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Revisiting the Arguments for the Existence of God: A Comparative Study of Western and Islamic Perspectives

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Abstract

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method and a critical comparative approach to examine, critique, and compare the arguments for the existence of God in Western and Islamic philosophy. The introduction clarifies the meaning of argument and distinguishes it from faith and reasoning. It then outlines key concepts necessary for a deeper understanding of the arguments for God's existence, including the role of Western and Islamic philosophers in shaping these arguments, the distinction between horizontal and vertical arguments in Western and Islamic traditions, and the empiricist and rationalist approaches to these arguments in both intellectual traditions. Following this foundation, the article systematically analyzes four categories of arguments for God's existence: ontological, cosmological, teleological (design), and moral arguments, as presented by Western thinkers. These arguments are then

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examined and critiqued based on the principles of Islamic philosophy. Throughout the discussion, the study highlights how misunderstandings or misinterpretations of key concepts and rational principles unique to Islamic philosophy—particularly in general and special metaphysics—have contributed to certain misapprehensions in the history of Western philosophy regarding arguments for God's existence.

Keywords

God, argument, Existence, Quiddity, Necessity, Contingency, Emergence.

Introduction

The entirety of human intellectual endeavor throughout the history of philosophical and theological thought aimed at proving the existence of God has been consolidated and categorized under the well-known framework of "arguments for the existence of God." These arguments can be examined within both Western and Islamic traditions, revealing similarities, differences, and even certain misunderstandings between the two. However, before delving into this comparison, one may first ask: What exactly is meant by argument?

It is clear that anyone who believes in the existence of God—regardless of their personal understanding or interpretation—possesses at least some form of justification for their belief. This justification may, in some cases, be found solely within faith itself (a fideist approach), such that when asked for a reason, the believer merely refers to their faith, responding: "I believe in God because I have faith in His existence." Alternatively, the justification may take the form of an argument or evidence presented by the individual. By argument, however, we do not mean a purely faith-based or doctrinal reason, but rather some form of evidence or indication of God's existence. Examples of such arguments can be found in both Western and Islamic thought, including the argument from miracles, the argument from utility, the argument from religious experience, the argument from need, and the argument from innate disposition (*fiṭra*). However, it seems that these arguments cannot, in the strictest sense, be considered arguments or demonstrations, as they are, at best, merely pieces of evidence or indicators of God’s existence. While such evidence and indications may indeed lead individuals to believe in God, they do not constitute demonstrative argument in the logical sense. A argument is an argument that, if composed of sound and true

premises (which must either be self-evident and in no need of argument or have already been established elsewhere), necessarily leads to its conclusion. Accepting this conclusion then becomes logically unavoidable, as the argument produces complete intellectual conviction (a rationalist approach). By contrast, justifications based on faith and evidentiary arguments lack this level of necessity and force. As we will later see, even teleological (design) arguments and moral arguments, despite being labeled as arguments, share a similar status with mere evidence and indications—although they may exhibit a greater degree of logical rigor in comparison.

Numerous studies, in the form of books and articles, have been conducted on the arguments for the existence of God, making it impossible to recount all their findings here. However, in this paper, we aim to revisit and analyze the major arguments for God's existence—namely, ontological, cosmological, teleological (design), and moral arguments—within both Western and Islamic philosophy. Our approach is primarily comparative and critical, seeking to examine these arguments through a lens of philosophical scrutiny.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to first consider several key points regarding the general differences between Western and Islamic approaches to the arguments for God's existence:

A. The Role of Western and Islamic Philosophers in the Formation of Arguments for God's Existence

In the history of Western philosophy and theology, the arguments for God's existence are typically categorized into four main groups: ontological arguments, cosmological arguments, teleological (design) arguments, and moral arguments.

The ontological arguments were first formulated in Western philosophy and theology, beginning with the era of Scholastic thought. Later, contemporary Islamic philosophers turned their attention to these arguments, examining and critiquing them. Today, these arguments have found both supporters and opponents in the Islamic world.

Cosmological arguments have been present in both Western and Islamic philosophy from the outset. However, there are profound differences between their Western and Islamic formulations. For example, the explanation of the argument from necessity and possibility—one type of cosmological argument—differs significantly in Islamic philosophy from its Western counterpart. Likewise, the argument from causality, which in Western philosophy and theology is treated as a distinct argument under the broader category of cosmological arguments, does not hold a parallel status in Islamic philosophy. Instead, causality is regarded as a fundamental presupposition for all arguments, as the principle of causality is a necessary condition for any demonstration, given that the premises of an argument serve as the cause of its conclusion.

Teleological arguments, which are primarily based on the order of the universe, were developed by Western philosophers and theologians, while Islamic philosophers paid little attention to them—despite the fact that numerous examples of such arguments can be found in the Quranic verses and hadiths within the Islamic tradition.

Similarly, moral arguments were entirely formulated by Western philosophers and theologians, and Islamic philosophy did not engage with them.

Nevertheless, there are arguments that are exclusive to Islamic philosophy and have not been explored by Western thinkers, such as

the argument from indigence-based possibility (*al-imkān al-faqrī*)[1] and the argument of the truthful (*burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*).[2] These arguments primarily developed after Mullā Ṣadrā and were shaped by the two fundamental principles of *Transcendent Philosophy* (*ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*): the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*).[3] Additionally, some arguments for the existence of God were put forth by Islamic theologians (*mutakallimūn*), most of which fall under the category of cosmological arguments. However, these theological arguments faced serious criticism from Islamic philosophers.[4]

B. Horizontal and Vertical Arguments for God's Existence in Western and Islamic Philosophies

It is essential to note that in Western philosophy and theology, arguments for the existence of God are often presented independently of one another ("horizontal"). For instance, one philosopher or theologian may propose a cosmological argument, while another offers a different cosmological argument without necessarily building

1. The argument from indigence-based possibility for proving the existence of God was first introduced by Mullā Ṣadrā (see Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, pp. 35–36), and later Ṣadraean philosophers further interpreted and refined it.
2. In a*l-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, Ibn Sīnā presents an argument for the existence of God, which he attributes to the "truthful" (*ṣiddīqīn*) (see Ibn Sīnā, 1996, p. 102). A more developed version of this argument can be found in the works of Mullā Ṣadrā, later Ṣadraean philosophers such as Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī, and neo-Ṣadraeans like 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī. Although the argument has sometimes been likened to the ontological argument, it is important to note that the two are fundamentally distinct.
3. To avoid unnecessary elaboration, these arguments have not been addressed in the present discussion.
4. For the same reason mentioned above, these arguments have also not been addressed in the present discussion.

upon the previous one. In contrast, in Islamic philosophy, these arguments are primarily developed in a progressive, interconnected manner ("vertical"). For example, Ibn Sīnā, in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, claims to present the first philosophical formulation of the "argument of the truthful" (*burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*). Later, Mullā Ṣadrā refines and expands this argument by employing the principles of the primacy of existence (*iṣālat al-wujūd*) and the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). Subsequently, Mullā Hādī Sabzawārī simplifies the argument by reducing its premises, and later, ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī presents it in such a way that it appears self-evident and primitive.

Given these considerations, tracing the evolution of arguments in Islamic philosophy is essential, as it represents a key distinction between Islamic and Western approaches to proving the existence of God.

C. Empiricist and Rationalist Approaches in Western and Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God

In examining arguments for the existence of God and comparing Western and Islamic perspectives, it is crucial to recognize the differences in their methodological approaches.

The new Western approach to arguments for the existence of God is predominantly empiricist, emphasizing what manifests in human experience. For this reason, most contemporary Western philosophers begin their formulation of arguments for God's existence with sensory perception and empirical premises. A prime example of this is Kant, who was deeply influenced by an empirical perspective. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, he starts with sensory perception, then moves to the faculty of understanding (while addressing the role of imagination within this process), and finally arrives at reason. It may be due to this approach that Western philosophers have been more

engaged than Islamic philosophers in practical philosophical discussions and in applied branches of philosophy—such as political philosophy, moral philosophy, and social philosophy—whose practical dimension distinguishes them from pure philosophy.

In contrast to this approach stands the perspective of Islamic thinkers and philosophers, which is predominantly rationalist. Islamic philosophers, in their works, directly engage with reason, viewing philosophy—and knowledge in its true sense—as an intellectual act concerned with intelligible realities.

The influence of these two approaches is particularly evident in the discussion of arguments for the existence of God. As will be demonstrated in the following pages, Western philosophy appears to exhibit a certain anxiety and perplexity in formulating such arguments.

The dominance of the empirical approach has ultimately led some Western philosophers and theologians to seek merely a *sufficient reason* for proving God's existence, as if the very possibility of presenting a rational argument for God's existence is ruled out from the outset. Instead, they settle for offering a sufficient reason or justification—one that is *subjective* and, at best, serves only to intellectually persuade the subject. In contrast, Islamic philosophy, with its rationalist perspective, emphasizes the necessity of presenting *demonstrative* argument (*burhān*), in which the *objective* dimension is paramount. To this day, it has not abandoned the effort to formulate rational arguments for God's existence.

This may also explain why the argument of the truthful—as previously mentioned—has not drawn the attention of Western philosophers and theologians. The foundation of this argument, which is rooted in the primacy and gradation of existence, is fundamentally

incomprehensible and unprovable through an empirical approach.

For the same reason, the argument of necessity and contingency (*burhān al-wujūb wa-l-imkān*) is understood in entirely different ways in Western and Islamic philosophy. Western philosophers have often interpreted *possibility* either as *probability* (that something could fail to exist) or as *origination* (that something did not exist at one time and then came into being). In contrast, in Islamic philosophy, *possibility* refers to the equipoise of an entity's essence or quiddity with respect to existence and nonexistence.

Similarly, the discussion of causality, which underlies all arguments for God's existence, has been predominantly centered on preparatory causality (*ʿilliyya muʿidda*) in Western thought. In contrast, Islamic philosophy is concerned with complete causality (*ʿilliyya tāmma*), which refers to a true efficient cause that both bestows existence and sustains it.

Having established these preliminary points, we will now proceed to examine and analyze the arguments for God's existence within the Western approach and critique them from an Islamic philosophical perspective.

1. Ontological Arguments

It should first be noted that ontological arguments belong to the category of *a priori* arguments, meaning that they infer the existence of God or the Necessary Being directly and without mediation from the very concept of God—rather than from the characteristics of the external world or created beings.

This category of arguments has been presented in multiple formulations within Western philosophy. Anselm, the originator of the ontological argument, proposed two versions of it, and further

formulations have been put forth by Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Hartshorne, Malcolm, and others[1] (see Geisler, 2005, pp. 207–238). In this study, however, we will limit our discussion to the two formulations presented by Descartes.[2]

A. Descartes' First Formulation of the Ontological Argument

1. Whatever is clearly and distinctly understood about something is true.
2. We clearly and distinctly understand that the concept of an absolutely perfect being entails its existence; otherwise, it would lack something (existence) and thus would no longer be absolutely perfect.
3. Therefore, it is true that an absolutely perfect being cannot lack existence.

B. Descartes' Second Formulation of the Ontological Argument

1. Whatever is essential to the essence or definition of a concept must necessarily be affirmed of it.
2. Existence is a logically necessary part of the concept of the Necessary Being; otherwise, it could not be defined as a Necessary Being.
3. Therefore, it must logically be affirmed that the Necessary Being exists.

1. Kant's classification and formulation of the ontological argument are primarily aimed at critiquing it.
2. Descartes' second formulation of the ontological argument is somewhat similar to Anselm's second formulation. However, their first formulations of the argument differ from one another.

In Descartes' first formulation of the ontological argument, God's existence is inferred from the concept of *perfection*, while in his second formulation, it is derived from the concept of the *Necessary Being* (Geisler, 2005, pp. 207–208; for Descartes' original text, see Descartes, 1986, pp. 45–46).

The ontological argument has faced numerous critiques, from figures such as Gaunilo, Aquinas, Caterus, and Gassendi to Hume, Kant, Schopenhauer, Findlay, Plantinga, and others (Geisler, 2005, pp. 209–241). However, the most significant criticisms have been put forth by Kant and some contemporary Islamic philosophers, including Ayatollah Javadi Amoli. Below, we will examine these critiques.

a. Kant's Three Objections to the Ontological Argument

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant presents a total of three objections to the ontological argument—one directed at its first formulation and the other two aimed at its second formulation.

1. **Kant's Critique of the First Ontological Argument:** Kant argues that existence is not a predicate in the sense that it could be an attribute or perfection affirmed of a subject or thing. Existence is not an additional perfection of an essence but rather a state of that perfection. In essence, existence fundamentally cannot add anything to the concept of an essence. If an essence is considered purely as such, without any additional considerations, existence does not contribute anything to a given essence (for instance, the essence of a hundred-dollar bill, as Kant illustrates) (see: Kant, 1998, p. 567). In reality, no conceptual difference can be conceived between the essence of a real hundred-dollar bill (one that exists) and the essence of an imaginary hundred-dollar bill (which exists only in the mind). As some philosophers have expressed, "If there were a distinction between a

real hundred-dollar bill and a mental one—that is, if adding the concept of existence to a hundred-dollar bill increased its value in any way—then the concept of a hundred-dollar bill would not refer to an actual hundred-dollar bill, and a real hundred-dollar bill would not, in fact, be an instance of a hundred-dollar bill" (Javadi Amoli, 1995, p. 205).

Ayatollah Motahari, in his footnotes on ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī's *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*, considers this objection to the first formulation of the ontological argument valid and deems it unreliable (Motahari, 2007, vol. 5, pp. 125–128). However, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli does not accept this critique of the first formulation of the ontological argument. He argues: "The concept of existence, regardless of discussions such as the primacy of existence or quiddity, has its own distinct meaning. This meaning, independent of its instantiations or the methods used to identify them, retains its conceptual integrity by primary predication (*al-ḥaml al-awwalī*).[1] Therefore, whenever it is predicated of itself or of a subject containing it, a proposition is formed which, within the framework of primary predication, is necessarily true. This fundamental aspect, which is also

1. Predication is of two kinds: essential primary predication (*al-ḥaml al-awwalī al-dhātī*) and common technical predication (*al-ḥaml al-shāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʿī*). Essential primary predication occurs when the subject and predicate are identical both in external existence and in mental conception, as in the statement: "A human is a rational animal." Common technical predication, on the other hand, occurs when the subject and predicate are identical only in external existence but differ in mental conception. An example of this is the statement: "Water is something that boils at 100 degrees Celsius," where the subject (water) and the predicate (something that boils at 100 degrees) are conceptually distinct but refer to the same external reality (Khansari, 1992, Vol. 2, p. 60). Thus, essential primary predication mainly pertains to the realm of the mind and concepts, whereas common technical predication relates to the external world and actual instances.

employed in Anselm's argument as explained earlier, remains immune to Kant's third objection—contrary to what some Muslim thinkers [referring to ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī and Ayatollah Motahari] have assumed" (Javadi Amoli, 1995, p. 206).

Nevertheless, it seems that Kant's objection to the first formulation of the ontological argument is valid: existence is not an attribute or perfection of an essence but merely the fact of having an external instance. If this formulation aims to prove God's external existence and pertains to "common technical predication"—which is indeed its actual intent—rather than remaining solely within the realm of the mind and essential predication, then Kant's objection applies to it.

2. **Kant's critiques of the second formulation of the ontological argument:** Kant's first critique of the second formulation of the ontological argument is as follows: If we reject both the concept and the existence of a necessary being, we do not encounter any contradiction—just as there is no contradiction in denying both a triangle and its three angles. Contradiction arises only when one is denied while the other is affirmed (quoted in Geisler, 2005, p. 219; for Kant's original text, see Kant, 1998, p. 565). In es sence, a predicate is necessary for a subject only if the subject itself exists in the first place. If both the subject and the predicate are negated together, no contradiction arises. In other words, the necessity of attributing a predicate to a subject is contingent upon the condition "as long as the subject itself exists." A predicate can only be ascribed to a subject insofar as that subject exists.

In response to Kant's critique, some Islamic thinkers, such as Haeri Yazdi, argue that Kant failed to distinguish between logical

necessity and philosophical (eternal) necessity.[1] Kant's objection holds only when dealing with logical necessity, where the subject can sometimes be negated or removed. However, if the necessity in question is philosophical necessity—as is the case with the Necessary Being—the negation of the subject is fundamentally impossible. Therefore, Kant's first critique of the second formulation of the ontological argument is not valid (Haeri Yazdi, 2005, pp. 367–369).

Ayatollah Javadi Amoli argues that Haeri Yazdi's response does not effectively counter Kant's critique. Haeri Yazdi's argument merely points out that necessity, in the case of the Necessary Being, must be eternal necessity. However, the ontological argument itself does not seek to establish the eternal necessity of the Necessary Being in the first place. Nevertheless, Ayatollah Javadi Amoli considers Kant's objection incomplete and holds that it does not apply to the second formulation of the ontological argument. He explains: "A conceivable entity whose existence and actuality are either part of or identical to its very concept [i.e., the concept of the Necessary

1. Necessity, in one classification, is divided into two types: logical essential necessity and philosophical (eternal) necessity. Logical essential necessity applies when a predicate is necessarily attributed to the essence of a subject, but only on the condition that the subject exists—meaning that the necessity holds while the subject exists. For example, in the statement "A human is a writer," the predicate (being a writer) applies only as long as the subject (human) exists, since without the existence of a human, there would be no writer. Philosophical necessity, on the other hand, applies when a predicate necessarily belongs to the essence of a subject without any conditions or qualifications, including the condition of existence. This type of necessity pertains to a subject whose existence is inherent to its very essence and self-sufficient, requiring no external conditions for its existence. Such necessity applies exclusively to the Necessary Being and its attributes—pure, absolute existence without essence and without cause. Examples include: "God is eternally existent," "God is all-knowing," or "God is all-powerful" (see Mullā Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 1, pp. 157, 186–187; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, 2003, p. 70).

Being]—unlike a triangle or other essentialist concepts—is such that when an essential attribute is predicated of it, denying its existence and actuality would be contradictory. For this reason, there is no possible way to form a negative proposition by negating its subject" (Javadi Amoli, 1995, p. 200).

In any case, considering the two aforementioned responses—those of Haeri Yazdi and Javadi Amoli—it appears that Kant's first critique of the second formulation of the ontological argument is not valid, and this formulation remains intact.

Kant's second critique of the second formulation of the ontological argument is as follows: Necessity does not apply to existence; rather, it is used only in propositions. Necessity is a logical condition, not an existential one. There is no proposition that is necessarily true in terms of existence. Anything that is known through experience (which is the only means of acquiring knowledge about existing things) could have been otherwise (quoted in Geisler, 2005, p. 219; for Kant's original text, see Kant, 1998, pp. 566–567). In essence, if necessity is merely a logical qualifier, then it follows that the domain of logic and logical propositions is confined to the mind. Consequently, there is no external entity that possesses necessity. The proposition "God is a Necessary Being" must therefore be either analytic or synthetic:[1] If it is analytic, then it remains within the realm of the mind. If it is

1. A proposition or statement, in one classification, is divided into two types: analytic and synthetic. In an analytic proposition, the predicate is obtained by analyzing the subject and is either inherent in it or identical to it—for example, "A body has extension." In contrast, in a synthetic proposition, the predicate lies outside the essence of the subject or is distinct from it—for example, "A body is heavy." Analytic propositions are independent of experience and are established solely through the principles of the mind or reason, without recourse to experience. However, all synthetic propositions are empirical and can only be verified through experience (Naghibzadeh, 1995, pp. 166–167).

synthetic, then it is false—because experience does not reveal necessity in the external world.

It seems that Kant's objection can be addressed by drawing upon certain foundations of Islamic philosophy. There is a distinction between the level of discovery and the level of abstraction. Necessity in analytic propositions is *discovered*, rather than abstracted from them. Before necessity is discovered in analytic propositions, a person finds it existentially within themselves; then, through conceptualization, they recognize it within analytic propositions. Thus, necessity is an existential qualification that is merely uncovered in logic. This perspective also applies to other “philosophical secondary intelligibles” (*maʿqūlāt thāniya falsafiyya*). Furthermore, the proposition "God is necessarily existent" is neither analytic nor synthetic; rather, it falls under the category of “extrinsically predicated from its very core” (*khārij maḥmūl min ṣamīmih*). To elaborate, in Islamic philosophy, propositions are classified into two types based on one criterion: extrinsically predicated from its very core and predicated through conjunction (*maḥmūl bi al-ḍamīma*). In the first type, the predicate is abstracted directly from the very core and reality of the subject, whereas in the second type, abstracting the predicate from the subject requires the addition of an external quiddity to the quiddity of the subject. Extrinsically predicated from its very core propositions, in turn, are divided into two kinds: (1) analytic propositions in Kant’s sense and (2) propositions of philosophical secondary intelligibles, where the predicate is one of these intelligibles abstracted from the very reality of existence. Necessity itself is one such predicate and is no exception to this principle: "The characteristic of this class of attributes [predicates] is that they do not have an instance separate from their subject" (Javadi Amoli, 1995, p. 203).

Given the aforementioned response, Kant’s second critique of

the second formulation of the ontological argument does not hold,[1] and this formulation remains valid.

b. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli's critique of the ontological argument: He argues that the fundamental flaw in the ontological argument is not any of Kant's three well-known objections. Rather, "the core issue in Anselm's argument lies in a fallacy stemming from the conflation of the concept of existence with its instantiation... By distinguishing between existence as predicated in a primary sense (*ḥaml awwalī*) and existence in a common predication (*ḥaml shāyiʿ*), Anselm's error becomes evident... Therefore, Anselm must clarify what he means by 'existence' in the phrase 'If God does not exist.' If he means existence in the primary sense, he is correct—denying the concept of existence to God, who is defined as the greatest conceivable being, results in contradiction... However, if by existence he means instantiation in the common predication, then there is no necessary connection between denying this kind of existence to God and negating His perfection as a concept, and thus no contradiction follows" (ibid., pp. 194–195). In short, in the proposition "The Necessary Existent necessarily exists," necessity applies per se by way of primary predication, but in terms of common predication, the Necessary Existent could, without contradiction, be considered a contingent existent. The real question, then, is how we transition from the conceptual realm (mind) to the external reality (extra-mental existence).

In response, it can be argued that humans can transition from

1. It is worth noting that Kant's second critique, which is based on the claim that necessity has no external existence, not only challenged ontological arguments but also posed difficulties for cosmological arguments in the West. This is because, as will be explained, such arguments primarily infer necessity and a necessary being from the existence of possibility. However, according to Kant, the very notion of a necessary being is incomprehensible, as external necessity itself makes no sense.

the conceptual realm to external reality when dealing with philosophical secondary intelligibles, such as necessity. For instance, the proposition "A triangle has three sides" expresses a necessity in thought that seamlessly extends to external reality—it is impossible to find a triangle with four sides in any place or at any time. Thus, certain mental judgments can indeed apply to the external world. If necessity is established in thought, it likewise holds in external reality. Regarding the concept of the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), which is a necessity in thought, we can also extend this necessity to external reality and affirm its actual existence. In essence, necessity applies both "in thought" and "in reality." Hence, two conceivable concepts emerge: necessarily nonexistent (*ḍarūrī al-ʿadam*), which must not exist in reality (such as a four-sided triangle), and necessarily existent (*ḍarūrī al-wujūd*), which must exist in reality (such as God) (see Ayatollahi, n.d., p. 16).

Ultimately, perspectives on the ontological argument remain divided. In the Western tradition, many individuals continue to disagree on the validity of this argument. Some believe that the ontological argument is clearly fallacious, as one cannot derive a judgment about external reality from the mere analysis of a concept. Others consider the argument valid but contend that the aforementioned formulation may not qualify as a strict "argument," since one cannot ascertain the truth of its premises without already knowing the truth of its conclusion (Peterson et al., 1997, p. 141). Similarly, in the Islamic tradition, contemporary philosophers have also taken differing stances. Scholars such as Haeri Yazdi and Mohammad Taghi Jafari[1]

1. While affirming the validity of this argument, Jafari replaces the term *ontological argument* (*burhān wujūdī*) with *argument from necessity* (*burhān wujūbī*). He holds that the core emphasis of this argument is not on existence (*wujūd*) but on necessity (*wujūb*); in essence, we arrive at the existence of God through necessity rather than mere existence (as cited in Ayatollahi, 2009, p. 4051).

have accepted the ontological argument, whereas others, including Motahari and Javadi Amoli, have not regarded it as valid.

2. Cosmological Arguments

Cosmological arguments belong to the category of *a posteriori* arguments, meaning that they infer the existence of God not from the concept of God but from some existing reality within the world.

Various formulations of these arguments have been presented by thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm, al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, Descartes, Leibniz, Wolff, Taylor, and others (see Geisler, 2005, pp. 247–280). However, for the sake of brevity, this discussion will focus solely on the cosmological arguments of Ibn Sīnā and Leibniz, following Geisler's classification in his *Philosophy of Religion.*

A. Ibn Sīnā's Cosmological Argument Based on the First Cause

1. Contingent existents (*mumkin al-wujūd*) exist—that is, entities that have emerged[1] into being must have been brought into existence by a cause; they do not exist independently or necessarily by themselves.
2. Every contingent existent requires a cause for its existence because it cannot account for its own existence.[2]

1. As previously mentioned, Western scholars did not fully grasp the meaning of *mumkin al-wujūd* (contingent existence) in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, and at times they equated it with *muḥdath* (emerging or originated)—something that was once nonexistent and then came into being. However, *mumkin al-wujūd* refers to that which, by its very nature, is indifferent to existence or nonexistence; it is in a state of potentiality, neither necessitating existence nor nonexistence.
2. More accurately put, contingent beings cannot prefer existence for themselves. In fact, in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, the discussion revolves around the "preference (*tarjīḥ*) of existence," not the "explanation of existence," and thus, this too is a form of misinterpretation.

3. An infinite regress of existential causes is impossible. While an infinite regress of causes related to becoming, or preparatory causes, may be conceivable, an infinite regress of existential causes is not, since the cause of existence must coexist with its effect.[1]

4. Therefore, there must be a First Cause for contingent beings, which is necessarily existent by itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-l-dhāt*). This First Cause cannot itself be contingent, for if it were, it would also require a cause—leading back to the necessity of a self-existent necessary being. (See Geisler, 2005, pp. 259–260; for Ibn Sīnā's original text, see Ibn Sīnā, 1996, pp. 97–98; also Ibn Sīnā, 1984, pp. 37–42.)

B. Leibnitz's Cosmological Argument Based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason

1. The entire observable world is in a state of change.
2. Anything that changes lacks an intrinsic reason for its own existence.
3. There must be a sufficient reason for everything,[2] either within itself or beyond itself.

1. It is worth noting that what Ibn Sīnā—and Islamic philosophy in general—means by the cause of existence is the giver of existence, or God Himself, who grants and sustains the existence of contingent beings at every moment. For such a cause, the notion of an infinite regress is fundamentally meaningless. Ibn Sīnā introduced the impossibility of an infinite regress of existential causes as a preemptive response to potential objections, considering it a didactic argument rather than a strictly ontological one.
2. As previously mentioned, the "sufficient reason" in Western philosophy pertains to the realm of argument—that is, mental persuasion and a subjective state—rather than an actual, objective reality.

4. Therefore, there must be a cause beyond this world that accounts for its existence.
5. This cause is either self-sufficient or depends on something beyond itself.
6. An infinite regress of sufficient reasons is impossible, for the inability to arrive at an explanation is not itself an explanation; ultimately, there must be a final explanation.
7. There must be a primary cause of the world that has no external reason beyond itself and is its own sufficient reason. (Quoted from Gieseler, 2005, pp. 271–272).

Among the most significant objections raised against cosmological arguments in general are those of Hume and Kant. However, prior to them, Ockham also posed three fundamental questions regarding this category of arguments. Below, we outline these objections:

a. Ockham's Three Objections to Cosmological Arguments

1. An infinite chain of essentially related causes is possible. That is, the regress of simultaneous efficient or originating causes (such as a father causing the existence of a child) is conceivable and poses no issue, although an infinite regress of sustaining causes, if assumed to be simultaneous, is impossible.
2. Causation is defined as the dependence of something's existence or presence on another; therefore, knowledge of efficient causes is solely based on experience.
3. Experience does not reveal the necessity of the connection between cause and effect. (Quoted from Gieseler, 2005, p. 269).

b. Hume's Eight Objections to Cosmological Arguments

1. A finite set of effects leads to a finite cause, as cause and effect must belong to the same category.

2. No proposition about existence can be logically necessary, because the negation or contrary of anything derived from experience is always possible.
3. Whatever can be conceived as non-existent is not necessary in its existence, including the so-called "Necessary Being."
4. If the Necessary Being is defined as "indestructible," then the world itself could also be a Necessary Being. Either the world is necessary, or God is not indestructible.
5. An eternal chain cannot have a cause, as its cause would have to be temporally prior to it. But nothing can precede an eternal chain in time; therefore, an eternal chain is possible.
6. Experience does not reveal a necessary connection between cause and effect. Continuous succession creates a habitual expectation, which we mistakenly interpret as causation.
7. The world as a whole does not require a cause; rather, the whole explains its own parts. Only the parts require causes. While the parts are contingent, the whole is necessary—albeit in a derivative, mathematical sense.
8. Arguments for God's existence only persuade those with a "metaphysical mindset." Most people think pragmatically rather than through pure reasoning. (Quoted from Gieseler, 2005, pp. 273–276. For Hume's original text, see Hume, 2013.)

c. Kant's Seven Objections to Cosmological Arguments

1. The cosmological argument is based on the invalid ontological argument. It abandons the realm of experience and borrows the concept of the Necessary Being from beyond the empirical domain. This constitutes an invalid leap from the posterior to the prior.

2. Necessity is a mental constraint, not an existential one. Propositions may be necessary, but entities and beings are not.

3. A noumenal cause cannot be inferred from a phenomenal effect. Causality is merely a mental category imposed on reality rather than something that constitutes reality itself.

4. What is logically inescapable is not necessarily real. Thus, a logically necessary being is not necessarily an actually existing being.

5. Cosmological arguments lead to metaphysical contradictions, such as the claim that a first cause must both exist and, at the same time, cannot exist—both conclusions following logically from the principle of sufficient reason.

6. The concept of the "Necessary Being" is not inherently clear or self-evident. It is conceived as something that is entirely unconditioned. However, this very definition eliminates the only possible way such a concept could have meaning.

7. An infinite regress of causes is logically possible because the principle of sufficient reason merely states that everything must have a reason, with no justification for arbitrarily halting the search for explanations. (Quoted from Gieseler, 2005, pp. 276–278. For Kant's original text, see Kant, 1998, pp. 569–574).

In response to the above objections, the following points can be taken into account:

1. Cosmological arguments are based on the principle of causality and the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes—as well as, in some cases, the principle of sufficient reason in Western

philosophy. However, it is important to note that causality in Western cosmological arguments is typically a form of preparatory causation, which can logically continue infinitely. The infinite regress of preparatory causes is not inherently impossible. In Islamic philosophy, however, things are different. Causality in Islamic cosmological arguments refers to a complete, existence-giving cause, which continuously grants and maintains the existence of contingent beings—entities whose essence is neutral between existence and nonexistence. This type of causality also functions as a sustaining cause and, by its very nature, cannot be subject to an infinite regress. This is precisely why Ibn Sīnā's argument from necessity and contingency has often been misunderstood in the West, where *imkān* (contingency) has sometimes been interpreted as probability and sometimes as temporal origination. This Western perspective stems from the dominance of an empirical approach, which contrasts with the rationalist methodology of Islamic philosophers.

2. Philosophers and Christian theologians, like Islamic *mutakallimūn*, interpret possibility as probability or origination (*ḥudūth*), considering the world to be originated or incipient (*ḥādith*) rather than eternal (*qadīm*). In this way, they seek to prevent philosophical and theological difficulties related to divine will from arising. However, in Peripatetic Islamic philosophy, *imkān* refers to the indifference or equipoise of an entity's essence towards both existence and nonexistence, requiring a preferring factor (*murajjiḥ*) to determine one over the other. This form of *imkān* is intrinsic to the entity, implying that it always necessitates a cause—ultimately the Necessary Existent. Consequently, Islamic philosophers regard the world as eternal, since divine emanation must be perpetual and without beginning. Through intermediaries such as intellects, universal souls, celestial spheres, and heavenly bodies, they address

issues related to divine will in a different manner, a discussion beyond the scope of this text. Beyond these two perspectives on *imkān*, the doctrine of the primacy and gradation of existence in Mullā Ṣadrā's Transcendent Philosophy advances further, considering the possible or contingent existent to be inherently limited and existentially impoverished. This is because anything that possesses quiddity, is delineated, and can be conceived by the human mind does not have existence as part of its essence.

3. Ultimately, Western philosophers, from the time of Berkeley and under his influence, along with that of certain other empiricist philosophers, replaced *cause and effect* with *sign and signified*. However, it must be noted that argument or reason pertains to the domain of affirmation, whereas causality pertains to the domain of existence. A sufficient reason seeks to persuade the human mind in a subjective rather than objective manner and is not necessarily reflective of external reality. The notion of explanation, which appears in certain Western cosmological arguments, follows a similar logic. On this basis, cosmological arguments can be divided into two periods: the pre-Leibnizian period, which was based on preparatory causality, and the post-Leibnizian period, which was grounded in the principle of sufficient reason and explanation. A key objection to the principle of sufficient reason is that if a reason is provided for each component of the world, then the whole—being nothing other than the sum of its parts—does not itself require a reason. Thus, the world as a whole could have its explanation within itself, allowing the principle of sufficient reason to be denied without leading to contradiction. Furthermore, the principle of sufficient reason is inherently a mental construct and does not resolve the problem of external reality. The God established on the basis of the principle of sufficient reason is ultimately something that cannot, in logical terms and within the

realm of thought, be nonexistent—meaning that God's nonexistence would be logically impossible, though not necessarily actual in external reality. Moreover, the principle of sufficient reason and the arguments based on it fail to account for the necessity present in the actual world, as previously explained, and are fundamentally incapable of grasping it.

Given what has been stated, one may assert: "The objections raised against the argument of necessity and possibility in modern Western philosophy reflect either an incapacity to comprehend the argument itself or the inadequacy of translators in conveying the rational and well-founded reasoning of the theosophical philosophers" (Javadi Amoli, 1374, p. 154).

3. Teleological (Design) Arguments

Teleological arguments, or arguments from design, which are based on order, harmony, purposefulness, governance, and fine-tuning in the world and its beings, belong to the category of *a posteriori* arguments. These arguments infer the existence of God or a designer from the observable order and harmony in the world.

As mentioned at the beginning of this text, Islamic philosophy has not engaged with the argument from design. Fundamentally, such arguments emerged in Christian Western thought and are rooted in natural theology. It is through natural theology that religion becomes separate from the Church, in the sense that natural theologians set aside religious institutions, rituals, and ceremonies, seeking to approach religion through autonomous reason and experience. They claimed that one could infer the existence of God directly from nature and, in pursuit of this goal, employed scientific—rather than philosophical—doctrines in support of religion.

Before presenting a formulation of teleological or design arguments, it is appropriate to consider a few key points regarding these arguments:

1. The argument from design does not pertain to just any kind of order. For instance, a group of balls neatly arranged next to one another or the orderly arrangement of molecules in a crystal may not necessarily require a designer. The order relevant to this argument is the harmony among components that lack awareness of each other and cannot coordinate themselves. In such cases, a designer is needed to establish this harmony, ultimately bringing about a purpose or goal. For example, the coordination among the parts of a machine falls within this category.
2. The order invoked in the argument from design should not be conflated with causality. For instance, the fact that heat causes expansion is a case of causality, not design.
3. The argument from design should not be confused with aesthetics. Something may be aesthetically pleasing without necessitating a designer.
4. Order is of two kinds: artificial (industrial) and natural (ontological). The former pertains to human-made artifacts, while the latter applies to nature. In the Western tradition, the argument from design is often based on analogy—that is, reasoning from the order observed in human artifacts to the order found in nature. This analogy, in turn, relies on an implicit syllogism: two analogous entities must both be the effect of a common cause.

Various formulations of teleological arguments have been presented by thinkers such as Paley, Taylor, Clarke, Tennant, and

others (see Geisler, 1384, pp. 157–172). One of the most recent formulations of the design argument is the "fine-tuning argument" (see Ayatollahi & Shoorvarzi, 2014, pp. 75–78). In this paper, we will focus solely on Paley's formulation.

Paley's Teleological Argument Based on the Watchmaker Analogy

1. A watch demonstrates that it has been designed for an intelligent purpose (i.e., to indicate time).
2. The world exhibits a greater degree of design than a watch, as it encompasses a more intricate craftsmanship, a more complex order, and a wider variety of mechanisms.
3. Therefore, if a watch requires a watchmaker, the world likewise necessitates a greater, intelligent designer—namely, God (cited in Geisler, 1384, pp. 157–158).

Various objections have been raised against this category of arguments by thinkers such as Mill, Russell, Hume, proponents of chance, Kant, Ducasse, and others. Below, we briefly outline some of these objections.

A. Mill's Objection to the Watchmaker Argument: According to Mill, Paley's argument, based on the watchmaker analogy, relies on drawing a resemblance between effects to infer a resemblance between causes. However, the greater the dissimilarities, the weaker the argument becomes. Our recognition of a watchmaker's existence is derived from experience, not from an intrinsic order within the watch itself (cited in: ibid., pp. 159–160).

B. Russell's Evolutionary Refutation: Russell argues that the order and harmony observed in the world can be explained through evolution and the principle of the survival of the fittest, eliminating

the need to invoke design and purpose (cited in: ibid., p. 161; for the original text, see Russell, 2009, p. 589). However, Geisler notes: "There is no logical reason why harmony cannot be the result of both evolution and design" (ibid., p. 161).

C. Hume's Two Skeptical Responses to the Teleological Argument:

1. According to Hume, the deity inferred—at best—from such arguments must, first, be fundamentally different from human intelligence, as human-made artifacts differ from natural ones; second, be limited, since its effect (the world) is finite, and cause and effect must be proportionate; third, be imperfect, as nature contains flaws; fourth, be multiple, as human artifacts are sometimes the product of several individuals; fifth, be male or female, as humans reproduce in this manner; and sixth, resemble humans, since some of God's creations have eyes, ears, and noses.
2. The order in the world could arise either from design or by chance. However, the universe might be the result of chance because it could be both eternal and in motion. Given an infinite number of random occurrences, every possible combination may eventually emerge, and the one best suited for survival would persist—simply because it has no alternative (cited in: Geisler, 2005, pp. 161–163).

D. The View of Chance Advocates: Some argue that the universe could have come into existence purely by chance: even if an immeasurable number of prior random events must occur against the order and arrangement of the world, it remains possible that such order may eventually emerge in actuality. However, one must acknowledge that the probability of such an occurrence is unimaginably remote (Geisler, 2005, p. 168).

H. Ontological Shortcomings in the Teleological Argument from Kant's Perspective:

1. The teleological argument relies on our empirical experience of order and design in the world; however, such experience does not necessarily lead us to a necessarily existent being. If God is merely one link in the chain of beings, then something superior might also exist; and if He exists outside that chain, experience cannot reveal Him to us. Thus, leaping from the cause observed in experience to the cause established by pure reason is a mistaken existential inference.
2. Although the teleological argument is not conclusive, it is valuable because it can point to the existence of a world-maker who, while not perfect in every respect and not a complete foundation for religion, remains majestic (cf. Gissler, 1384, pp. 170–172; see also Kant, 1998, pp. 569–574).

W. Cosmological Issues in the Teleological Argument from Ducasse's Perspective:

1. This argument does not prove the existence of a creator with absolute perfection, as deficiencies, evils, diseases, and similar imperfections also exist in the world.
2. There are instances where designers are inferior to their designs, as seen in the case of the inventor of the microscope.
3. The teleological argument shares the same shortcomings as the cosmological argument. If the world requires a designer, then that designer would also require another designer. Moreover, if, according to the principle of sufficient reason, everything must have a cause, then no ultimate cause can be posited (cf. Gissler, 1384, pp. 172–173).

In response to the aforementioned objections, the following considerations regarding teleological (design) arguments can be highlighted:

1. The first fundamental issue with these arguments is the analogy to human-made artifacts, which lacks a solid foundation. In the case of a watch, experience teaches us that there must be a watchmaker. However, we have no analogous experience regarding nature and its order. Nevertheless, it can still be argued that coordinated parts must have an organizing cause.
2. The second objection is the theory of evolution. It is claimed that atoms and molecules initially existed, which then collided and gave rise to simple entities (single-celled organisms). Through the combination of these entities, complex beings such as plants, animals, and ultimately humans emerged. Evolution itself relies on the survival of the fittest, meaning that entities with greater adaptability persist while those with lesser adaptability naturally disappear. Consequently, nature advances toward complexity through the struggle for survival and natural selection, rendering the need for a designer or organizer unnecessary.

   In response to the theory of evolution and in defense of teleological arguments, some have resorted to probability theory. They argue that the likelihood of a multicellular organism—and ultimately a highly organized entity like a human—emerging purely through "blind selection" is so infinitesimally small that it can practically be dismissed.

   However, some have critiqued the use of probability theory in this context, raising the following points: (1) Although the

probability of a multicellular organism—and ultimately a highly organized entity like a human—coming into existence may be extremely low and close to zero, it is still not absolutely zero. (2) Probability is meaningful under identical conditions; if conditions change, the probability may also change and become stronger. (3) The number of occurrences is significant in probability; the greater the number of trials, the higher the probability of an event occurring. (4) Probability is a mental construct, and it may not exist as a real factor in the actual world. In other words, for someone who has witnessed the realization of one possible outcome, probability becomes meaningless—it is a certainty for them. (5) If humans were able to fully and precisely understand the causes and mechanisms governing the world through scientific means, probability would lose its significance.

Beyond the aforementioned critiques of probability theory, one might also consider the possibility that atoms and molecules collided countless times without forming any complex structures until, at some point, such a combination did occur, giving rise to composite organisms. The principle of the survival of the fittest then ensured that the most viable organisms persisted. Although this probability is extremely low, over the course of millions of years, such an event could have taken place. Therefore, probability theory alone is insufficient to justify the argument from design.

3. It seems that, rather than focusing on nature itself, a more effective approach in defending the argument from design would be to examine the laws governing nature and infer the existence of an organizer or designer from them. These laws cannot originate from matter itself but must instead stem

from the giver of these laws. The fact that such laws have guided the process of evolution over millions of years, leading to the emergence of highly complex and precise beings, points to an immense intelligence. While proponents of evolution argue that these laws emerged through the evolutionary process itself, it is equally conceivable that God established and sustained these laws.

4. Teleological arguments are more dialectical than demonstrative and logical. In fact, this argument serves as a form of dialectical argument rather than producing demonstrative certainty; one might say it leads more to psychological certainty than epistemic certainty (for definitions, characteristics, and conditions of epistemic certainty according to some Islamic philosophers, see Abbaszadeh, 2019, pp. 397–406; 2023, pp. 343–364). However, for the general public, dialectical argument is often more practical and effective than demonstrative argument. Therefore, the lack of demonstrative value in the argument from design does not negate its dialectical significance—as the Quran itself engages in "the best form of argumentation" when addressing polytheists and others (Javadi Amoli, 1995, p. 236).

5. Teleological arguments, on their own, lack sufficiency without the argument from necessity and contingency (cosmological argument), as they cannot independently establish the existence of a necessary being. In other words, at best, teleological arguments merely demonstrate the existence of an organizer. Therefore, "if the teleological argument is viewed not as an independent argument but as an extension or supplement to the cosmological argument, its explanatory power increases. If the cosmological

argument can validly establish the existence of a necessary being, then it is reasonable to claim that the teleological argument reveals an additional important characteristic of that being—namely, that it is intelligent and conscious" (Peterson et al., 1376, p. 162).

4. Moral Arguments

Moral arguments can also be considered *a posteriori* in a certain sense, as they seek to infer the existence of a lawgiver based on the moral law inherent within human beings.

Various formulations of these arguments have been presented by thinkers such as Kant, Rashdall, Sorley, Trueblood, Lewis, and others (see Geisler, 1384, pp. 157–184). In this section, however, we will focus solely on Kant's formulation.

The Moral Argument Based on the Necessity of Morality:

1. Happiness is an innate desire of all humans.
2. Morality (categorical imperatives of command and prohibition) is a duty for all humans.
3. The unity of these two constitutes the highest good.
4. The highest good is inherently desirable.
5. The unification of duty and innate desire is not possible for a finite human within a limited time.
6. However, the moral necessity of performing certain actions implies their possibility (ought implies can).
7. Therefore, it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God (to make this unity possible) and the immortality of the soul (to make this unity attainable).(Quoted from: Geisler, 2005, pp. 175-176. For further study, see: Naghibzadeh, 1995, pp. 332-335).

In contrast to this category of arguments, some have also employed moral arguments against the existence of God, as seen in the works of thinkers such as Russell, Bayle, Camus, and others (see: Geisler, 2005, pp. 184-188).

Regarding moral arguments, the following points can be considered:

1. Kant himself never presented moral necessity as an argument for the existence of God. As he stated, such a claim is by no means logically necessary; rather, it is practically implied only to make human moral experience meaningful (Geisler, 2005, p. 176).
2. Several criticisms can be raised against Kant's argument: First, the highest good may simply be unattainable. Second, it is unclear whether "ought" truly implies "can." Third, duty and inner inclination might already be reconcilable within this worldly life, for instance, if one identifies duty with hedonism. And fourth, there may be no objective moral law at all, or if such a law exists, there is no necessity for a transcendent giver behind it.
3. At best, Kant's moral argument only implies that one should live as if God exists (Geisler, 2005, p. 177).
4. Before presenting any moral argument for God, the problem of evil (especially moral evil) must first be addressed. Without resolving this issue, the moral argument lacks sufficiency.
5. Like the teleological argument, the moral argument depends on the cosmological argument: Even if one accepts objective moral laws, a theistic argument based on them still relies on a premise borrowed from the cosmological argument—namely, that these laws require causes or explanations (Geisler, 2005, p. 196).

6. Ultimately, one might say: For a theist, the moral argument remains useful in complementing cosmological and teleological arguments. Believers argue that this argument helps resolve another part of the puzzle, as it at least provides a justification for our moral beliefs (Peterson et al., 1997, p. 166).

Conclusion

We reviewed, critiqued, and compared the four major arguments for the existence of God in Western and Islamic philosophy—ontological, cosmological, teleological (design), and moral arguments. The key findings expected from this study are as follows:

1. A argument is distinct from both faith and mere reasoning.
2. Historically, both Western and Islamic philosophers have played a significant and parallel role in shaping arguments for the existence of God.
3. In Western philosophy, these arguments are generally structured horizontally and independently, whereas in Islamic philosophy, they are structured vertically and incrementally.
4. Western philosophers tend to adopt an empirical approach, whereas Islamic philosophers primarily rely on rationalism in formulating arguments for God's existence.
5. Ontological, cosmological, teleological (design), and moral arguments have been subject to critique and refinement in Western thought and have also faced serious objections within the framework of Islamic philosophy.
6. Misinterpretations or imprecise understandings of certain rational concepts and principles specific to Islamic philosophers have led to misconceptions in the evaluation and critique of arguments for God's existence within Western philosophy.

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