

Answers to Some Questions about My Position on the Arguments for the Existence of God

Hamidreza Ayatollahy's answers to Eugeny Loginov's questions

I received an email from Dr. Eugeny Loginov in which he asked me to answer some questions about his project on finding the positions of famous philosophers on the arguments for the existence of God as follows:

Dear Professor Ayatollahy,

My name is, I work for the Moscow Center for Consciousness Studies and the Faculty of Philosophy, Lomonosov Moscow State University.

I'm preparing a book about the arguments for and against the existence of God. The idea of the book is to publish what different philosophers think about 6 questions about the existence of God. Most of the contributors specialize in the philosophy of religion but not all, some of them are metaphysicians, moral philosophers, epistemologists, historians of philosophy, or logicians. I want to present the whole and diverse picture about this classical issue and make some empirical bases to answer the questions about what is up today in this field and what is not. I want first to publish the Russian version of the book and then if it will be possible to publish the English one. Now 172 philosophers have already participated in the project. Among them are quite famous people such as Daniel Dennett, Vadim Vasilyev, Richard Swinburne, Graham Harman, Peter van Inwagen, Linda Zagzebski, John Milbank, as well as novice authors.

Maybe you would be so kind to join the project? May I ask you a few questions about the topic?

The followings are the questions along with my answers about my position in this field:

1- What is your position regarding the general idea of making arguments for the existence of God? Do you think it is valid at all? Why?

If believing in the existence of God is equivalent to believing in a physical phenomenon that does not change my life, it will be a marginal matter in my beliefs. But if the belief in God is based on the definition that we have of God in such a way that it creates a responsibility for me towards Him and has an effect on the fundamental destiny of my life and leads me to believe that based on that moment of my life will be evaluated and rewarded inherently and belief in the resurrection is one of the requirements of that, then no issue in my life will be more important than determining my duty to believe in the existence of God. For this reason, each person, according to his persuasive capacity and justification ability, should be able to show that this belief is a true thing and cannot be superstition or arbitrary, or accidental. Therefore, he should not only have a justified belief in the existence of God but also in the type of His relationship with the man and the world.

The importance of arguing for the existence of God is as follows: we consciously or unconsciously have a multitude of beliefs, each or a set of which directs each of our activities. Man has experienced that the results of some of his activities that were caused by

these beliefs were either harmful or useless, so he analyzes them and looks for a logic or rationale that can show which belief was fundamentally correct or useful. Which one is harmful and useless? The ability of the mind is such that it has a good analysis of the examination of beliefs. This ability of reason is manifested in its best state in rational reasoning to justify a belief. As a result, since a person must follow a certain logic or path to justify any belief, the reasoning is the most important of them, so he must use different levels of reasoning to justify his belief in the existence of God to make sure that his activities are based on correct beliefs. and there will be no harm to him.

In my opinion, approaches that are either anti-rational or non-rational in believing in God, like fideism, are not a desirable approach and face many problems.

2- If you tried to prove God's existence (or to make a claim against its existence), what definition of the notion of "God" would you use? Do you think that the classic definition of "God" as "the all-good, omniscient and omnipotent creator of the world" is still the suitable one?

From my point of view, this definition is not as appropriate because there are various interpretations of the meaning of the creator, for example. Therefore, the components of the definition should be split and the exact meaning of each should be clarified. Usually, the beginning of the proofs begins with this definition, which, due to the ambiguity in the components of the definition, creates false expectations from the proofs, or gives unclear or paradoxical results from the proofs.

I do not consider this definition suitable with Islamic thoughts and the attitudes of Islamic philosophy.

God should be defined in a way that includes both his inherent attributes and attributes that show his relationship with other beings, especially humans. In my opinion, God is a pure being who has all the attributes of perfection such as power, knowledge, justice and goodness. He is the creator of us and the world; In such a way that the existence of any other being, especially human beings, is completely dependent on him. One of the best analogies (not in every way) for his relationship with the world is somewhat similar to our relationship with our imaginary forms or beings. Just as our imaginary forms and beings depend on us as their creator at every moment, and our knowledge, our power, and our presence flow on that imaginary being in all moments, it can be said that God's knowledge, power, and presence are also over us and our world can be like this. The existence of other beings, which have arisen from his benevolence, is purely dependent on Him at every moment. Every change and possibility of change in the world depends on Him.

He is also the master owner and resource of everything, anything, and everyone in the world. God establishes the system of reward and punishment for our actions in this world and the hereafter. In our knowledge of him, we must pay attention to the fact that we cannot fully understand his existence and attributes, so even though these attributes can be attributed to him, he is superior to any concept we have of these attributes. Because of our limited power, we attribute perfections to him that we find in other beings, but our understanding is always mixed with defects and filth, so we must always emphasize that his perfections are free from any defects and filth so that we can get closer to him in our knowledge.

As for our relationship with him, it should be said that he should be the only reference and direction of our activities and thoughts, and be our only concern in all our work, and our other concerns should find meaning in this direction.

His generosity and resourcefulness require him to somehow guide mankind to the best life. He has a double generosity and kindness that includes the believers (those who work in his path) for their spiritual upliftment, such as purifying those believers from the obstacles they have created against their further upliftment or His extraordinary assistance which is called miracles in Western literature or other forms.

The best definitions have been given by God Himself, from which the elements of the above definition are taken.

So God is:

1. the pure existence that has all perfections
2. the creator and benefactor of the world and the worldly beings, that all beings are completely dependent on him and his grace in every moment and situation, so he has complete knowledge and power over everything in the world.
3. the origin of any change or possibility of change in the world
4. the owner and resource of everything in the world, especially humans.
5. the establisher of the reward and punishment system in this world and the hereafter
6. free from any defects and filth that our limitations attribute to his perfections.
7. who has special generosity to believers.

In my opinion, it is a valid argument that can prove such a God with all these characteristics.

3- Which of the various arguments for God's existence (or claims against its, or His, existence) do you regard as the most valid and/or the most interesting one?

Most of the arguments for the existence of God are expressed in the form of epistemological Internalism. In my opinion, in this context, the possibility and necessity argument (not cosmological argument¹) and *Seddiqin* argument² and a very special type of ontological argument are valid.

Design argument in the formulation of fine-tuning can be a good justification for God's consciousness and His existence, but this argument is limited to giving evidence of the existence of God. Although the design argument is an argument that most people can achieve without philosophical complications, it is unable to explain many aspects of God.

In my opinion, the arguments from religious experience can only state that there should be a Deity, but it cannot be an argument for a God with the characteristics of monotheistic religions. I do not consider the proofs of the occurrence of the world, the cosmological

¹ For the difference between necessity-contingency argument and cosmological argument see Ayatollahy, "An Analysis of Cosmological Argument Compared with Necessity-Contingency Argument in Islamic Philosophy", *Qabasat*, Vol.11, No. 3, 2006. P. 95-112.

² See: Ayatollahy, *The Existence of God, Mulla Sadra's Seddiqin Argument versus Criticisms of Kant and Hume*.

argument in the formulations of Aquinas, Leibniz and Copleston, the ontological argument in the formulations of Descartes and Anselm, the Kalam cosmological argument, moral arguments, the argument from miracles, usefulness argument and Pascal's wager to be conclusive.

If we examine the justification of God's existence in the context of epistemological externalism, we will come across the explanation of Plantinga and Alston, but the formulation of their explanation, in my opinion, can only warrant the existence of the divine and the conclusion of the Christian and Islamic God from it does not come out.

But I have presented a new type of explanation in the context of epistemological externalism, which is based on external epistemology based on trusted hearings³, which I think can be a very good justification (even more concrete than the previous arguments) to justify the existence of God with all The characteristics that were said about God in the answer to the previous question. I do not consider the arguments against God's existence in various forms such as evil or divine hiddenness or divine knowledge to be valid.

4- What are your thoughts regarding the significance of demonstrations of God's existence (or claims against its, or His, existence) in the history of philosophy, science, religion, and culture in general?

- Since philosophy seeks a deep understanding of the world in its highest sense, the concepts that bring it closer to these boundaries of human thought will play an important role in it. Understanding God and His truth require understanding the deep concepts that philosophy is also looking for. For this reason, trying to explain God brings philosophers closer to the best understanding of the world. The elements that have been used to explain God have greatly contributed to the philosophizing of philosophers (not about God but about other features of the world). In my opinion, every philosopher, even if he is a complete atheist, needs to engage with the concept of God and the attempts for justification of His existence in order to increase the depth of his philosophical view. For this reason, we may not find a philosopher who has not spoken about this and has not defined his position against or in favor of it.
- In the history of science, when science considered itself only to the extent of explaining the physical phenomena of the world and did not seek to comment on other areas such as the existence of God due to its success in explaining the scientific characteristics of the world, there is no need to propose anything to prove the existence of God and explain Him in the world. But when science wants to determine its relationship with God and religious teachings, despite his limitations, it needs to determine this relationship, and as a result, not only the arguments for the existence of God were needed, but also the relationship of scientific findings with some other religious teachings must be explained. Practically, inappropriate interventions of scientists in denying or proving religious beliefs and teachings and inappropriate interventions of religious thinkers in rejecting or proving scientific findings have caused conflicts between them.
- About the role of the arguments for the existence of God in the history of religious thought, I believe that since religion has various aspects such as moral, religious, ritual,

³ Ayatollahy, "The justifiability of Ordinary Belief in God through Epistemology Based on Trusted Hearings"

mystical, and intellectual, and the proofs of God mostly deal with the intellectual aspects of religion, so these argumentations are only in this field have been active and used as a prelude for other aspects. But when the arguments for the existence of God and rational explanations tried to interfere in the scope of other aspects of religion, they reject this kind of interference.

5- There is a widely held opinion that Kant's critique of the arguments he was aware of was so devastating, that the very question of making arguments for the existence of God ceased to be philosophically relevant. Do you agree? Why?

Kant's criticisms of the arguments of his time, such as ontological and cosmological arguments, are very precise and scholarly criticisms. In these critiques, there are deep philosophical precisions that have even been able to influence the philosophical activities of his time and after. Since the philosophical attitude of his time and even his own was influenced by empiricism, in that case, the justification of a creator of experience with empirically philosophical foundations would have problems with Kant's view. With a phenomenal view of the world, which explains the concepts of causality, existence, and necessity within the categories of understanding, it is not possible to justify a non-phenomenal thing (it does not mean the phenomenon but is beyond it) such as God. Kant's point of departure was phenomena, and with this path, he tried to acquire pure intellectual concepts. He very well says that with the causality that is inside the phenomena, a noumenon in his term cannot be justified as the cause of the world.

But if our initial point of departure is pure intellect and we consider causality, existence and necessity as mere intellectual concepts that apply to the world of phenomena, then it is possible to provide valid intellectual proof of the existence of God without getting caught in Kant's criticisms. For this reason, contemporary Islamic philosophers such as Javadi Amoli, taking advantage of the prevailing view in Islamic philosophy, have set the path of proving the existence of God in a different way, in which case none of Kant's critiques will come into it⁴. As a result, any proof of the existence of God in the context of empirical thinking cannot be immune from Kant's criticisms, and from this path, any ontological or cosmological way to prove the existence of God will be closed. Unless we change the basis of the discussion from an experience-oriented approach to an intellectual-oriented approach, which will be a different context and, in my opinion, it can lead to a good result.

6- What text (or texts) is in your opinion the most important one (or ones) for understanding the problem in question?

The texts available in the West, which have been published in the form of a book or a part of a book about arguments for the existence of God, have not paid attention to many Islamic thoughts, especially the Sadraean one, which has rich literature in Persian and Arabic. Therefore, I do not consider those texts sufficient for this discussion.

⁴ Javadi Amoli, *Tabyeene barahine ethbate khoda (Explanation of God's Proofs)*, p. 153-169 and 199-207.

Considering the previous article, I consider Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli's book titled *Explanation of God's Proofs*⁵, which is in Persian, to be the best book in this field. In this book, all the arguments for the existence of God in the history of Islamic thought, as well as such arguments in the Western philosophy of religion, have been examined. Due to the lack of familiarity of Western philosophers with the different argumentation of *Seddiqin* argument, I have also published a book in English in which, while explaining *Seddiqin* argument, I have shown why the critiques of Kant and Hume cannot be included in this type of argument for the existence of God⁶.

In a part of my book titled *Contemporary Religious Studies: A Critical Approach*⁷ (which has also been translated into Russian⁸), I have discussed "comparing the arguments for the existence of God in both Western and Islamic traditions". Also, in a ten-session lecture, I have explained all the arguments for the existence of God in Western and Islamic thought, and I have shown which ones are valid and which ones are invalid through logical analysis. These lectures, which are in the Persian language, have been seen hundreds of times in cyberspace such as on YouTube⁹ and Aparat¹⁰.

References:

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<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgS40t78Ru1uuGDDYqMFcman8-TIM0A0U>

<https://www.aparat.com/hamidrezaayatollahy> ɔ <https://www.aparat.com/playlist/123801>

⁵ Javadi Amoli, Abdullah (1384A.H., 2005) *Tabyeene barahine ethbate khoda (Explanation of God's Proofs)*.

⁶ Ayatollahy, Hamidreza (2005) *The Existence of God, Mulla Sadra's Seddiqin Argument versus Criticisms of Kant and Hume*

⁷ Ayatollahy, *Sanje'hayee dar dinpajoohi mo'aser (Contemporary Religious Studies: A Critical Approach)* p. 62-135.

⁸ Хамид Реза Аятоллахи *Современное религиозоведение* p.8-86.

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLgS40t78Ru1uuGDDYqMFcman8-TIM0A0U>

¹⁰ <https://www.aparat.com/hamidrezaayatollahy> ɔ <https://www.aparat.com/playlist/123801>