

Do We Have Good Reasons to Believe?

هل لدينا أسباب وجيهة للاعتقاد؟

[إنجليزي - English]

www.onereason.org website

موقع سبب واحد

www.islamreligion.com website

موقع دين الإسلام

2013 - 1434

IslamHouse.com

Do We Have Good Reasons to Believe?

Why is the universe the way it is?

One of the most important questions that almost all thinkers, philosophers and people like you and I have asked is “Why does the universe exist at all? And why is it the way it is?”



In response to this question there are those who say that the universe is uncaused, in other words it is eternal, meaning it has no beginning and no end. If this is true, there should be an infinite history of past events. However, the infinite in the real world is not possible as it implies a quantity that is limitless. Let's take the following examples into consideration: if there were an infinite number of books in a room and two were taken away, how many would be left? The response may be “infinity” or for those who are logically inclined “infinity minus two”. In any case, the responses don't make sense because although two have been taken away from infinity there still remains infinity! Consequently, we're not able to count the remaining books left in the room. Therefore the infinite leads to contradictions and simply doesn't exist in the real world (although it exists in mathematical discourse; however it is based upon certain axioms and conventions). Therefore, it logically follows that the universe must have a finite history of past events, which indicates that it must have begun to exist at some point in time.

The above may sound too philosophical, but it is also supported by scientific evidence, for instance, Stephen Hawking, in his lecture *The Beginning of Time* states, “The conclusion of this lecture is that the universe has not existed forever. Rather, the universe, and time itself, had a beginning in the Big Bang, about 15 billion years ago.”¹ According to contemporary cosmologists, the universe began at time zero with the event commonly called the “Big Bang”. The theory postulates that the universe began as a “singularity”, an extremely hot and dense entity that expanded and subsequently cooled, going from something incredibly small and hot to the current size and temperature of our universe. In light of these facts, it is interesting to note that there is no scientific explanation as to what happened before time zero. In addition to this, the Big Bang theory can only postulate what happened 1×10^{-34} seconds after the Big Bang but not anytime before it. What happened before this particular point in time is unknown.

In the context of the above discussion, it can be concluded that generally physicists agree that as a result of the Big Bang, physical time and space were created as were energy and matter. So two premises can be drawn from all the above: 1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause 2. The universe began to exist - Therefore the universe has a cause. How do we get to this conclusion? Well, if everything we know and see that begins to exist has a cause, for example a noise in the room or the pyramids at Giza, then the universe - which also began to exist - must also have a cause.

The Cause for the Universe = God?

1 (<http://www.hawking.org.uk/index.php/lectures/publiclectures/62>)

Our discussion so far has provided good reasons to believe that there must have been a cause for the universe. However, this doesn't tell us much about what the cause is, but if we think deeply about the nature of the cause - also known as conceptual analysis - we can conclude that it must be very powerful as it brought into existence the entire universe, and it must be:

One...

The cause for the universe must be a single cause for several reasons. An attractive argument to substantiate this claim includes the use of the rational principle called Occam's razor. This principle is commonly summarised as "the simplest explanation is the best explanation". In philosophical terms the principle enjoins that we should not multiply entities beyond necessity. What this basically means is that we should stick to explanations that do not create more questions than it answers. In the case of the cause for the universe we have no evidence to claim multiplicity, in other words more than one, and if we did it would create more questions than it answers.

Uncaused & Eternal...

This cause must also be uncaused due to the absurdity of an infinite regress, in other words an indefinite chain of causes. To illustrate this better, if the cause of the universe had a cause and that cause had a cause ad infinitum, then there wouldn't be a universe to talk about in the first place. For example, imagine if a Stock Trader on a trading floor at the Stock Exchange was not able to buy or sell his stocks or bonds before asking permission from the investor, and then this investor had to check with his, and this went on forever, would the Stock Trader ever buy or sell his stocks or bonds?

The answer is no. In similar light, if we apply this to the universe we would have to posit an uncaused cause due to this rational necessity.

However, some philosophers and scientists claim that “why doesn’t the cause be the universe itself?” and “why can’t the cause stop at the universe?” Well, the problem with these claims is that they would imply the universe created itself, which is absurd because how can anything exist and not exist at the same time? Finally, it would be irrational to claim that whatever begins to exist causes itself!

Immaterial..

The cause has to be immaterial since it created everything. If you were to take any state of physical existence, you would come to the conclusion that, that state of physical existence owes itself to another state of physical existence. And that state of physical existence, owes itself to another state of physical existence. But you can’t go back states of physical existences ad infinitum. There has to be a beginning to the entire state of physical existences. Therefore, the logical conclusion is that the origin of all creation has to be a non- physical state. After thinking about the nature of the cause for the universe we come to the remarkable realisation that it has all the basic attributes of the traditional monotheistic God, namely that He is one, eternal and immaterial. But what reasons do we have to start claiming that a particular religion is true? This leads us to discuss the Quran, the book of the Muslims.

The Quran

The Quran is no ordinary book. It has been described by many, who engage with the book, as an imposing text, but the way it imposes itself on the reader is not negative, rather it is positive. This is because it seeks to



positively engage with your mind and your emotions, and it achieves this by asking profound questions, such as “So where are you people going? This is a message for all people; for those who wish to take the straight path.”² and “Have they not thought about their own selves?”³

However, the Quran doesn’t stop there, it actually challenges the whole of mankind with regards to its divine authorship, it boldly states “If you have doubts about the revelation we have sent down to Our servant, then produce a single chapter like it – enlist whatever supporters you have other than God – if you truly think you can.

If you cannot do this – and you never will – then beware of the fire prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones.”⁴

This challenge refers to the various wonders in the Quran, even within its smallest chapter, that give us good reasons to believe it is from God. Some of these reasons are historical and scientific.

2 Quran Chapter 81 Verses 26 – 28

3 Quran Chapter 30 Verse 8

4 Quran Chapter 2 Verse 23

Historical...

There are many historical statements in the Quran that show us good reasons that it is from God. One of them is that the Quran is the only religious text to use different titles for the rulers of Egypt at different times. For instance while addressing the Egyptian ruler, at the time of Prophet Yusuf (Joseph), the word “Al-Malik” is used which refers to a king (note: that during the middle old kingdom Hyksos Asiatic families were governing Egypt and they did not use the title Pharaoh, as the Quran mentions “The King said, 'Bring him to me straight away!’”).⁵

In contrast, the ruler of Egypt at the time of the Prophet Musa (Moses) is referred to as Pharaoh, in Arabic “Firaawn”. This particular title began to be employed in the 14th century B.C., during the reign of Amenhotep IV. This is confirmed by the Encyclopaedia Britannica which states that the word Pharaoh was a title of respect used from the New Kingdom (beginning with the 18th dynasty; B.C. 1539-1292) until the 22nd dynasty (B.C. 945-730).

So the Quran is historically accurate as the Prophet Yusuf lived at least 200 years before that time, and the word “King” was used for the Hyksos kings, not Pharaoh.

In light of this, how could have the Prophet Muhammad known such a minute historical detail? Especially when all the other religious texts, such as the Bible, just mention Pharaoh as a title for all times? Also, since people at the time of the revelation did not know this information and hieroglyphs were a dead language, what

does this say about the authorship of the Quran? There is no naturalistic explanation.

Scientific...

The Quran always mentions nature as a sign for God's existence, power and majesty. Every time these are mentioned, they are expressed with a great accuracy, and they also give us information that could have never been known at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. One of these signs includes the function and structure of mountains. The Quran mentions that mountains have "peg" like structures and that they have been embedded into earth to stabilise it, a concept known in Geology as isostasy. The Quran mentions: "We placed firmly embedded mountains on the earth, so it would not move under them..."⁶ and "Have We not made the earth as a bed and the mountains its pegs?"⁷

The Quran's eloquent renderings of the facts mentioned above are confirmed by modern science which only came to be understood by the end of the 20th Century. In the book *Earth*, by Dr. Frank Press, former president of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, states that mountains are like stakes, and are buried deep under the surface of Earth.⁸

With regards to the vital role of mountains, it was formerly understood that mountains were merely protrusions rising above the surface of Earth. However, scientists realised that this was not actually the case, and that the parts known as the mountain roots extended down as far as 10 to 15 times their own height. With these features, mountains play a simi-

6 Quran Chapter 21 Verse 31

7 Quran Chapter 78 Verses 6-7

8 Frank Press, and Raymond Siever, *Earth*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman & Company: 1982

lar role to a nail or peg firmly holding down a tent, which has been discovered by modern geological and seismic research, a concept known as isostasy.⁹

In conclusion, how can we explain this in the light of the fact that this is relatively recent science (with no one at the time of the revelation knowing this information)? What does this tell you about the author? Again, there is no naturalistic explanation.

Is Life Absurd without God?

The writer Loren Eiseley said that man is a cosmic orphan. This is quite profound, as man is the only creature in the universe who asks: why? Other animals have instincts to guide them, but man has learned to ask questions. If many of these questions raised by man exclude God then the conclusion is simple: we are the accidental byproducts of nature, a result of matter plus time plus chance. There is no reason for your existence and all we face is death. Modern man thought that when he had got rid of God, he had freed himself from all that repressed and stifled him. Instead, he discovered that in killing God, he had also killed himself.

If there is no God, then man and the universe are doomed. Like prisoners condemned to death we await our unavoidable execution. What is the consequence of this? It means that life itself is absurd. It means that the life we have is without ultimate significance, value, or purpose. For example, according to the atheist worldview this life is purposeless, or at best, just assembled to propagate our DNA. The way some atheists get out of this is by saying we can

9 M. J. Selby, *Earth's Changing Surface* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1985), 32.

create purpose for ourselves, however this is a self-delusion as we try and find some purpose by attributing purpose to the things we do in life, but remove purpose from our very own lives. Also, without God our lives do not have any ultimate meaning. If our ends are the same, in that we just pass out of existence, what meaning does that give our lives? Does it even matter if we existed at all? If the universe was never in existence what difference would it make?

Existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus understood the meaningless reality of life in absence of acknowledging the purpose of our existence. This is why Sartre wrote of the “nausea” of existence and Camus saw life as absurd, indicating that the universe has no meaning at all. The German Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche argued in clear concise pronouncements that the world and human history do not have any meaning, any rational order or aim. Nietzsche argued that there is only a mindless chaos, a directionless world tending towards no end. It is not wonder the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said he would have wished the world never existed. All of these views on the world are absurd conclusions carved by the atheist world view.