldn't necessarily have a set of natural laws which are common to all parts of reality. The laws of physics would not apply to chemistry and the laws of chemistry would not apply to biology, and so on. Scientific order would find no basis if multiple Gods were working at potentially contrary purposes.

Another thing is such beliefs in the plurality of Gods, emanating from the awful aspects of nature and one God set against the other, resulted in perpetuating the diversities rather than affecting a harmony so as to fulfill the goal of religion, which seeks to attain the One among many, unity in diversity and the universal form amidst the particulars. Polytheism, with all its weakness and failures, is admittedly the embryonic stage in the evolution of religious thoughts. In the later part of the Vedic era, we find a tendency towards One Divine Being; the frantic competition among the Gods to gain supremacy over the other gradually developed into the idea of one single God - or the Supreme Being, which subsequently constitute the central theme of religion.

6.4 HENOTHEISM, KATHENOTHEISM, MONOLATRY

Henotheism is derived from the Greek word 'henos' (one/ single) and 'theos' (god). Henotheists worship only one God, while accepting the existence of other deities that may be worshiped by other people or groups. Henotheists also believe that the God whom they worship is the supreme of the pantheon of existing deities without denying or rejecting the worthiness of other deities. It is the belief in 'one' God as distinguished from monotheism or belief in 'one only' God. Max Muller represented it as a definite stage in the advancement from polytheistic to monotheistic belief. Muller stated that henotheism is "monotheism in principle and polytheism in fact". He maintains it to be the earliest stage in the history of religion. Muller says that these primitive institutions of God was in itself neither

monotheistic nor polytheistic. In no language does the plural exist before singular. The primitive intuition of God and inner feeling of dependence on God cannot however be called monotheistic. Belief in God as exclusively one involves a distinct negation and is possible only after the conception, whether real or imaginary, of many Gods. The belief, he says, might be formulated as 'there is a God' but not yet as 'there is but one God'.

Henotheism is observed in Vedic Period, directed towards the variety of Hindu deities. This view is also akin to the Yahweh worship of Mosaic Judaism of the pre-prophetic era. Two related terms to henotheism are monolatry and kathenotheism, which are typically understood as sub-types of henotheism.

Kathenotheism is an extension of "henotheism". It is derived from "kath' hena" which means "one by one". Kathenotheism is the belief that there is more than one deity, but only one deity should be worshiped at any given time. Another may be worthy of worship at another time or place. Each god, then, is supreme in turn. Kathenotheism is often found common in polytheistic religions in which natural forces are worshiped. A deity such as the Rain God is worshipped when there is need for rain. Sun God is worshipped in times of harvest, God of Fertility is invoked in marriage and Goddess of Education (ex. Saraswati in Hindu religion) is communed when children go for exams and on other similar occasions.

Monolatry is more exclusive than henotheism. Monolatry refers to the belief that there may be more than one deity, but only one is worthy of being worshiped. One worships that deity consistently without alteration in his/her belief. Monolatry sometimes makes people discard the deities whom they do not revere. Religious fundamentalism is a form of Monolatry in which the devotee of a particular deity tries to force his religion or deity as the "Absolute" on fellow humans. Monolatry is more exclusive than henotheism because a monolator worships only one god, while the henotheist may worship any within the pantheon, depending on circumstances. In some belief systems, the choice of the supreme deity within a henotheistic framework may be determined by cultural, geographical, historical or political reasons.

While the Vedas, the earliest Hindu scriptures, are for the most part henotheistic, the notion of one supreme entity or self becomes more prominent in the Upanishads, the culmination of the Vedas. Henotheism is a step from polytheism to monotheism.

6.5 DIETHEISM

Ditheism assumes two opposed or complementing principles as the ultimate realities governing the universe. Ditheism defined in terms of two opposing forces is related to the Western idea of dualism like good versus evil. Other ditheists see the two equally powerful forces as working together, more like the yin and the yang. As a religious doctrine, ditheism proved itself superior to the earlier polytheistic views, inasmuch as it focused its thought on the problem of evil and sought to find out a solution.

Ditheistic thoughts are traced in the teachings of the Gnostics who believed in the two opposite, spiritual and self-existing principles; in the Parsee religion also two rival deities, namely, Ahura Mazda and Ahirman - one being the symbol of goodness and the other symbolising evil are discussed. In the Christian concept of God and 'Satan' and in the Platonic concepts as well as in Neo-Platonism two opposing principles - of goodness and of evil are observed.

With the factual existence of evil in the background, the goodness of God tends to be preserved by sacrificing His omnipotence and omniscience by the theists, laying thereby a foundation, however subtle, of a finite God. Similar ideas were set forth by John S. Mill on a later date. Mill points out that "every evidence of design in nature is an instance of the designer working under certain limitations. The evidence therefore of 'natural theology' distinctly implies that the author of the cosmos worked under limitations." The theories of ditheism do not award a practical solution to the problem of evil. Even dualism in the form of two independent substances faces challenges. Dr. H. Stephen points out, "if there are two absolutely independent substances as dualism supposes, it is impossible to understand how they could have come into interaction with each other, so that the one could act upon the other - God on matter and matter on God." The flow of religious thinking, therefore, takes a different turn: a turn towards Monotheism. Lotze believes that as a theory, dualism is unthinkable, because it always assumes a third or higher principle to solve the conflict between two realities. And that third principle is deemed to be the highest principle of religious life. The God of Monotheism appears as an all-embracing, one Supreme Being, as the sole explaining cause of the universe, so as to achieve a harmony in diversity - a factor so far absent in dualism.

6.6 MONOTHEISM

The term monotheism comes from the Greek word 'monos' which means 'one' and 'theos' which means 'God'. Thus, monotheism is the belief in the existence of a single God. Because monotheism is founded upon the idea that there is only one God, monotheists also believe that this God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, created all of reality and is totally self-sufficient without any dependency upon any other being. The largest monotheistic religions are Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Monotheism is typically contrasted with polytheism which is a belief in many Gods, and atheism which is an absence of belief in any God.

Sigmund Freud has argued that monotheism might have had its origin in Egypt. In his article *The Origins of Religion*, Freud says, the King Akhenaton reintroduced the worship of the Sun god Aten in 1375 BCE. Akhenaton made Aten's religion as the sole religion and projected Aten as the monotheistic God. He also prohibited any other forms of religion and worshipping of other gods by royal decree. Freud suggests that Moses the founder of Judaism might have been influenced by the monotheism of Akhenaton when he carved the concept of one God for the Jews. In Islam also we see this idea that God is one and has no partners to share His divine glory. Christianity goes slightly away from the traditional monotheism of Judaism and Islam because of the concept of Trinity, in which the Christians see One God in Three personalities.

A distinction can be made between two types of monotheism:

- 1) **Inclusive monotheism** - the belief that there is only one deity, and that all other claimed deities are just different names, merely different aspects or incarnations of their one supreme God, and
- 2) **Exclusive monotheism** - which refers to the belief that there is only one deity, and that all other claimed deities are false and distinct from it, either the product of invention, evil, or human error; they deny the existence of the Gods of any other religious faiths.

The Hindu denomination of Smartism is an example of inclusive monotheism. Most Abrahamic religions are examples of exclusive monotheism. Most monotheistic systems tend to be exclusive in nature. Due to this exclusivity, monotheistic religions have historically displayed less religious tolerance than polytheistic religions. Deism, Pantheism and Panentheism (or theism) are considered to be the three forms of Monotheism. We will discuss them at length in the following sections.

6.7 DEISM

The words deism and theism are derived from the latin word 'deus' and Greek 'theos' both mean 'god'. In English the words "deist" and "theist" were originally synonymous, but by the 17th century the terms started to diverge in meaning. Deism is discussed as one form of monotheism. In addition to adopting general monotheism, deists also adopt the belief that the single existing God is personal in nature and transcendent from the created universe. They reject the belief that this God is immanent, which is to say presently active in the created universe. According to the deistic view of reality, God created the universe but then separated itself from its own creation. Sometimes this is referred as the "watchmaker" God - a God who has created the machine of the universe and, having set it going, looks on it with perfect confidence. The most celebrated expression of this view can be seen in Aristotle's conception of "Prime Mover". Leibnitz propounded the doctrine of "pre- established harmony". In the 18th century the rationalistic outlook especially in France and England emphasizes the deistic conception of God.

Deism rejects supernatural events such as prophecies, miracles, and divine revelations prominent in organized religion. Instead, deism holds that religious beliefs must be founded on human reason and observed features of the natural world, and that these sources reveal the existence of a supreme being as creator. The universe is believed to be rational and ordered because that is how God wanted it to be; God, in turn, is also a rational being with rational desires, rational goals, and rational methods which are understandable through human reason. Deists were and are opposed to religious orthodoxy, dogma, and doctrine, all of which they have argued lead inevitably to corruption and intolerance. Deists also reject the very pious and overly emotional forms of worship. In deism, religion is a matter of reason and rationality rather than highly emotional religious faith.

Philosophers, like, Soren Kierkegaard supported a very different form of deism labeled as "Deistic Supernaturalism". According to this view, God is not only transcendent and external to nature but is also the "superhuman and supernatural revealer of values." Denying that God's nature can be known via human experience, deistic Supernaturalist argues that God can be understood via direct revelations from God. Communion with God can thus be established via activities like prayer or meditation.

Although deism at one point came to be a dominant position among the intelligentsia of England, France, Germany, and even America, later on it lost its impact. For one thing, people who are inclined to reject belief in traditional Gods can become atheists and reject belief in Gods altogether. For another thing, it regards the universe as a finely tuned machine, like a watch. But that picture of the universe is not so common; instead, the universe is seen as more dynamic, chaotic, and more in continual development.

Another thing which makes deism inadequate is that the relation between the Creator and the creation not established. Although God creates the world at a certain point of time, He keeps no intimate relationship with the finite beings and remains away. As regards the problem of creation in this doctrine, a question may reasonably arise as to why He felt the necessity of creating the universe if eventually, He should transcend it.

The doctrine also leads to yet another question- Does He create the world out of pre-existing materials, extraneous to His Being? An answer in the affirmative involves a dualism of spirit and matter, while one in the negative establishes that God created the universe out of Himself, without explaining the possibility or cause of His subsequent dissociation from His own creation.

If God is indifferent to the world He created and leaves it alone to function independently according to its own universal laws - the image of the Infinite Person, as a result, becomes too crude and anthropomorphic to suit or satisfy the cravings of a theistic mind for an intimate God. Since the aim of religion is harmony and cordiality between the finite and the infinite, Galloway comments on the doctrines of Deism and called it "psychologically false and spiritually inadequate."

Monotheism gradually leads to monism. On the other extreme of Deism, we come across the theory of Pantheism which gives the idea of God as the immanent principle of the world. The pantheistic view identifies nature with God.

6.8 MONISM

Monism is a higher conception of unity. The monotheistic conception, regarded purely as such, is bound to involve dualism. What it aims at is only unity of Godhead- the reduction of the many Gods to one who is above and apart from the world which He makes and guides. Monotheism regards nature as set over against God and can therefore satisfy the longing for

unity only in a qualified sense. But monism traces the whole of existence to a single source. The pantheistic view identifies nature with God. Monotheism leads to monism. One reality is conceived, which is manifested in diverse ways. 'That One' was later identified with the Atman or Brahman in the Upanishads.

6.9 PANTHEISM

The term pantheism is derived from the Greek roots 'pan' which means 'all' and 'theos' which means 'God'. Thus, pantheism is either the belief that the universe is God and worthy of worship or that God is the sum total of all that there is and combined substances, forces, natural laws which we see around us are but manifestations of God. The central point of the pantheistic doctrine is to deny the difference between God and nature which is the necessary implication of monotheism. Pantheism is the belief that the physical universe is equivalent to God, and that there is no division between a Creator and the substance of its creation. God is conceived here not as transcending nature but as immanent in it. The world does not proceed from God, but is itself God.

In the western philosophy, we find its origin in the teaching of Parmenides and Xenophanes as well as in the philosophy of Spinoza. While in the east, it is found in the philosophy of Samkara.

According to Spinoza, God is substance and substance is God. This substance is one absolute spiritual reality. Like Spinoza, Hegelian form of idealism is pantheistic in character. Hegel considers Reality as the Absolute mind or will. God is infinite and omnipresent. This theory is related to the Upanishadic saying "*Aham Brahmasmi*" (I am Brahman) - Bruhadaranyaka Upanishad, 2.5. 19 and "*Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman*" (All This is verily Brahman)- Bruh. Up. 1.4.10.

In the theory of Pantheism, human values like freedom of individuals, truth, beauty, goodness and all ethical achievements were lost into obscurity. The root of all religious aims thus shattered. Pantheism proceeded on its way to an Absolute, who is not, for all practical purposes, the God of religion. Pantheism overlooks the distinction between cause and effect. Some questions arise against Pantheistic view: if God is immanent or if He is within this world then how can God be real, eternal and infinite? If we believe that all is God and God is all, then how to explain the problem of evil in the world?

In deism God is completely separated from His creation and in Pantheism all including God, is perfectly merged, beyond recognition, into a "block universe", rejecting the concept of history, progress and evolution. While deism lays emphasis on the transcendent nature of God and pantheism professes His immanent nature, panentheism (Theism) steers a middle course between the two central ideas. It explains God as neither transcendent nor immanent, but both transcendent and immanent.

6.10 PANENTHEISM

The term panentheism means "all-in-God" (pan-en-theos). Panentheism like pantheism is the belief that the physical universe is joined to a God. However, it also believes that a God is greater than the material universe. According to this belief system God interpenetrates every part of nature, but at the same time fully distinct from nature. So this God is part of nature, but still retains an independent identity. Panentheists also believe that this God has a mind, created the universe, and cares about each of us personally. Pantheists on the other hand believe that the universe itself is divine and do not believe in personal or creator Gods. According to Hartshorne, panentheism can be understood through an analogy: just as a single organism exists both as a collection of semi-autonomous individual cells and as an autonomous individual who is more than just a collection of cells, God can be seen as both a collection of all the constituent parts of reality and as "something more" than the universe itself. Although we, along with the rest of existence, can be thought of as part of God's "body," God's mind or consciousness extends beyond that body and causes God to be more than just a collection of parts. As parts of God, our freedom is not absolute - just as the freedom of cells in our body is not absolute. At the same time, our actions and thoughts are not dependent upon or controlled by God any more than we are able to consciously control and direct the actions of our individual cells. We may be more than our cells, but we depend upon our cells acting independently of our minds in order for us to grow and even to be in the first place.

The panentheistic God, therefore, is capable of meeting the practical demands of human religious aspirations and devotions; He is thought to be the source of human values and ideals. Nature, life and mind are not treated as independent entities but considered to be the expressions of the divine mind.

Panentheism holds that 'all things' are in God. If all things are in God then God cannot be more than all things. God will have the same status with the things. It also creates religious difficulties by producing a sense of dualism. In pantheism 'all things are in God' indicates a dualism of 'all things' and 'God'. God is both immanent and transcendent. The question arises, if God is immanent then how can God be transcendent? It is logically inconsistent to make both the claims together?

6.11 AUTOTHEISM

Autotheism is the viewpoint that divinity is inherently within 'oneself' and that one has the ability to achieve godhood. Autotheism can also refer to the belief that one's self is a deity, within the context of subjectivism.

6.12 ATHEISM (NOT GODISM)

Atheism means that either there is no God, or if there is, He cannot in any way affect human existence. To support this conception evidence is offered consisting of our rational understanding and knowledge, scientific development and materialistic ideas. In atheism, questions regarding God are answered from scientific knowledge. Atheism claims that the religious beliefs in human history have nothing to do about the existence of God. According to materialistic philosophers, our knowledge and experience in terms of God and the world contain nothing but material objects. So far no consistent or satisfactory theory of the nature of God has been explained by philosophers of theism. Theists answers related to Problem of evil, acceptance of one unique God, relation of Creator and creator are not free from conflicts.

Atheism as a theory of the non-existence of God is not found as a satisfactory theory. Some reasons are indicated below:

Firstly, though the existence of God is completely denied, it cannot be totally ignored. For in order to explain the world we have to assume that there must be a creator, sustainer, controller of the universe.

Secondly, although there is scientific development, still scientific development cannot fade away the shadow of God in the form of Supreme Being from the heart of the people.

Different thinkers and philosophers have given their ideas regarding the non-existence of God. But in as far as they ignore the religious experience of the theist their arguments are partial and for the sake of argument alone.

6.13 AGNOSTICISM

The term Agnosticism is coined by T. H. Huxley to express a position of suspended belief. Agnosticism literally means "not-knowism". It is principally applied to the belief with respect to God. It does not give us confirmation about the sufficient reason to affirm or deny the existence of God. Agnostics believe that the existence of God or gods is unknown or inherently unknowable. The proponents of agnostic theory were Aldous Huxley, Herbert Spencer, David Hume and Voltaire. All agnostic philosophers try to consider God in terms of matter or objects which are within space and time. Huxley said, the existence of God may not be denied, but we cannot know His real nature. Hume is an agnostic and skeptic philosopher. He doubted the existence of God. But Hume fails to give a satisfactory opinion to solve the problems of reality. He does not put a consistent level between empirical and metaphysical ideas.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Explain different concepts of theism which refer to disbelief or doubt in the existence of God.

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2. What is henotheism?

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3. What is deism?

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4. What is monotheism and how is it different from monism?

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5. What is the distinction between pantheism and panentheism?

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6.14 LET US SUM UP

This unit gives a descriptive picture of different conceptions of God or theisms. Some theologians in their study of the phenomenon of religion show that “God consciousness” in humans came first through experiencing fear. Theism is the belief in the existence of deities. Polytheism means belief in many Gods. Monotheism is the belief in the existence of a single God. Various theologians and philosophers through time have believed that monotheism "evolved" from polytheism, arguing that polytheistic faiths were more primitive and monotheistic faiths were more advanced. Henotheism involves believing that multiple Gods exist and focuses on worship of just one of those Gods. Henotheism is a step from polytheism to monotheism.

Deism, Pantheism and Panentheism (or theism) are considered to be the three forms of Monotheism. Monotheism gradually leads to monism. While deism lays emphasis on the transcendent nature of God and pantheism professes His immanent nature, panentheism

(Theism) steers a middle course between the two central ideas. It explains God as neither transcendent nor immanent, but both transcendent and immanent. Sometimes the term 'theism' is used as equivalent to the term 'panentheism' or 'concrete monotheism.'

Atheism refers to the belief that there is no divinity and agnosticism is the belief that the existence of God or gods is unknown and/or inherently unknowable.

6.15 KEY WORDS

Immanence: The theory of immanence holds that the divine encompasses or is manifested in the material world. It is held by some philosophical and metaphysical theories of divine presence. Immanence is usually applied in monotheistic, pantheistic, panentheistic faiths to suggest that the spiritual world permeates the mundane.

Transcendence: In religion, transcendence is the aspect of a deity's nature and power that is wholly independent of the material universe, beyond all known physical laws.

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6.17 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The concept of theism is involved in a number of concepts which refer to disbelief or doubt in the existence of God. They are:

Nontheism: The absence of clearly identified belief in any deity. Nontheistic religions include Taoism and Zen Buddhism.

Antitheism: A direct opposition to theism, or else the view that theism is destructive.

Atheism: Atheism refers to the belief that there is no divinity. This includes both strong atheism, the belief that no deity exists, and weak atheism, an absence of belief in the existence of deities.

Agnosticism: The belief that the existence of God or gods is unknown and/or inherently unknowable. This includes strong agnosticism, the view that the question of the existence of deities is inherently unknowable or meaningless, and weak agnosticism, which states that the question of the existence of deities is currently unknown, but not inherently unknowable.

2. Henotheism involves believing that multiple Gods exist and focuses on worship of just one of those Gods. However, henotheism allows that more than one God may be worthy of worship. It is the belief in 'one' God as distinguished from monotheism or belief in 'one only' God. Max Muller represented it as a definite stage in the progress from polytheistic to monotheistic belief.
3. Deists adopt the belief that the single existing God is personal in nature and transcendent from the created universe. However, they reject the belief, common among monotheists in the West, that this God is immanent, which is to say presently active in the created universe. According to the deistic view of reality, God created the universe but then moved away and separated itself from creation.
4. The term monotheism comes from the Greek word 'monos', which means 'one', and 'theos', which means 'God'. Thus, monotheism is the belief in the existence of a single

God. The largest monotheistic religious systems are Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism.

Monism is a higher conception of unity. The monotheistic conception, regarded purely as such, is bound to involve dualism. What it aims at is only unity of Godhead- the reduction of the many Gods to one who is above and apart from the world which He makes and guides. Monotheism regards nature as set over against God and can therefore satisfy the longing for unity only in a qualified sense. But monism traces the whole of existence to a single source.

5. The term pantheism is built upon the Greek roots 'pan' which means 'all', and 'theos' which means 'God'. Thus, pantheism is either the belief that the universe is God and worthy of worship or that God is the sum total of all there is and that the combined substances, forces, and natural laws which we see around us are but manifestations of God.

The term panentheism means "all-in-God" (pan-en-theos). Panentheism like pantheism is the belief that the physical universe is joined to a God. However, it also believes that a God is greater than the material universe. According to this belief system God interpenetrates every part of nature, but at the same time God is fully distinct from nature. So God is part of nature but still retains an independent identity.

UNIT 7 NATURE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*

Structure

7.0 Objectives

7.1 Introduction

7.2 God as Creator

7.3 God is Eternal

7.4 God is Omnipotent

7.5 God's Omniscience

7.6 God is Simple

7.7 God's Necessity

7.8 Let us Sum up

7.9 Key Words

7.10 Further Readings and References

7.11 Answers to check your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we are going to study about the nature and attributes of God. Nature and attributes of God are very important features of all religious traditions. These serve as keys to faith in God for the believers. Here we will discuss the main nature and attributes of God as commonly accepted by the scholars of religious thoughts. We will critically examine the theories of different religious thinkers on the nature and attributes of God. By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- Have an over-all glance of the nature and attributes of God.
- Rationally distinguish between the Infinite Being (God) and finite beings.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

What is God? What do we mean when we use the word 'God'? Do all who use the word God mean the same thing by it? Can we assume that there is just one concept of God? Over

* Alok Nag, Vishwa Jyoti Gurukul, Varanasi.

the years we know people have thought of God radically different ways.

Today many philosophical and religious problems about 'God' arise from misunderstandings about exactly what that word is taken to mean in different religious traditions. For example, within Western religious traditions, to speak of God as literally existing in a particular place, a being 'out there' in some way, external to the world, is to limit him. And a being so limited cannot be God. So we need to be clear that any argument about an external, separate entity is not the understanding of God in Semitic religious tradition.

We know ordinary things exist because we can define them, set boundaries to them, know what they are. In other words, things are known to exist because they are limited. We can stand outside them and point to them. But if God is infinite and eternal, he is everywhere all the time. It would not be possible to point to him as we can with the finite objects, because it would not be possible to point away from him. It is, therefore, clear that God is not part of the universe. God is not outside the universe either; for, if he is infinite, he cannot be outside anything.

That does not mean that we cannot employ symbolic and poetic language to express belief in God. But such language needs to be recognized for what it is, and not taken literally. Once taken literally, the God it refers to becomes a useless or dangerous idol. For the purpose of our discussions about the existence of God, we need to have some basic definition of what the term 'God' means. R Swinburne in *The Coherence of Theism* offers the following definition that includes the nature and attributes of God:

God is a person, without a body (i.e. a spirit), present everywhere (Omnipresent), the creator and sustainer of the universe, a free agent, able to do everything (i.e. omnipotent), knowing all things (Omniscient), perfectly good, a source of moral obligation, immutable, eternal, a necessary being, holy, and worthy of worship. Similarly, many thinkers of Religions describe God with many attributes such as: God is – Omnipotent, Omniscient, Eternal, Simple, Necessity, Good, One, Changeless, Love, and Perfect. God cannot be either male or female, but for convenience he will be referred to as male. We shall deal with a few of these attributes of God.

7.2 GOD AS CREATOR

According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said

to have created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no 'nothingness' out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator.

Now there is another side to this argument. If there is no matter external to God through which he creates, then God cannot be separate from creation. For example we cannot say 'There is something of beauty', and then point to something else and say 'There is its creator.' In other words, to say that God is creator *ex nihilo* implies that everything is alive with his life.

According to the eternalist thinkers, temporality is an essential feature of creatures. They hold that the universe was created with time and not in time. It implies that the creation is the product of a divine timeless decree. God is before creation not by virtue of existing at a time when the universe was not yet in existence, but by virtue of his necessity and the creation's contingency. It implies that everything created is necessarily in time, mutable and so they are corruptible. On the other hand, anything not created is necessarily eternal, immutable and incorruptible.

7.3 GOD IS ETERNAL

What does it mean to call God eternal? Two main answers have been given to this question. According to the first, 'God is eternal' means that God is non-temporal or timeless. In other words, He is in no way limited or conditioned by time. According to the second, it means that God had no beginning and that He can have no end that he is interminable. God has always existed and will continue to exist forever. God's mode of being involves no 'before' or 'after' and no 'earlier than' or 'later than'. In other words, in God past, present and future are all given at once as a single now. It is completely without successiveness. God does not comprise of anything that we could recognize as a history or biography. This view is called 'the classical view of divine eternity.' The second view says that God is temporal, according to which it is incoherent to suppose that

God is outside time. But it is coherent to suppose that God has always existed and always will.

Those who say that God is timeless are committed to the view that God is both changeless and impassible. But divine immutability and impassibility is not entailed by the temporal view of divine eternity. According to its defenders a timeless God must be vastly different from people. Such a God can, for example, have no thoughts which succeed each other. And such a God can have no memories, expectations or emotions. But if God exists in time, then he might be thoroughly mutable. And, like people, he might have thoughts which come after each other. God might also have memories, expectations and emotions. He might be much like us, as defenders of the temporal view often seem to take him to be.

7.3.1 Arguments in Defense of Classical View of Divine Eternity

- God is cause of all change. But change and time are inseparably connected. So God cannot be something existing in time.
- God is the creator who accounts for the existence of the universe. But one can only make sense of things existing in time in so far as one thinks of them as parts of the universe. So God cannot be something existing in time.
- God is perfect and unlimited. But nothing in time can be this. Among other things temporal existence always implies loss. Things in time lose what they once had because things in time are subject to change. And they are always vulnerable to what the future might bring. But something which is perfect and unlimited cannot lose what it has or be vulnerable to what might come.
- God exists is necessarily true. So something about God is his necessary existence. God is all that he can be, for any reality he lacks but could possess would need grounding in something else than himself. So God must be changeless and unchangeable. And if God is this, then God must be timeless.
- Things in time occupy space. But God does not. So God is outside of time.
- If God exists necessarily, and if God is essentially temporal, then time exists necessarily. But temporal things do not exist of necessity. So God should not be thought of as a temporal thing.

God's eternity follows from divine necessity. For, if God exists necessarily, it is impossible

that He does not exist. Therefore, He can never go out or come into being. God just exists without beginning or end.

In other words, Eternity of God has been used in four different senses:

1. Timelessly logical and mathematical truth.
2. Enduring through all times.
3. Time is retained and yet transcended as total simultaneity. And,
4. As the fulfillment of all values in the best way.

Hence it has been maintained by some thinkers that God is changeless with regard to his essence, but has change in so far as his accidents are concerned.

God sees events as taking place in time, but from all eternity those events have been the same to Him as after they have taken place. God's eternity could be described as follows: Eternity is not, as men believe, before and after us, an endless line. No, it is a circle, infinitely great—all the circumference with creation thronged; God at the center dwells, beholding all. And as we move in this eternal round, the finite portion which alone we see, behind us is the past; what lies before we call the future. But to Him who dwells far at the center, equally remote from every point of the circumference, both are alike, the future and the past.

Within the tradition of classical theism which originated from ideas in Greek philosophy and is found developed in the Christian tradition by Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas, God is definitely eternal rather than everlasting. He is not simply an ongoing part of the universe, but is beyond the whole process of change.

The Philosophers who regard God as eternal generally see him as embodying the structure of reality, out of which emerges space and time and the world which we encounter with the senses. This is highlighted by the idea of creation out of nothing *ex nihilo*— not at some point in the past, but as a bringing into reality everything that exists here and now.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What does the traditional theism say about God as creator?

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7.4 GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

The word Omnipotence is composed of two Latin words: *Omnis* (all) and *potens* (powerful). It means the ability to do all things or to have absolute power. God is supposed to be a power to do all things. The title ‘omnipotent’ signifies that God possesses all might or power.

God has power chiefly as the creator and sustainer of the order and ruler of the created world. God is the Lord of the world and it is subject to him. He has power over it. But should it not also be said that God must have power in a somewhat stronger sense – not just power over things, but power of an unlimited or infinite kind? Many thinkers arrive at a conclusion that God possesses power of this kind which is intrinsic to him and therefore he is called Omnipotent.

What does one mean by calling God omnipotent? According to some thinkers, God is omnipotent since he can do even what seems logically impossible. Still others are of the opinion that the omnipotence of God does not mean, that He can do things that are logically absurd or things that are against his will. For example, he cannot lie, because the holiness of His character prevents Him from willing to lie. And He cannot create a rock larger than He can lift; nor both an irresistible power and an immovable object; nor can He draw a line between two points shorter than a straight one; nor put two mountains adjacent to one another without creating a valley between them. He cannot do any of these things because they are not objects of power. They are self-contradictory and logically absurd.

Some scholars think that God’s omnipotence means his ability to bring about the existence of any conceivable thing, events or state of affairs. Distinguishing between passive power (as ‘I can be shot’) and active power (as ‘I can sing’), Thomas Aquinas argues that God is omnipotent since he can make (active power) anything to exist which can be thought of

as (absolutely speaking) able to be. God is omnipotent in the sense that there is no definite limited range of possibilities in what he can bring about. On the contrary, the beings belonging to a distinct genus and species are limited in they can bring about, for they can only produce effects which are characteristics of things in that genus and species. According to Thomas Aquinas, however, God is not limited in anyway. If God creates out of nothing, his power is not limited. If his act of creation is not something that took place in the past, but an ongoing feature of life, it implies that God brings everything about, without being limited by the material that he uses to do so. In this sense, the idea that God is omnipotent is implied in the doctrine of creation. It would be illogical to call God the 'creator' in this absolute sense and then to say that there are things he cannot do.

7.5 GOD'S OMNISCIENCE

God's omniscience means that he is all-knowing. Since God is not a bodily being he does not possess sense organs and therefore does not have sensations and emotions. It is argued that if God is eternal in the sense that his existence is not extended in time, then he is changeless or immutable then there can be no process in God like he coming to know something or reasoning something out. And if God is not in time then his knowledge cannot be located at any moment in time. He must have possessed all knowledge from the beginning; for otherwise He would be learning all the while, and that would of itself constitute a change in Him and would necessarily lead to even more manifest changes. And if God does not depend on creatures for anything, then his knowledge can not in any respect be produced by creatures. It must belong to God as he is in himself. He is omniscient.

According to theism, from all eternity God has possessed all knowledge and wisdom. God's omniscience may also be argued from His infinity. In the scriptures God is pictured as an infinite being. Thus His knowledge must be infinite.

Some thinkers also argue that God's omniscience includes perfect foreknowledge. From eternity God has known all things that have come to pass and all things that are yet come to pass. He has ever known exactly what things would have come to pass if His immutable purpose had been different from what it is at any point.

The basis of God's foreknowledge of all things that come to pass is His own purpose. God could not have known that a thing would come to pass unless it had been certain to come to pass. God's eternal, immutable purpose is the only scriptural basis for the

certainty of future events.

The difference between the intelligence of God and human beings can be stated as follows: God and human beings are intelligent; but in what manner? Man is intelligent by the act of reasoning, but the supreme intelligence lies under no necessity to reason. He requires neither premise nor consequences; nor even the simple form of a proposition. His knowledge is purely intuitive. He beholds equally what is and what will be. All truths are to Him as one idea, as all places are but one point, and all times one moment.

Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:

- God is wholly perfect. He cannot be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is all knowing.
- The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
- God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
- Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that God is, knowledge is something we can ascribe to God.

These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing.

If God is omniscient, he knows everything. There can be two ways of looking at this argument:

1. If he is eternal, existing outside time altogether, then his omniscience is timeless. His knowledge of past, present and future is simultaneous. It is not that he correctly guesses what will happen in the future, but that – for him – there is no future. His knowledge is eternally present.
2. If he is everlasting, then he will know everything that has happened in the past, and everything that is happening in the present. He will also be aware now of those things in the present which will determine what happens in the future. In this sense, God might be said to ‘know’ the future, even though he has not been there yet!

The central problem with this argument for theists concerns human freedom and responsibility. If God knows what we think we freely choose to do, is not our freedom an illusion? Once someone knows that something is going to happen, then that thing is not a

matter of chance, but inevitable. If it's not inevitable, then God cannot know it. In other words, if God knows what is to come, how can the future be anything but predestined or unpreventable?

In Short

- If God is omniscient, he knows everything.
- He therefore knows that I will do X.
- Therefore, I am not free to choose not to do X.

Can we then argue that God's omniscience and contingency are compatible notions? Many philosophers have suggested that we can. Most famous argument is that of Philosopher Boethius. According to him God is eternal, meaning 'the whole, simultaneous and perfect possession of boundless life.' According to Boethius, therefore, God's knowledge is not best thought of as foreknowledge. It should rather be thought of as 'knowledge of a never passing instant.' In that God sees future things present to him. For Boethius, God does not foreknow, God simply knows. This argument suggests therefore, that God might know that at some point in the future I will freely choose to do X. In this case, my freedom is part of what God knows – therefore I remain free to choose.

But this argument seems to create a logical problem as follows:

- I am free to choose if, and only if, there are at least two possible options at the moment of choosing.
- If God knows that I am free to choose, he must allow two possible outcomes.
- Therefore he cannot know which of those outcomes I will choose without denying me my freedom to make that decision.

An example might be: 'You can choose any colour you like, as long as it's red!' (No freedom) or 'You can choose any colour you like.' (Freedom, but I cannot insist that you choose red.)

One way out of this dilemma could be to say that we freely make choices based on many factors, both conscious and unconscious. We do not fully understand these, and therefore do not fully appreciate why we make the choices we do. On the other hand, an omniscient God would understand all about us, and would therefore know exactly those factors,

including our desire not to be predictable, which lead to our apparently ‘free’ choice.

Check Your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are reasons given by those who hold the view that God is all-knowing?

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7.6 GOD IS SIMPLE

The claim that God is simple is an ancient one. But what do we mean to say that God is simple? A famous account of divine simplicity comes in Augustine of Hippo’s *The City of God*. Here he says, There is one sole Good, which is simple and therefore unchangeable; and that is God. By this Good all good things were created but they are not simple, and for that reason they are changeable. The term ‘simple’ applies to things which are in the fullest and truest sense divine, because in them there is no difference between substance and quality.

According to Augustine, God is simple because he is immutable. But Augustine also thinks that God is simple as not possessing different properties or attributes. He says that the expressions such as, ‘the knowledge of God’ or ‘the goodness of God’ are not distinct realities in the divine substance.

According to Anselm of Canterbury, ‘The supreme nature is simple, thus all things which can be said of its essence are simple one and the same thing in it.’ Anselm acknowledges that those who believe in God use different statements when speaking of God’s nature. They say, for example,

‘God is good’, ‘God is just’, ‘God is wise.’ But these expressions do not imply that God is something with really distinct attributes. According to Anselm, there is no distinction between God and anything we might want to call ‘the attributes of God.’ Therefore, both for Augustine and Anselm, the various attributes the believer ascribe to God in sentences

such as, 'God is X', 'God is Y' , and so on, are not distinct realities in God. They are God. Some defenders of divine simplicity however, have said more than this. For they add that God is simple in the sense that there is no real distinction between God's nature (or essence) and God's existence. According to their account, God is simple since he is immutable and since he has no attributes really distinct from himself. They also argue that God is simple since existence belongs to God by nature. God is simple since God is Being or existence without qualification. Thomas Aquinas famously puts it, God is *Ipsum Esse Subsistens* (Subsisting Being itself). According to Aquinas, God is simple since he is immutable and since he is not a being with different attributes. For Aquinas however, God is simple since he is not a 'composite' of essence and existence.

The following arguments have been put forward in support of divine simplicity:

- God cannot be thought of as having changeable properties, distinct from himself, since God is the source of all changes.
- God cannot be thought of as having distinct temporal properties; since God as creator of the universe, must transcend time.
- God is not a material object. So he cannot be thought of as having parts in the way that material objects have parts.
- Something with different properties depends for its existence on the existence and conjunction of those properties. But God cannot be something which depends for existence on anything. God is the reason why anything exists at all.
- One cannot distinguish between God and God's existence or between God's nature and God's existence, since to do so would imply that existence is something which God receives from another. But the being of God is wholly underived.

These lines of argument are insisting that there must be a dramatic difference between God and creatures or contingent beings. Compositeness or lack of simplicity is very much a feature of things in the world. These are material, temporal and dependent. How shall we preserve God's transcendence in relation to the created order? For defenders of belief in divine simplicity, oneway of doing so is to teach that God is simple.

7.7 GOD'S NECESSITY

Since Aristotle, in western philosophical theology God has been conceived as a necessary

existent being. Probably, for Aristotle God's necessary existence meant simply his immunity to generation and corruption. This conception is connected with the contemporary notion of God's 'factual necessity' which is stated as follows: given that God exists, it is impossible that he ever came into or will go out of existence. He is uncaused, eternal, incorruptible and indestructible.

During the Middle Ages, Islamic Philosophers such as al-Farabi began to enunciate an even more powerful conception of God's necessity. According to them, God's non-existence is logically impossible. This conception of God's necessary existence lay at the heart of Anselm's Ontological argument. It states: if God's non-existence is logically impossible, it follows that he must exist. God is logically necessary being.

Powerful theological and philosophical reasons are given for taking God's existence to be logically necessary. Philosophically, the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being implies his necessary existence in this sense, since logically contingent existence is not as great as necessary existence. If God is by definition God is necessary being, in the sense of logical necessity, cosmological questions simply do arise with respect to God. His existence is self-explanatory in a way that the existence of no other being is. The existence of necessary being answers the question, "why is there something rather than nothing?" The conceptualist argument also entails the existence of a logically necessary being in order to ground the realm of abstract objects. The moral argument leads naturally to such a being, since moral values and principles are not plausibly logically contingent. The motivation for claiming that God is logically necessary being stems from the conviction that God is necessarily the ultimate being in the universe.

Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in the answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing at all?' If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

Check Your progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Traditionally, what are the reasons given for God as necessary being?

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7.8 LET US SUM UP

The discussion on the nature and attributes of God helps us to understand what people mean by God. In the course of our analysis we discovered that God is the creator or the ultimate cause of all the finite beings of the universe. Therefore, he is logically an uncaused cause. He is simple and therefore is not limited in his being and knowledge. The critical and analytical survey of the nature and attributes of God leads us to comprehend the implications this has for religious belief.

By definition God is the locus and source of all values. Such a being is absolute goodness and worthy of worship.

7.9 KEY WORDS

Atheism: The conviction that there is no such being called God.

Agnosticism: The view that there is no conclusive evidence to decide whether God exists or not.

Deism: The idea of an external designer God who created the world, but is not immanent within it.

Idolatry: The literal identification of God with any individual thing or concept.

Pantheism: An identification of God with the physical universe.

Panentheism: The belief that God is within everything.

Theism: Belief in the existence of God.

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7.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. According to traditional theism, God is said to be the creator of the universe, and he is said to have created it out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). This is an important feature of theistic belief, for it implies that God is not an external force working with matter or coming in to animate it, nor is he an agent over against other agents. Rather, he is the absolute origin of everything in the universe. There is no external material object, no 'nothingness' out of which things we have in the world can be made. Everything that comes into existence does so as a creative act of God. This is the implication of the idea of God as creator.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Those who hold that God is all-knowing give the following reasons:
 - God is wholly perfect. He cannot be this if he lacks knowledge. Therefore, God is

all knowing.

- The Order in the world can be accounted for in terms of a God which has knowledge.
- God is the creator of the universe. But creating is an act of intelligence. So God has knowledge.
- Knowledge is something which exists in the world. Since God accounts for all that exists in the world and since this must reflect that knowledge is something we can ascribe to God.

These arguments prove that God is omniscient or all-knowing

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Traditionally, the arguments were given for necessary being for two reasons: The first is to halt the regress of causes. Of necessary being no further questions can be asked. The second function is to provide a sense of ultimacy to the explanation. It eliminates any vagueness or ambiguity in the answer to the question 'why is there something rather than nothing at all?' If God is personal, then we can speak of him as the cause of the universe. There is no mystery about the ultimate foundation of existence, for causal questions and ultimacy questions come together in the one logically necessary person: God.

UNIT 8 TRADITIONAL ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Augustine on the Existence of God
- 8.3 Ontological Argument
- 8.4 Cosmological Argument (Five Ways of Aquinas)
- 8.5 Kalam Cosmological Argument
- 8.6 Teleological Argument
- 8.7 Moral Argument
- 8.8 Argument from Religious Experience
- 8.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.10 Key Words
- 8.11 Further Readings and References
- 8.12 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to give the student some of the traditional arguments about the Existence of God. While it gives some arguments, there is no attempt made to formulate a universal proof for the existence of God. What we are trying to do is to examine some of the traditional arguments about God's existence. The basis for these arguments is reason, but then we realize and have to accept that the topic we are studying, namely, the Existence of God, is such that we cannot come to any universal conclusion, given the topic of our study. Hence we shall examine the place that proofs hold in such a context and the significance of some of these arguments. Thus, by the end of this unit you should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of some proofs for the existence of God;
- to differentiate the ontological, cosmological, teleological and moral arguments;

* Savio D'Souza, Salesian Institute of Philosophy, Nasik.

- to relate it to the positions of Augustine, Bonaventure and Duns Scotus
- to understand the character of an argument for the existence of God

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Most believers do not need proofs for the existence of God, even so we feel the need to speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. On the other hand, most non-believers or atheists would not feel the need of proving their non-belief or non-acceptance of God, because they see this as most natural. In such a scenario, the responsibility then seems to be on the believers to give some arguments to prove the existence of God. While we agree that there can never be a universal proof for the existence of God, even so we can definitely speak of arguments in favour of the existence of God. The aim of this chapter is to examine certain arguments that have traditionally been used to prove, or demonstrate, the existence of God. We shall examine different types of arguments, and we shall also look at some individual philosophers, who had significant arguments to prove the existence of God.

We need to look into the actual demonstration of God's existence, that is, the ways to show that the proposition "God exists" is true. We need to ask the question, "Is this proposition evident or not?" Evident is that which shows itself to us directly, so that it does not need any demonstration. For a proposition to be evident, at least as far as we are concerned, both the subject and the predicate must be known to us. If they are not, the proposition is not evident. Does this then mean that it is not true? No. It may not be evident but it may be true, although the truth of this proposition may have to be demonstrated. If the proposition "God exists" were evident, then there would not be any atheists. But there are atheists, because this is not an evident proposition, although it may be true, and certain, and therefore, it needs to be demonstrated. This is necessary because the terms of the proposition are not known to us directly. Since we do not see God directly, we have to prove that God exists. But the question remains that is a universal proof for the existence of God possible?

8.2 AUGUSTINE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In the teachings of St. Augustine there is a vast difference between God and the world. God is eternal, is transcendent, all good, all wise, absolute in every way. He is the cause of everything, the creator of the universe out of nothing. He also taught that God in the beginning, predetermined everything so that he knew from the first what would happen to all his creatures through-out eternity. The God of Augustine is the idealization of everything that man considers good and worthy. He is absolute, perfect goodness, the source, and creator of everything. He knows everything, and has so controlled the universe that everything is determined by him forever.

St. Augustine's central proof of God's existence is from thought, the proof from within. It begins from the apprehension of the mind of necessary and changeless truths which is present to all. This truth is superior to the mind which cannot change it or amend it. The mind varies in its apprehension of truth, but truth remains ever the same. Eternal truths must be founded on being, and reflect the ground of all truth. They reflect the necessity and immutability of God, who is the ground of eternal and necessary truths.

St. Augustine also seeks to prove the existence of God from the external and corporeal world but these are more like hints, or reminders. He was keen to show that all creation proclaims God, who is recognized in the dynamic attitude of the soul towards God. The soul seeks happiness, and some seek it outside themselves. St. Augustine tries to show that creation cannot give the soul the perfect happiness it seeks, but points upwards to the living God who must be sought within. He seeks to demonstrate the existence of God from his effects. He views the rational knowledge of God in close connection with the search of the soul for the Truth which is a kind of self-revelation of God to the soul.

8.3 ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The first type of argument that is used to show the existence of God is the ontological argument, and it is so called because it attempts to show that the very concept of God, implies its existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God then he or she ought to be able to understand and accept that God must exist. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, who first gave a serious formulation of this argument. His argument was as follows:

God is the greatest possible being – “that than which nothing greater can be thought”.

God exists at least in the mind or understanding.

A being, who exists only in the mind, is not so great as a being, who exists in reality as well as in the mind.

If God existed only in the mind, he would not be the greatest possible being.

Therefore, “that than which nothing greater can be thought” must exist in the mind as well as in reality.

Hence, God must exist in reality (as well as in the mind).

This argument met with many objections because of its claim that the existence of something can be inferred merely from its definition.

Gaunilo, a Benedictine monk and a contemporary of Anselm, produced a parallel argument, substituting the concept of God with that of the “most perfect island”. Following Anselm’s argument, logically the ‘most perfect island’ must exist in reality. But that is obviously not the case, thus, casting doubt on Anselm’s argument. But Anselm replied that this argument applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique, in the sense that God is the only necessary being, and includes the conception of aseity – self-existence – as a part of its meaning. All other beings, as the ‘island’ are finite and dependent objects, and hence not necessary. Hence, we can always conceive of a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a more perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island.

Descartes reopened the discussion on the ontological argument by reformulating it, and asserting that existence must be among the defining properties of God. Just as the defining characteristic of a triangle is that the sum of its internal angles is equal to the sum of two right angles, in a similar manner existence must be among the defining characteristics of God. Although, Immanuel Kant objected to this argument, because he said, that one cannot legitimately think of ‘existence’ as a property which an entity may or may not have, or have to varying degrees. When we say of something that ‘it exists’, we are talking of it as already actualized. Existence is not a ‘property’ of a thing, as for instance it being red or blue or yellow is, and as a property, it doesn’t add anything to the conception of a thing. This debate of whether existence can be considered a property or not, marks a lasting issue in the history of modern western thought, which was continued by Bertrand Russell well into the twentieth century.

8.4 COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Another argument that strives to prove the existence of God is the so-called ‘Cosmological Argument’. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world, to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle, and have been presented by St. Thomas Aquinas, who used Aristotle’s ideas as the intellectual medium to put down his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the ‘Five Ways’. His arguments could be presented as follows.

First Way (from motion)

Everything that moves is moved by something.

That mover is in turn moved by something else again.

But this chain of movers cannot be infinite or movement would not have started in the first place. Therefore, there must be an unmoved mover, whom we call God.

Second Way (from the nature of the efficient cause)

Everything has a cause.

Every cause itself has a cause.

But you cannot have an infinite number of causes.

Therefore, there must be an uncaused cause, which causes everything to happen without itself being caused by anything else.

Such an uncaused cause is what people understand by ‘God.’

Third Way (from possibility and necessity)

Individual things come into existence and later cease to exist.

Therefore, at one time none of them were in existence.

But something comes into existence only as a result of something else that already exists. Not all things can be ONLY possible. There must be one that is of itself

necessary. Therefore, there must be a being whose existence is necessary, by which we understand 'God'.

Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the **KALAM ARGUMENT**. It was spelt out by the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century.

8.5 KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The Kalam Argument for the existence of God originated and became highly developed in Islamic theology during the late Middle Ages. It gets its name from the word "kalam", which refers to Arabic philosophy or theology. It is an Arabic term that literally means 'argue' or 'discuss', though it has also been translated as 'theology' or 'dialectical theology'. Traditionally, the argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existence, in the real world, as well as an argument demonstrating the problem with infinite temporal regress, thus, showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been corroborated by scientific discoveries, and mathematical insights viz., aspects of the Big Bang theory and Hilbert's paradox of the Grand Hotel. The most thorough and articulate proponent of the argument today is Dr. William Lane Craig.

8.5.1 Statement of the (modern) deductive Kalam Cosmological Argument:

Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence – causal principle.

The universe (space, time, and matter) began to exist – it is corroborated by the implications of two scientific arguments, the Big Bang theory, and the second law of thermodynamics.

Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

Sub-argument:

As the cause of the universe (space, time, and matter), the cause must be outside of space, time and matter, and therefore be spaceless, timeless, and immaterial. Moreover, the cause must be a personal agent, otherwise there would be no justification for an impersonal cause to be able to produce the universe at any point in time.

Therefore, a personal God exists.

The first premise of the argument is the claim that everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence. In order to infer from this that the universe has a cause of its existence the proponent of the Kalam Cosmological argument must prove that the past is finite, that the universe began to exist at a certain point in time. The crucial premise of the Kalam Cosmological argument, then, is the second: “The universe began to exist”. How do we know that the universe has a beginning of its existence? Might not the universe stretch back in time into infinity, always having existed? The proponent of the Kalam Cosmological argument must show that this cannot be the case, if their argument is to be successful, which they have tried to do by demonstrating the contradictory nature of infinite regress in time, and on the basis of certain scientific principles and discoveries.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument?

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2. What are the different types of Cosmological Arguments?

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8.6 TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This argument is related to the sense of the word ‘telos’ which signifies the meaning end or purpose. Here, we are speaking of the telos of the world. In a way this argument also argues that the sense of purposeful design that we see in nature suggests that the world has a

designer, namely God. That is why this argument is also referred to as the Way of Design or the Fourth Way of Aquinas.

Thomas Aquinas links the idea of causation to that of purpose, in line with the Aristotelian idea of causation. He says that causation includes the idea of the purpose of a thing. He holds that goal directed behavior is in all beings, even if they lack awareness. Such beings that lack awareness are directed to their goal by someone who has the awareness, and understanding that they themselves lack. Everything in nature is directed to its goal.

While this is one of the traditional arguments, it was best explained by William Paley (1743 – 1805). He gave the example saying that if one was to find a watch lying on the ground, one would assume that it had a maker and had been designed by a watch maker. This would be natural because one can see immediately that it is made up of different parts which work together. They work in harmony to tell us the time. The world too, he says, is like a machine, with different parts designed so that they have a part to play in the whole. The intricate design of the world in which, like the watch, different parts work together in such a way that suggest a complex design and planning. The design is such that when looked at as a whole, one cannot but think of the designer of the world, who is argued to be God.

Religious common sense tends to look at the intricacy of nature as pointing to a God, who is the designer, and provides a purpose to creation. There is no evidence to sustain an analogy between human creativity, and the idea of a divine creator. It is difficult to sustain the teleological approach as a logical argument. At best, we can only say that the world appears to have some order and purpose. For the believer, it supports his or her belief. But to the atheist, it is logically inconclusive.

8.7 MORAL ARGUMENT

This line of argument examines those aspects of human experience, which relate to religion. It asks whether there is anything in the way in which people respond to the idea of God which can be used to prove that God exists. One possibility is the experience of morality, namely that we have a sense of what we ought to do, and also a sense of guilt when one realizes that one has done what is believed to be wrong. The second possibility is religious experience, itself. Moral rules arise as God's commands, which can be based on a look at human nature, and the structures of the world, or as the product of human

society, and human choice.

We look at the second possibility. Aristotle related morality to his idea of a final cause. He held that we ought to do that which leads to our maximum self-fulfillment. Once we discover our true nature we will want to act accordingly. By this approach, we could say that morality is rational and objective. If one experiences moral obligation, it implies that one is free to act, and that one will experience happiness as a result of virtue. For this to be possible, there has to be some overall ordering principle which will reward virtue with happiness, and this might be called God. This was also, the argument of Immanuel Kant. He argues that you cannot prove the existence of God, but one's sense of morality implies that the world is ordered in a moral way, and that this in turn implies belief in God.

If one believes that there is an objective moral order, it may be used either to suggest that the world is created by a moral being, God, or to show that morality is well established on objective rational grounds, and no God is needed. On the other hand, if morality is a human product, no God is required to account for moral experience. Hence, the moral argument cannot prove the existence of God. At most, it can illustrate the way in which the idea of God is used in situations, where there is a moral choice to be made. This is the fifth way of St. Thomas Aquinas.

8.8 ARGUMENT FROM RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

There is in every person the capability of self-transcendence in every experience. That is to say, a very ordinary this-worldly experience seems to point beyond itself and reveals something about the meaning of life as a whole. It reveals to us the religious, and the transcendent dimension. Some philosophers use this as an argument for the existence of God.

For those who have had a religious experience, it is impossible to doubt the existence of God. One cannot argue against their experience. But then the issue is that there are various ways of interpreting what has been experienced. What one person calls God may have a perfectly alternative explanation to someone else. While we could be mistaken about an experience, it is also possible that we might have a correct experience, and have truly experienced God. This is true also of our religious experience. But this requires a previous knowledge of what God is so that we can say whether the experience is correct or not.

The problem is that such knowledge is not possible of God. Because if there was such

knowledge then there would be no discussion on the existence of God, because if God exists then its existence would be evident to all, and there would be no such debate. Hence, if religious experience is a source of knowledge of God, it remains convincing only to those who accept or share this experience. But to the philosopher, the proposition 'God exists' can be either correct, incorrect, or meaningless. Religious experience can thus, become the basis for the argument for the existence of God only when all people accept one definition of the word 'God'.

If religious experience according to different cultures can be found to have a common core, then there is hope of coming to a common understanding of the term 'God'. But if we do not arrive at a common core then most will be unconvinced by the argument from religious experience. This argument may be enlightening and persuasive, but it is not logically compelling. That is why this argument is not much liked by philosophers. However, for people with a religious mind, it is the most persuasive of all arguments.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What are the limitations of the teleological argument, and argument from religious experience in establishing proofs for the existence of God?

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8.9 LET US SUM UP

The Ontological Argument follows the apriori approach. While the cosmological, teleological, moral, and religious experience approaches are aposteriori. While considering the arguments about the existence of God it is good to remember that God is not something which might or might not happen to exist. We have to understand the concept of necessary existence. God does not merely happen to exist. Neither can God come into existence or pass out of existence, since such a being would not be God. If

God's existence is possible, then it is necessary. It is the very essence of the concept of God to exist, and it is being itself, and not just 'a' being.

Hence when we try to give arguments about the existence of God, we do not try to show the existence of God as the existence of one entity alongside others, but we are speaking about a fundamental way of regarding the whole universe. It is about the structure of being itself and not merely about the possible existence of 'a' being.

All in all, the ontological argument has made us aware of the logical problems in speaking about God as "that than which no greater can be thought". It has also made us aware of the distinction between conceptual perfection, and an existential perfection. The claim that the existence of something can be inferred from its definition does not seem possible for most people.

The cosmological arguments and the argument from design suggest that there are features of this world, which enable the mind to go beyond experience. We try to understand the cause of everything, and we also try to understand why the world as we experience it is as it is.

The moral argument suggests that together with freedom and morality, we have an intuition of God. This is more evident every time we have or experience a moral obligation.

The argument from religious experience cannot be conclusive because experience is always open to various interpretations. Yet, religious experience keeps us focused on the fact that at the heart of religion, there is in man a struggle to express our belief in God. Religious experience is a context in which we try to understand the existence of God.

Finally, these arguments may not be conclusive but they are significant because they indicate the thought process of a religiously inclined person. It indicates in a special way what they understand by the word 'God' and how they use that word. For a believer these arguments reinforce their faith. For the agnostic or the atheist, they are unlikely to be convincing. But all in all, at least they show us the real differences in various perspectives that the belief in God implies. As it is said, "For him who believes, no proof is needed. For him who does not believe, no proof will ever be sufficient."

8.10 KEY WORDS

Act: the perfection of a being, or the existence of a being.

Argument: offering reasons and causes in support of a conclusion.

Atheist: a person who denies the existence of God.

Being: whatever exists or may exist; something existing in its own way.

Causation: the principle by virtue of which anything is produced

Concept: abstract, universal idea; the intellectual representation of an object.

Contingent: uncertain, non-necessary, non-essential, accidental; a being which exists, but which may not exist.

Cosmological Argument: reasons offered in proof of God's existence, based on the order that exists in the world.

Existence: that which makes a thing to be.

Experience: sense awareness, an immediate and direct perception of reality.

God: the supreme being, creator of all things, the first cause, the most perfect of all beings, in the monotheistic view.

Immutability: the inability to change or be changed.

Moral Argument: based on man's consciousness of universal and absolute binding character of the moral law.

Necessary: that which needs to be there by all means if a certain end is to be achieved.

Ontological: related to the study of being.

Potency: a tendency to actuality; a dormant capacity or faculty.

Proposition: a judgement symbolised in words and so arranged as to convey a complete thought.

Reality: anything that exists, independent of man (could be actual or existent.).

Soul: a spirit or entity that is supposed to be only in all living things. (Greek psyche, or Latin *anima*.)

Teleological: related to the end, purpose or final cause.

Telos: end.

8.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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8.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. It attempts to show that the very concept of the idea of God implies his existence in reality. That is to say, if a person is able to clearly conceive the idea of God, then he or she ought to be able to understand, and accept that God exists. It was St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury, who first gave a serious formulation of this argument.

This argument is apriori, and it can be applied only to God, because the concept of God is unique, in the sense that God is the only necessary being. All other beings, as the 'perfect island' are finite objects, and hence not necessary. Hence, we can always conceive a more perfect island, but God is already the greatest possible being, and nothing greater can be thought of. We cannot think of a more perfect God, while we can always think of a more perfect island. It is a consistent argument, but one that will hardly convince an atheist or an agnostic of God's existence.

2. The Cosmological argument consists of the Five Ways of St. Thomas. This argument strives to proceed from the fact of the existence of the world to a transcendent creator. These arguments originate in the thinking of Aristotle, and have been presented by Thomas Aquinas, who used Aristotle's ideas as the intellectual medium to put down his own religious philosophy. These are commonly referred to as the Five Ways. The first three types are: First Way. (from motion.) Second Way. (from the nature of the efficient cause.) Third Way. (from possibility and necessity.)

Another form of the Cosmological Argument is the **Kalam Argument**. It was spelt out by

the Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi and Al-Ghazali in the ninth and tenth century.

The Kalam Argument was used to demonstrate the impossibility of an actual infinite existence in the real world, as well as an argument demonstrating the problem with infinite temporal regress, thus, showing that the universe cannot be eternal. In recent years these philosophical arguments have been corroborated by scientific discoveries and mathematical insights, viz., aspects of the Big Bang theory, and Hilbert's paradox of the Grand Hotel.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The teleological argument is also called the argument by design, and at best it indicates that there appears to be an order or purpose to the created world, however it does not logically, establish the existence of God. To an atheist the teleological argument would be logically inconclusive. Likewise, the argument by religious experience is indubitable for the person who has had the religious experience, however, unless we have a common understanding for the concept of God, it will not be a logically compelling argument. Differences in culture will have to be shown to have a common core as to the understanding of God. Unless that can be achieved, this type of argument will be compelling and persuasive for a person who believes in religion and God, but for an atheist, it will remain unconvincing.

Unit 9 THE PROBLEM OF EVIL*

Structure

- 9.0 Objective
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Logical Problem of Evil
- 9.3 The Evidential Problem of Evil
- 9.4 Free Will Theodicy
- 9.5 Soul Building Theodicy
- 9.6 Best of Possible Worlds Theodicy
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.8 Key Words
- 9.9 Further Readings and References
- 9.10 Answer to Check Your Progress

9.0 Objectives

In this unit, we will discuss one of the important problems in the philosophy of religion and theology; the problem of evil. Considering the wide arena of debate, even contemporary philosophers and theologians are contesting the discussions around the problem of evil. The problem of evil as discussed by contemporary philosophers presupposes the idea of a single god which is all benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent. This presupposition gave the problem of evil its basic structure that we are going to discuss.

At the end of this unit learner will be able to understand,

- The logical and evidential problem of evil
- The concept of theodicy; free will theodicy, soul building theodicy, best of possible worlds theodicy.

9.1 Introduction

*Himanshu Parcha, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Unitedworld School of Liberal Arts and Mass Communication, Karnavati University.

What do the two literary texts – *Jude the Obscure*, and *The Brothers Karamazov* – have in common? The protagonists of both the texts – Jude and Ivan respectively reject the idea of God. Their rejection of God is based on the presence of evil in society. For Ivan the suffering of children is the embodiment of evil, he argues that if a God exists, who promises harmony and forgiveness, then what explains the suffering of children. Because of this presence of evil in the form of the suffering of children Ivan rejects the idea of God. Jude's rejection of God is not based on the logical argument like Ivan, his reasons for the rejection of God are more personal and intimate. Through multiple failures in his social life Jude moves away from the idea of God, he argues that if God had existed then I would not have failed in my life. Both texts shed light on important aspects of the idea of evil and its connection with the presence of God.

Here the question arises: what do we mean by the concept of evil? In our daily lives, we face different types of evil, some are explainable, and some are not. In a general sense, pain and suffering are closely associated with the aspect of evil. Anything that brings a drastic discomfort to human life is usually bracketed in the very category of evil. But are these the only criteria to define it? Are there any other parameters that one needs to consider while categorizing evil? In this regard, the existence of Omni-qualities or the supreme being also comes under purview.

Generally, all monotheistic religions believe that there exists a divine being who is all benevolent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The evils of this world that we face in our daily lives pose a challenge to the very existence of such a being, and thereby to all such religions. This means that such a divine being has all the power, knowledge, and moral disposition to prevent all kinds of evil, and the presence of evil creates a situation that is logically not possible. This logical inconsistency between all benevolent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and the evils of this world give rise to *the logical problem of evil*. Furthermore, the evils of this world generate possibilities in which the existence of such a divine being is improbable. From an epistemological point of view, evils of this world provide evidence against the existence of such a divine being, when we specifically focus on the evidence part then the version of this problem is known as *the evidential problem of evil*.

Philosophers and theologians have reasoned that why would a being who is all benevolent, omnipresent, and omniscient cause, allow or permit evil. This exercise of finding God's reasons for permitting evil is known as theodicy. There are different versions of theodicies

available in theological and philosophical literature. The most prominent of all these theodicies is free will theodicy, which states that evils are not due to God rather they are due to the free actions of human agents; the soul building theodicy states that God permitted evil in order to inculcate different virtues; an interesting theodicy is due to Leibniz, this is known as possible worlds theodicy, which proposes that God would have allowed evils because best of all possible worlds contain evils and because God is all benevolent he has the moral disposition to offer best of all possible worlds. This suggests that the problem of evil is based on a basic question that these theodicies are raising, i.e., whether God has reasons for not preventing evils.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1. What is the problem of evil?

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9.2 The Logical Problem of Evil

The logical problem of evil possibly finds its origin in the works of ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. Many believe that it was Epicurus (who, some say, was an atheist) who rejected the idea of God on highlighting the logical inconsistency. David Hume also credited Epicurus for the formulation of the logical problem of evil. Hume's character Philo in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion states that:

Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then from whence comes evil?"

(David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, 1779, p.186)

The Epicurean saying quoted above focuses, basically, on two aspects 1) God's ability, and 2) God's disposition/will, which means that God's omnipotence and omniscience provided him with all the abilities to prevent all kinds of evil, and his goodness shows that God has dispositions to prevent every kind of evils which he can prevent. From this, we can deduce that there is a logical inconsistency between God and evil, which means if there is God then there would not be any evils, and if there are evils then there would not be such God which has all the qualities mentioned above. Alvin Plantinga argues that "most contemporary philosophers who hold that evil constitutes a difficulty for theistic belief claim to detect logical inconsistency" (Plantinga, 1982, p.83). To understand this logical inconsistency, let us put the matter a bit formally:

- (a) A divine being who is all benevolent, omnipresent, and omnipotent exists.
- (b) Evil exists.

We can describe two propositions as logically incompatible if we can derive contradiction by adding them to other propositions which are logically necessary propositions. The logical inconsistency between (a) and (b) can be seen in virtue of the following two propositions:

- (P1) An all benevolent being prevents *every* evil it can prevent.
- (P2) An omnipotent and omniscient being *can* prevent all evils.

The basic analysis of proposition (P1) and (P2) shows that both these propositions are necessarily true because the truth of these propositions is, in some sense, warranted by the meaning of the terms like "omniscient", "omnipotent", "all benevolent", etc. In (P1) the presence of "all benevolent" shows that God has the disposition to prevent *every* evil it can prevent, similarly in (P2) the presence of "omniscience" and "omnipotent" shows that God has all the knowledge and power to prevent all evils. So that is why these propositions are necessarily true. Now if club together these necessary propositions with propositions (a) and (b), then we reach a kind of contradiction. The combination of (a), (P1), and (P2) imply that there is no evil, but there are evils in this world, which simply means that the logical implication of the above combination contradicts with (b).

It seems that the alleged logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil is based on the fact that both (P1) and (P2) are necessarily true. So, to resolve the logical problem of evil, one need to show that either of (P1) and (P2) are not necessarily true.

Nelson Pike argues that (P1) is not necessarily true because from all benevolence of God we cannot deduce that he will prevent every evil which he can prevent. He argues that the logical problem of evil is wrongly based on the premise that God will prevent every evil which he can prevent. He tries to resolve the problem of evil by weakening the basic premise of the logical problem of evil. He introduced a weakened premise:

(P3) An all-benevolent being will prevent every evil which he can prevent unless it has *sufficient reason* for permitting evil.

The very introduction of the proposition (P3) as a premise weakens the logical problem of evil. Because it shows that if God has sufficient reason for allowing evil, then God will allow evil, and by the very implication of that there remains no logical inconsistency between the existence of God and evils in this world. So, the logical incompatibility between the existence of God and the evils of this world are eventually based on the fact that whether God has sufficient reason for permitting some evils. If God has sufficient reason for not preventing some evils, then the logical problem of evil fall.

Does God really have sufficient reasons for not preventing some evils? The answer to this question will be explored in the next section.

9.3 The Evidential Problem of Evil

In the previous section, we have seen that the logical problem of evil was based on a very logical strong relation, the relation is so strong that the mere introduction of a weakened premise which talks about God's sufficient reasons for not preventing evils collapse the complete structure of the logical problem of evil. Philosophers who have strong contention that the evils of the world pose a challenge to the existence of God would not find the logical solution to the problem of evil constructive and conclusive.

The basic challenge to the belief in the existence of God does not come from the basic fact that there exists evil in the world, rather the challenge comes from how much and how severe kinds of evils exist in the world. The challenge to the theistic belief comes from what Marilyn McCord Adams calls "horrendous evil":

Among the evils that infect this world, some are worse than others. I want to try to capture the most pernicious of them within the category of horrendous evils, which I define (for present purposes) as 'evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole'. The class of paradigm horrors includes both individual and massive collective suffering . . .

[E]xamples include the rape of a woman and the axing off of her arms, psycho-physical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's own deepest loyalties, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, the explosion of nuclear bombs overpopulated areas. (Adams, 1999, p. 26).

The evils which Adams' characterized as horrendous are harder to deal with from a logical point of view, and a mere logical theodicy cannot answer why there are such evils exist in the world. Such evils provide strong *evidence* or reason against the existence of a being who is all benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Even if we consider the weaker premise (P3), there are no sufficient reasons which can justify the existence of such horrendous evils. Therefore, it is extremely unreasonable for one to think that God might have sufficient reasons for not preventing such evils, which, in some sense, means God also lacks the capacity to have sufficient reasons altogether.

The problem posed by the evidential relation between the horrendous evils of this world and the existence of God is much more serious and problematic than the problem posed by the logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the evils of this world. To understand the difference between these two problems we first need to consider the difference between what *we consider* God's reasons for not preventing evils, and what are *God's actual reasons* for not preventing evils. This difference is sufficiently highlighted by David Lewis in his 1993 paper *Evil for Freedom's Sake?* He makes a difference between "defence" and "theodicy", defence refers to what we think God's reasons for not preventing and evils, and theodicy refers to God's actual reasons for not preventing evils. The resolution of the logical problem of evil by introducing a weaker premise can be classified as a defence, but that defence is not sufficient to resolve the evidential problem of evil. To resolve the evidential problem of evil one need to know God's actual reasons for not preventing such evils, but knowing God's actual reasons would be unwise, here Lewis suggested a middle path. He argues that one can start from somewhat plausible hypotheses like the weakened logical premise and from there one can advance to more complex hypotheses to understand God's actual reasons for not preventing such evils. In the upcoming sections, we will be discussing various attempts about finding God's reasons for not preventing evils.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit.

1. What is the logical problem of evil?

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2. Discuss the difference between the logical and evidential problem of evil.

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9.4 Free Will Theodicy

One of the earliest attempts to understand God's reasons for not preventing evil was developed by St. Augustine. He argues that God has created human beings in his own image and provided them with free will for their development and flourishing. But instead of using this free will for development humans misused free will and chose the path of sin. This sin is the origin of every kind of evil in this world, which means that it is not God who is responsible for free will rather it is the free actions of human beings that resulted in different evils. Augustine clearly stated that evil does not exist as an independent ontological category rather it is the "privation of good", which means evils exist only in the absence of good, and this privation of good happen only because of the free actions of human agents.

The debate between free will and predetermination is a complex one. The free will theodicy talks about the libertarian idea of the existence of free will that is not bound by any external force, not even God. In this manner, the idea of 'freedom of man' takes frontal importance. Thus, any action taken by man is not an impact of any force, highlighting the importance of his free will. This can be propounded by a three-step theory- i) the idea of libertarian free will of utmost importance; ii) considering the freedom of the subject, not even God can cause the person to do what is truly right; iii) in this regard, God should create a world where agents have free will.

The argument that therefore lies here is that even though libertarian free will is appealing, there are satisfactory accounts of libertarian free will are not yet available. It is because to claim that there is no external force in causal of action is a problematic aspect. This is to claim that the agent is in some way a cause of the action. But the very understanding of causation becomes complicated here and brings up multiple questions. Besides, the very unrestricted aspect that follows the idea of free will is problematic in every way. At what point does one restrict the other to practice their free will? Should one let heinous crime happen without intervening, considering the idea of libertarian free will? Another point being, that just because libertarian free will is an utmost important concept, would that warrant one to exert power and cruelty among others. Further, some evils are caused by natural actions like accidents or calamities like earthquakes, unprecedented fires, floods, etc. This being not caused by any agent or morally wrong character defies the entire debate over the existence of evil and the debate around the problem of evil.

9.5 Soul Building Theodicy

Developed by John Hick, the soul-building theodicy propounds that the evils of the world can be justified if one views God as an environment. This environment facilitates people with experiences, through which people can practice their personal choice and undergo spiritual growth. This thereby would result in their communion with God. In this process, Hick suggests that an individual undergoes the phase of soul-making. The idea herein is that God created the world for the greater good and hence is justified with a specific purpose in mind. This is to say that the world is perfectly designed and when one views evil as a problem, they assume the world to be a hedonistic paradise.

The problems with this theodicy are multifold. If God is really justified in designing this world, then what about horrendous atrocities meted out on humankind like the holocaust, and even the widespread of a global pandemic? Plus, it seems very inappropriate that the world should contain such horrible sights merely to gain spiritual growth and insights while growing up. Further Hick does not provide any justification for animal pain and the atrocities that children and kids go through- be it through disease or through the ills meted out by adults. Moreover, if soul-building is actually the purpose of life, then with the present situation on earth, the human race is failing at it (with many people dying young before

responding to temptations, facing challenges, and undergoing spiritual growth). On the other hand, many people live the life of luxury without any moral baggage that accompanies them in the journey.

9.6 Best of Possible Worlds Theodicy

This was the theodicy that was posited in contrast to the problem of evil by the medieval philosopher Leibniz. The idea behind this theodicy is based on the fact that God is omnipresent, all-benevolent, and omnipotent. Hence, God created the existing world. In this regard, God could have created a different world or no world at all, which by extension means that there are multiple worlds. Because God is Omnipresent and Omnipotent, he knew which possible world would be the best and therefore led to its creation and since he is all-benevolent, he chose to create that world. This, therefore, means that God created the best possible world. Leading the argument further, Leibniz argues that if there is a possibility of the existence of a better world, God wouldn't have created the present world, which is the best possible world. Against the argument that one can always imagine a world that is less evil than one present, Leibniz posits the argument that this merely remains a product of an individual's imagination. Thereby, he says that any world that does not contain the evils of the present world can very possibly contain the evils of a much greater extent. Thereby, one can very well claim that God created evil to which Leibniz claims that evil is not a thing in its essence but a source to move an individual away from the goodness of The One. Criticized for its overly optimistic approach, Voltaire made a satirical commentary against Leibniz stating that the world contains many evils that forgo such a positive perspective. Even Bertrand Russell rejected Leibniz's theory and claimed that moral and physical evil necessitates its origin from a metaphysical evil. Whereby, meaning that evil in its essence is a thing and according to Leibniz all things are good, which is why evil is also good.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of this unit

1. What are the relations between free will theodicy and soul building theodicy?

9.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the problem of evil and its various formulations. The logical problem of evil states that there is a logical inconsistency between the existence of God and the evils of this world. We have seen that the logical problem of evil can be resolved by developing a mere logical theodicy that we can develop by introducing weaker premises to show the connection between God and the evils of this world. We discussed that the evidential problem of evil is much harder than the logical problem of evil because it is based on the evidential relations between the God and evils of this world, and no theodicies can possibly resolve this problem. After discussing these two primary formulations of the problem of evil, we discussed various attempts to find out God's reasons for not preventing some evils.

9.8 KEY WORDS

Omniscient: A being who has the knowledge of everything

Omnipotent: A being who has the power or ability to perform every action which he wants to perform

Omnibenevolent: A being who possess unlimited goodness

Theodicy: Philosophical or theological attempts to find out God's reasons for not preventing some evils.

9.9 Further Readings and References

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9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. The problem of evil is a philosophical problem that attempts to understand the relationship between the existence of omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent being with the evils that exist in the world. Generally, all monotheistic religions believe that there exists a divine being who is all benevolent, omnipresent, and omniscient. The evils of this world that we face in our daily lives pose a challenge to the very existence of such a being, and thereby to all such religions. This means that such a divine being has all the power, knowledge, and moral disposition to prevent all kinds of evil, and the presence of evil creates a situation that is logically not possible. This logical inconsistency between all benevolent, omnipresent, and omniscient, and the evils of this world give rise to *the logical problem of evil*. Furthermore, the evils of this world generate possibilities in which the existence of such a divine being is improbable. From an epistemological point of view, evils of this world provide evidence against the existence of such a divine being, when we specifically focus on the evidence part then the version of this problem is known as *the evidential problem of evil*.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The logical problem of evil possibly finds its origin in the works of ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. Many believe that it was Epicurus (who, some say, was an atheist) who rejected the idea of God on highlighting the logical inconsistency. God's omnipotence and omniscience provided him with all the abilities to prevent all kinds

of evil, and his goodness shows that God has dispositions to prevent every kind of evils which he can prevent. From this, we can deduce that there is a logical inconsistency between God and evil, which means if there is God then there would not be any evils, and if there are evils then there would not be such God which has all the qualities mentioned above.

2. The logical problem of evil was based on a very logical strong relation, the relation is so strong that the mere introduction of a weakened premise which talks about God's sufficient reasons for not preventing evils collapse the complete structure of the logical problem of evil. Philosophers who have strong contention that the evils of the world pose a challenge to the existence of God would not find the logical solution to the problem of evil constructive and conclusive. The basic challenge to the belief in the existence of God does not come from the basic fact that there exists evil in the world, rather the challenge comes from how much and how severe kinds of evils exist in the world. The challenge to the theistic belief comes from what Marilyn McCord Adams calls "horrendous evil". The evils which Adams' characterized as horrendous are harder to deal with from a logical point of view, and a mere logical theodicy cannot answer why there are such evils exist in the world. Such evils provide strong *evidence* or reason against the existence of a being who is all benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Even if we consider the weaker premise, there are no sufficient reasons which can justify the existence of such horrendous evils. Therefore, it is extremely unreasonable for one to think that God might have sufficient reasons for not preventing such evils, which, in some sense, means God also lacks the capacity to have sufficient reasons altogether.

Answers To Check Your Progress III

1. Free will theodicy and soul building theodicy are related to each other in an interesting manner. Human free will is the first step towards the development of the human soul or soul building. St. Augustine argues that God has created human beings in his own image and provided them with free will for their development and flourishing. But instead of using this free will for development humans misused free will and chose the path of sin. This sin is the origin of every kind of evil in this world, which means that it is not God who is responsible for free will rather it is the free actions of human beings that resulted in different evils. Augustine clearly stated that

evil does not exist as an independent ontological category rather it is the “privation of good”, which means evils exist only in the absence of good, and this privation of good happen only because of the free actions of human agents. The soul-building theodicy propounds that the evils of the world can be justified if one views God as an environment. This environment facilitates people with experiences, through which people can practice their personal choice and undergo spiritual growth. This thereby would result in their communion with God. In this process, Hick suggests that an individual undergoes the phase of soul-making. The idea herein is that God created the world for the greater good and hence is justified with a specific purpose in mind. This is to say that the world is perfectly designed and when one views evil as a problem, they assume the world to be a hedonistic paradise. This shows that both theodicies are related to each other, and the soul building is not possible with free will, and free will is there because the process of soul building is still going on.

UNIT 10 PROBLEM OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM*

Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Definitions of Atheism and Agnosticism
- 10.3 Forms of Atheism and Agnosticism
- 10.4 Arguments for Atheism and Agnosticism
- 10.5 Arguments against Atheism and Agnosticism
- 10.6 Towards Affirming the Existence of God
- 10.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.8 Key Words
- 10.9 Further Readings and References
- 10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss the problem of atheism and agnosticism, the two philosophical positions that negate the existence of God. After defining and differentiating both these theories, the unit discusses the different forms of atheism and agnosticism. The unit then goes on to elaborate how the proponents of these two positions argue in favour of non-existence of God and of our inability to have certain knowledge about the existence of God. In the next section, we examine critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics by posting arguments against their views – atheism by showing some of its inherent contradictions regarding the non-existence of God and agnosticism by pointing out the inconsistencies in maintaining the inability of the human mind to have certain knowledge. Having examined the inadmissibility of the positions of both atheism and agnosticism, section five arrives at possible ways of affirming the existence of God. The rest of the sections are meant to help the students to understand better the contents of the unit. All in all, the unit enables the student to take a plunge into the problem of the existence of

* Joy Kachappilly, Sacred Head College, Shilong.

God from a philosophical perspective. Thus, by the end of this Unit the student should be able:

- to have a basic understanding of both atheism and agnosticism;
- to know the different types of atheism and agnosticism;
- to understand the positions of both atheists and agnostics regarding the problem of affirming the existence of God;
- to appreciate the pitfalls of these theories; and,
- to arrive at a possible affirmation of the existence of God.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of Religion is a philosophical thinking or reflection on religion by applying the philosophical method. It speculates about the origin, nature and function of religion. It also takes up the basic problems relating to the existence, nature and attributes of God. The problem of affirming the existence of God is one of most important issues in philosophy. Since time immemorial, traces of disbelief in the existence of the Supreme Being are noticed among philosophers. Every religion believes that the root reason for human dignity lies in human beings' ability to recognize the existence of one Supreme Being and their ability to commune with God. From the very circumstance of his/her origin human being is already invited to converse with God. For human beings would not exist were they not created by God's love and constantly preserved by it; and they cannot live fully according to truth unless human beings freely acknowledges that love and devotes themselves to their Creator. But still, sadly, many of our contemporaries have never recognized this intimate and vital link with God, or have explicitly rejected it. Thus, both atheism and agnosticism must be accounted among the most serious problems that arise in Philosophy of Religion and hence, deserves a closer examination.

10.2 DEFINITIONS OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Atheism is that system of thought which is formally opposed to theism. It is the doctrine or belief that there is no God. An atheist is a person who does not believe that deities exist. The term atheism originated from the Greek 'atheos,' meaning 'without gods,' which was derogatorily applied to anyone thought to not believe in the accepted gods, or to believe in false gods, nogods, or doctrines that stood in conflict with established religions. Since its

first coming into use, the term atheism has been very vaguely employed, generally as an epithet of accusation against any system that called in question the popular gods of the day. Thus, while Socrates was accused of atheism by the civil authorities in Athens and Diagoras called an atheist by Cicero, Democritus and Epicurus were styled in the same sense impious (without respect for the gods) on account of their new atomistic philosophy. In this sense too, the early Christians were known to the Romans as atheists, because they denied their gods; while, from time to time, various religious and philosophical systems have, for similar reasons, been deemed atheistic. However, today the word 'atheism' designates the negation of theism, the denial of the existence of God.

Agnosticism could be seen as an attitude of the mind towards human's knowledge of God; namely, that God is humanly unknowable. The word 'Agnosticism' comes from the Greek word 'Agnostos' which means 'unknowing' or 'a profession of ignorance.' The word was first used by T.H. Huxley in 1869 to designate anyone who denies human being knowledge of immaterial reality, and especially of the existence and nature of God. An agnostic is not an atheist. An atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic professes ignorance about His existence.

Thinkers who belong to both atheistic and agnostic traditions hold that though we might not be able to prove the existence of God, we might be able to disprove it. Many philosophers hold that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and good God can be empirically refuted by the existence of evil and suffering. Of course, the existence of a creator God would not be so refutable, and both atheism and agnosticism would have to depend on arguments other than that of the mere existence of evil.

10.3 FORMS OF ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Atheism takes different forms. The most trenchant form which atheism could take would be the positive and dogmatic denial of the existence of any spiritual and extra-mundane First Cause. This is sometimes known as dogmatic or positive theoretic atheism. It may be doubted whether such a system could ever possibly be seriously maintained. Still, we can think of some advanced phases of materialistic philosophy which profess to find in matter its own cause and explanation and positively exclude the existence of any spiritual cause. A second form of atheism is based either upon the lack of physical data for theism or upon the limited nature of the intelligence of human being. This second form may be described as a negative theoretic atheism.

A third form is positive moral atheism, in which human actions would neither be right nor wrong, good nor evil, with reference to God. Another form of negative practical or moral atheism maintains that human intelligence is incapable of relating to an extra-mundane, spiritual and personal lawgiver. Still a third form of moral atheism speaks of godlessness in conduct, quite irrespective of any theory of philosophy or morals or of religious faith. All these forms of atheism could be clubbed together under two heads: strong atheism and weak atheism.

Similarly, we can speak of different kinds of agnostics. There are those who deny that reason can know God and make any judgment concerning that existence. Bertrand Russell is an example of this kind of agnosticism. A second group of agnostics deny that reason can prove the existence of God but nonetheless profess a belief in God's existence. Immanuel Kant belongs to this form of agnosticism. There is a third group of agnostics who because of their philosophical commitments deny the possibility of knowing God. Some of these philosophical commitments include nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, Logical Positivism and Existentialism. These philosophical positions have generated agnosticism of various forms and could be called as nominalists, empiricists, existentialists, etc.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Define both atheism and agnosticism.

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10.4 ARGUMENTS FOR ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

When we discuss atheism, we think of the atheological arguments put forth by various philosophers. These arguments are meant to prove the non-existence of God. The argument from evil (sometimes referred to as 'the problem of evil') is by far the most famous of such arguments, but it is by no means the only such argument. Indeed, in the 1990s

philosophers developed a flurry of atheological arguments.

There are two types of atheological arguments, namely, logical arguments and evidential arguments. Logical arguments attempt to show that the concept of God is self-contradictory or logically inconsistent with some known facts. These arguments attempt to demonstrate a contradiction in the concept of God. If an argument of this type were successful, it would mean that the existence of God is impossible; there is a 0% probability that God exists. Thus, for example, Dan Barker in 1997 introduced the Freewill Arguments for the Non-existence of God. He argues that two of the traditional divine attributes, namely, divine freedom and divine foreknowledge are incompatible with one another.

Evidential Arguments attempt to show that certain known facts that are consistent with theism nevertheless provide evidence against it. These types of arguments start with a known fact, such as the amount of suffering in the world. The arguments then attempt to show that the fact in question supports the hypothesis of atheism over the hypothesis of theism because we have more reason to expect the fact to obtain on the assumption that God does not exist than on the assumption that God does exist. Accordingly, the fact in question is more probable on the assumption that atheism is true than on the assumption that theism is true, and hence provides some evidence for atheism and against theism. By combining such facts, one can begin to construct a cumulative case for atheism.

With regard to agnosticism, taking recourse to different philosophical positions such as nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, logical positivism and existentialism, the proponents

attempted to uphold their view, namely, we cannot have knowledge about the existence of God. Thus, nominalism erases universality from being and holds it to be mere signification of words. It holds that there is nothing in beings that allows the mind to transcend from them to God. Hence, we cannot know God with certainty. William of Ockham is the main proponent of nominalism. Empiricism holds that all knowledge comes through experience, and as such, terms such as 'contingency' and 'necessity' are impossible. Human mind can never reason with certitude as human experiences are particulars in nature. Hence certain knowledge regarding the existence of God is impossible. David Hume subscribed to such a view. With regard to Kantianism, Immanuel Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason, while tackling the problems of necessity and universality of human knowledge posed by David Hume, maintains that human knowledge requires both sensibility and understanding. The former is possible in both space and time while the latter requires the

twelve categories. Since God cannot be subjected to sensibility as He does not come under the purview of space and time, Kant held that we cannot have any direct natural knowledge about God. However, on moral grounds, Kant postulates a belief in God, but such a belief in God has no cognitive content and does not guarantee His actual existence.

The central principle of Logical Positivists is the principle of verifiability, which states that a proposition is true if its language elements are reducible to or verifiable in terms of some direct or indirect sense experiences. Thus, those propositions which belong to empirical sciences are factual and they are verifiable while formal propositions, such as those of logic and mathematics, are true if they are consistent with themselves. However, statements about God are neither factual nor formal. Hence, they are not verifiable, neither are they true or false. They are merely meaningless and non-sensical statements.

Finally, existentialism holds that the only essence of a human being is that which he/she freely creates for himself/herself through the decisive realization of his/her human possibilities. Human being in his/her existence is a free tendency. He/she makes himself/herself what he/she is. To say that he/she possesses a stable and determined essence is to rob him/her of his/her freedom and to make his/her being a fixed and formalized unfolding of a pre-determined pattern. As a continual flux of existential tendencies, human being cannot grasp himself/herself through any conceptual knowledge. From these, we can conclude that existentialism is essentially agnostic in nature. It refused human beings any rational or conceptual understanding of God. Even when some awareness of a ground of Being is suggested, one can never identify this ground with God.

10.5 ARGUMENTS AGAINST ATHEISM AND AGNOSTICISM

Philosophers, especially those belonging to the theistic tradition, have proposed a number of arguments to disprove the position taken by the atheists. As stated previously, atheism presupposes the non-existence of any gods. There are many different offshoots of an atheistic worldview although roughly we can speak of strong atheism and weak atheism.

Strong atheism is complete denial of the existence of deity in any form, which involves a contradiction. A strong atheist must deny divinity by attributing human being with divine abilities. Common atheistic observation concludes that human person is a finite being and can only obtain knowledge through personal experience and application but for the theists, knowledge can also be received through divine revelation. The strong atheist needs

to not only have all the knowledge of every person ever but also all of the knowledge in the universe. It can be concluded that a strong atheistic worldview, no matter how eloquently explained, is impractical and illogical. Clinging to a strong atheistic view requires that one must reject scientific and philosophical evidence currently known and yet to be known.

Weak atheism, however, covers a much wider range of atheistic beliefs. Typically, weak atheism is attributed to those with any sort of non-theistic worldviews. It denies the existence of God for various reasons. For some since God cannot be found through the uses of the senses, He does not exist. But we know that the air we breathe, the force of gravity, emotions, values, beliefs and thoughts cannot be seen, heard, tasted, smelled or touched. Yet all these exist. Similarly, God who is a spirit cannot be found by way of our senses. This does not mean that he does not exist. Some atheists who hold materialism argue that matter and space just happen to exist and always have existed. But we know that nothing can come from nothingness. Things cannot exist by chance. For the religious, the universe and everything in it was created by God.

Similarly, one can also refute agnosticism proposed by nominalism, empiricism, Kantianism, logical positivism and existentialism. To reject nominalism, we can say that nominalists failed to recognize that while each being is indivisibly singular, the intellect has the power to consider one aspect of the singular while leaving others out of consideration. Thus, intellect can attain universal notions, and subsequently, can have knowledge of God. The empiricists are guilty of one-dimensional interpretation of human experience. To limit experience to what is directly perceptible by the five senses is to eliminate large part of human experience, namely, experiences through intellect. God's existence is inferred intellectually rather than through the senses. Kant erred in saying that perception through human sensibility is an absolute condition for knowing anything. The Logical Positivists by proposing the principle of verifiability limits human knowledge like the empiricists. Finally, the existentialists commit a two-fold error. They fail to recognize that a finite being without an essence is a contradiction. For a finite existence is always the existence of something, and this, from this very beginning. Human being without an intrinsic limit or essence would be an act of infinite existence. Secondly, the existentialists fail to recognize that unless human freedom is grounded in intelligence and dependent upon it, humans cannot know the possibilities among which they can choose. Since essence is a potency that can be realized through existence, these possibilities are really surreptitiously re-introduced essences.

10.6 TOWARDS AFFIRMING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Believers in the existence of God automatically turn to scriptures to prove the existence of God. However, unbelievers reject all arguments from scriptures saying that God's self-testimony is not creditable for proving the case. They argue that one's statements about oneself may be false. While that's true, self-testimony is still permissible in any court of law provided that other witnesses agree. Non-scriptural arguments are therefore needed. These arguments are discussed briefly here although some of them will be studied in detail in the coming units.

The intuitive argument, first presented by Augustine, is that humankind has a direct intuition of the existence of God. This argument relies on two significant facts. First, all humanity, throughout history and in all cultures, is incurably religious. Second, when people try to comprehend the immensity and grandeur of the universe, they realize some great intelligence and power is surely ordering the affairs of the universe.

The ontological argument, first presented by Anselm, asserts that the perfect being (God) must actually exist because man can conceive of him. Anselm declared that God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Since humankind cannot conceive of anything that does not exist, and since humankind can conceive of the idea of God, then God himself must exist.

The moral argument is that within all people, there is an innate capacity to know right from wrong. This capacity to discern right from wrong indicates the existence of a moral governor of the universe, a moral creator whose goodness is absolute. That moral governor is God.

The cosmological argument, credited to Thomas Aquinas, is concerned with the laws of nature. The central idea of this argument is that the existing cosmos is undeniable evidence of a creator. The natural law that supports this idea is that for every effect there must be an adequate cause. Since nothing can come from nothing and since the cosmos is something, then something or someone must have produced the cosmos. The cosmos is the effect.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

This unit discussed the problem of atheism and agnosticism, the two philosophical

positions that negate the existence of God. It defined and differentiated both these theories and pointed out the different forms of atheism and agnosticism. The unit then elaborated how the proponents of these two positions argued in favour of non-existence of God and of our inability to have certain knowledge about the existence of God. We, then, examined critically the positions of both atheists and agnostics and pointed out their inherent contradictions and inconsistencies. Having examined the inadmissibility of the positions of atheism and agnosticism, the unit affirms the existence of God. The unit, thus, enables the student to take a plunge into the problem of the existence of God from a philosophical perspective.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Briefly discuss Strong Atheism.

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10.8 KEY WORDS

Agnosticism: It is the doctrine that one cannot know the existence of anything beyond the phenomena of experience. It is the belief that there can be no proof either that God exists or that God does not exist.

Atheism: It is disbelief in or denial of the existence of God or gods.

Empiricism: It is the view that experience, especially of the senses, is the only source of knowledge.

Existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.

Kantianism: It comprises diverse philosophies that share Kant's concern to explore the nature and limits of human knowledge in the hope of raising philosophy to the level of a science.

Logical positivism: A philosophy asserting the primacy of observation in assessing the truth of statements of fact and holding that metaphysical and subjective arguments not based on observable data are meaningless.

Materialism: It is the theory that physical matter is the only reality and that everything, including thought, feeling, mind, and will, can be explained in terms of matter and physical phenomena.

Nominalism: It is the doctrine holding that abstract concepts, general terms, or universals have no independent existence but exist only as names.

10.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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10.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Atheism is that system of thought which is formally opposed to theism. It is the doctrine or belief that there is no God. An atheist is a person who does not believe that deities exist. Agnosticism, on the other hand, could be seen as an attitude of the mind towards human's knowledge of God; namely, that God is humanly unknowable. An agnostic is not an atheist. An atheist denies the existence of God; an agnostic professes ignorance about His existence.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Strong atheism is complete denial of the existence of deity in any form, which involves a contradiction. A strong atheist must deny divinity by attributing human being with divine abilities. Common atheistic observation concludes that human person is a finite being and can only obtain knowledge through personal experience and application but for the theist's knowledge can also be received through divine revelation. The strong atheist needs to not only have all the knowledge of every person ever but also all of the knowledge in the universe. It can be concluded that a strong atheistic worldview, no matter how eloquently explained, is impractical and illogical.