

Metaphysical Concept of God in Kantian Philosophy and Its Educational Implications

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Abstract

Right from the beginning of any philosophical idea or thought, the most disputed and controversial problem in the arena of man's thinking is the meta-physical concept of God. Different philosophers and educationists have given different views and explanations about the concept of existence of God. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), one of the most influential philosophers in the history of world philosophy, believed that the reality of God cannot be demonstrated theoretically but should be believed practically as the foundation of moral life. One should not say God is but God must be, otherwise moral obligation is meaningless. Kant has rejected all the three proofs i.e., ontological, cosmological and physico-theological but favors only moral arguments for proving the existence of God. He further stated that the concept of God should not be thought as an intelligent being, but as a moral being and the world was created according to man's moral needs that is the reason, after Kant teleology leads to moral theology, one that is not about the possibility of proving God's existence but which is about stating that moral life is possible only if God exists and this moral or natural disposition helps him to become a whole or self which gives meaning to his intellectual restlessness and practical struggle of life. Hence in the present study, an analytical approach has been used by the researcher to analyze Kant's primary and secondary sources related to metaphysical concept of God and its educational implication and present it in a lucid and systematic way.

Key Words: Metaphysics, Apriori, Ontology, Cosmology, Transcendental, Theology.

Introduction

The term Metaphysics is generally used to characterize all doctrine that is non-empirical. In this perspective metaphysics will include all questions of Theology, Mathematics, logic and the foundation of science. But Kant used this term in the sense of doctrine dealing with the problems of God, freedom and immortality of soul. His whole philosophical enterprise cannot be understood, unless we recognize his philosophical perspective. Kant wanted to eliminate metaphysics from the scope of human knowledge and the intellectual field. But he never ignored the role of metaphysical belief and metaphysical experience. Regarding the subject matter of metaphysics Kant says

“The unavoidable problems set by pure reason itself are God, freedom and immortality.

The science which, with all its preparations is in its final intention directed solely to their solution is metaphysics.”¹

There are other metaphysical problems but Kant is not interested in these problems. All of these unsolved questions are about the details of theology, super-physics, infinity etc. Kant however acknowledges that there

¹ Bandyopadhyay, K. (2005), p. 4

was a time when metaphysics was entitled the Queen of all the science. It is true that metaphysics certainly deserves the title of honor on account of the outstanding importance of her subject matter. Kant agrees with Hume that the metaphysical principles cannot be established either by deductive reasoning or by experimental enquiry. However according to him some metaphysical questions are unavoidable, particularly the questions about God's existence, the immortality of human soul, and of men's freedom and responsibility because they spring from human reason itself. As he says in Prolegomena:

“That the human mind will ever give up metaphysical researches is as little to be expected as that we, to avoid inhaling impure air should prefer to give up breathing altogether”².

Thus according to Kant, metaphysics will continue to be so long as there will be human race on this earth. Hence the issues of metaphysics or justification of the Supreme Being is constantly approached by Kant in his entire work. He believed that the ultimate goal of the nature created by God is man as moral being and the world was created according to man's moral needs. That is why after Kant, teleology leads to a moral theology, one that is not about the possibility of proving rationally God's existence but which is about stating that moral life is possible only if God exists. Kant argues that we must postulate the reality of God and immortality in order to be able to act as moral beings in this world. Without immortality and God we would be condemned to moral despair. Moral action makes us deserving of happiness but frequently does not lead to happiness in this world. If we want to establish a connection between the two, we must assume that they will be made to coincide by God in the long run. In this way, the notions of God and immortality, as prerequisites for the realization of the summum bonum or the highest good, make possible the moral enterprise for Kant, and therefore we must believe in their reality.

Hence it must be kept in mind that what is being considered by Kant is the objective reality of the concept of God, and not the objective reality of God, as it is beyond the critical philosophy to consider it, as God cannot be given in intuition. Kant insists that the Transcendental ideal, or the concept of God can have the valid employment only as a regulative principle of reason, any attempt to employ the same to be constitutive of the existence of God would be dialectical and detrimental to the nature of human reason itself. The schema of God is only a human way of conceiving the ground of nature, for the purpose of employing our cognitive faculties in order to arrive at the unified understanding of the world of sensibility and understanding. Therefore, theoretical philosophy, in fact, does not address the question of the belief in the existence of God but deals only about thinking of the world as if it were created by God, with a view to purposive unity of nature. Kant's views about the various approaches towards the existence of God are as:

Ontological proof: The main principle of the ontological argument is that existence is the very essence of the idea of God. The root of this argument is found in Plato (427-347 B.C) and later on in an explicit form in the writings of St. Augustine (354-430 A.D). In Plato, the ideas were considered to be more important, more

² Bandyopadhyay, K. p, 27

valuable and fundamental than the existing things. He believed that existence was not much important than essence. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) had already said that God as a perfect being existed necessarily because the idea of perfect being also contains the attributes of existence. Kant shows that the ontological argument does not go beyond the strictly logical framework. The perfect being can be thought of because it does not involve any contradiction, but the logical possibility is not the real one. The latter involves the agreement with the conditions of being which differ from the conditions of thinking. Second, existence is not a simple predicate, a concept contained within other concepts. Then, Kant considers we can think of a relationship between concept and existence in two ways: Analytically and synthetically. In the first one, existence is deduced from the concept as part of an entity, a situation in which existence has the same nature as the concept. The concept exists only in the man's spirit, hence the existence resulting from it is purely ideal, an idea of existence, not existence itself. In the second one we can think of existence as an addition to the concept following a synthetic relationship. There is, in the human spirit, a faculty that allows a relationship between things that are absolutely heterogeneous. This is how experience is born. Kant admits that a synthetic relationship between the concept of perfect being and its effective existence is impossible because the perfect, absolute being would cease to be as such. Hence from the ontological proof of the existence of God, Kant argues that existence is not a real predicate, and that therefore any attempt to prove God's existence from the idea that he posse the perfection of existence is bound to fail. As Kant says:

“Being is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which would be added to the concept of things. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations as existing in them. Logically it is merely the copula of a judgment. The proposition, ‘God is omnipotent’ contains two concepts, each of which has its object-God and omnipotence. The small word ‘is’ adds no new predicate, but only serves to posit the predicate in its relation to the subject”.³

b) **Cosmological proof:** The cosmological argument is based on the following assumptions:

1. Every event has a cause, and no event in the world can be without a cause.
2. All the things of the world are contingent.
3. Essence and existence are identical.
4. Contingent things imply the existence of a necessary being (God).

Cosmological argument in its elementary form was first formulated by Plato in laws and Phaedrus. Later on Aristotle (384-322 B.C) stated it quite clearly. Afterwards it is held that St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274 A.D) regarded it as the central argument for proving God. Hence cosmological argument begins with the cosmos and

³ Masih, Y. 1971, P. 116.

proceeds to the existence of a creator of the orderly universe. According to Kant it is not a rational proof because it also goes outside experience to suppose the properties of the necessary being, from the concept of the real being. The cosmological proof, according to Kant, runs as:

If anything exists, an absolute necessary being must also exist. Now I, at least, exist. Therefore an absolutely necessary being exists. The minor premise contains an experience, the major premises the inference from there being any existence at all to the existence of the necessary. The proof therefore really begins with experience, and is not wholly apriori or ontological. For this reason, and because the object of all possible experience is called the world, it is entitled as cosmological proof.⁴

For Kant, this proof, which he himself endorsed in his only possible Argument, hides many pseudo-rational principles and a whole nest of dialectical assumption, which the transcendental critique can easily detect and destroy. Thus the cosmological argument has to be rejected because its solution in terms of necessary being is unsatisfactory and self contradictory. And this is how Kant has formulated the case

“The transcendental idea of necessary and all sufficient being is so over whelming great, so high above an everything empirical, the latter being always conditioned, that it leaves us at a loss, partly because we can never find in experience material to satisfy such a concept, and partly it is always in the sphere of conditioned that we carry out our search, seeking there ever vainly for the unconditioned-no law of any empirical synthesis giving us an example of any such unconditioned or providing the last guidance in its pursuit.”⁵

Kant points out that the cosmological argument contains a nest of dialectical assumptions. It may be permissible to assume the existence of God as the cause of all possible effects, in order to assist reason in the search for the unity of cause, but to say that such a being necessarily exist is not at the modest language of legitimate hypothesis, but the impudent assurance of apodictic certainty. The abyss between the contingency of the phenomenal world and the absolute necessity of God can never be bridged by the human reason. Kant believed that it is another form of ontological proof and hence rejected it also.

c) **Physico-Theological proof:** It is a proof based on design in the world or proof from order or finality. It infers the existence of a supreme being from the nature and arrangement of actual world. The manifoldness, order and beauty of the world entitle us to infer a cause of its origin and continuance. It discerns purposes and ends in nature, although our observation without its guidance would not have detected them. It is an argument by analogy, inferring from the similarity between natural products and works of human art such as houses, ships, clocks, that a similar causality namely understanding and will lie at the bottom of nature. Kant has criticized this argument mercilessly, but he never lost sight of its value as a plea for faith. He claims that:

⁴ Kuehn, M. 2001, p. 249.

“This proof always deserves to be mentioned with respect. It is the oldest, clearest and the most accordant with the common reason of mankind. It enlivens the study of nature just as it itself derives its existence and gains ever new vigor from that source. It suggests ends and purposes, where your observation would not have detected them by itself, and extend our knowledge of nature by means of the guiding- concept of a special unity, the principle of which is outside nature. This knowledge again reacts on its cause, namely, upon the idea which has led to it, and so strengthens the belief in a supreme Author (of nature) that the belief acquires the force of an irresistible conviction.”⁶

For, Kant this argument proves only the design or architect of the world and not its creator. That is one who planned and ordered this world and not the one who brought it into being. Secondly if the necessary existence of God be established through any proof whatsoever, then God ceased to be an actual entity and would turn out to be a symbol with its stipulated meaning. This physico-theological proof as per Kant only proceeds from the character of experience to its ultimate causes is reducible to the cosmological proof, which in turn, is merely the disguised ontological proof. Hence the above mentioned arguments or proofs have failed to prove the divine existence. For Kant these three were the only possible proofs and all of them have failed in their objective. Kant hints that the notion of God has its origin in natural inference or propensity or the notion of a necessary being is derived from grounds other than rational.

d) **Moral argument:** In moral argument, it is the moral order which is added as the decisive mark. However for Kant, the moral argument was never taken as an intellectual argument for proving God but as a postulate and rests ultimately on faith. In Critique of judgment (1790), while approaching the idea of God as a regulative principle from the perspective of which one can understand world unity and harmony, Kant emphasizes that the ultimate goal of the nature created by God is man as a moral being and the world was created to meet man's moral needs. Teleology leads thus to a moral theology i.e., where we do not have to prove God's existence rationally but to state that moral life is possible only if God exists. Hence, God who is the cause of all nature, the phenomenal and noumenal selves and who contains the ultimate principle of all connections is postulated to bring about the exact harmony of happiness with virtue. According to Kant if a judgment is subjectively sufficient but objectively insufficient, then for Kant it would be called as faith. Hence, God as the postulate for promoting summum bonum (highest good) is a matter of faith. Kant invokes the idea of sovereign good that humans should follow as supreme value of moral life. Since sovereign good is understood as a synthesis of virtue and happiness, and their premises are God's existence and soul's immortality.

Conclusion and Implications

The issue of existence and justification of the Supreme Being is constantly approached by Kant in his entire works. For him, the world was created according to man's moral needs and the ultimate goal of life is to become a moral being. Kant has rejected all the three proofs i.e., ontological, cosmological and physico-theological for

⁵ Masih, Y. 1971, p. 140.

⁶ Kuehn, M. 2001, p. 256

existence of God on the basis of being, cause and design etc. He believed that the reality of God cannot be demonstrated but should be believed as the foundation of moral life. One should not say God is but God must be, otherwise moral obligation would be meaningless. Hence Kant proposed the faith or belief as a replacement for metaphysical knowledge which can neither be communicated nor learned from others but is something that has to be believed by every man for himself. So Kant's idea of God as a supreme-being, a divine being, a final purpose, an author of the world may be brought into the minds of the students not as a physical entity but as a moral being or moral concept and we should develop those moral and ethical values based on ultimate reality among the students. God's omnipresence and omnipotence should be presented through history, languages, geography and other relevant subjects. Metaphysical concept is based on apriori knowledge hence children's should be encouraged to develop inquiring outlook based on Kant's premises.

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