

# ISWARA-ANUMANA OR INFERENCE OF GOD.

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Perhaps, the first duty of the philosophy of religion is to prove the existence of God. Theists have, for ages long, tried to prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the existence of God. There are many systems of philosophy and many religions, which try—each in its own way—to convince the critic of the soundness of their arguments and attract him to their fold. But sceptics and atheists do persist to thrive and there is no end to their arguments too, against the existence of God. The tug-of-war between the two continues and is bound to continue till eternity. There is one argument which is ever handy for the theist, viz., the majority of mankind do believe in Providence in some form or other, in spite of the non-perceptibility of God, and this should be sufficient proof for His existence. But the athiest is not moved by this argument.

Now, let us examine certain arguments advanced by theists. The Naiyayikas (the followers of the Nyaya system of philosophy propounded by Akshapada, more popularly known as Goutama) say that God can be proved to exist by Anumana Pramana or inference. They argue that since every effect must have a cause, the universe which is undoubtedly in the nature of an effect must have a cause, too. In other words, the universe must have been created by a personal creator. And that creator cannot be an ordinary human or super-human being, but must undoubtedly be endowed with such qualities as Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence. This argument, they claim, is flawless and leaves us directly at the door of God. Because the fact, that an effect must have a cause, cannot be denied by any sane person, nor can it be denied that the universe is a product, they say, it should have been created at some time or other. Many thinkers, who have no faith in any religion, nay, even many scientists, do feel that the universe, varied and manifold as it is, works in such a wonderful harmony, strictly following many set laws with such a regularity that it could be so only under the guidance of an intelligent, all-wise and all-powerful Master.

Still, there are other scientists who would explain all as the work of blind nature. To these, the theist's reply is that scientists may discover many laws of nature and explain many a phenomenon, but the question would still remain as to why nature follows these laws so rigidly, or why such laws should exist at all. Scientists can offer explanations upto a certain stage only, beyond which the questions, how and



why, would remain unanswered. Beyond the physical plane there must be a transcendental plane, which should be the realm of God. Some great scientists also have felt this way. People who are always hankering after bread, or political power, might not be able to realise this truth, but all serious and deep thinkers appear to be inclined to admit the existence of an invisible creator of the universe owing to many reasons. This, in short, is the line of thinking of a rationalistic theist.

But, strange as it may seem, the Vedantins are strongly opposed to this way of getting at God. They hold that God cannot be inferred in any way, because no inference can be final. There will be no end to arguments and counter arguments. The Vedic texts alone—and of course the inspired utterances of mystics or saints who have directly perceived God—can establish Him. Inference, by itself, is insufficient and incompetent. Again it may be affected with a thousand and one flaws. Further, there may be many causes for a single effect. Take for instance the case of a big mansion. It is certainly not constructed by a single person, but by a team of highly talented men. Even the plan of the mansion need not be conceived or drawn by a single person. In a similar way, it might be argued that the universe might have come into existence owing to a number of causes or might have been created by many super-human beings—many gods—and not a single God!

Again, the Vedantins affirm, inference may lead us to another labyrinth. At least three kinds of causes are necessary to create a thing. To cite a popular example, if a pot is to be made, there should be mud, which is called its material cause. There should be the potter, who is called its efficient cause. There should be the wheel, the stick, the knife, etc., which are called its instrumental causes. Now, in the case of the universe, even granting, for argument's sake, the existence of God as its efficient cause, there is the question of the other two causes, the material and the instrumental. What did God create the universe with? What were His instruments? And who created those? And with what materials and instruments were they, again, created? What were the material and instrumental causes for them? This will lead us to the fallacy of infinite regress! If, on the other hand, we try to avoid this by maintaining that the universe came into existence without the help of the two, that is, the material and instrumental causes, it can be equally held that it came into being without the third, that is, the efficient cause too! In other words, if we avoid the necessity for the two kinds of causes the necessity for the third cause also can be avoided. This would be flatly to deny God!



Further, there is the vexed question, whether God is a person, that is, whether He possesses a body, or not. If the latter is the case, He could not have created anything at all, for a bodiless (formless) all pervading, static, spirit could do nothing. If the former is the case, who created the body and how? If we avoid this trouble and postulate an uncreated body to God, the opponent might equally urge that the universe, too, could be an uncreated product! Again, where did God reside before or while creating the universe? If in Heaven, who created Heaven, and when and how? This question also can be repeated over and over. Again, what purpose did God create the world for? Surely He could have nothing to gain thereby. Nor can it be seriously pressed that He did it out of compassion towards the souls, for the souls themselves should have come into being only after creation, and again, He ought not to have made the world so overflowing with misery and suffering!

“What!” the reader might exclaim in bewilderment, “have the Vedantins suddenly turned athiests? Do not the Upanishads proclaim, in unequivocal terms, that God creates, protects, and finally consumes the universe? Are the Vedantins themselves not bound to answer every one of these questions which they ruthlessly put to the Naiyayikas? Then why pick holes in another’s coat?”

The Vedantin is ready with his reply. He insists on picking holes in the Naiyayika’s coat because they exist there. He only wants to show him that his method of approach is fundamentally wrong and would lead to absurd conclusions and negative results if carried to its logical end. The nature of God is transcendental in every way, and inference based upon certain relationships existing between earthly things can lead us to conclusions about earthy things only. It is wrong to apply the analogy of the pot and the potter to the unknown factors of God and His creation of the world. If the analogy is to hold good the relationship between the universe and God should be identically the same as that between the pot and the potter. The potter, it is true, cannot make a pot without the help of mud, water, wheel, stick, knife and other things; he should also possess a strong and able body, must have a residence and a purpose. But, we cannot affirm, in the same manner, that the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent creator of the universe, too, must have all these factors present. We cannot carry truths which are applicable to finite centres of experience into the sphere of infinity. Inference may help us in the field of the former, but in the case of the latter, intuition, or the revelations of the Rishis, or the Vedas alone could be helpful.



In knowing God, and all about God, the Vedantin maintains, the Vedas are our only guide. The Vedic texts also refer to God's great qualities and His various kinds of relationship with the world, but they emphasise, at the same time, that every one of His qualities and every kind of His relationship is exalted and transcendental (Aprakrudam). His knowledge is transcendental, His power is transcendental, His overlordship is transcendental, His steadiness is transcendental, His strength is transcendental, His brilliance is transcendental, His beauty is transcendental, His love is transcendental, and He possesses an infinite number of other transcendental qualities. Again, He is the only exalted father, mother, teacher, friend, and every other conceivable relation. Nay, sometimes the Vedas would speak of Him in unique, and paradoxical terms too, which would be beyond the limits of our conception. They say, for instance, that God is greater than the greatest and smaller than the smallest (Anoraneeyam mahatomaheeyam), He is unborn, yet He is born (Ajayamano banudavi jayathe), etc., etc. By no stretch of imagination or method of inference can we conceive all these. We will have to simply accept what the Vedas say and try to understand Him as such. The mind of faith alone could help us here.

Let us consider this with reference to an example. Suppose a person has never seen or heard of an elephant and it has fallen to our lot to convince him of the existence of such a strange being. How are we to do this? We can give him a vivid description of the wonderful animal, but our friend should believe us and try to make out a mental picture of the animal. But, if he does not, and requires us to prove its existence to his satisfaction, is there, on the face of the earth, any method of inference capable of proving the existence of an elephant? We can make an attempt by saying, "A fly is bigger than an ant; a sparrow is bigger than a fly; a crow is bigger still, a goat is still bigger; this series must have an upper limit and the elephant is the largest animal of all. But this kind of argument can give him no picture of the elephant at all. We can say that it is not a reptile, nor a bird, nor an aquatic being; but it is the biggest land animal; it possesses a wonderful hand (trunk) hanging from the face; its ears are very big while its eyes are very very small, etc. And our friend should have confidence or faith in us and listen to our description of the animal with full sympathy, and a will to understand, if he cares to have a true knowledge of the same. We can even offer to take him to the place where we have seen an elephant and show him the animal if he follows us. But, if he persists in questioning, how the elephant can boast of a single long hand hanging from the face while no other animal has such, or presses us to reconcile its big ears with its



small eyes, there is no way by which we can prove to him all these. There is no method of inference by which we can prove the existence of a thing which is fundamentally different from all we have seen. Therefore, the Vedantin urges that, in the region of the unknown, intuition or revelation alone should help us, and that it is wrong to carry the method of inference there also.

To revert to our example of the potter and the pot, the Vedas too do claim that God created the world, but at the same time they emphasise that there is a world of difference between the potter who makes the pot and God who creates the world. The potter does need his materials and instruments such as mud, wheel, stick, knife, etc. He must have a place to work in, and a purpose to serve. But God, who possesses such exalted characteristics as Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence cannot require them. There can be absolutely no comparison between a potter and God. The Almighty God can see without eyes, hear without ears, grasp without hands, move without legs, etc., etc. In fact He holds the non-sentient matter and the sentient spirits as part and parcel of His own self—as His body as it were (*yasya alma sareeram, yasya Prithivi sareeram*)—and by the mere fiat of His will (*Saukalpa*) He can create, that is, manifest or throw out the universe into its gross forms, as He could draw them back also and consume them unto Himself with equal ease! The Naiyayika cannot show an earthly creator possessing similar power, nay, not even an infinitesimal fraction of it, and therefore his method of inference could be of little help here †

Kurathazhwan, the great scholar and disciple of Sri Ramanuja, exclaims (in verse 38 of his Sri Vaikuntha stava) thus :

Kim sadhanab kva divasan Kimupadadanah  
Kasmai phalaya srijateesa idam samastham,  
Ithyadyanishthitha Kutharka matharkayaathah  
Tvad vaibhavam Srutivido vidurapratherkyam.

“With what, sitting where, from what, and what for, has He created all these? These are the silly questions asked by crooked logicians. But the Vedantins pay little heed to such bickerings, for they know, oh Lord! that Thy greatness is verily incomprehensible and that the Srutis (Vedas) alone are competent to speak about Thee!” The Vedantin, especially the Visishtadwaitin, has no contempt either for sense-perception (*Prathyaksha pramana*) or inference (*Anumana pramana*) as such. He says that we can utilise them in fields where they can help us. But, in a sphere, which is beyond the reach of sense-perception and



inference, as for instance in determining the nature of the soul, or its life after death, or its final destiny, the Vedas alone, he maintains, should be our sole resort.

Even though the word, 'Veda', means knowledge, or more correctly 'a means of knowledge', in fact, it is the purpose of the Vedas to impart us knowledge only about those things which cannot be known or proved by other means, viz., sense-perception or inference. (Prathyakshena anumithyava yorthas sa kyo na veditum, Vidanti Yath thad vedena tasmad Vedasya Vedatha). The Vedas are the revelations received by the ancient Rishis (Seers) about the subtle truths of regions which are beyond the ken of ordinary mortals and if we want to acquire a knowledge about those truths we should have complete confidence in the Rishis who are their custodians. The Vedic texts (Sabdha) are the trustworthy words (Aptha Vachanas) of the seers and they are our only means to get at the hidden truths of ultimate Reality. Sage Vyasa (Badarayana) lays emphasis on this point in many places in his Brahma Sutras. *Sastra yonithwat* (1—1—3), *Tarkapratiasthanadapi* (2—1—11), *Scruteshu Sabdamoolathvat* (2—1—27), *Anavrittissabdat* (4—4—22), etc. Such texts emphasise that in the matter of knowing anything about God, or about the true nature of our own individual selves, or of our final goal in life, or the ways to it, or the impediments to it, the Vedas and the Vedas alone should be our safe guide.

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