

Is there a God?

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Annual West Coast Convention 2007
December 29, 2007

Introduction

There is a raging yet lively debate [1,2,3,4,5,6] going on between atheists and theists over the existence of God – which is a sign of a healthy and invigorating intellectual spirit.

Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih II, may Allah be pleased with him, wrote, in his book, *Hasti-Bari-Tala* [7].

“If people believe in God on hearsay or declare a belief in God to avoid a debate, then this will not guarantee their salvation. ... Therefore, it is of utmost importance that considerable thought be given to the question of the existence of God.”

This speech therefore addresses the question: Is there a God?

A discussion about God’s existence should start with the acknowledgement that the burden of proof lies with the theists, that is, with those who believe in God.

There are some questions that puzzle most reflective people: How did the laws of nature come to be? How did the universe come into existence? And how did life as a phenomenon originate from nonlife?

Let us consider the Kalam cosmological argument [8] for the existence of God, a method of argument developed by medieval Muslim logicians and popularized in the West by philosopher William Craig.

Given that an observable universe exists, there are three possibilities: First, the universe always existed. Second, the universe created itself. Third, an all-powerful and all-knowing transcendent being, which we call God, created it. Let us examine them one by one.

Eternal Universe

Consider the possibility of an eternal universe, a universe that existed for ever. But the Second of Law of Thermodynamics and the theory of entropy preclude this possibility. If the universe really had existed for an infinitely long period of time, its entropy, the

measure of its molecular disorder, would have reached its maximal value; that is, the universe would have suffered a ‘heat death’ [9,10]. The fact that the universe has not yet died in this fashion implies that it cannot have endured for all eternity.

Origin of the Universe

As long as the universe could be conveniently thought of without an end and without a beginning, it remained easy to see its existence as a self-explanatory brute fact and perhaps there was not much need to postulate something else that produced it.

But the big-bang theory radically changed the situation.

The big bang [5, 11] is a widely-accepted theory of the origin of the universe. According to this theory, more than fourteen billions years ago, the universe emerged from a highly compressed and extremely hot state and then it rapidly cooled down and expanded. The big bang theory is considered a cornerstone of modern cosmology.

The big bang theory provides a moment at the origin of the universe when creation could have occurred. At the origin, we encounter a point that physicists call a singularity, at which neither space nor time exists – and at that point the laws of physics break down.

If the universe had a beginning, it became entirely sensible, almost inevitable, to ask what produced this beginning.

Therefore the idea of the origin of the universe with a singularity implying a role of God in its creation did not sit well with many atheistic scientists [14].

Bondi and Hoyle came up with a steady state theory, in an attempt to explain the expansion of the universe in a way that would not require the universe to have had a beginning. But this theory was readily discarded, as it did not correspond to the observational data.

Stephen Hawking, professor of mathematics at Cambridge University, and James Hartle proposed a theory, where the universe has no boundary either in space or in time, that is, it has neither beginning nor end. In his book *A Brief History of Time* [12], Hawking then asked if there was any place for a creator any more.

There are several problems with Hawking’s theory. Hawking's solution uses imaginary time, which is invoked to stipulate imaginary universes. It remains an extremely speculative theory with little chance of experimental verification.

Fine Tuning of the Universe

The universe with all its laws appears to be delicately balanced and fine-tuned [9, 17] to produce human life. Physicists call this finding the anthropic principle. Many of the basic features of the universe are, in essence, determined by the values that are assigned to the fundamental constants and the initial conditions at the beginning of the universe.

Hawking [12] wrote that if the rate of expansion one second after the big bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand trillion, the universe would have recollapsed before it reached its present size. If the rate of expansion has been slightly higher, then the galaxies would have never formed.

In the anthropic principle, the theist sees a purposeful design, the handiwork of God. The atheist looks upon it as a very lucky coincidence where humans exist in a universe with the right parameters to ponder over the mystery of their existence.

But the odds of life appearing in the universe are so infinitesimal, so incredibly small that we need a rational explanation of how something this unlikely could take place.

Multiple Universes

Consequently, many atheists, in desperation, have fled to the second explanation: multiple universes [9, 15] – actually, infinity of universes. The uniqueness and fine tuning of our universe is dismissed by claiming that it is but one among countless universes.

In one version of this phantasmagoric theory, universes are springing up, as if there was no tomorrow. But please don't ask where and how.

So what is the empirical evidence for oscillating and parallel and multiple universes? There is none.

Steven Weinberg shared the Nobel Prize with Dr. Abdus Salam. Weinberg is one of the greatest physicists of our time and he is also a prominent atheist. Even he admits that the theories of multiple universes "are very speculative ideas ... without any experimental support" [15].

In my view, the atheists have invented a complicated set of circumstances to circumvent a much more obvious solution. They seem to abolish one seemingly unobservable God by making up an infinite number of unobservable substitutes, which rightfully belong to the Hollywood genre of science fantasy movies.

Laws of Nature

All these models of multi-universes or Hawking's boundary-less universe originating out of a collapsing black hole require pre-existing laws of physics.

And no one has an explanation [14] for how these grand laws of physics came into existence. Who devised the code? Who wrote the majestic multi-variable differential equations? And who provided the solutions to the equations?

Indeed the question can be posed in a deeper way. How can inanimate fundamental particles obey instructions or abide by grand mathematical rules? How can the universe operate without a sustainer?

The atheist viewpoint cannot explain the profound lawfulness of nature itself. Paul Davies, a mathematical physicist, writes [9], "If the divine underpinning of the laws is removed, their existence becomes a deep mystery."

Creation of the Creator

Richard Dawkins, an evolutionary biologist and professor of public understanding of science at Oxford, in his recent book, *The God Delusion* [1], makes a concerted attack against theism and asks if the universe needed a creator, then what about God? Who created God?

Dawkins presents this question as if it was the mother of all arguments against the theistic position. Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih II, in *Hasti Bari Tala* [7] refers to a hadith that predicts a time to come when atheistic people will use this question as an argument against the existence of God.

Let us examine this question a little more deeply. We find that it points to the limitation of inductive reasoning. The question simply does not apply to the Prime Cause, which is, by definition, uncreated. The atheists are reduced to denying the first proposition – that is, everything that has a *beginning* does not necessarily have a cause and thus the universe simply *is*.

Now either an immeasurably intelligent mind, an all-powerful being, an agent that exists beyond time and space created the universe or the universe, with neither mind nor consciousness, with neither will nor intelligence, first devised the grand laws of nature and then created itself out of absolute nothingness.

Take your pick: God or universe. Which is the better candidate to be the Prime Cause? Which is the more rational and intellectually satisfying alternative?

The Unity of Source

Another argument in favor of God's existence is the establishment of the unity of source – that is, the fact that the authors of the Holy Quran and the universe are the same. The Quran says:

Do not the disbelievers see that the skies and the earth were a closed-up mass, and then We clove them asunder? And we made every living thing from water. Will they not believe? [21:31]

This verse alludes to the origin of the universe as envisioned by the big bang theory. Creation of life from water is also a well-established scientific fact. What is quite striking about this verse is that it challenges the disbelievers or atheists and raises the fundamental questions of the origins of the universe and of life – which happen to be the two of the most hotly debated topics today [1,2,4,5,6].

Hadhrat Khalifatul-Masih IV, may Allah be pleased with him, in his book, *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth* [10], gives many examples of Quranic verses that refer to scientific facts that have only been recently discovered.

Darwinian Evolution

Let me briefly talk about the theory of Darwinian evolution, which is erroneously seen by many as evidence against the existence of God. Dawkins, in his book *The Blind Watchmaker* [3] noted that it was very difficult to be an atheist before Darwinian Theory of evolution came along.

It should be emphasized that the Darwinian Theory [6,16,17] presupposes the existence of the molecular machinery of cell and the genetic material of RNA and DNA for it to work upon. The theory of evolution cannot provide any explanation for the origin of life or for the genetic material.

We recognize [10] the fact that fossils show emergence of life forms over a period of millions of years in a progressive manner from relatively simple to the increasingly complex. But linked to these observations is a hypothesis of common descent with modification and of the Darwinian process of random mutation and natural selection, which is seen as the only creative force behind life in all its myriad variety. That is where we tend to be skeptical, since definite evolutionary pathways of any organism are still missing [16].

The scientists who question Darwinism are still in a minority, but there is a growing scientific dissent. Recently, one hundred eminent religious and non-religious scientists from diverse fields made a public declaration [19] that they “are skeptical of the claims for the ability of random mutation and natural selection to account for the complexity of life” and that “careful examination of the evidence for Darwinian theory should be encouraged.”

Hadhrat Khalifatul Masih IV expressed similar skepticism [10] about the Darwinian Theory in his book, *Revelation, Rationality, Knowledge and Truth*.

God of the Gaps

Allow me to comment upon a common misconception. The atheists say that theists often use “God of the gap” strategy [1,2,3] and invoke God to explain the remaining gaps in the scientific knowledge. If a gap in the current knowledge is found, it is assumed that a God, by default, must fill in. But gaps shrink as science advances and the God of the gaps is threatened with eventually having nowhere to live.

But is that really true? Let me give you one example. Ernst Haeckel was a renowned 19th century evolutionary biologist. He, like many of his contemporaries, believed that a cell was a “simple little lump of protoplasm” [16] and advocated the theory of spontaneous generation of life. In the last fifty years, the science of molecular biology has made

tremendous progress. Now we understand that the cell is a molecular machine far more complex in its structure and functionality than anything yet devised by the human mind [6]. A spontaneous generation of the cell is thus considered inconceivable.

These advancements have not deposed God from anywhere. Quite the contrary, many of the greatest discoveries of the twentieth century have established God more firmly in the intellectual discourse [5,6].

Reason for the Rejection of God

Let me talk briefly about the reason behind atheism. Most atheists are intelligent, thoughtful and sincere people. This poses the nagging question as to why there is such disbelief and such persistent rejection on the part of those who should know better.

In my view, their rejection of the existence of God has very little to do with scientific enterprise, although scientific enterprise remains essentially agnostic.

The things that make people reject God arise from the human condition: Free will under divine omniscience, creation of evil by a God of virtue, belief in eternal damnation, human suffering inflicted by a God of Mercy [1,2,15].

Perhaps the primary reason for rejecting God and religion is religion itself. The atheistic scientist is justified in despising religious dogmas and scriptures that imply a God whose grandeur does not match up to the grandeur of the universe he knows.

When superstitious folktales, seclusion and marginalization of women, arcane theology, inane ritualism, and dogmas of intolerance and irrationality are attributed to the author of this grand and lofty universe, atheism is a natural consequence.

Examples of diabolic acts committed by Muslims and non-Muslims in the name of religion abound. But in a *lighter* vein, Steven Weinberg captured the problem succinctly; he writes, “Good people will do good things and bad people will do bad things, but for good people to do bad things – that takes religion.” [13]

Experiencing God

Perhaps the final and ultimate evidence for the existence of God comes from the personal experience of divine signs.

The Promised Messiah, on whom be peace, says [20]:

“Search for God is a difficult matter. Observation of the heavens and the earth and reflection of the perfect orderliness of the universe only leads to the conclusion that the universe should have a creator, yet it is not a proof that such a Creator exists. There is a difference between ought to be and is. The first duty of a person, therefore, is to acquire certainty with regard to the existence of God ... How can this certainty be acquired? It cannot be acquired through mere stories. It

cannot be acquired through mere arguments. The only way to acquiring certainty is to experience God by having conversation with Him or by witnessing His extraordinary signs.”

Conclusion

I would like to conclude this speech by reiterating a simple truth that is part of our deepest conviction. Advancement of science reveals the intricacy of the universe and the grandeur of the divine design and reinforces the fact that in the workings of the universe there is sign for those who reflect.

The Holy Quran says:

He is Allah, the Originator, the Creator, the Designer. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the Heavens and the earth glorifies Him. And He is the Mighty, the Wise. [59:25]

In the end, as is in the beginning, all true praise is for Allah alone.

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