

Descartes-Existence Of God

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- Descartes is regarded as Father of Modern Western Philosophy.
- He was rationalistic philosopher.
- According to Descartes some of the ideas appear to be innate, some are our own inventions, most of them seem to have been received from without. Certain ideas we regard as effects or copies of an external world. But all this may be illusion.

- Descartes says that one of the ideas I find in myself is the idea of God.
- He gives some arguments to prove the existence of God.
- First, nothing can come from nothing, whatever exists must have a cause for existing, this, too, is a self-evident proposition.
- The cause must be at least as great as the effect, there must be at least as much reality in it.

- That which contains greater reality in itself and which is the more perfect, cannot be a consequence of, and dependent on, the less perfect.
- Hence, I myself cannot be the cause of the idea of God, for I am a finite, imperfect being, while the idea of God is the idea of a perfect, infinite being.
- It must have been placed in me by an infinite being, or God, and hence God must exist.

- This proof for the existence of God is not the ontological proof but a causal proof which begins with the idea of a perfect being existing in my mind.
- It is not argued that such a being exists merely because we have a concept of him, but rather, that from the idea of such a being we can necessarily infer the existence of that being as the cause of the idea.
- The argument differs from the ontological proof in two respects-

- 1. Its starting point is not the concept of God as a formal essence, but the actual existing idea of God in the mind of a man
- 2. It proceeds by causal influences from the idea of God to God himself and not, as in case of the ontological argument by strict formal implication from the essence of God to his existence.
- But it may be urged, the concept of infinity is a mere negative concept- the denial of perfection. This cannot be so, according to Descartes , for the idea of finitude implies the idea of infinity, or of God, how could I doubt or have desires if I did not have in myself the idea of a being more perfect than myself, by comparison with whom I recognize the defects of my nature? Doubt implies a standard of truth, imperfection a standard of perfection.

- Again Descartes says that I could not have been the cause of my own existence, for I have an idea of perfection, and if I had created myself, I should have made myself perfect, and, moreover, I should be able to preserve myself, which is not the case. If my parents had created me, they could also preserve me, which is impossible. Finally, it also follows from the very notion of God as a perfect being that exists. It is not in my power to conceive a God without existence, that is a being supremely perfect and yet devoid of an absolute perfection. This is the ontological argument used by both Anselm and Augustine.

- It is also unthinkable that the divine perfections, which I conceive, should have more than one cause, for if these causes were many, they would not be perfect, to be perfect there must be one cause only, one God. God must be self-caused, for if he is the effect of another being, then that being is the effect of another, and so on and never can reach a causal explanation of the effect with which we began.

- Descartes says that the idea of God I have received from God, it is innate. God is not only the cause, but the archetype our existence, he has created man in his own image. We need not wonder that God in creating us should have placed this idea in us, to serve as the mark of the workman imprinted on his work. If God did not exist, we could not possibly be what we are, nor could we have an idea of God. We know more of God himself and of the human mind than we know of corporeal objects. Reflecting upon the idea of God, we perceive that he is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, the source of all goodness and truth, the creator of all things. He is not corporeal and does not perceive by means of the senses, as we do. He has intellect and will, but not like ours, and he does not will evil or sin, for sin is the negation of being. This is the usual theistic position with which we have become acquainted in scholasticism.

- We can accept reason only in so far as it does not conflict with revelation. He also holds with him that God could have arranged the world otherwise than it is, and that a thing is good because God makes it so, he does not make it so because it is good.