

## **AN EVALUATION OF IMMANUEL KANT'S CRITIQUE OF THE TRADITIONAL RATIONAL PROOFS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE**

Anetoh, Bonaventure Chike, Ph.D  
Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Tansian University Umunya  
anetohbonaventure@yahoo.com

---

### **Abstract**

*In the medieval period of philosophy, some philosophers and theologians like Boethius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas etc., offered what could be said to be rational proofs for God's existence. Aquinas tried to demonstrate the existence of God using the cosmological arguments in which he argued from what we observe to the existence of that being which is invisible and transcendent. Anselm came up with the 'ontological argument' in which he described God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Obviously, Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence is purely rationalistic and centres basically on the power of reason. In the modern period of philosophy, Rene Descartes articulated a newer version of the ontological argument for God's existence, basing completely on unaided power of human reason. Descartes distrusted the senses, and saw reason as the true source of objective knowledge. G. W. Leibniz has also similar view about human reason. However, Immanuel Kant criticized all efforts made by philosophers to rationally demonstrate the existence of God, and insists that human reason cannot offer us certain knowledge beyond the domain of possible experience. Thus, this write-up focuses on an evaluation of Kant's critique of the traditional proofs for God's existence. It submits that human reason cannot certainly delve into the domain of divinity without involving itself in one error or the other. Human reason can guarantee certain knowledge only within the domain of possible experience. God and other supra-sensible entities are not within the domain of possible experience. It is obvious that the domain of belief is quite different from the domain of reason. Human reason can err if it is extended beyond its limits. The implication of this is that God ought to be approached with belief (faith) and not with reason. Hence, traditional speculative metaphysicians must acknowledge the limit of human reason as a cognitive faculty.*

**Keywords:** Emmanuel Kant, Religion, Proofs, Traditional, Rational.

---

## **Introduction**

The issue of the extent of the cognitive ability of human reason is a very controversial issue among philosophers. Some rationalists such as Rene Descartes, Wilhelm Leibniz, Baruch Spinoza etc. argue that the knowledge of transcendent entities can be attained through unaided power of human reason, while some empiricist philosophers like John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume etc. claim that experience is the basic source of knowledge, and assign subservient role to reason in the acquisition of knowledge. The basic questions are: 'What actually can human reason know with certainty? How can we actually be certain of what we claim to know? What is the limit of human reason as a cognitive faculty? Can human reason attain the knowledge of transcendent entities with certainty? Is human reason limited to the knowledge of empirical realities. The responses to these controversial questions are very essential in assessing the role and limit of human reason as a cognitive faculty.

It is obvious from the history of philosophy that some philosophers believe that human reason can attain the knowledge of God. In the medieval period of philosophy, some philosophers and theologians like Boethius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas etc. offered what could be said to be rational proofs for God's existence. Aquinas tried to demonstrate the existence of God using the cosmological arguments in which he argued from what we observe to the existence of that being which is invisible and transcendent. Anselm came up with the 'ontological argument' in which he described God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Obviously, Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence is purely rationalistic and centres basically on the power of reason. In the modern period of philosophy, Rene Descartes articulated a newer version of the ontological argument for God's existence, basing completely on unaided power of human reason. Descartes distrusted the senses, and saw reason as the true source of objective knowledge. G. W. Leibniz has also similar view about human reason. He argues that the knowledge of God can be attained through human reason. According to Leibniz, as cited in Scruton (1985:16) "...reality is accessible to reason alone, since it is only reason can rise above the individual point of view and participate in the vision of ultimate necessities, which is also God's." However, Immanuel Kant criticized all efforts made by philosophers to rationally demonstrate the existence of God, and insists that human reason cannot offer us certain knowledge beyond the domain of possible

experience. Thus, this write-up focuses on an evaluation of Kant's critique of the traditional proofs for God's existence.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

The concepts of 'Human Reason' and 'God' are the basic concepts in the topic of our discussion. It seems to the researcher that a brief conceptual clarifications of these two basic concepts would enable us understand and appreciate the discussions in this write-up better.

## **Human Reason**

There seems to be basically two sources of knowledge in philosophy: the senses and reason. There was a great controversy in the modern period of philosophy between empiricists and rationalists on the source and justification of human knowledge. Empiricists like John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume etc. argue that sense perception guarantees certain knowledge, while the rationalists like Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Wilhelm Leibniz etc. argue on the contrary, insisting that it is reason that guarantees certain knowledge. It is easier to explain the senses and their operations than the faculty of reason because they are empirical; and we can easily locate them. On the contrary, it is difficult to explain human reason and its operations. However, let us at this juncture attempt explaining this complex faculty of cognition. Reason is the distinctive characteristic of human beings. It distinguishes human beings as rational beings. It enables man to think rationally, form ideas and make inferences. Analysing the nature of human reason, Macmurray (2010:1) states:

In the first place, there is that usage which makes reason the differential characteristic of human or, perhaps better, of personal nature. I prefer the term "personal" because it includes the possibility of the existence of rational beings other than human beings. This usage of the term is enshrined in the classical definition of man as a rational animal. The second main use of the term "reason" and "rational" is that which refers them to the capacity for logical understanding. We talk of reason in a way which refers the term to our capacity for knowledge in a limited sense, in that sense in which it is based upon the capacity for forming and

entertaining general ideas and on inferring correctly by means of them.

It becomes obvious from Macmurray's specification that reason enables us to attain knowledge of realities. For Immanuel Kant, reason is the highest cognitive faculty since human knowledge ends with reason. According to Kant (1990:189)

All our knowledge begins with sense, proceeds thence to understanding, and ends with reason, beyond which nothing higher can be discovered in the human mind for elaborating the matter of intuition and subjecting it to the highest unity of thought. At this stage of our inquiry it is my duty to give an explanation of this, the highest faculty of cognition,.

Kant argues that the faculty of reason functions inseparably with the faculty of 'understanding' which in turn works in connection with the faculty of 'sensibility'. Human reason is the faculty of abstractions. This is done by borrowing some principles from the faculty of 'understanding', though some principles are contained in the faculty of reason. Kant claims that reason is the faculty of principles which gives a priori unity to the cognitions of 'understanding' by means of conceptions. From the foregoing, it is obvious that reason does not apply directly to experiential objects. It relates directly to the 'understanding' and gives rational unity to the cognitions of 'understanding' by means of conceptions. It relates immediately to the 'understanding' and it is through 'understanding' that it can be employed to the domain of experience. However, in this discourse, serious attention would be given to the issue of whether human reason can demonstrate with certainty the existence of the Supreme being.

## GOD

It must be stated 'ab initio' that the clarification of the concept 'God' is on purely philosophical basis. God is the Supreme Being. The question of God was given a very serious attention in the medieval period of philosophy. This is as a result of the fact that most philosophers of the period in question were also great theologians. Philosophy in this era was made the handmaid of Theology. Augustine, one of the early medieval philosophers, saw God as the highest being. Analyzing Augustine's idea of God, Stumpf (1994:141) states:

Actually, Augustine found it easier to say what God is not than to define what He is. Still, to say that God is superior to finite things was a major step. Taking the scriptural name for God given to Moses, namely, "I am That I Am," Augustine transposed this to mean that God is *being itself*. As such He is the highest being, not the beingless One of Plotinus but the "something than which nothing more excellent or more sublime exists," a phrase that influenced Anselm to formulate his famous ontological argument. As the highest being, God is perfect being, which means that He is self-existent, immutable, and eternal being. As perfect, He is also "simple," in that whatever plural attributes are assigned to Him turn out to be identical; His knowledge, wisdom, goodness, and power are all one and constitute His essence.

Thus, God, for Augustine, is a pure being, in which there is no change. God is the one eternal reality, which is the source of being and truth. On his own part, Boethius, sees God as the greatest and most perfect being. As such, he tried to prove God's existence using the argument from the 'grades of perfection', insisting that there must be a being which is the highest in the degree of perfection. This highest being, for Boethius, is the source of unity in the world. For Anselm, God is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' which cannot but have existence as a necessary attribute. Anselm approached God from ontological point of view. His notion of God had already been anticipated by Augustine because Augustine described God as something than which nothing more excellent exists. This being 'than which nothing greater can be thought', for Anselm, exists both in understanding and in reality. An Arabian philosopher, Avicenna seems to have similar conception of God. He sees God as the First Cause, whose being is necessary, having its existence in itself. Thomas Aquinas' view of God is not very different from those of his predecessors. For him, God is the First Cause, powerful creator of all things, a necessary being and a pure actuality. Hence, God is the ultimate truth, goodness and perfection itself. God, for Aquinas, is simple, eternal and perfect. He brought out very clearly God's attributes such as simplicity, perfection, goodness, limitlessness, unity etc (Aquinas in Timothy McDermott (ed.) (1989:14-25). Aquinas is well known for his cosmological arguments for God's existence.

Obviously, we do not intend, in this section, to exhaust the views of all philosophers on God. However, from the foregoing, it is obvious that God is generally seen as the 'First cause' and the 'Supreme Being' whose existence is necessary.

### **Analysis Of Kant's Critical Philosophy**

In order to appreciate Immanuel Kant's critique of the traditional proofs for God's existence, there is need to understand his critical philosophy. The era of critical philosophy could be said to have started with Kant. Obviously, Kant turned the attention of philosophical enquiry from speculative metaphysical investigation about the nature of reality to a critical investigation of the structure of human reason. Kant's critical philosophy centres on the analysis of the structure of human reason as a cognitive faculty in order to ascertain the limit within which it can attain certain knowledge. Kant insists that human reason ought to be subjected to severe criticism because the dogmatic use of reason without criticism can only lead human reason to meaningless and groundless claims. For Kant, human reason is limited and can only guarantee genuine knowledge within the bounds of possible experience. In the words of Kant (1950:110):

Reason by all its *a priori* principles never teaches us anything more than objects of possible experience, and even of these nothing more than objects of possible experience, and even of these nothing more than can be known in experience. But this limitation does not prevent reason from leading us to the objective boundary of experience, namely, to the relation to something which is not itself an object of experience but is the ground of all experience. Reason does not, however, teach us anything concerning the thing in itself; it only instructs us as regards its own complete and highest use in the field of possible experience. But this is all that can be reasonably desired in the present case, and with it we have cause to be satisfied.

Prior to Kant, some speculative metaphysicians such as Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, Wilhelm Leibniz etc. claimed that human reason can attain objective knowledge of all realities. One of the afore-mentioned metaphysicians

and rationalists, Rene Descartes tried to establish an indubitable foundation for knowledge basing on unaided power of reason. He doubted the existence of everything until he arrived at 'cogito ergo sum' (I think, therefore I am) which he took as the unshakable foundation of knowledge. From such foundation, he tried to prove the existence of other things and God. In line with Descartes, Leibniz also claimed that human reason can attain the knowledge of all realities including God. Thus, he argues that "...reality is accessible to reason alone, since it is only reason can rise above the individual point of view and participate in the vision of ultimate necessities, which is God's." ( Leibniz, cited in Scruton (1985:16). David Hume criticized the claims of speculative metaphysicians, and denied the knowledge of anything that is not empirically verifiable, especially the idea of causality. Thus, he criticized metaphysical propositions describing them as 'sophistry and illusion' because they are not empirically verifiable. Obviously, it was Hume's ideas that woke Kant from his dogmatic slumber, and enkindled his desire to embrace critical philosophy. In *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant clearly confessed thus:

I openly confess my recollection of David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction. I was far from following him in the conclusions at which he arrived by regarding, not the whole of his problem, but a part, which by itself can give us no information. If we start from a well-founded, but undeveloped, thought which another has bequeathed to us, we may well hope by continued reflection to advance farther than the acute man to whom we owe the first spark of light. (Kant, 1950:8)

Having woken up from his dogmatic slumber, Kant embarked on critical philosophy. In his critical philosophy articulated in his very influential book, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant analyses the faculty of reason and confines speculative and pure reason to its limit. According to Bonevac (1993:41) "The critical method requires reason to critique itself, to determine its own limits, and then to devise rules for staying within them." Critical philosophy made Kant to ascertain the limits of reason as a cognitive faculty. He argues and insists that

human reason can guarantee certain knowledge only within the bounds of possible experience. In his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant states:

Having adduced the clearest argument, it would be absurd for us to hope that we can know more of any object than belongs to the possible experience of it or lay claim to the least knowledge of anything not assumed to be an object of possible experience which would determine it according to the constitution it has in itself. For how could we determine anything in this way, since time, space, and all the concepts of the understanding, and still more all the concepts formed by empirical intuition (perception) in the sensible world, have and can have no other use than to make experience possible? And if this condition is omitted from the pure concepts of the understanding, they do not determine any object and have no meaning whatever. (Kant, 1950:99)

Kant further elaborated this point of argument. Thus, he further argues that:

Reason by all its a priori principles never teaches us anything more than objects of possible experience, and even of these nothing more than can be known in experience. But this limitation does not prevent reason from leading us to the objective boundary of experience, namely, to the relation of something which is not itself an object of experience but is the ground of all experience. Reason does not, however, teach us anything concerning the thing in itself... (Kant, 1950:110)

It becomes very obvious from Kant's specification that human reason, which is the highest cognitive faculty, can only guarantee certain and objective knowledge of the phenomenal world, but cannot attain objective knowledge of the noumenal and transcendent entities, which are not within the sphere of possible experience. This explained why Kant criticized the traditional rational arguments for God's existence because such arguments went into the areas human reason cannot guarantee certain and objective knowledge. Kant insists that human knowledge is limited to the phenomenal world while the noumenal world remains unknowable. Thus, attempt to extend human reason to transcendent and noumenal entities leads reason to illusions.

## **Human Reason Versus The Existence Of The Supreme Being: An Examination**

As was earlier stated in this work, Kant argues that human reason can only guarantee certain knowledge only within the bounds of possible experience. The basic question is this: Can human reason offer us certain knowledge of the Supreme Being? This is a very controversial issue among philosophers. As was demonstrated in the earlier part of this work, some metaphysicians claim that human reason can guarantee certain knowledge of the Supreme Being. However, as it is obvious from Kant's specification, the Supreme Being is not within the bounds of possible experience, and thus human reason cannot attain certain knowledge of its nature. This entails that human reason cannot even demonstrate its existence or non-existence. According to Reardon (1988:43)

Clearly, on what we have seen to be Kant's premises, no proof of divine existence is possible; the very nature of human knowledge precludes it, as Kant's fourth antinomy purports to show. But he is not content with such a blanket exclusion. He wishes, rather, to exhibit how the entire chain of reasoning which constitutes these allegedly rational demonstrations is at point weakened by fallacies.

Attempt to extend human reason to such area leads reason to illusions. It ought to be noted that Kant observed that human reason has irresistible tendency to go beyond its limits towards the transcendent entities. He described this as 'Dialectics of pure reason' which can only lead to illusion. This explained why Kant criticized the traditional rational arguments for God's existence such as the cosmological arguments, ontological arguments and physico-theological arguments. Let us at this juncture examine Kant's critique of such arguments.

### **Kant's Critique Of The Traditional Rational Proofs For God's Existence**

Kant criticized the traditional rational proofs for God's existence. Some philosophers have tried to demonstrate rationally the existence of God in varied ways. The arguments advanced by philosophers to rationally demonstrate the existence of God can be classified under Ontological argument, Cosmological argument and Physico-theological argument. Kant argues that these traditional speculative arguments for God's existence is unsuccessful as a result of the fact that human reason is extended to the realm in which it cannot attain certain knowledge.

In his book, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant dwelt first with the ontological argument. The ontological argument for God's existence was initially articulated by Anselm in the medieval period of Philosophy in which God was said to be 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived' which has existence as its necessary attribute. Descartes also articulated another version of the ontological argument. The Cartesian argument for God's existence is an attempt to establish the existence of the Supreme Being from a mere 'idea'. The argument is rooted on the idea of God as the subject of all perfect predicates, and as the absolutely perfect and necessary being. Hence, the absolutely perfect and necessary being cannot but have existence as its attribute since existence is a perfection. The ontological argument states that God, which is the absolutely perfect being cannot but have existence as its essential attribute.

Kant is not comfortable with the ontological argument, and thus, he criticises it. He insists that the ontological argument does not offer a sufficient proof for the existence of the Supreme Being. This is as a result of the fact that the conception of an absolutely necessary being is a mere idea. Thus, existence cannot be said to be a necessary predicate of such a being. Kant argues that being is not a real predicate. According to Kant,

Being is evidently not a real predicate, that is, a conception of something which is added to the conception of some other thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations in it. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgment. (Kant, 1990:335)

For Kant, the notion of the Supreme Being, as articulated in the ontological argument, is merely an idea, and as such, it is incapable of enlarging our cognition with regard to its existence. Analyzing Kant's critique of the ontological argument, Reardon (1988) states:

In the *Critique*, accordingly, the ontological argument is dealt with first. In the 'Only Possible Ground' Kant disclosed the fatal flaw in it to be its treatment of existence as itself a predicate or attribute, which it is not, inasmuch as existence is no part of the content of a defining idea. What the argument involves, he now points out, is that the concept of a perfect being implies of necessity the actual

existence of such a being. Reasoning starts, that is, with a definition of 'ens perfectissimum', and just as the mathematician draws from a mathematical definition all the consequences which are entailed by it, so, by the terms of the ontological argument, the very definition of a perfect being requires the latter's existence, existence being regarded as one of the perfections without which the being thus defined could not be the sum of all perfections. Kant agrees that to assume the existence of a triangle and at the same time to deny that it has three angles is contradictory, but there is no contradiction at all, in denying both the triangle and its three angles. And it is exactly the same with the concept of an absolutely necessary being: if the existence of that being is denied, then the entity itself, with all its predicates, is likewise denied and no contradiction is incurred. For what does the idea of a perfect (i.e. unconditioned) being consist in? That simply of a being which cannot but exist, whose non-existence is an impossibility. Yet how does one pass from the idea of such a being to its actuality? The concept in itself affords us no certainty that there is in this necessary being something that renders its non-existence impossible. All it states, in effect, is that if the non-existence of a being is impossible such a being is necessary. The concept itself is only a logical determination; merely to suppose something to be the case will not of itself do anything to establish its reality. (Reardon, 1988:43-44)

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Kant is not comfortable with the ontological argument for God's existence.

Having criticized the ontological argument, Kant examined the cosmological argument, and discovered that it also fails in its venture. I do not intend here to give a detailed analysis of the cosmological argument. However, a brief exposition of the basic thrust of the argument suffices for our investigation in this research work. Aquinas offered arguments from motion, efficient cause, necessary versus possible being, degrees of perfection, order in the universe etc.

to demonstrate the existence of God. The cosmological argument as articulated by Aquinas begins from the sensible world and rise by laws of causality to the existence of the highest cause existing apart from the world. The cosmological argument attempts to demonstrate the existence of the Supreme Being arguing that every contingent being has a cause. Hence, since there cannot be infinite regress in the series of causes, there must be a necessary being that is uncaused. It presumes that a necessary being cannot but exist since there are contingent beings. Kant is not comfortable with the cosmological argument. He argues that the cosmological argument applies the concept of causality outside the phenomenal world. In Kant's view, causality is one of the categories of understanding which cannot be applied validly beyond the sphere of possible experience. He argues that the cosmological argument does not actually ground itself upon the constitution of experience, but rather it grounds itself upon pure principles of reason. According to Kant (1990:344)

...,although the cosmological argument professed to lay a basis of experience for its edifice of reasoning, it did not ground its procedure upon the peculiar constitution of experience, but upon pure principles of reason – in relation to an existence given by empirical consciousness; utterly abandoning its guidance, however, for the purpose of supporting its assertions entirely upon pure conceptions. Now what is the cause, in these transcendental arguments, of the dialectical, but natural, illusion, which connects the conceptions of necessity and supreme reality, and hypostatizes that which cannot be anything but an idea? What is the cause of this unavoidable step on the part of reason, of admitting that someone among all existing things must be necessary, while it falls back from the assertion of the existence of such a being as from an abyss?... It is something very remarkable that, on the supposition that something exists, I cannot avoid the inference, that something exists necessarily. Upon this perfectly natural – but not on that account reliable – inference does the cosmological argument rest.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Kant sees in the cosmological argument a fundamental mistake, and thus, the argument is fallacious. Reardon (1988:45-46) articulates Kant's critique of the cosmological argument for God's existence thus:

Kant turns next to the cosmological argument, which from contingent existence infers necessary existence. 'If anything exists', it runs, an absolutely necessary being must also exist. Now I at least exist. Therefore there also exists an absolutely necessary being. The minor premiss(sic) contains an experience; the major premiss(sic) reasons from an experience in general to the existence of a necessary being. Kant's primary objection to this line of argument - though he discovers in it a whole nest of fallacies - can be anticipated: that it attempts to pass from an idea of causation which is applicable only within the sensible world to one of causation whereby something altogether transcending the sensible world is causally operative upon and within that same world. But this is not legitimate. The principle of causality is valid only for the conditions of sense-experience, where it plainly is meaningful; we cannot use it when we try to go beyond those conditions... In any case, to maintain that the most real or perfect being exists necessarily is to reintroduce the fundamental mistake of the ontological argument, that there is a logical transition from concept to reality... But even so, the essential fault of the cosmological argument remains: namely, that its appeal to the efficacy of 'God' as the world's ultimate cause fails because we can have no knowledge either of the existence of such a being or of the way in which ultimate causality would operate even if we did. Theologically, once more, the notion lacks content.

Let us at this juncture examine Kant's critique of Physico-Theological argument for the existence of the Supreme being.

Kant criticized Physico-Theological argument for God's existence. Physico-theological argument is also known as the argument from design. It seems to be the simplest proof of all. Kant commends this argument for being the

one that most conforms with the common reason of humanity. In the words of Kant,

This argument always deserves to be mentioned with respect. It is the oldest, the clearest, and that most in conformity with the common reason of humanity. It animates the study of nature, as it itself derives its existence and draws ever new strength from that source. It introduces aims and ends into a sphere in which our observation could not itself have discovered them, and extends our knowledge of nature, by directing our intention to a unity, the principle of which lies beyond nature. (Kant, 1990:349)

Physico-Theological proof for God's existence argues from the point of view of order and harmony in the universe. This argument claims that the different things in the universe were designed for their different purposes by an ordering rational and intelligent being. This being is said to be the Supreme Being. It presumes the existence of an orderer from the experience of order in the universe. Despite the fact that Kant commended this argument as demonstrated above, he insists that it is insufficient to demonstrate the existence of the Supreme Being. Kant argues that Physico-Theological argument only proves the existence of a designer of the world, but does not prove the existence of God or the creator of the world. Hence, the argument, for Kant, is incapable of demonstrating the conception of the supreme being. Analysing Kant's critique of physico-theological argument, Reardon (1988:47) states:

The most it can do, Kant thinks, is to prove an *architect* of the world, whose activity is very largely limited by the adaptability of the material in which he works. It cannot prove an omnipotent *creator* of the world, as a fully theistic doctrine would demand. If we expect the argument to take us further than this we have to reinforce it with the cosmological proof, which in turn must lean on the ontological. But, as we have seen, any form of argument which thus relies, whether directly or indirectly, on an appeal to a concept alone to establish existence is fallacious. Hence, all attempt to prove divine existence by

speculative reasoning collapses, and no transcendental theology can be based upon it.

At this point of our discussion, it is obvious that Kant is of the view that human reason cannot prove the existence or non-existence of the Supreme Being. This is as a result of the fact that human reason cannot validly be applied beyond the phenomenal world to establish any reality beyond the phenomenal world. Kant insists that the issue of the existence of the Supreme being belongs to the domain of belief and not to the domain of knowledge.

### **The Question Of God's Existence: The Issue Of Belief/Faith**

Having demonstrated that human reason cannot adequately prove the existence of the Supreme Being, and that such is beyond the limit within which human reason can guarantee certain knowledge. It becomes obvious that the issue of the existence of the Supreme Being belongs to the domain of belief. Kant emphasized on the importance of belief in God. According to Reardon (1988:47):

But although Kant is emphatic that reason in its purely speculative use is incapable of proving the existence of a Supreme Being it is certainly not true that he turns his back on philosophical theology altogether. Belief in God, as he stated at the close of the *Only Possible Ground*, may not be in the strict sense rationally demonstrable, but it is nonetheless of the highest importance actually to believe in God, and to show that belief can be rationally supported is a major part of his endeavour when he comes to study the capacity of reason not only in its theoretical but in its practical aspect. For he is convinced that it can be sustained by what he describes as 'moral theology.' He will demonstrate later, he says, how the laws of morality do not merely presuppose the existence of a Supreme Being but rightly postulate it- although only of course from a practical point of view- 'as these laws are themselves absolutely necessary in another relation.' For it is in the realm of our moral experience that the idea of God assumes its true significance. If we cannot rank it among the certitudes of the scientific reason yet it can become the

centre of a 'faith' that is not simply an emotional gesture but a matter of reasoned conviction.

Kant denies any rational demonstration of the existence or non-existence of God in order to establish the necessity of faith. Articulating further Kant's idea, Reardon (1988:48) states:

I have, therefore, found it necessary to deny *knowledge* of God, freedom and immortality, in order to find a place for faith (Glaude).<sup>29</sup> Such a faith, for Kant is, notwithstanding, a rational attitude, not a mere 'hunch', nor an arbitrary 'will-to-believe' overriding non-belief. For if divine existence cannot be proved neither can it be disproved. And when this is recognized reason is free to engage in a very salutary work of constructive thought: able, that is, to correct our 'knowledge' of God- should it be possible to obtain such knowledge in some other way- to bring it into harmony both with itself and with all our other intelligible aims, purifying it from all that is inconsistent with the concept of a Supreme Being and any admixture of empirical limitation.<sup>30</sup> Although such a concept, Kant adds, is for purely speculative reason a sheer ideal,...

It ought to be noted that despite Kant's rejection of rational demonstration of God's existence, he still believed in God. He was only quarrelling with rational demonstration of God's existence because such is beyond the domain within which human reason can guarantee certain knowledge. Kant condemned the attempt to secure religious belief on logical grounds. However, he still preserved his faith in God and never resigned completely to an agnostic position.

### **Evaluation and Conclusion**

Serious attention has been given to Kant's critique of the traditional rational arguments for God's existence in this work. It ought to be noted that Kant's critique of the traditional arguments for God's existence does not imply that Kant is questioning the existence of God. Many scholars have misunderstood and misinterpreted Kant. Such scholars accused Kant of denying the existence of God. Obviously, Kant never denies the existence of God. He is only trying to establish the fact that the existence or non-existence of God cannot be established

by human reason. Thus, he wishes to demonstrate that the sphere of God is not within the domain of reason, but of belief (faith). The fact that human reason cannot demonstrate the existence or non-existence of the Supreme Being does not in any way imply the non-existence of such Being. It is obvious that there is a Supreme Being that controls the universe. No one can doubt the existence of such Supreme Being without involving himself or herself in a contradiction. Kant argues that God, which is the Supreme Being, is not within the scope in which human reason can guarantee certain and objective knowledge. Hence, any attempt to rationally demonstrate the existence or non-existence of the Supreme Being is a futile effort. Kant sees such attempt as one of the areas in which traditional speculative metaphysicians have wrongly employed human reason beyond the scope within which it can attain certain knowledge. Kant's argument appears plausible from philosophical perspective. Human reason can make speculations on the nature of God, but may not claim certainty and objectivity of such speculations. Things about God properly belong to the domain of faith (belief), and not that of reason. It is necessary to draw this distinction because God is a supra-sensible entity. Human reason cannot certainly delve into the domain of divinity without involving itself in one error or the other. Human reason can guarantee certain knowledge only within the domain of possible experience. God and other supra-sensible entities are not within the domain of possible experience. It is obvious that the domain of belief is quite different from the domain of reason. Human reason can err if it is extended beyond its limits. The implication of this is that God ought to be approached with belief (faith) and not with reason. Hence, traditional speculative metaphysicians must acknowledge the limit of human reason as a cognitive faculty.

## **References**

- Bonevac, D. (1993) 'Kant's Copernican Revolution', in R. Solomon and K. M. Higgins (eds.) *Routledge History of Philosophy* (Vi), 40-65.
- Kant, I. (1990) *Critique of Pure Reason*, J.M.D. Meiklejohn, (trans.), New York: Prometheus Books.
- Kant, I. (1950) *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*. New York: The Bobs Merrill Company, Inc.

Macmurray, J. (2010) *The Nature of Reason*, <http://www.jstor.org/pss/4544254>, (04/08/2010).

McDermott, T. (ed.) (1989) *Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologiae*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press.

Reardon, B.M.G. (1988) *Kant as Philosophical Theologian*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.

Scruton, R. (1985) *Kant*. New York: Oxford University press.

Stumpf, S.E. (1994) *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.