



# Descartes and the Question of God's Existence

Thoibisana Akoijam

## Abstract

When Antoine Arnauld, in his *Fourth Set of Objections*, aimed at Descartes' *Meditations*, expressed the difficulty of accepting the certainty that *God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this*, with the claim that *what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists*; he sets the structural problem of Cartesian epistemology, which is also popularly known as the Cartesian Circle. Descartes replied by drawing attention to the difference between *clear and distinct perceptions* to which one is actually attending and *clear and distinction perceptions* that one merely remembers having considered in the past. He claims that whereas the former perception is beyond doubt, the latter cannot be trusted until it is established that a non-deceptive God exists. The controversy surrounding the Cartesian Circle has been reduced to debates concerning whether Descartes was interested mainly in providing a psychologically stable system of beliefs or if he wanted to establish that these beliefs correspond to reality. Hence, the underlying question concerning the Cartesian Circle is whether Descartes intended to provide a formidable challenge to the reliability of *human cognition* or whether he merely wanted to use the skeptical process to direct the reader to a *clear and distinct perception* and then on to the first principles of metaphysics. Whereas there is evidence on both sides of the argument, the present essay will focus on the metaphysics of God.

**Keywords:** Descartes, God, Existence, Perfection, *Meditation Third and Fifth*

## Introduction

The essay is divided into three sections: the first part explicates Descartes' ideas of God – it seeks to highlight the nature, meaning, and concepts of God as discussed in the *Meditations on First*

*Philosophy*;<sup>i</sup> the second part discuss some of the most important issues concerning the questions of the existence of God, and the proof for such an existence; and the third is a brief account of the question of [ir] relevance of God in Descartes' project of philosophy or in his ultimate quest for an absolute conception of reality.

## Ideas of God in Descartes

Descartes, in his *Meditations*, identifies *ideas* with *objective reality*, insofar as it exists as parts of the intellect. They represent things to the mind. It is a reality that a thing possesses by virtue of its representational content.<sup>ii</sup> And, ideas in so far as they *exist* (externally or actually as objects of fact) possess formal reality. As for the nature of the *ideas*, Descartes writes, "The nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode" (Descartes, 1995, p.28).

Descartes also refers to the "levels of formal reality" that has its origin in the *formal reality of the mind* (of which it is the mode). He argues that the ideas that contain *objective reality* are derived from another *objective reality* that contains as much *formal reality* as there is *objective reality* in the idea. He writes, "But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause, which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea" (Descartes, 1995, pp.28-29).

Although Descartes admits that the objective reality of an idea may have its origin in the objective reality of another, he also asserts that this origin of the idea cannot continue indefinitely and must end with an archetype; whole reality [or perfection] is represented both objectively and formally (Descartes, 1995, p.29). That is, he argues that, whereas we can be the cause of the formal reality of our ideas, we cannot be the cause of their objective reality, or their representational content. This is because the nature of an idea needs no formal reality other than what is borrowed from my thought, of which it is a mode. This is also owing to the causal principles according to which there is at least as much formal reality as objective reality contained in the idea. If not, then we have to assume that something found in the idea, gets that something from nothing. However, Descartes writes, "...yet the mode of being by which a

thing exists objectivity < or representatively > in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing" (Descartes, 1995, p.29).

In examining the possible origin of the *objective reality* of his ideas, Descartes introduces the distinction between three types of ideas, namely, innate, adventitious, and factitious. Whereas, innate ideas are ideas that are inherent in the mind, or given by God; adventitious ideas have their origins in things existing external to or independently of his mind; and factitious ideas are ideas that have origin in the ability of the mind to put together ideas out of bits and pieces, from the contents of other ideas. Descartes' ideas, in so far as they provide an account of the underlying conditions for the possibility of knowledge, have been identified as a form of rationalism. His metaphysical view that God is the only true substance and everything else (the idea of mind, body, substance, attributes, and modes) depends on God for its existence (and being) became the foundation of his epistemology. <sup>iii</sup> But what is God? Descartes writes, "By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, <eternal, immutable,> Independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be that exists)" (Descartes, 1995, p.31).

He also argues that such ideas are cast as inherent in the mind or put there by God. He writes,

It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite (Descartes, 1995, p.31).

That is, according to Descartes, the idea of God, unlike other ideas, cannot arise from our mind or our natural finite power of thinking. This is because the idea of God, which includes within it the idea of infinity, unity, simplicity, perfection, substance, and immateriality, also includes the ideas required by the causal principles. So, whereas the ideas of other human beings and angles are of finite substances and could be modeled on the mediator's awareness of oneself, the idea of God requires an infinite cause (and cannot come from any finite being). This is because the idea of God represents an infinite

being, and it has an infinite objective reality. The cause of such an infinite being must contain such reality (infinite reality) as it is. So, a finite being cannot be the cause of an infinite being because a finite being has fewer levels of reality than the infinite, and, according to Descartes's causal principles, a cause cannot have less reality than the effect. Or, it must have at least as much reality as the effect. Hence, the idea of God (that is infinite) requires God as a cause (of the infinite idea of God) because it is only in the idea of God that there is also the idea of the infinite objective reality, which represents God as a *supremely perfect and infinite being*. It follows that the mediator's idea of God, or the content of the idea of God could exist only if God produced it himself. <sup>iv</sup>

Descartes' idea of a *supremely perfect being* also contains within itself the idea of completeness of reality or being as necessary to the idea of God. Since I, a finite being is not perfect, I cannot be the cause of the idea of perfection. That is, an imperfect being cannot be the cause of the perfect being. The imperfect being also cannot develop towards infinite perfection, of an eternal, supreme being. This is because God does not grow and develop. Descartes noted that since the mediators experience ignorance and the growth of knowledge in themselves, it is obvious that they are not like God. Descartes writes,

First, though it is true that there is a gradual increase in my knowledge, and that I have many potentialities which are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God, which contains absolutely nothing that is potential; indeed, this gradual increase in knowledge is itself the surest sign of imperfection (Descartes, 1995, p.32).

He continues, "What is more, even if my knowledge always increases more and more, I recognize that it will never actually be infinite, since it will never reach the point where it is not capable of a further increase" (Descartes, 1995, p.32). However, God, on the other hand, Descartes argues,

... [is taken] to be actually infinite, so that nothing can be added to his perfection. And finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced merely by potential beings, which strictly speaking is nothing but only by actual or formal being (Descartes, 1995, p.32).

Hence, an infinite creative power is required to explain the existence of any finite being.<sup>v</sup> This is also known as the proof from preservation.<sup>vi</sup> This also rules out the possibility of the deceiving-God hypothesis, that appeals to defective design.<sup>vii</sup> God cannot be a deceiver because it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect and deception stems from defect. Since the idea of God is perfection, it entails that he would not deceive.

Descartes also argued that the infinity found in the idea of God is a special infinity of power and perfection, dissimilar from an infinity of extension. In the First Set of Replies in his *Objections and Replies*, Descartes contends that since the universe is not "limitless in every respect," its 'unboundedness' should be called "indefinite" rather than "infinite" (Descartes, 1995, pp.63-86). He writes,

I make a distinction here between the indefinite and the infinite. I apply the term 'infinite, in the strict sense, only to that in which no limits of any kind can be found; and in this sense, God alone is infinite. But in case, like the extension of imaginary space, or the set of numbers, or the divisibility of the parts of a quantity, there is merely some respect in which I do not recognize a limit; so here I use the term 'indefinite' rather than 'infinite', because these items are not limitless in every respect (Descartes, 1995, p.81).

Descartes also makes a distinction between the formal concept of the term infinite, or infinity, and the thing that is infinite (Descartes, 1995, p.81). He claims that the idea of God exhibits a special unity among its attributes of infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, and so on. In fact, a cause is needed not only for the idea of each attribute but also for the mediator's understanding of the unity (Hatfields, 2014, p.175).

Finally, while examining the idea of God, at the end of the *Third Meditation*, Descartes argued that the idea of God (and its attributes) requires innate ideas. This is because the ideas of God (like, infinity, perfection, substance, immaterial, causal principles) do not pertain to things that can be represented by the senses or imagination. He writes,

It only remains for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not acquire it from the senses; it has never come to me unexpectedly, as usually happens with the ideas of things that are perceivable by the sense, when these things present themselves to the external sense organs- or seem to do so. And it was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it. The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me (Descartes, 1995, p.35).

It may be concluded that, whereas Descartes argues that the infinity of God could not be modeled on any lesser being, its content also cannot arise from our natural finite power of thinking (alone, as in the first proof). Descartes claims that the innate idea of God is like *a mark of a craftsman stamped on his work*, which is not essentially different from the word itself. <sup>viii</sup> Descartes also argues that God must enable the intellect to form the idea of an infinitely perfect being. It follows that the innate idea of God requires a special provision. It is different from other innate ideas, like a perfect circle, where no experience can ever give that idea because no circle, we encounter is perfect. In other words, no perfect circle exists (objectively) whereas the innate idea of God contains within itself the existence of God. That is, the innate idea of God reveals the nature of God (or any other things) which also includes the inherent necessity of God's existence. Existence thereby becomes the essence of the idea of God. What follows is an account of the existence of God and the questions that arise in that context.

### **Question of the existence of God (and its essence)**

The existence of God was considered for a second time in Descartes' *Fifth Meditation*. It reconsiders the ground for doubt and the truth of a clear and distinct perception of God (besides the essence of material things). Descartes takes up the argument from ontology to prove the existence of God. He writes in his *Fifth Meditation*,

Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one which I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its

nature. Hence, even if it turned out that not everything on which I have mediated in these past days is true, I ought still to regard the existence of God as having at least the same level of certainty as I have hitherto attributed to the truths of mathematics (Descartes, 1995, p.45).

The ontological argument for the existence of God is a way of proving the *existence* of God by means of the *nature* or *essence* of God.<sup>ix</sup> In other words, it is proof from the idea of God itself that follows the order of discovery as in the *analytic method* (Hatfield, 2014, p.222). This is also known as a *a priori* proof of the existence of God. The significance of this proof is that it purports to discover the essence of God, which is purely intellectual and self-evident intuition. His ontological argument is also a methodological discussion to secure clear and distinct perception as the means for knowing the nature of the essence of God as existence. So, what exactly is this ontological argument?

The proof of God's *existence* can be observed by considering his *essence* or what is also called the *necessary properties* of his being. The term ontology is derived from the Greek word, *onto* meaning *being*. Also, the Latin form *esse* is the root from which the word *essence* is derived. Hence, the question of ontology is the question of the essence of the thing/being. It is the question of *what it is* or *what are the properties* that make the things or being, *what it is*. In other words, the ontology argument of God is the question of the necessary connection between God's essence and his existence. <sup>x</sup>

Descartes argues that existence is a property inseparable from God. That is, existence is necessarily a property of God's essence. Descartes was critical of the Aristotelian idea of existence as separable from essence. He argues that the Aristotelian theory that knowledge of essence depends on the knowledge of the existing things. This subsequently separates the questions of essence, that is, the question of what a thing is, from the question of the existence of a thing. The point of Descartes' argument is that, whereas actual existence is not essential for the idea of geometrical objects, in the case of God, existence is inseparable from God's essence. This is because, if actual (factual) existence is separable from essence, then

God's existence cannot follow from his essence (Hatfield, 2014, p.223). Descartes writes,

But when I concentrate more carefully, it is quite evident that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the fact that its three angles equal two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle, or than the idea of a mountain can be separated from the idea of a valley. Hence it is just as much of a contradiction to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking a perfection), as it is to think of a mountain without a valley (Descartes, 1995, p.46).

It is also noticed that, according to the argument concerning a *supremely perfect being*, existence is God's essence because a *supremely perfect being* or perfection includes in itself existence. For example, a being/thing that does not exist would lack perfection, then a thing that has perfection (existence). And since God is supremely perfect, God must have that perfection. Therefore, a supremely perfect God will always have existence because perfection includes existence. As Williams also writes,

...Descartes argues, [that] the idea of God is a special case. For the idea God is the idea of a being who possesses all perfection- his essence involves every perfection. But one perfection is existence itself, so the essence of God necessarily involves existence. Hence, from the mere idea of [the] essence of God, it follows necessarily that God actually exists (William, 2005, pp.138-139).

However, the question is, even if existence is inseparably bound up with God's essence, *is it necessary to conclude [that] from the fact that I think of God as existing that he does exist?* That is, as I am free to imagine a horse with or without wings horse, and the winged horse does not exist, so I might imagine [the] existence of God, even though God does not exist (Descartes, 1995, p.46). In other words, it raises the question of the [im]possibility of the existence of God merely from the fact that the mediator thinks of God as necessarily existing. It also does not cancel [the] question of the [necessary]



connection between the essence and existence of God as a mere contrast or a fictitious composite, like the imagination of a winged horse. If so, God as having the essence of necessary existence, would have no bearing on reality. (Hatfield, 2014, p.224) To this objection, Descartes writes:

However, even granted that I cannot think of God except as existing, just as I cannot think of a mountain without a valley, it certainly does not follow from the fact that I think of a mountain with a valley that there is any mountain in the world; and similarly, it does not seem to follow from the fact that I think of God as existing that he does exist. for my thought does not impose any necessity on things; and just as I may imagine a winged horse even though no horse has wings, so I may be able to attach existence to God even though no God exists (Descartes, 1995, p.46).

That is, the mere thought of humans that God exists, does not entail the existence of God, nor vice-versa. Because, as argued earlier, God's perfection includes his existence. Otherwise, God would not have been the supremely perfect being. My thinking or imagining that God must necessarily exist does not affect God's existence. Because it is God's essence to exist; or existence is the essence of God, irrespective of what I think (God exists/ God does not exist). So, just as there is a necessary connection between a mountain and a valley, there is a necessary connection between God's existence and his essence. It is a connection (necessary connection) discovered in God as the object of clear and distinct ideas.

Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God collapses if it can be proven that his prior supposition that *God has all perfection, including existence, is false*. This is also known as the question of *hypothetical necessity*. According to this, one starts with a hypothetical necessity by assuming or supposing that, for example, all triangles are right-angled triangles. It will follow that all triangles are subject to the Pythagorean theorem which holds only for right-angled triangles. Hence, the conclusion that all triangles are Pythagorean, follows necessarily from the hypothesis that all triangles are right-angled. But the point is that all triangles are not right-angled. Hence, the argument that there is a necessary

connection between a random *triangle* and a *right-angled* triangle is false because the hypothesis is not true. The same may apply to Descartes' necessary connection between *existence* and *essence*, such that there is no ground for believing in the supposition of God's existence as necessarily connected to his essence. Descartes responded by admitting that,

It is not necessary that I ever light upon any thought of God; but whenever I do choose to think of the first and supreme being, and bring forth the idea of God from the treasure house of mind as it were, it is necessary that I attribute all perfection to him, even if I do not at that time enumerate them or attend to them individually. And this necessity plainly guarantees that, when I later realize that existence is a perfection, I am correct in inferring that the first and supreme being exists (Descartes, 1995, pp.46-47).

Now, this is a response directed at the notion of the innate idea of God. And just as all innate ideas are intrinsically and intuitively given clearly and distinctly, the room for supposition, or false supposition is ruled out. In other words, the intrinsic content of the idea of God necessarily attributes all perfections to God. So, whereas other ideas, like fictitious, can enter into a hypothetical necessity (hypothetical connections contain no inner necessity), the idea of God has an inner necessity that cannot be reduced to any kind of hypothetical necessity.

The question concerning the relationship between the *existence* and the *essence* of God was raised by Gassendi in the *Fifth Set of Objections* (Descartes, 1995, pp.179-267) Gassendi refuses to acknowledge that essence and existence can be separated. He argues that if a thing does not exist, it has no essence. This is because an essence cannot exist apart from its instances (Descartes, 1995, pp.221-222). Another objection, (which is the most famous of his objections) is his assertion that *existence is not a predicate* that can be differently related to God and to other things. That is, he argues that either existence is not a predicate, or it is equally contained in the conceptions of all things. (Descartes, 1995, p.224) He has granted that if we cannot think of a winged horse without wings or a mountain without a slope, just as we cannot think of God as not having knowledge and

power, existence in both cases cannot be differentiated. That is, existence cannot be used as a perfection present or absent in the essence of a non-existent thing. This is because what does not exist has no perfections, and all existing things, therefore (at least), share equally the perfection of existence. Hence, Gassendi concluded that God, if he exists, does not differ from other things on those scores. (Descartes, 1995, pp.224-225) According to him, Descartes' ontological argument cannot really explain the difference between the possibility of slopeless mountains or a winged horse, without even thinking of them as existing; and the impossibility of thinking of a wise and powerful God without thinking of him as existing (Descartes, 1995, p.225).

Gassendi's point of argument was further taken up by philosophers like Hume and Kant. Both argued that existence is not a predicate thing. There is no difference between *imagining a thing* and *imagining it as existing*. That is, thinking of the thing as existing adds nothing to it. To imagine a thing is to imagine it as existing. Hence, existing is not a predicate.

Now, whereas Descartes granted Gassendi (as well as Hume and Kant) that when we imagine things, we imagine them as existing. Descartes, however, disagrees with their conclusion of equating *imagining a thing* to *imagining it as existing*. This is because, for Descartes, thought cannot be reduced to images. That is, thought can grasp abstract relations and properties, including possibility and necessity, which can enter into the content of a judgment. Descartes claims that, in the case of existence, it is possible to understand the difference between a thing with merely possible existence and the one that exists necessarily. That is, in both cases, in thinking of the thing, we could think of it as it would be if it existed. However, there is a difference between thinking of a thing that *possibly* exists, like a geometrical figure (here, possibly also includes the impossible existence of, say, a perfect circle), and the *cognition* of the necessary existence of God (Hatfield, 2014, p.229). The latter rules out the possibility of its impossible existence. Hence, Descartes in his *First Set of Replies* writes, "It must be noted that possible existence is contained in the concept or idea of everything that we clearly and distinctly understand, but that necessary existence is contained only on the idea of God" (Descartes, 1995, p.83). He continues,

Those who carefully attend to this difference between the idea of God and every other idea will undoubtedly perceive that even though we always understand other things as if they were existing, still, it does not follow that they do exist, but merely that they are capable of existing (Descartes, 1995, p.83).

Still, another way of putting the argument from Gassendi and Kant is the objection that *existence is not a property* of a thing, that the concept of a thing may or may not have. That is, existence is the positing of a thing in the world that corresponds to the concept. In other words, existence cannot be used as a property of a concept. This is because the concepts remain the same whether the thing exists or not; it may even convey something about the thing, on the assumption that the thing exists.<sup>xi</sup> Hence, Descartes' assumption that the thing in question exists, is charged with begging the question (Hatfield, 2014, p.230).

Whereas there are various objections and debates surrounding the relation between the existence and essence of God, it is observed that Descartes has always resorted to the idea that God is innate and the notion that the intellect can reveal to us the real possibilities and necessities of things, independently of sensory experience.<sup>xii</sup> Descartes also refuses to contemplate the meaning of a word, to prove the existence of God. This is because the meaning of a word is presumably acquired from others through the sense of listening or reading.<sup>xiii</sup> Descartes resorts to the knowledge of God through the idea of a clear and distinct perception of the essence of God as necessarily existing. He explains [in his Fifth Set of Replies in *Objections* raised against the *Third Meditation*] that his idea of God's essence permits him to 'understand,' 'reach' or 'know' God's essence, which reveals that he must exist (Descartes, 1995, p.252). Therefore, God exists.

### **Does Descartes need to believe in God? Does he really believe in God?**

There has been a serious discussion on the role of Descartes' God in his project of philosophy. It has often been asked, could not Descartes not try to answer his doubt without appealing to God. Or,

was Descartes not convinced by Cogito's reasoning that every time, he has to resort to the innate idea of God for his existence and every other thing around us? However, one cannot take Descartes to be so casual about accepting these two. One cannot deny the deliberate effort made by Descartes in grafting the idea of God. The speculation that Descartes' God is an attempt to prove his orthodoxy in the face of Galileo's condemnation is the only way to explain his main argument. There is, in fact, so much in Descartes' work that is rational and modern that we cannot take his arguments for the idea of God and its existence as prejudiced and superstitious as the thoughts of his time. Contrary, it would be our prejudice and also lack of consistency than those of Descartes to take him in this line of thought (Francks, 2008, p.120). This section seeks to delineate Descartes' concept of God and also traces Descartes' project in philosophy.

To start with, the question concerning the existence of God is for Descartes, not a question for the existence or non-existence of God. It is more like what Francks comments on "the question about the need to believe in a different order of being" (Francks, 2008, p.122). In the *Principles*, section 1.51-2, Descartes explains that God is the only true substance, because God is the only thing that exists in such a way as not to depend on anything else for its existence. All other things, mind, and matter (and everything else in nature), are substance in a different sense because they depend only on God for their existence. Does this mean that God exists? Or does this mean that God should/must exist? Anyone attempting to answer this question in a causal sense would agree that God exists because matter and mind exist, and if their existence depends on God, God must also exist. But the question is, does this serve the purpose of Descartes' God? Or does Descartes introduce God to explain the causal phenomena? <sup>xiv</sup> If so, and if this is the only purpose of Descartes' God, Descartes would not have given the fifth proof for the existence of God. Descartes' God is much more than this. As Francks noted, "Created substances are dependent on God not merely causally but ontologically: that God is the single underlying reality which they express" (2008, p.123).

God, for Descartes, is not merely the originator of the world; God is not a different kind whose existence needs to be proved. God,

rather than Descartes, occupies a special sense. God, in Descartes' conceptualization, plays the central part in his philosophical project. Descartes' metaphysical conception of God stands as the driving force of his *Meditations* and subsequently in his *Principles of Philosophy*, where he explicated what he calls *the tree of philosophy*, with its roots in metaphysics. It is well known that Descartes sought to establish the foundation of the first philosophy by overthrowing Aristotle's metaphysics. So, whereas Aristotle tries to establish his metaphysics through the causal principles of the matter that can exist independently of God, Descartes brings God as the metaphysical ground for explaining all phenomena, including Aristotle's metaphysics. Descartes believes in the innate idea of a single, infinite substance, namely God, who is the reason for all existence in space and time but who also, as an entity, transcends space and time.

This single substance, God, who has all the attributes of infinite perfection, of an eternal, supreme being, is also an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Being (with a capital 'B'). Its perfection embraces [not merely the existence in the ontic / ontology sense] God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good. God's power is not a power that he desires; it just is his power to make everything happen as it is. It is in this sense, that God is all-powerful. Hence, God is omnipotent.

God is also omniscient, in the sense that God is the *ultimate truth*. Finally, God is omnibenevolent, in the sense that God cannot lack anything. The notion of *lack* can be explained in terms of negative attributes like evil, anger, cruelty, etc. That is, whereas evil or moral failings are literally failings, weaknesses, and inadequacies – anger is a lack of courage to accept the situation; cruelty is hurting others or trying to avenge ourselves, etc. All these attributes (like evil, anger, and cruelty) are inadequacies and immoralities in purely negative terms. But God is wholly perfect, which means God does not have such weaknesses and immoralities. God is rather wholly good. Therefore, God is also goodness. It is God's divine goodness that has endowed man with free will to do good, knowing what good is.

The above line of argument also echoes Bernard Williams's observation on the modern proponents of the ontological arguments who concluded that "there is a being omnipotent, omniscient,

eternal, benevolent, [who is also the] creator of Heaven and earth" (2005, p.146). Williams argues that the premises from which this conclusion is drawn are highly complex and disputable of philosophical logic. There are other contemporary philosophers like Plantinga who have reformulated the argument for God (the existence of God) without the aid of any piece of natural theology. Plantinga proves the existence of God along with his qualities such as omniscience, omnipotence and benevolence, by drawing upon propositions that are rationally and logically sound. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the Plantinga theory of ontological argument, also popularly known as modal logic [for the existence of God].

However, Williams also noted that what is important in Descartes' concept of God, is *the formative and virtually unquestionable features of the premises of the argument that were exceedingly straightforward* (2005, 146). He also noted that Descartes' concern for the foundation of scientific knowledge significantly depends on God. God, insofar as, is the single substance of divine certainty, as well as divine will, that coheres and interconnects mass concepts, beliefs and attitudes, Descartes' God is an absolute conception of reality, that has also constructed his philosophy of Cartesianism.

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> *Meditations on First Philosophy*, by Descartes. All quotation from *Meditations*, and *Objections and Replies* are from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume II. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, 1984, reprinted 1995.

<sup>ii</sup> The Cartesian idea is a concept that is different from the traditional understanding of ideas (where ideas are identified with *forms*). It rejects the traditional doctrines of ideas that inform its imitations and gives their image of the reality they have. The

Cartesian idea is rather patterned after God's pure cognitions, and is entertained by minds. (*Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy*. (2015), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Rowman and Littlefield. p.181.

<sup>iii</sup> In the *Third Meditation*, Descartes argues that the *cogito* is released from the doubt about the reliability of clear and distinct perception because God exists and God is not a deceiver. That is, on the one hand, Descartes appeals to the faculty of clear and distinct perception, to prove the existence and non-deceptiveness of God, whereas on the other hand, the reliability of the clear and distinct perception is provided by God. In other words, on the one hand, a particular method of ascertaining the truth (of clear and distinct) is vindicated by proving that God exists and is no deceiver; on the other hand, this proof (that God exists and is no deceiver) relies on that very method. (Hatfield, 2014, p.177) It is this procedure that has the appearance of what is called the Cartesian Circularity.

<sup>iv</sup> These are the two variations of the same arguments in the *Third Meditation*. The first argument is the idea of an infinite substance, which I possess, but requires a cause that must itself be infinite. The second is that I, who possess this idea, must have been created by an infinite substance or God. Both are labeled as arguments *a posteriori*. Descartes' *a posteriori* argument resembles Thomas Aquinas's proof of the existence of God. The principal difference is that Descartes did not use the world's existence to prove God because of hyperbolic doubt. He based his argument on the existence of the self, which has an idea of God. (Ariew, 2015, p.96)



v Again, having the power of creation, one would not have denied oneself other attributes, such as infinite knowledge, so one would know that one is God.

vi It proceeds by a process of elimination, whereby Descartes gave four possible causes of one's being, oneself, one's parents, other beings less perfect than God, and God. He ruled out the first three, leaving only God as the creator of my finite being. (Hatfield, 2014, p.173).

vii Since perfection includes the absence of deception, God would not create the mediators with a defective mind. Hence, when the mediators conceive something as clear and distinct, it is clear and distinct, as God would not deceive them to perceive something that is not clear and distinct as clear and distinct.

viii It is this point of argument because of which Descartes is caught in the web of the Cartesian Circle.

ix The other proof, as outlined in Third Meditation, is proof for the existence of God from the effect.

x There are various versions of ontological arguments. The original argument was attributed to the 11<sup>th</sup>-century theologian, Anselm of Canterbury. It is different from cosmological in that the latter posits God as the cause for the existence of finite and contingent beings in the world. Descartes' proofs for the arguments of God that are discussed in the *Third Meditation* are of this kind. It is also known as argument from effects.

<sup>xi</sup> Kant claims that existence is not a trait that adds anything to the concept of a thing. He also maintains that existence does not make an object *greater*. The common example drawn is between that of a real one-hundred-dollar bill and of an imaginary hundred-dollar bill thought of in the mind. Whereas the first can be crumpled, the latter cannot be. However, both retain the exact same properties. That is, the ability to be used in reality does not affect the perceived *greatness* of that object, the dollar bill in this case.

<sup>xii</sup> Hatfield notes that Descartes answer would be the same as to his own second objection. That is, his idea of God is not just an idea of God's necessity, but a perception of the real necessity of God's existence. (Hatfield, 2014, p.230)

<sup>xiii</sup> It may be noted that Aquinas and Caterus object to Descartes' proof for the existence of God in terms of the meaning of a concept constructed with the words. They argue that the meaning of a word (God) does not reveal the true nature of God.

<sup>xiv</sup> So, if God does not exist, then the world would lose its point, its purpose and its explanation. That is, if God does not exist, there is no world, and there is no point of talking about the nature and purpose of the word. All there would be the endless sequence of physical processes, where human lives would have no meaning, and the only would be about those we create for ourselves, and the only rewards and punishments would be human ones (Francks, 2008, p.121).

**References**

- Ariew, R, et al. (Eds.). (2015). *Historical Dictionary of Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Rowman and Littlefield.
- Cottingham, J. (1992). *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. Cambridge University Press.
- Descartes, R. (1995). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (volume II). (J. Cottingham, et al., Trans.). Cambridge University Press.
- Francks, R. (2008). *Descartes' Meditations: A Readers' Guide*. Continuum.
- Hatfield, G. (2014). *The Routledge Guidebook to Descartes' Meditations*. Routledge.
- Williams, B. (2005). *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*. Routledge.