PROFESSOR DESHPANDE ON "GOD"[1]

I

Professor Deshpande's* position on God's existence can be summed up in the following three distinct, though connected, arguments, which we will designate as A, B and C.

A. 1. God's existence *may* be possible or impossible,

2. It is *possible* only under conditions such that the Godhead is said to possess any *one* or *two* attributes in one Person.

3. It is *impossible* only under conditions such that the Godhead is said to possess *all three* attributes in one Person. (P. 24)

4. To say that God *may* exist and to say that God *actually* exists is not to say the same thing, since they have different meaning.

B. 1. If—that is, granting, if not accepting—God actually exists, then, either his existence is *experienced* or *inferred.*

2. But since God's existence can neither be experienced nor inferred, God cannot be said to exist. No evidence can be found to fully substantiate the claim about God's existence. (p. 9–10)

C. 1. If—that is, granting, if not accepting—God actually exists, what 'role' does he play in out day-to-day life ? What 'use' can God be put to in our daily life—the life that offers Science, Philosophy, Morality, Art etc. He is 'useless' for all these, "Science is frankly careless about Him; Philosophy is better off without Him; Morality has no reference to Him; Art has no need of Him." (P. 37).

2. "He appears to be a bastard begotten by Fear in the womb of Ignorance" (P. 37).

3. God *seems* to have *nothing* special to do with us men (P. 38).

4. And we men too have nothing special to do with him. (P. 38).

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1. "God" has reference to Professor D. Y. Deshpande's longish essay published in the book form by Hind Kitab Publishers entiled "The Truth about God" (1946). All the references, therefore, are to this book.

* Hereafter I shall refer to Professor Deshpande by his popular name D.Y.

II

Of these arguments I propose to deal only with Argument A at some length, disregarding B and C, not because the latter are unimportant, but because they are rather familiar arguments in the philosophical circles and are debated almost ad nauseum. I am personally inclined to accept the view that such debates are usually at cross-purposes. It seems to me like Russell challenging Sartre and Vice-Versa. I can defend the view—if not here—that it all depends on the approach you take, how and with what do you *start* your enquiry. It is, if I may say so, Wittgensteinean position about " forms of life ". But let that pass !

One more interesting reason as to why I will deal with Argument A and not B and/or C is that I find the Argument new. I can not say whether it is really original. As far as my knowledge goes—which is not very far Argument A was not noticed by me anywhere and so I thought I should deal with it here. In dealing with it I will presume that D. Y. Still holds the position in Argument A and in dealing with it my interest will be purely logical.

Let us, therefore, try to understand the Argument A in details as D. Y. put it and find out, if we can, whether, and if so in what way, can this Argument be claimed to be logically tenable.

III

1. D. Y.'s argument is based on certain definitions which we must first note. In giving those definitions D. Y. draws a distinction between ' actual ' and ' possible ' and says, " when we say that a thing is actual we mean that it exists. But when we say that a certain thing is possible we mean, not that it exists, but that it *may* exist; that is to say, its existence is *not incompatible* with any thing that exists. When the existence of a thing is incompatible with certain other things which do exist, we say that the former is *impossible*——To say, therefore, that a certain thing is impossible is to say that it certainly does *not* exist; but to say that a certain thing is possible is *not* to say that it exists. The latter statement merely means that it *may* exist : nothing in our knowledge conflicts with its existence. But it also means that it may *not* exist. And whether it does or does not will have to be found out by observation or inference." (P. 23)

D. Y. accepts the position that since God's existence cannot be either experienced or inferred, God's existence cannot be said to be 'actual'. And with this I have no quarrel. The interesting and disputable point that D. Y. makes is regarding the 'possibility' and 'impossibility' of God's existence. And it is this point that I would like to consider critically from the logical point of view.

2. D. Y. says, " Now it is clear that there is nothing impossible in the existence of a God who created the Universe around us. Nor is there any impossibility in the possession by Him of any one of the three attributes *singly* (stress mine). None of the facts of Science—contradicts the existence of an all-powerful God, or an all-kind God, or an all-wise God. Further, it is equally possible that this creator-God may possess, not only one, but even any *two* (stress his) of the attributes of the God-head. The creator-God may be all-powerful and all-wise, or he may all-powerful and all-kind, or he may be all-wise and all-kind. No facts conflict with his possession of any *two* (stress his) attributes. *But no being-not even the almighty—Can possess all the three attributes of infinite power, infinite goodness, and infinite wisdom.* (stress his). Such a conception is quite *impossible.* (stress his). No such *could* (stress his) ever exist," (P. 24).

3. From the above, D. Y.'s position can be stated thus :

(*a*) God-head with *one* attribute may be 'possible', since it does not conflict with facts.

(*b*) God-head with *any two* attributes may also be 'possible' since it does not conflict with facts either.

(*c*) But God-head with *all three* attributes together is 'impossible' since it does conflict with facts.

Let us consider these three statements in that order. But before we do this we should bear in mind that by 'facts', D. Y. means 'positive evil in this our world—pain, cruelty, stupidity, ignorance, disease, decay and death.'

(*a*) Why does D. Y. think that God-head with any *one* attribute is possible ? Simply because, it does not conflict with evil. Now, what does it mean to say that God-head with a single attribute is not incompatible with facts ?

It means that there is no contradiction in saying that there is all-kind God and at the same time saying that there is evil. In other words, predicate 'all-kind' is not incompatible with predicate 'evil', and so we can use both of them. But I think this is not sound. The two predicates are incompatible when they cannot be used for the *same* object without resulting in inconsistancy. It seems that D. Y. uses predicate 'all-kind' for 'God' and the predicate 'evil', *not* for 'God', but for the 'world'. And I don't see how the point of incompatibility can even be raised here. The question of incompatibility will arise only when we will attribute 'all-kind' and 'evil' to God only and say that 'God is all-kind' is not incompatible with 'God is evil'. But this is *not* what D. Y. *Says*. It may be what he *means* to say, as far as I can understand him.

But even here, that is to say even when these two predicates are applied to the different objects, namely God and world, why do we say that are not incompatible. I think, because God is only all-kind but not all-powerful and hence although he may wish that there be no evil, he has no power to forbid it from the world. Thus 'all-kind God' is not incompatible with 'evil world' and hence there is no impossibility in the possession by Him of any one of the three attributes singly. What is said about 'all-kind', can also be said about 'all-powerful' and 'all-wise'.

(*b*) What about God having any two attributes ? Is it compatible with evil in the world ? Yes, holds D. Y. And I think, the explanation put forward in (*a*) above can be, with a little modification, used in this case also. Thus 'All-kind and all-wise God' is compatible with 'evil world', because, may be, although God is kind and wise, he has no power to stop it since he has *only* two attributes in Him. Here again, as in (*a*), we can say that the question of incompatibility cannot be even raised, since the predicates are applied to different things.

(*c*) Coming to the important point in D.Y., Godhead with *all* three attributes together is incompatible with evil in

the world. As D. Y. Says, " It is utterly impossible that God possesses infinite power, infinite widsom, and infinite goodness, and yet either produces or suffers to exist a large amount of evil " (P. 25).

IV

I think we can understand D. Y.'s arguments better if we keep in mind that the crux of the matter is that whereas Godhead with any *one* or any *two* attributes is not incompatible with evil in the world and so is *possible*, Godhead with *all three* attributes is incompatible with evil in the world and so is *impossible*. Regarding this position of D. Y.'s I would like to raise the following points :

1. As stated above in (*a*) and (*b*), the question of incompatibility, and therefore of impossiblity on D.Y.'s definition, cannot even be raised, since the predicates are attributed to different things and not to the same thing.
2. However, it can be said that the predicate ' evil ' is not really applied to the ' world ', but to Godhead, by saying that the real predicate is not ' evil ', but ' creator of evil ' which can reasonably be applied to ' Godhead '. And then the question of incompatibility and therefore impossibility can be validly raised, since these predicates then, can be applied to the *same* thing.
3. I think D. Y. had the position in (2) in mind and not the position in (1), although he can be taken to accept position in (1). I will, therefore, presume that D.Y. takes up the position in (2) above and raise the following point.

   (4) Presuming that ' creator of evil ' is *compatible* with any one or with any two attributes, why cann't the same be said about the attributes when taken together? And conversly, presuming that ' creator of evil ' is *not compatible* with all three attributes taken together, why cann't the same be said about any one or with any two attributes ? What is, if at all there is any, the logical difference between these predicates. Is there any difference as to their logical status ? If so, what ? Strawson in his ' Introduction to Logical Theory ' gives us a definition of ' incompatible

> predicates '. He says, " When we apply a predicate to something, we implicitly exclude from application to that thing the predicate that lies outside the boundaries of the predicate we apply, but in the same incompatibility–range. By this I mean that if we go on to apply to the thing, in the same breath, one of the predicates which lie outside those boundaries, we shall be taken to have contradicted ourselves and said nothing." (P. 6)

This criterion of ' incompatible predicates ' can be applied to those predicates which D.Y. applies to Godhead and it can be mantained that all three predicates—namely " all-kind ', ' all-powerful ' and ' all-wise '—are compatible with the predicate ' creator of evil ', because the latter predicate does not lie outside the boundaries of the three predicates. Thus all the four predicates are in the same range of compatibility. And conversly, if we keep ' creator of evil ' as a predicate that lies outside the compatible-range of the three other predicates, then ' creator of evil ' can be as much incompatible with any one or any two as with all the three. And that is why if we accept the position that any one or two predicates are compatible with ' creator of evil ', we have no logical ground to hold that the three predicates together are not compatible with ' creator of evil '. And conversly, if we accept the position that the three predicates together are not compatible with ' creator of evil ', we have no logical ground to hold that any one or two predicates are compatible with ' creator of evil '. All the four predicates have the same logical status.

I am aware that D.Y.'s general position about God's existence remains unaffected even if he takes up the position which he rejects. I am also not disregarding the possibility of my not being within the measurable distance of understanding D.Y. Inspite of everything, I have raised the point only for its logical interest.

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