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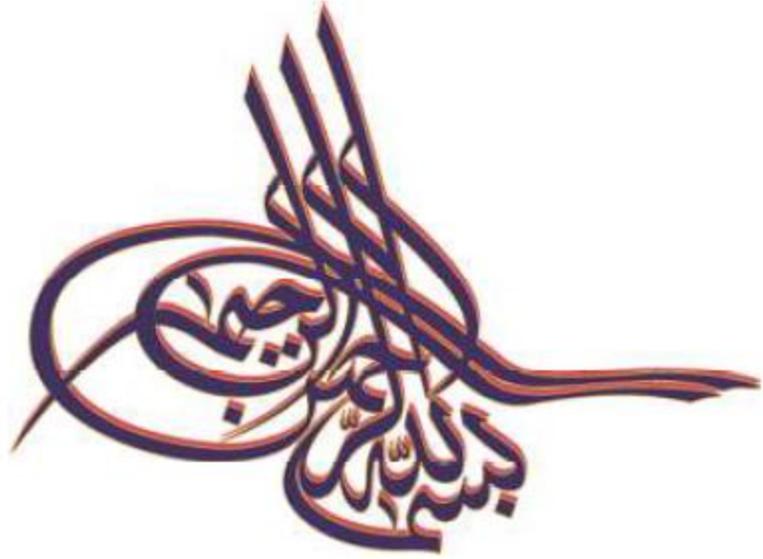
Faith in the Unseen:

How we know Allah is Lord of creation

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"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"
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Abstract

This paper answers the misconceptions of those who claim there is no proof for the existence of Allāh (God) as the uncreated Creator. The mistaken epistemology, or theory of knowledge, at the root of this misconception is identified as materialism, naturalism, and scienticism. These approaches to knowledge are flawed because they exclude valid non-scientific sources of acquiring true knowledge, such as perception, consciousness, and memory. Human nature intuitively accepts the existence of the Creator, and faith in Him is consolidated by the religious experience, or the 'sweetness of faith.' Logical and rational ways of thinking support what is known by human nature. The cosmological argument, or argument from existence, establishes the existence of the Creator as the uncreated necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), and the teleological argument, or argument from design, confirm the Creator's perfect attributes of Will, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom. Each of these arguments will be presented as referenced in the Qur'ān, the Sunnah, and the writings of classical Muslim scholars, with some additional material for the modern context. The most common objections to these arguments that Muslims are likely to encounter are also sufficiently rebutted. Concluding remarks will summarize the arguments in abridged, simplified form.

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Grantor of Mercy

Introduction: Islam or Science?

One of the most significant challenges to Islam in the modern world is the perceived 'lack of proof' for the existence of Allah (God) as the Creator. This misperception stems from a flawed *epistemology*, or theory of knowledge, that privileges the scientific method as the only means of ascertaining the objective truth. This theory can be described in three ways:

1. *Materialism*, the belief that only physical matter exists.
2. *Naturalism*, the belief that nothing exists beyond our understanding of nature.
3. *Scientism*, the belief that science is the only source of objective truth.

All of these views express the worldview of most atheists, even if they do not consciously subscribe to them in the philosophical sense. They are predicated on the rejection of knowledge about the Unseen (*al-ghayb*) from divine revelation or non-scientific sources. This exclusion of religious experience as a source of knowledge occurred in the West as a reaction to the excesses of the Church, but it is not strictly a Western phenomenon. Even in the time of the Prophet there were idolaters who denied the afterlife simply because it could not be seen.

Allah ﷻ said:

They say, 'There is nothing but our worldly life. We die and we live and nothing destroys us but time.' They have no knowledge of it. They only assume.¹

Their dismissal of the Hereafter was not based upon proof or logical reasoning, but rather was simply unfounded speculation intended to rationalize their behavior in opposition to divine revelation. Similarly, the arguments of those today who reject the existence of the Creator are largely based upon unproven assumptions about the nature of reality.

Of course, Islam accepts the scientific method as a source of knowledge. Muslims have a rich history of interacting with science, or natural philosophies, and integrating them into their broader worldviews because "the concept of knowledge [in Islam] enjoyed an importance unparalleled in other civilizations."² Modern science is important for Muslims as it is one of the best ways to gain

¹ Surah al-Jathiyah 45:24.

² Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 334.

insight into the natural world. Nevertheless, science is limited in what it can tell us because it is limited to human observations, measurements, and experimental methods.

There is, in fact, another source of knowledge beyond the scientific method that contributes to the accuracy of our worldview: experience. Experience can also be divided into perception, consciousness, and memory. Each of these sources of knowledge yield independently justified beliefs that can further be integrated into a coherent, consistent worldview.³ Certainly, human civilization had acquired much collective knowledge even before the modern scientific method was fully developed.

As such, the demand for purely *scientific* proof for the existence of the Creator originates from a flawed theory of knowledge. It is a blindspot that is not unique to the modern world either.

Allāh ﷻ said:

Those who do not expect to meet Us say, 'Why are not angels sent to us? Why do we not see our Lord?' They have become arrogant in themselves with great insolence.⁴

And as the Israelites had said to Moses after the affair of the golden calf, "We will not believe you until we see Allāh outright."⁵ This way of thinking is actually rooted in the arrogance of the human soul, a failure to accept one's relatively tiny place in the greater cosmos. Since Allāh created the entire universe, He is far greater and above it all. The Prophet said about the Creator, "His veil is light. If He were to reveal Himself, the splendor of His countenance would consume His creation as far as the eye can see."⁶ Creatures cannot physically behold the essence of the Creator, which is why Allāh sends us revelations through His Prophets, "It is not for any human being that Allāh should speak to him unless by revelation, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger with inspiration by His permission as He wills."⁷

Consider a group of scientists who observe microbes in a petri dish. The microbes may be completely unaware of the scientists who shape and manipulate their environment, or they might even have a slight hunch that 'something' greater exists beyond them and their world, but could they ever directly observe or measure the scientists themselves? The sheer difference in magnitude

³ Robert Audi and Paul Moser, "The Sources of Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, (Oxford University Press, 2005), 90-91.

⁴ Sūrat al-Furqān 25:21.

⁵ Sūrat al-Baqarah 2:55.

⁶ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ([Bayrūt]: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīyah, 1955), 1:161 #179.

⁷ Sūrat al-Shūrā 42:51.

between microbes and humans makes it impossible. Now consider that the difference between us and the Creator is infinitely greater than the difference between the microbes and the scientists. It is simply outside of the scope of science to directly perceive the essence of Allāh.

This does not mean that science has no role in refining our knowledge of the Creator through the study of His creation. There is no true contradiction between science and religion when both are properly contextualized. In fact, the most comprehensive international study of scientists' attitudes toward religion ever undertaken has discovered that the 'conflict perspective' on science and religion is an invention of the West. Most scientists around the world do not see an inherent incompatibility between science and religion, instead preferring to understand them both as independent fields of knowledge or "the notion that science and religion refer to different aspects of reality."⁸ The mistaken view that science disproves belief in the Creator is divorced from the tangible experiences of most professionals who work in science for a living.

Allāh has given us many signs in the creation to infer His existence, His indisputable power over His creation, and the authenticity of His revelations. Some of these signs are intuitive, such as the instinctual nature of human beings to seek out a higher power; some are supported by logical and rational thinking, such as one's reflection upon the existence of the cosmos itself; and some are supported science, such as our discovery of the design features or 'fine-tuning' in creation. The following sections will explore these avenues to faith as they are expressed in the Qur'aṅ, the Sunnah, and the scholarly heritage of Islam.

⁸ Elaine H. Ecklund, David R. Johnson, and Brandon Vaidyanathan, *Secularity and Science: What Scientists Around the World Really Think About Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 9.

1. Fiṭrah: Human Nature and Faith

Arguably the most important piece of evidence for the existence of the Creator is the fundamental nature of human beings to gravitate towards faith. In Islam, this is known as the *fiṭrah*, the natural predisposition that the Creator instilled within us. The Qur'aṅ and Sunnah appeal to the uncorrupted *fiṭrah*, the instinct that makes Muslims receptive to the message and teachings of Islam.

Allāh ﷻ said:

Direct your face to the religion inclining to truth, the fiṭrah of Allāh upon which He created people. Let there be no change in the creation of Allāh. That is the upright religion, yet most people do not know.⁹

In this manner, Islam conforms to reason and human nature, it reigns in the soul's lowest impulses and unlocks the higher spiritual faculties of humankind, all ordered towards establishing a personal relationship with the Creator in this life and in the Hereafter.

The vast majority of people throughout history, and today, believe in Allāh (God) or a higher power by another name. It feels natural and intuitive for most people to do so. In the time of the Prophet , his opponents among the idolaters conceded that they believed Allāh had created them and the universe. They acknowledged the existence of Allāh, but they did not want to worship Him alone.

Allāh ﷻ said:

If you asked them who created the heavens and earth, they would surely say it is Allāh. Say, 'All praise is due to Allāh,' yet most of them do not know.¹⁰

When people face a very difficult or dangerous situation, they again naturally and intuitively pray to Allāh to relieve them of their troubles. The realization that we are powerless awakens the dormant spirit of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) within the human soul.

Allāh ﷻ said:

When hardship afflicts man, he calls upon his Lord in penitence. Then, when He grants him one of His favors, he forgets who he called upon earlier and makes partners with Allāh, to mislead from His path.¹¹

⁹ Surat al-Rūm 30:30.

¹⁰ Surat Luqman 31:25.

¹¹ Surat al-Zumar 39:8.

This fact of human nature is the origin of the popular American aphorism, "There are no atheists in fox holes."¹² There are counterexamples, of course, when the *fiṭrah* of a person has been so thoroughly corrupted by false beliefs, but these are the exceptions and not the general rule.

People find comfort and solace in religion, and Islam specifically, because the human soul yearns for a relationship with its Maker. The soul was created to seek out purpose and meaning through this relationship. Faith in Allāh continues to increase within the soul as it experiences the fruits of faith. Indeed, some sociological studies have shown that religious upbringing is strongly associated with better life-outcomes such as physical and mental well-being, character strengths, and avoidance of high-risk behaviors.¹³

Allāh ﷻ said:

Whoever works righteousness, male or female, and is a believer, We will grant him a good life and reward them for the best of what they used to do.¹⁴

According to Al-Suyūṭī (*rḥa*), one of the meanings of the 'good life' that Allāh promises to believers is the experience of contentment (*al-qana'ah*).¹⁵ Islam does not promise its adherent that they will be in a euphoric or extremely happy state of mind at all times, but rather that they can achieve satisfaction with their place in the universe, giving them the strength of faith to traverse the inevitable highs and lows of this world. In short, the soul naturally desires meaning, purpose, direction, and spiritual resources, all of which are fulfilled by surrendering one's will to the Creator, as Allāh ﷻ said, "Surely by the remembrance of Allāh hearts are put to rest."¹⁶

When a believer advances in their study and practice of Islamic faith, they will eventually come to experience what is known as the "sweetness of faith." The Prophet ﷺ said, "He has tasted the sweetness of faith who is content with Allāh as his Lord, Islam as his religion, and Muhammad as his Prophet."¹⁷ And the Prophet ﷺ said, "Wealth is not in having many possessions. Rather, true wealth is the richness of the soul."¹⁸ Faith inspires a feeling of prosperity within the soul, a sense of gratitude for the blessings of this life and hope for the eternal rewards awaiting in the next. Moreover, the sweetness of faith can be experienced not only as an individual, but on the level of fellowship and

¹² A 'foxhole' is an area in which troops take shelter from enemy bombs and artillery fire.

¹³ Y. Chen and T. J. VanderWeele, "Associations of Religious Upbringing with Subsequent Health and Well-Being from Adolescence to Young Adulthood: an Outcome-Wide Analysis," *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 187.11 (2018): 2355.

¹⁴ *Sūrat al-Naḥl* 16:97.

¹⁵ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2001), 1:360, verse 16:97.

¹⁶ *Sūrat al-Ra'd* 13:28.

¹⁷ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:62 #34.

¹⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, (Bayrut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najjāh, [2002]), 8:95. #6446.

community as well. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever would love to taste the flavor of faith, let him love a person only for the sake of Allāh Almighty.”¹⁹ Love and fellowship for the sake of Allāh is the basis of the religious community and, as such, is another fruit of the faith that can be experienced collectively.

Since believers have pillars of support, both as individuals and communities, this gives them the resources needed to overcome the inevitable obstacles, hardships, and tragedies of life. By contrast, a hypocrite, or one who is insincere or without faith, will usually succumb to the pressure of trials. The Prophet ﷺ said:

The parable of the believer is that of a crop which withstands the wind, for the believer continues to withstand the suffering of trials. The parable of the hypocrite is that of a cedar tree, for it does not budge until it is uprooted.²⁰

By experiencing the benefits of Islam, the believers can grow in their religion until they eventually achieve the spiritual status of conviction (*yaqīn*), which is the absence of doubts or misgivings. Imām al-Ghazālī (*rḥa*) comments upon the nature of the religious experience:

Hence, when you have understood the meaning of prophecy and you have abundantly examined the Qur'aṅ and Sunnah, you will inevitably arrive at the knowledge that the Prophet ﷺ embodied the highest levels of prophecy, and that is reinforced by experiencing his teachings in regards to worship and its effects on purifying the heart... Thus, when you experience that one thousand, two thousand, and many thousands of times over, you will necessarily attain knowledge (of Allāh) in which there is no doubt.²¹

In this regard, it is incumbent upon us to facilitate tasting the fruits of faith within ourselves and our communities by encouraging study and recitation of the Qur'aṅ, engaging and insightful lectures on Islamic topics, encouragement of supererogatory acts of worship, and communal events designed to bring the hearts together.

Despite this, the positive experiences of faith by which believers derive comfort, meaning, and joy with Islam are inherently subjective; that is, they occur in the lives of individuals but do not readily transfer to others in the same way as scientific knowledge. One cannot force another person to accept the faith, let alone taste its sweetness, because “there is no compulsion in religion.”²² As

¹⁹ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Aḥmad Shākir (ed.), *Al-Musnad*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), 8:86 #7954; declared authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) by Aḥmad Shākir in the commentary.

²⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 7:114 #5643.

²¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, [1972]), 185-186.

²² Surat al-Baqarah 2:256.

noted, the *fiṭrah* of individuals can become corrupted by false beliefs and negative experiences. The Prophet ﷺ related in a sacred saying he attributed to Allāh Almighty:

I have created all of My servants inclined to worship, but devils come to them who turn them away from their religion. They outlaw what has been made lawful for them, and they command them to associate partners with Me for which no authority has been revealed.²³

In a study published by the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, it was discovered that philosophical concerns, personal trauma, and negative experiences with Muslims can all interact to compound and aggravate the doubts experienced by believers.²⁴ The method of correction depends upon the primary source of doubt. If a Muslim has doubts about Islam due to their bad experiences with other Muslims, the remedy is to facilitate positive experiences with the faith and its adherents. If a Muslim has doubts due to philosophical concerns, then more rationally-oriented arguments should be marshaled to reinforce belief in Allāh.

Imām Ibn Taymīyah (rḥa) writes:

The establishment and recognition of the Creator is a fundamental instinct in human nature, even though some people have done something to corrupt their nature such that they need a (philosophical) argument to achieve knowledge of Allāh. This is the opinion of the majority of people, as well as the skilled debaters, that knowledge of Allāh is sometimes achieved effortlessly and other times by argument, as was recognized by more than one of the theologians.²⁵

When objections to theism in Islam are presented as skepticism over the 'lack of proof' for the Creator's existence, the answer is to present the *cosmological argument*, which is supported by logic and reason, and the *teleological argument*, which is supported by experience and scientific observation. Both arguments present a rationally sound method by which careful reflection upon intuitive experiences leads naturally to belief in Allāh.

2. Cosmological Reality: Argument from Existence

The most profound existential question facing humankind is very simple: Why does anything exist at all? Why is there 'something' and not nothing? Every person will ask themselves this question at some point in their lives; it is a duty upon seekers of truth to find a compelling answer. The Qur'aṅ

²³ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 4:1297 #2865.

²⁴ Youssef Chouhoud, "Modern Pathways to Doubt in Islam," *Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research*, 24 October 2016. <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/youssef-chouhoud/modern-pathways-to-doubt-in-islam/>

²⁵ Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, (al-Madīnah al-Munawwarah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭibā'at al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 1995), 16:328.

asks us to reflect upon the presence of the cosmos and to come to a conclusion upon the most obvious explanation for its being.

Allāh ﷻ said:

***Were they created by nothing? Or did they create themselves? Or did they create the heavens and earth? Rather, they are not certain!*²⁶**

There are three propositions: 1) the universe appeared from nothing (that is, without an agent to bring it into being), 2) people created themselves, or 3) Allāh created the universe. The first two propositions are nonsensical, because nothing can create itself if it does not already exist. The universe could not have created itself, neither could people. Therefore, the universe must have been created by something greater and more powerful than itself, which must be Allāh who embodies perfect Will, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom. These few verses are brief but concisely answer an age-old philosophical debate. The reasoning is so simple and compelling that Jubayr ibn Muṭʿim (*rḍa*) heard the Prophet ﷺ reciting these verses in the evening prayer, and he said, “My heart was about to fly!”²⁷ The argument in this passage was so convincing and eloquently stated to him that Jubayr embraced Islam.²⁸

This is known as the *cosmological argument*, that the existence of the contingent universe is sufficient evidence in itself that it has an all-powerful Creator. Al-Ghazālī states the argument this way, “The proof for the existence of the Exalted and Holy is that we say every event happens by a cause. The world is an event and thus it must have a cause, and what we mean by the world is everything besides Allāh the Exalted.”²⁹ There are slight variations on this argument in the works of theologians, but the broad propositions are summarized by İsmail Latif Hacinebioğlu in the following steps:

1. Everything in the universe that has a beginning must have a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the beginning of the existence of the universe must have been caused by something.

²⁶ Surat al-Ṭūr 52:35-36.

²⁷ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 6:140 #4854.

²⁸ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAzīm*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 1998), 7:406, verse 52:35.

²⁹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-ʿIṭiqād*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyah, 2004), 1:24.

4. The only such cause must be an uncaused cause, or God.³⁰

The initial premise is widely accepted on the basis of human experience. Everything we encounter in this life has a beginning and an origin, a place from which it came and a cause to bring it about. It is only logical, then, to suggest that the universe itself must have begun and therefore was caused to exist by a *necessary being* not contingent upon the universe or anything else. Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (*rḥa*) defined the 'necessary being' (*wājib al-wūjūd*) as the Creator "who exists in Himself, since the reality of His existence is without a predecessor whatsoever."³¹ The agent that caused everything we know to exist - Allāh - must exist without an initial cause, because an infinite regression of contingent causes is impossible.

The philosophers and atheists will counter by disputing the premise that the universe has a beginning, proposing instead that an infinite regression of causes is possible or that the universe is eternal. Al-Ghazālī answers this doubt by demonstrating how the idea of an infinite regression is mathematically impossible and thus leads to logical absurdities. One thought-experiment he provides is based upon the movements of the planets around the sun. Imagine that the solar system has existed for eternity. Yet, the planet Saturn still revolves around the sun once for every thirty years on Earth. This means the Earth has completed more revolutions than Saturn, while an eternal universe must necessitate that both planets have made an equally infinite number of revolutions. The number of revolutions of Earth compared to Saturn cannot be both equal and unequal at the same time, as Al-Ghazali says, "Each number has no end, yet some of them are lesser than others. This is clearly impossible."³² The point of this example is the same as was demonstrated by mathematician David Hilbert's famous paradox of the Grand Hotel, which is to illustrate that an actual infinite regression cannot exist in the real world because it would have to be both complete and incomplete simultaneously. Hilbert states that "the infinite is nowhere to be found in reality, no matter what experiences, observations, and knowledge are appealed to."³³ Likewise, mathematicians from Aristotle until today make a distinction between an *actual infinite*, which is a completed series, and a *potential infinite*, which remains incomplete.³⁴ An actual infinite, which is a completed series of natural numbers, is unattainable. A never-beginning and never-ending trail of falling dominoes

³⁰ Ismail L. Hacinebioğlu, *Does God Exist? : Logical Foundations of the Cosmological Argument*, (Istanbul: Insan, 2008), 188.

³¹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-Āliyah Min al-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī*, (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), 1:134).

³² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-Iʿtiqād*, 1:29.

³³ Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam (eds.), *Philosophy of Mathematics: Selected Readings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 191.

³⁴ Øystein Linnebo and Stewart Shapiro, "Actual and Potential Infinity," *Noûs*, 53.1 (2019): 160.

has by definition already finished its course, but in reality it would still be unfinished because we can always add one more to the series; this contradiction means it cannot really exist.

Al-Ghazālī similarly argues in his classic refutation of the philosophers that sound reason cannot accept the idea of an infinite regression of cause-and-effect occurrences, “In the world there are events with causes. If these events depend upon other events without end, then this is impossible and cannot be believed by a rational person.”³⁵ It should be noted that there is no scientific proof whatsoever that the universe exists as an infinite regression or it is, as they say today, one of many ‘multiverses.’ Infinite regressions are only *imaginary numbers*, a concept that can be expressed in mathematical formulas but does not reflect the tangible reality of contingent beings. Rather, such claims of an eternal universe are counter-intuitive to our entire human experience, which is unavoidably based upon the acceptance of discrete cause-and-effect as a fact of life. Moreover, the lack of an infinite regression’s explanatory power was highlighted by German theologian Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, “...however far back we might go into previous states, we will never find in those states a complete explanation for why, indeed, there is any world at all, and why it is the way it is.”³⁶ In other words, the infinite regression hypothesis does not provide *sufficient reason* for the existence of the world; it is not a credible, alternative explanation. It is only put forth to argue against the much more plausible premise that the universe is created. A hypothetical infinite regression is not a reasonable doubt to an otherwise strong chain of theistic logic.

Another counter to the cosmological argument is to ask the question: Who created the Creator? The problem with this question is that it is a *categorical mistake of definition*. The cosmological argument already establishes that the necessary being must logically exist, so Allāh is by definition uncreated. It is the same as if one asked: What does the color blue taste like? These properties does not interact in the way the question asks. Ibn Taymīyah likewise explains the fallacy of asking who created Allāh, “It is known by necessity and human nature, for all who have sound nature among the children of Adam, that the question is invalid. It is not possible for the Creator of the creation to have a creator. If He had a creator, He would be created Himself and would not be the Creator of everything.”³⁷ In this regard, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Satan will come to one of you and say, ‘Who created this and this?’ until he says, ‘Who created your Lord?’ If it comes to that, let him seek refuge in Allāh and stop these questions.”³⁸ And in another narration, the Prophet ﷺ said, “Let him say: I

³⁵ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, (Miṣr: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1955), 1:107.

³⁶ Gottfried W. Leibniz, Roger Ariew (ed.), and Daniel Garber (ed.), *Philosophical Essays*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989), 149-150.

³⁷ Ibn Taymīyah, *Dar’ Ta‘aruf al-‘Aql wal-Naql*, (al-Riyād: Jāmi‘at al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd al-Islāmīyah, 1991), 3:314.

³⁸ al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4:123 #3276.

have faith in Allāh.”³⁹ These erroneous types of questions are put forth by Satan to confuse people, so believers should avoid these lines of thinking and engage in positive activities that increase their faith.

A version of the cosmological argument was used by the great jurist and theologian Imām Abū Ḥanīfah (*rḥa*) in his debate with philosophers who were skeptical about the existence of the Creator:

It was reported from Abū Ḥanīfah that some philosophers (*ahl al-kalām*) intended to discuss with him the establishment of the existence of one Creator. Abū Ḥanīfah said, ‘Tell me before we speak on this matter about a ship on the Tigris river, moving by itself and filled with food, goods, and other materials, then it goes back by itself, then anchors itself, then unloads itself and continues to do all of this without anyone to manage it.’ They said, ‘This could never happen.’ Abū Ḥanīfah said, ‘If it is impossible for a ship, then how is it possible for the entire world in all of its vastness?’⁴⁰

It does not make any intuitive sense that a thing would appear and move on its own, much less that it demonstrate order and purpose. However, the cosmological argument is only one piece of the greater picture. It should be complemented, as implied by Abū Ḥanīfah, with the very compelling argument from *teleology*, that the universe exhibits clear and abundant characteristics of intelligent design.

3. Teleological Reality: Argument from Design

One of the most easily accessible proofs for the existence of Allāh is the argument by design, since it is readily accepted by one with sound and uncorrupted *fiṭrah*. Al-Rāzī states the idea clearly, “The establishment of the existence of the Maker intuitively is that human nature bears witness that the occurrence of a designed abode (*dār manqūshah*) with wondrous designs, built upon subtle components in harmony with wisdom and benefits, is impossible unless there existed One with knowledge and obvious wisdom to design it.”⁴¹ The cosmological argument first establishes the existence of the uncreated necessary being, then the teleological argument compliments this logic by establishing the absolute power of the Creator over the creation. These two arguments are not mutually exclusive, but rather they overlap and reinforce one another.

The world, and indeed the hidden fabric of the universe, exhibits a limitless number of clear instances of order, pattern, and purpose. The Qur’añ refers to many examples of design in creation as the ‘signs’ (*ayāt*) of Allāh, the same word used to describe miracles and revelations. It is as if to

³⁹ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:120 #134.

⁴⁰ Ibn Abī al-‘Izz, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwīyah*, (Bayrūt: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1997), 1:36.

⁴¹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1999), 19:71, verse 14:10.

say that all around us, every day, we witness the miracles of Allāh in the form of the sun, the moon, the stars, the crops, the fruits, the animals, and even the consciousness of human beings.

Allāh ﷻ said:

***Verily, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the changing of night and day, are signs for those who understand, who remember Allāh while standing, sitting, or lying on their sides and reflect upon the creation of the heavens and earth, saying: Our Lord, You have not created this all aimlessly. Glory be to You, so save us from the punishment of Hellfire.*⁴²**

People who observe and think deeply upon the creation come to the conclusion that everything was made to exist for a deliberate purpose. The believers feel a healthy sense of fear of Allāh, an apprehension at missing out on this marvelous purpose, and hence in this verse the believers seek refuge in Allāh from the Hellfire.

The signs of Allāh in creation are literally endless. They extend from the farthest reaches of the universe – the celestial bodies, stars, and galaxies – to the innermost components of our being – our consciousness, our bodies, and even the hidden complex code of DNA that directs our physiological development.

Allāh said:

***We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it is clear to them that it is the Truth. Is it not enough that your Lord is a witness over all things?*⁴³**

The only reasonable conclusion to make is that the universe was purposefully designed by the Creator, who has the divine attributes of absolute Will, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom.

Since the Qur'ān frequently mentions the signs of Allāh in creation, it is one of the preferred methods of establishing His existence and authority. Ibn Taymiyyah writes, "Affirming the Creator by means of signs is an obligation, as it has been revealed in the Qur'ān and Allāh has made it instinctual to His servants. Though deductive (philosophical) arguments may be correct, their usefulness is lacking."⁴⁴ Many people are burdened by a difficult philosophical discourse full of technical jargon, but every human being without exception can easily experience the wonders of creation every single day.

⁴² Surat 'Āli 'Imrān 3:190-191.

⁴³ Surat Fuṣṣilat 41:53.

⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu' al-Fatawā*, 1:48.

According to Ibn Kathīr (*rḥa*), the methodology of the Four Imāms when asked about the existence of the Creator was to direct the questioner to the signs of Allāh in creation. Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, as mentioned earlier, asked an atheist to consider how the world could possibly begin to move on its own. Imām Mālik was asked by the Caliph Harūn al-Rashīd and he told him to reflect upon the diversity of languages, voices, and sounds in creation. Imām al-Shāfi'ī told a questioner to think about the one species of leaves that is eaten by different creatures but produces a variety of beneficial substances such as silk, honey, milk, and musk. Imām Aḥmad asked another person to ponder over the simple phenomenon of the divine invention of new life from an ordinary chicken egg. Ibn Kathīr summarizes the approach of these early Muslim authorities:

The running rivers that travel from area to area with benefit, and what Allāh has produced from the earth of various animals and plants of different tastes, scents, shapes, and colors, and the unity of the soil and water; all of this demonstrates the existence of the Creator and His awesome power, His wisdom and mercy with His creation, His kindness, good treatment, and benevolence with them. There is no God besides Him. There is no Lord like Him. I depend upon Him and I turn to Him. The verses in the Qur'ān indicating this are very plentiful.⁴⁵

The wisdom of this method is that the argument by design is highly intuitive, agreeable to human nature, and accessible to anyone regardless of their level of theological or philosophical training. It is perhaps the most effective means of inspiring a person's innate propensity to naturally accept faith in Allāh and, for this reason, it is heavily emphasized in the Qur'ān.

In this spirit, Imām Ibn al-Qayyim (*rḥa*) provides us with the thought-experiment of a watermill spinning on its own, producing, harvesting, and distributing its crops without anyone or anything to direct it:

What do you say about a watermill revolving over a river in perfection? Its tools are perfected, its parts measured with excellence, and it is so obvious such that no observer can find fault in its parts or its form. It presides over a grand garden within which are every kind of fruit and crops, watering them as needed. Within this garden, its shrubbery is gathered and its maintenance is assured for its well-being. Its produce is excellent and guaranteed, and all of its needs are well served. Thus, nothing of it is left disordered and none of its fruit is left to rot. Then, the value of everything produced is divided according to their needs and necessities, divided by every type and distributed, and this distribution occurs in this manner at all times. Do you find this arrangement to have a creator or harvester or manager? Or, is the arraignment of that watermill and garden

⁴⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 1:107, verse 2:21.

without an actor or maintainer or manager? What do you find that your mind tells you in that case and how could you explain it?⁴⁶

This example combines the cosmological and teleological arguments: Why does the windmill exist at all? And why is it ordered? Of course, any person who came across such a sight would immediately conclude that someone must be maintaining the windmill. A similar argument was put forth by English theologian William Paley in his classic 19th century watchmaker analogy. Paley asks us to imagine someone walking through a field and finding a pocket watch on the ground, "The conclusion, which the first examination of the watch, of its works, construction, and movement suggested, was that it must have had for the cause and author of that construction, an artificer, who understood its mechanism and designed its use. This conclusion is invincible."⁴⁷ The point is that the person would *immediately* conclude that the object was designed without having to think about it. Extending this intuition to the rest of the universe, it is natural and reasonable for anyone to infer that the wonders of creation must have been designed by a powerful agent for a greater purpose.

At a deeper level, the universe is ordered according to a precise set of physical constants governing the behavior of natural laws and forces, such as the speed of light, gravity, electromagnetism, and nuclear interactions. Scientists refer to this as the *fine-tuned universe*, that the fundamental components of the universe are balanced so perfectly that conscious life can exist. Some scientists also refer to this as the *strong anthropic principle*, that there is something inherent to the universe that compels it to produce conscious life. In light of these concepts, notable modern theologian William Lane Craig summarizes the logic of the teleological argument as follows:

1. The fine-tuning of the initial state of the Universe is due to either physical necessity, chance, or design.
2. It is not due to physical necessity or chance.
3. Therefore, it is due to design.⁴⁸

Like the cosmological argument, this is a solid chain of logic based upon the scientifically documented fact that the universe is unmistakably organized. Since the universe is finely-tuned for life, it is reasonable to conclude that it must have a *fine-tuner*, who is the uncreated Creator.

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa'ādah wa Manshūr Wilāyat al-'Ilm wa al-Idārah*, (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2002), 1:214.

⁴⁷ William Paley, Matthew D. Eddy (ed.), and David Knight (ed.), *Natural Theology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, UK, 2006), 15.

⁴⁸ William Lane Craig, "Design and the anthropic fine-tuning of the universe," in *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science*, edited by Neil A. Manson, (London: Routledge, 2003), 175.

In fact, all progress in the natural sciences is based upon the metaphysical presumption of *ontological unity*, the idea that reality is singular, cohesive, and consistent. Every scientific experiment must be replicable to be valid and result in accepted knowledge; implicit in replicability is recognition that the laws of nature are unified and predictable. The Qur'a'n states that ontological unity points to the unity of the Creator, "Had there been in the heavens and earth another god besides Allāh, they would have been ruined."⁴⁹ In other words, if there were two Creators, we would see conflicts between the natural laws within the creation. Apparent inconsistencies, such as the superficial contradiction between the scientific theories of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics, only exist on the surface. Most scientists assume that on a deeper level of reality, both theories can be reconciled and absorbed into a more comprehensive 'Theory of Everything' that can explain all observable phenomena in terms of their uniform, fundamental components. Since all of the laws of nature interact coherently within a singular reality, as if they originate from one common source, it is logical to assume that they all proceed from one Law-giver.

The philosophers and atheists will counter the teleological argument by proposing purely naturalistic explanations for instances of design in creation. That is, they will claim that either the universe was indeed designed, but by 'nature' and not by Allāh, or that the universe was not designed at all. Ibn al-Qayyim responds to the first point in this manner:

Tell me about this nature: Does it sustain itself? Does it have knowledge and power over these wondrous actions? Or is it not like that but rather it only appears to inherently sustain itself? If they say it surely sustains itself and has complete knowledge, power, will, and wisdom, then say to them that this is the Creator, the Designer, the Fashioner, so why do you refer to Him as nature?⁵⁰

If they say 'nature' exhibits the divine attributes of Allāh, such as Will, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom, then they are simply describing the reality of Allāh without crediting Him as the designer. Ibn Taymiyyah notes that the presence of these attributes in creation reflects their perfect existence within the Creator, "Whatever is affirmed in the creation of intact attributes, which have no deficiency, such as life, knowledge, and ability, then the Creator is more worthy of these than them."⁵¹ The features of design in creation lead us to logically conclude that they were designed by the necessary being who demonstrates unmatched power and intelligence. Claiming that 'nature' has these attributes, but should not be worshiped, is a merely rhetorical shift.

⁴⁹ Surat al-Anbiyā' 21:22.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftāḥ Dar al-Sa'ādah*, 1:261.

⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatawā*, 1:48.

On the other hand, if they say that nature has none of these qualities at all, then it is flatly counter-intuitive to most people that anything appearing so eloquently designed must have had someone design it. Ibn al-Qayyim continues:

If they say no, rather nature is a quality lacking agency and all of its actions are without knowledge, will, power, or awareness at its source and only its effects can be witnessed, then say to them that this cannot be believed by any person of sound reason. How do these wondrous actions and perfect subtleties, which cannot be fully known or measured by the brightest of minds, proceed from one without sense, power, wisdom, or awareness?⁵²

It is entirely unreasonable to assume that the universe appeared by chance, without an agent or designer. Our human nature is to acknowledge the designs of a designer, whether it is a fully-functioning windmill, a pocket watch, or the heavens and earth in all of their glory. Ignoring this instinct when applied to the Creator is both irrational and unnatural.

The philosophers and atheists will also counter by putting forth the so-called 'infinite monkey theorem.' Their idea is that if a monkey were typing at random on a type-writer for an infinite amount of time, he would eventually produce the works of famous English playwright William Shakespeare. Likewise, in their view, the universe came about not by design but by pure random chance, as a freak accident of blind natural forces. This theorem is invalid because it again relies upon the impossible notion of an infinite regression. The typing monkey only exists as potential infinite series, an imaginary mental construct that is never truly infinite because he can always press one more key; he will never complete a series of natural numbers. The universe does not exist as an actual infinite that continuously spawns and respawns without beginning or end. Moreover, it is impossible for a prohibitively high degree of randomness to achieve such order and complexity by chance. Physicist Gerald Schroeder demonstrates that the odds of random monkeys producing a single sonnet of Shakespeare (a mere fourteen lines) is 10 to the 690th power. For comparison, the number of atomic particles in the entire known universe (protons, electrons, neutrons, etc.) is about 10 to the 80th power.⁵³ The odds of the monkey randomly producing a few lines of poetry is at an extremely low level of magnitude, one that never appears in the real world. In mathematics, a number so infinitesimally small is considered *negligible* in any formula, which means it functions as if it were zero or nothing. The fact is that the monkey will never randomly produce the ordered complexity needed to write even a single page of Shakespeare, let alone his entire corpus. If the words of a

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Antony Flew and Roy A. Varghese, *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 76-77.

mere mortal cannot be created by chance, how can it be true for the entire universe in all of its glory, its celestial bodies, its creatures, its beauty, and its endless wonders?

4. Conclusion

The proof for the existence of the Creator is established by virtue of a complete theory of knowledge. Atheists, or those who deny the Creator, base their worldview upon incorrect assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge, specifically their dismissal of non-scientific sources of knowledge such as experience, perception, consciousness, and memory. Science deals solely with the observable world and, as such, by itself it cannot provide comprehensive knowledge of reality. The Creator exists at such a great level of magnitude as compared to us that we cannot directly see Him, so there is no scientific method of detecting Him. There is no real conflict between science and Islam when these two sources of knowledge are properly contextualized. Indeed, science can inspire faith in the Creator by study and reflection upon His creation.

Human nature itself bears witness to the existence of the Creator. Most people throughout history until today believe in Allāh (God) or a higher power by some other name. People will intuitively call out to Allāh when they are in trouble. They also naturally yearn for the purpose, meaning, direction, and spiritual resources that religion, and Islam specifically, provide. Believers who traverse the path of faith will come to experience its fruits, or the 'sweetness of faith.' This religious experience, repeated again and again, consolidates faith in the heart and makes it beloved to the believers, which then leads to positive outcomes in this life and eternal salvation in the Hereafter.

Personal experience is subjective, however, so there are complementary logical and rational lines of thinking that validate the religious experience. The argument from existence affirms that the universe had a beginning, it therefore had a cause, and this cause must be uncaused itself, which is the characteristic of an agent with absolute Will, Knowledge, Power, and Wisdom - Allāh. The argument from design supports this further by highlighting the 'signs' of Allah in creation, pointing to many natural instances of pattern, order, and purpose. This is the simplest and most effective means of establishing the existence and authority of the Creator, because it requires no special theological or philosophical training, it conforms to human nature and intuition, and it is accessible by every person. Scientists have discovered that the universe is configured precisely according to an array of natural laws, or fine-tuning, which confirms the idea that the universe was designed. Science itself relies upon the premise that the laws of nature are coherent and consistent within a single reality, implying the presence of one Law-giver. Atheistic explanations for design in nature are either merely rhetorical shifts away from theism, or they rely upon the the impossible notion of an infinite regression, which is disproven by theoretical and practical mathematics.

When Muslim community leaders discuss the existence of the Creator with other Muslims struggling with doubts, it is important to identify the source of their doubt so as to provide the most effective remedy. If a Muslim doubts the Creator or Islam because of some bad experience with other Muslims, one should try to facilitate positive experiences for them within the faith and community. If a Muslim has trouble accepting the existence of the Creator because of some philosophical issue, such as the apparent lack of 'scientific' proof, one should present to them the combined logic of the cosmological and teleological arguments. In any case, one must always adhere to the conditions of enjoining good and forbidding evil as laid down by the scholars, which are to discuss this and other controversial matters with knowledge (*'ilm*), gentleness (*rifq*), and patience (*ṣabr*).

Success comes from Allāh, and Allāh knows best.