

Existence of God in the Light of Cosmological and Teleological Arguments

Dr. Abid Mushtaq*

ABSTRACT

The concept of a divine reality or realities is perhaps as old as humanity itself. The sense of numinous and transcendence is embedded deep inside the human mind as our complex consciousness is not satisfied only with the mundane needs and physical survival. This is a general fact that providing all material benefits and luxuries wouldn't satisfy a man as he yearns for something permanent and absolute. But it's also a fact of the world, especially in this age of scientism; many people doubt this Divine Realm due to their belief in the philosophy of materialism. Belief in a supernatural dimension has been the default position for most of the humankind since time immemorial with very tiny exceptions. But with the increase in the experimental and empirical sciences, many men are considering this belief as irrational and unscientific. Atheists commonly call the belief in God as blind faith or psychological weakness. But more and more religious apologists, especially Christian and Muslim, are coming in this battlefield of ideas and are challenging the atheistic outlook on reality. Some of the prominent theist debaters are William Lane Craig, Alvin Plantinga, Haroon Yahya, Hamza Tzorsis, John Lenox, Aliester McGrath and others. From the atheist camp, the prominent figures are Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Late Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett etc. We see a trend of debates between the two camps and books from both sides proving their points and refuting the other side. This paper tries to show that the belief in this Divine Entity or God is not against real science or reason; on the contrary, it is the very epitome of human reason to reach the belief and certitude in the existence of an Absolute Being and the Creator of the Universe. It also analyses the belief of 'scientist', the faith in the philosophy of scientific materialism and considering modern empirical science as the only source of knowledge. Furthermore, the nature of consciousness has also been discussed which also adds to the mystery of the numinous.

Keywords: Theism, atheism, god, matter, reality, consciousness, cosmos, design.

Introduction

Polemical discussions are rampant nowadays regarding the concept of God and both believers and atheists try hard to prove their point. Though there are classical arguments in favour of theism, modern theist scholars have devised sophisticated

* Assistant Professor (Contractual), Shah-i-Hamadan Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Kashmir, Srinagar.

details adding strength to the classical ones. The reason is the advancements in science and the new information about the Universe and biology. The modern arguments can be considered as the sequel of the ancient logical and rational shreds of evidence formulated by the likes of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, al Ghazali, and Maimonides.

The main arguments in this paper in favour of the Divine are cosmological and teleological arguments. Both of these arguments have been devised and presented by the ancient and medieval theist scholars but the present era makes these more sophisticated and assertive because of the details added by the modern physical and biological sciences. The common misconceptions among the 'New Atheists' is that science has made the concept of God and the supernatural obsolete but theist scholars believe it's quite contrary. In fact, modern empirical sciences have given a boost to the theist arguments. The beginning of the Universe, Cosmological Constants, Fine-Tuning of the Cosmos and intricate design in the biological world points to a Powerful and Conscious Creator.

The Claim of Atheists

Strong atheists usually claim that the burden of proof is on those who claim that there is a God and not on them. This is because, they say, one who claims a positive should be able to provide the conclusive evidence in support of that claim. Let us turn the tables on atheists themselves as most of them behave and say as if they are 100% certain there's no God. Though while debating with theists they say that they lack belief in any god because of the lack of the conclusive evidence, still, we commonly hear from them the statements which imply the absolute denial of anything spiritual. This confusion has been created by atheists themselves as they should call themselves agnostics rather than atheists if they are not completely sure about the non-existence of any sort of deity. Let us see an example in the statements of so-called four horsemen of modern atheism – Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris and Daniel C. Dennette. In his famous book, *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins has created a hierarchy of certitude about the belief in any kind of God. The hierarchy goes like this: He writes;

Let us, then, take the idea of a spectrum of probabilities seriously, and place human judgments about the existence of God along with it, between two extremes of opposite certainty. The spectrum is continuous, but it can be represented by the following seven milestones along the way.

1. Strong theist. 100 percent probability of God. In the words of C. G. Jung, 'I do not believe, I know.'

2. Very high probability but short of 100 percent. De facto theist. 'I cannot know for certain, but I strongly believe in God and live my life on the assumption that he is there.'
3. Higher than 50 percent but not very high. Technically agnostic but leaning towards theism. 'I am very uncertain, but I am inclined to believe in God.'
4. Exactly 50 percent. Completely impartial agnostic. 'God's existence and non-existence are exactly equiprobable.'
5. Lower than 50 percent but not very low. Technically agnostic but leaning towards atheism. 'I don't know whether God exists but I'm inclined to be skeptical.'
6. Very low probability, but short of zero. De facto atheist. 'I cannot know for certain but I think God is very improbable, and I live my life on the assumption that he is not there.'
7. Strong atheist. 'I know there is no God, with the same conviction as Jung "knows" there is one.'¹

After making this list on the degree of beliefs, he puts himself on number six. He also states that it is weird to be a strong atheist as one cannot know with certainty that there's absolutely no God or gods. We raise the same question. If one is uncertain, to any degree whatsoever, about the existence or non-existence of God, then he must call himself an agnostic rather than an atheist. Strangely many self-styled atheists and modern atheist debate junkies have come up with a solution to this dilemma. They are calling themselves agnostic atheists instead of just atheists. This means gnosticism and agnosticism are related to knowledge and theism and atheism are related to belief. Since they don't have knowledge about the existence or non-existence of God, they are agnostics. And they don't believe in God due to their lack of knowledge, they are atheists. But the question is when theists say they believe in a God, atheists immediately point out that how can a person believe something about which he has no absolute knowledge? Hence they are fast to proclaim that theists have blind faith and atheists falsely assume that theists have no knowledge about the existence of God. This is the narrow worldview which reduces knowledge and certainty to materialistic reductionism and empirical sense perception discarding the possibility of an equally valid epistemic ground of Rationalism. As mentioned earlier, most atheists are commonly heard making the absolutist statements like, "There is no God", "There is no afterlife", "Theism is a blind belief", "There is nothing spiritual", "Only matter is the reality", etc. This is the reality of most atheists who call agnostics, 'atheists without guts' but when they themselves have to debate the sophisticated theists they wear the garb of philosophical agnosticism.

Is Matter the only Reality?

This question has been asked and pondered over by the great philosophers and thinkers since time immemorial but there's still no unanimous answer. For pre-Socratic materialist philosophers like Epicurus, the answer is yes but for the philosophers like Plato the answer is no, there's more, not only more, but absolute. Let us delve deep into the question and try to find out answers or at least begin a journey closer to Truth. Is thought material? Any sane person would answer in negative. Does thought exist? Again the sanity would imply the answer is positive. Reality is all inclusive, the Existence as a whole, and we found a non-material phenomenon, thought, a part of this reality. This shows that material reality is not the only reality. Now let us have a look at a Rose. A rose is a material thing and it is unanimously believed and perceived. When we look at a rose it smells good and has a colour red. But is it actually red or smells good? We know that a particular spectrum of light is reflected by the object which falls on our retinas and travels through electrochemical signals to our brain where the colour red is perceived or object seen. In the darkness of our heads, we are seeing the red rose. Same goes for the good smell which is nothing but chemicals sensed by our brains as pleasant. Similarly, if a tree falls in the forest and there is no conscious observer present, there will be no sound but only vibrations. These vibrations or waves are interpreted by our brains and we hear sounds in the stream of our consciousness. Can anyone claim with 100% certainty that the external reality is out there rather than in our minds? Can anyone know for sure that the external reality which we perceive by our minds is actually like that? Different species view things differently. Whose version is the right one? Moreover, we can't see many things in the outer world but they exist like ultraviolet light which was only detected recently by highly sophisticated technology indirectly. Is it also not a matter of 'faith' that we think we know there is definitely an external reality? So is it possible that a dimension exists which is beyond our powers of discovery or perception? It very well is possible. Another thought experiment is the simulation or matrix hypothesis which says that whatever we experience as external reality is actually our vivid imagination or a mass hallucination. The brain in a vat example further elaborates it like this; There is a probability that our brains exist in a vat in the laboratory of an alien scientist who is giving electrical signals to our brain and we perceived a virtual reality.

Another field of science which creates doubt in scientific materialism is Quantum Mechanics. One of the greatest pioneers of theoretical physics and quantum mechanics, Neils Bohr says:

“Everything we call real is made of things that cannot be called real”²

One of the inventors of Quantum Mechanics, Werner Heisenberg, says:

I think that modern physics has definitely decided in favour of Plato. In fact, the smallest units of matter are not physical objects in the ordinary sense; they are forms, ideas which can be expressed unambiguously only in mathematical language.³

When one delves deep into the phenomena of the quantum world, one finds that the fundamental reality at the base of everything is much mysterious than we ordinarily observe. The apparent solidity of the macro world melts down in the micro world. The sub-atomic particles usually defy the laws of common sense and logic. One such phenomenon is ‘superimposition’ in which electrons and other particles can be proven to exist simultaneously in multiple places, i.e. a single sub-atomic particle can exist at multiple places in a single moment. Another bewildering fact of the Quantum World is ‘entanglement’ in which two twin subatomic particles are separated but a connection still remains between the two even if they are separated by a very long distance. If one particle is acted upon the other particle responds to it and it seems the mysterious field connecting the two works faster than the speed of light. Atomic and sub-atomic world is quite different from the world of macrocosm and solidity. Particles don’t seem to have any dimensions, length, width or weight. Photons, the particles of light are massless. Furthermore, electrons have a dual nature; they are particles as well as waves depending on how they are observed which is also called the ‘observer effect’. This shows the further we go deep into the sub-atomic world, further we realize that we know almost nothing about the nature of reality. Considering all these phenomena we must envision the physical universe as information. Another mysterious phenomenon is of touch. The common perception is that we can touch things but in physics, this is not literally true. We have never touched anything because the electrons engulfing atoms repulse against the electrons of other physical things, hence it is impossible to actually interact with other entities. We do “feel” at the macro level that we are touching things but it’s not literally true and this is one of the bewildering aspects of quantum physics.

The point of all these derivations and interpretations from neuroscience and quantum physics is to hint towards a spiritual idea, that only God is the fundamental Reality and everything besides Him is transitory, contingent or even illusory. Qur’an points towards this fact in this verse;

“Everything is ephemeral (*halik*) except the Essence of God”⁴

Another meaning of this verse could be included in the argument of contingency. Everything in this universe is dependent on other things. Nothing can exist alone on its own. When everything is contingent, they can’t self-exist and have to depend on an Absolute for their existence. The contingent is the other meaning of the word *halik*.

Cosmological Argument

After pointing towards the contingency of everything including our senses, we will now proceed to give some rational and logical arguments in favour of the existence of a Conscious and Powerful Creator of the universe. The argument says that everything has a cause and universe also must have a cause. Also to save our minds from the ambiguity of an infinite regress there must be a First Cause which caused everything and which precedes every event in the history of the Cosmos. First cause argument is deistic as well as theistic as it is stated by Aristotle and it's also mentioned in the Bible and the Qur'an. Why is there a necessity of a First Cause? The primal reason is the impossibility of actual infinity. Aristotle argued that there are two kinds of infinities – Potential and Actual. Consider prime numbers which have a starting point from the numeral 1. Now go on adding numbers and you will never stop and there will be always another number which could be added to the previous number. Now consider a set of numbers within a space that has a beginning and an end but the numbers within this space are infinite. This is paradoxically not possible because you cannot add any number to a complete set, hence it can't be infinite. Similarly, infinite time, where there is no temporal beginning and ending, is logically not possible. If you travel backward in time and tried to find where it all began, you won't stop anywhere and no matter how many billions and trillions of years you go back there still will be billions and trillions of years to travel. Since an infinite temporal regress is akin to an actual infinite, it can't exist in reality and if there is no beginning to the universe and there is an infinite past, we can't reach to the present moment. Previously Steady State Theory stated that that universe is eternal and infinite but the present scientific perspective, widely established through repeated experimentation, states that there is a beginning of the universe. The Big Bang theory is the established theory unanimously accepted by the scientists. It not only states that the universe had a beginning, but everything physical including physical laws had a starting point at the moment of the big bang. Space, time, matter and energy – everything came after the big bang and what was before the big bang or from where did the stuff of the universe come? The answer usually is 'Nothing'. The absence of the basic ingredients of the physical existence is 'Nothing'. It means the universe popped out of nothing which is an evident impossibility as something cannot come out of nothing. There must be an originator who or which started the whole process and that entity or thing must be beyond physicality or transcendent as that entity or thing caused physicality to begin or exist. Only a highly powerful and conscious Being can do this because to do something from nothing, we need a conscious and volitional Being who created the whole physical existence. That Being itself must necessarily be transcendence, beyond and above its creation. It is this Being whom we call God or the Creator of the universe and everything within it. Qur'an points to this fact in these verses;

“The Originator of the heavens and the earth (Universe). When He decrees a matter, He only says to it: Be, and it is.”⁵

Pointing to the big bang singularity the Qur’an most probably states the fact in these words:

“Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece, then We parted them?”⁶

An addition to the Cosmological Argument was done by the medieval Muslim thinker, al Ghazali. The argument is popular as ‘Kalam Cosmological Argument’ which goes like this: “Whatever begins to exist must have a cause. The universe began to exist; therefore, it must have a cause.”

Famous Christian theist scholar, debater and apologist, writes about this particular argument in these words; “The Kalam cosmological argument originated in the attempts of Christian thinkers to rebut Aristotle’s doctrine of the eternity of the universe and was developed by medieval Islamic theologians into an argument for the existence of God. Let’s look at the formulation of this argument by al-Ghazali (1085-1111). He reasons, “Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning.” In support of the first premise, that every being that begins has a cause for its beginning, Ghazali reasons: anything that begins to exist does so at a certain moment of time. But since, prior to the thing’s existence, all moments are alike, there must be some cause that determines that the thing comes to exist at that moment rather than earlier or later. Thus, anything that comes to exist must have a cause. The second premise is that the world, or the universe, began to exist. In support of this premise, Ghazali argues that it’s impossible that there should be an infinite regress of events in time, that is to say, that the series of past events should be beginning-less. He gives several reasons for this conclusion. For one thing, the series of past events come to an end in the present – but the infinite cannot come to an end. It might be pointed out that even though the series of events has one end in the present, it can still be infinite in the other direction because it has no beginning. But Ghazali’s point may be that if the regress of past events were infinite, then it would be impossible for the present moment to arrive. For it is impossible to cross the infinite to get to today. So today could never arrive, which is absurd, for here we are!”⁷

As mentioned above, modern kalam cosmological argument receives much impetus from the widely accepted big bang theory where every ingredient or stuff of the physical existence came out of nothing. Professor of theoretical physics and a renowned atheist debater, Lawrence Krauss has even written a book titled, ‘*A Universe from Nothing*’. Famous Muslim debater, Hamza Tzortzis, once debated with Professor Krauss in which Hamza claimed that the ‘nothing’ of Krauss is

‘something’ after which Krauss responded in these words, “Nothing is “No space, no time, no laws... there’s no universe, zero, zip, nada.”

Various theories have been postulated as substitutes of the big bang theory. These theories, rather hypotheses, are very dear to the hearts of the new atheists because these pseudo theories save them from the problem of the beginning of the universe. But the reality is that none of these so-called theories are established as per the scientific experimentation, not even close. Most of those eternal universe theories are wild guesses or personal opinions of some physicists. Doctor Craig responds to these theories in the following words; “...it is true that there are alternative theories to the Big Bang theory that do not involve a beginning of the universe. But while such theories are possible, it has been the overwhelming verdict of the scientific community that none of them is more probable than the Big Bang theory.”⁸

Qur’an also states the same phenomenon of creation ex nihilo in these words: “Were they created by nothing? Or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Nay, they have no firm belief.”

Teleological Argument

Most of the phenomena in nature are so delicate and complex that many people regard it highly improbable that these things came into existence by mere chance and random unconscious factors. *Teleos* or purpose is deemed behind every biological aspect of life. An eye is not a random socket but it has a purpose which is to see and perceive the external reality. Most people since time immemorial have found it difficult to believe that such an exquisite design could be an accident as atheists want us to believe. Theists deduce a Volitional Mind behind all these intricate phenomena. Not only in the living beings but in the formation and the stability of the universe, there is a fine tuning in the cosmological constants without which a universe couldn’t form. Physical laws of nature are so refined that it necessarily demands a Law-Giver. This realization is in the nature (*fitrah*) of man and is an example of sound reasoning (*qalb saleem*). Many scientists believed in the teleological evidence for God and their very basis to do science was the harmony of God’s creation. Father of the celestial mechanics, Johannes Kepler, firmly believed the role of God in the formation and symmetry in the celestial bodies and he was thinking God’s thoughts after Him.

Here mention may be made of the great scientists and philosophers of the 20th century, Antony Flew, who remained a staunch atheist academic and debater for 40 years. After all this he changed his mind and wrote a remarkable book providing evidence for a Creator, ‘*There is a God*’ is the title of the book which became one of the best sellers. His main evidence was from the teleological argument

especially mentioning the sophisticated complexity of DNA. Telling about his journey from a Non-Believer to a Believer, he writes, “Perhaps the most popular and intuitively plausible argument for God’s existence is the so-called argument from design. According to this argument, the design that is apparent in nature suggests the existence of a cosmic Designer. I have often stressed that this is actually an argument to design from order; as such arguments proceeded from the perceived order in nature to show evidence of design and, thus, a Designer. Although I was once sharply critical of the argument to design, I have since come to see that, when correctly formulated, this argument constitutes a persuasive case for the existence of God. Developments in two areas, in particular, have led me to this conclusion. The first is the question of the origin of the laws of nature and the related insights of eminent modern scientists. The second is the question of the origin of life and reproduction.”⁹

Conclusion

Till now we tried to show the conclusive pieces of evidence for the existence of God from rationalistic arguments. The two specific arguments are the cosmological and teleological arguments. It is evident from the theory of the origin of the universe that a highly powerful and knowledgeable Being must have created the universe as the laws and constants of the universe are standing on a knife’s edge. The minute disturbance in the constants or laws of the physical nature, from stars to atoms, will set the universe towards chaos and destruction. It’s also logically clear and sound that any creator of matter, energy and space-time cannot be made up of this physical stuff. The Creator of nature must necessarily be Supernatural, Immaterial and Spiritual. Moreover, the design which is apparent in the biological organisms makes it impossible to deny a Volitional Creator behind all organic phenomena. The irreducible complexity of a human eye or the systematic language embedded in the DNA is ample evidence for a Mind behind this. The Bible and the Qur’an both have used these very arguments and appealed to the innate sense of humanity for the acceptance of the Divine. But for a sound mind or a pure heart, which Qur’an calls *qalb-i-saleem*, these shreds of evidence are a secondary source of their faith. They immediately grasp the presence of the Divine behind every mental or physical phenomenon. As it’s also stated in the scriptures that there is a remembrance in every soul and instinctual faculty present in every human that prompts them to believe in the Absolute. This is the theistic point of view and opponents can surely disagree with these conclusions as there is no compulsion in the religion and freedom of thought is bestowed on humanity by the Almighty. Let us create an environment in which these kinds of debates will often happen and let’s try to create an empathetic and sharing heart. To Him belongs all Glory.

Notes and References

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, London, 2006, p-51.

² www.goodreads.com

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Qur'an* 28:88.

⁵ Ibid 2:117.

⁶ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois, US, 2008, p.96.

⁷ Ibid 21:30.

⁸ William Lane Craig, and Armstrong, Walter Sinnott, *God? A Debate between a Christian and an Atheist*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2004, p.8.

⁹ Antony Flew, *There is a God – How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed his Mind*, Harper Collins publishers, New York, 2007, p-95.