Reason and Belief in an Age of Empirical Science

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I

IT IS SOMEWHAT puzzling that while the vast majority of the world (around 80 percent) believes in some form of supernatural transcendence, the dominant view in many scientific and philosophical circles is that those who affirm God's existence bear the burden of proof. Meanwhile, atheists, who deny God's existence, need not prove God's nonexistence, because theirs is the default position; belief in God is the extraordinary claim. This assumption gets reinforced by the widespread notion that atheists and agnostics are the "normal" people, but this idea is contradicted by the beliefs of most human beings worldwide. The paradox begs the question: Shouldn't the burden of proof rightly rest on those who deny God's existence?

Nonetheless, the rise of scientism, agnosticism, and atheism in recent times warrants rational debates about the existence of God or ultimate reality. New Atheist writers such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Lawrence Krauss, Leonard Mlodinow, and others frequently invoke the authority of science (often equating it with reason) and point out that our best scientific theories make no reference to God; thus, naturalism—the belief that reality consists only of the physical world and that science is the best way to understand it—must be true.[1] These writers assume that empirical and experimental science is the only genuine form of knowledge—a highly controversial metaphysical presupposition not shared by all scientists or based on any "evidence." With this assumption, they respond to traditional arguments for God's existence with a wide range of counterarguments. For example, they contend that if God is the cause of everything, then God Himself must have a cause, which leads to the problem of infinite

Prayer hall of Vakil Mosque in Shiraz, Iran

regress. Their writings include the argument from evil and suffering—that the prevalent reality of suffering across the globe negates the existence of God as all-good—and the "divine hiddenness" argument, which posits that if God existed, His reality would be obvious to everyone.[2]

Before we explore the limits of these counterarguments in light of arguments for God's existence, especially from the Islamic tradition, we must recognize that these debates often depend on a particular understanding of God and its specific historical and religious context. For instance, many New Atheist writers critique only the Christian or monotheistic view of God, even though belief in God as ultimate reality also involves nontheistic arguments, as seen in Buddhism and various mystical traditions. Moreover, participants in these debates often fail to clearly define (or even agree on) the epistemological criteria to prove or disprove something. Clarifying assumptions will help us examine the underlying conceptions of God and the criteria of knowledge at play, so the debate does not turn into a circular exchange that obscures, rather than illuminates, the deeper philosophical and existential questions at stake.

II

There are various logical, moral, ontological, cosmological, aesthetic, and teleological arguments for God's existence.[3] These are best considered in relation to one another rather than in isolation, because arguments for God are often shaped by one's conception of the Divine, and different religious or metaphysical traditions offer varied understandings of ultimate reality. For instance, in the Christian tradition, philosophers frequently regard ontological arguments (i.e., those based purely on reason) and cosmological arguments (i.e., those based on the existence or order of the universe) as the most sophisticated defenses of God's existence.[4] However, in Islamic, Buddhist, and other traditions, some of the strongest arguments for God's existence are framed in terms of consciousness and its ontological precedence over matter.

But people rarely change their minds about God's existence—or lack thereof—based solely on logical and philosophical proofs. In contrast to logical proofs, the world's mystical traditions offer a concrete, existential pathway (a spiritual road map, if you will) for realizing the Divine deep within one's consciousness. Despite ongoing debates about "mystical experiences," which grossly oversimplify the spiritual arguments, such pathways significantly influence people's beliefs about God.[5] One would expect philosophers of religion to be interested in the arguments that emerge from the very nature of spirituality as one pursues a given path, but they rarely engage with, or try to grasp, such arguments. I am referring here to the first-person accounts of spiritually accomplished individuals that describe experiencing God through a profound penetration of consciousness.

If one wants to prove God's existence (or argue against it), one must begin by defining the term *God*. The traditional definition of God as "the all-good, omniscient, and omnipotent creator of the world" may not be in line with everyone's metaphysical views. For instance, I understand God not simply as the being who possesses these attributes but also as the supreme principle, one who is both absolute and infinite.[6] The term *absolute* denotes the ultimate reality, a completely independent, self-sufficient,

and unconditioned reality, which transcends all limitations of time, space, forms, or boundaries—that is, the ultimate source or principle of everything that exists. Being absolute, God remains beyond Being itself—referred to here as the *Beyond-Being*—and outside any name, form, or conceptualization. The ultimate reality remains unconstrained by any particular manifestations or determinations because it is not defined by attributes like goodness or omnipotence. Instead, it is the pure, infinite, and all-encompassing reality that underlies and gives rise to all that exists.

Despite the compelling theories of empirical science, such as general relativity and quantum mechanics, it lacks relevance regarding the nature of being and consciousness.

So, attributes such as omniscience, goodness, or omnipotence apply to Being rather than to Beyond-Being. In other words, we can draw a distinction between the personal God (Being) and meta-personal divinity (Beyond-Being): the former enters a relationship with its manifestation, while the latter transcends all relationships. Furthermore, Beyond-Being is absolute necessity in itself, whereas Being is absolute necessity in relation to the cosmos but not in relation to Beyond-Being. In fact, Being is the first self-determination of Beyond-Being, arising from its inner infinitude and thus opening the door to the inexhaustible ontological possibilities.

We can visualize this through the metaphor of light: *Beyond-Being* is the *source of light*, a powerful and infinite energy that transcends any specific form, brightness, or color and is pure, undetermined light.[7] Now, imagine that this *source of light* self-determines or manifests and actualizes as a specific *light beam* (*Being*) in the world and has properties such as brightness, color, and warmth, which can be observed and experienced. The light beam interacts with objects, casting shadows and illuminating spaces. Put differently, it enters into relationships with its environment.

Thus, the distinction between *God* and *meta-personal divinity* is similar to the difference between the light beam (which actively interacts with its surroundings) and the *light source* (which transcends any specific relationship with the world). The light beam is necessary for the world to be illuminated, but it does not define or limit the *source of light*. This analogy helps us distinguish between the unmanifest, infinite source (Beyond-Being) and the specific, observable manifestation of the source (Being).

III

Given this definition of God, many philosophers consider the counterarguments of New Atheist writers to be rather weak. For instance, the claim that "if God is the cause of everything, then God must also have a cause" presupposes God's existence while paradoxically treating God as a contingent being—a self-refuting assumption, given the concept of God as an uncaused Being.[8]

Nevertheless, many people today accept only proofs that emerge from mathematical modeling and physical evidence. Contemporary atheists like Alex Rosenberg adopt this stance on the basis of the perceived success of modern science.[9] Of course, one cannot deny that many modern theories have had empirical success. Einstein's general theory of

relativity, proposed in 1915, remains a most notable example of such empirical success; it mathematically described how massive objects warp space-time, leading Einstein to predict the bending of light around stars and the existence of gravitational waves.[10] A century later, in 2015, the LIGO (Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory) experiment confirmed Einstein's predictions by detecting gravitational waves—that is, ripples in space-time caused by the collision of black holes.[11] This discovery provided physical evidence for a phenomenon that previously existed only in mathematical equations.[12] Such examples, atheists argue, show that the achievements of empirical sciences far outweigh the methods of philosophy or revelatory traditions that claim to illuminate the nature of reality. Consequently, they affirm only what science reveals to be real.

However, this is a highly contentious claim, as both the definition of *science* and the notion that success applies exclusively to science remain widely debated, especially in light of contemporary environmental and nuclear crises.[13] Despite the compelling theories of empirical science, such as general relativity and quantum mechanics, it lacks relevance regarding the nature of being and consciousness, because these go beyond measurable, external phenomena and enter the realm of experience, existence, and ultimate reality.

In other words, a major limitation of empiricism lies in its inability to address a foundational question of metaphysics: Why is there something rather than nothing?[14] Science typically assumes, and relies on, physical or mathematical frameworks, such as space-time, quantum fields, or fundamental laws but cannot explain *why* these frameworks exist at all. While physics can trace causal chains back to the big bang, it cannot explain *why* existence itself should be the default state rather than nonexistence.[15] This question, deeply rooted in metaphysics, goes beyond the empirical scope of science.

Similarly, the study of consciousness presents plain yet profound challenges for empirical science. While neuroscience has made significant strides in correlating brain activity with various mental states, it has not resolved the "hard problem of consciousness" famously articulated by Australian philosopher and cognitive scientist David Chalmers.[16] The main impediment results from the dependence of empirical science on third-person observation and measurement, while consciousness is a first-person phenomenon, something directly experienced rather than externally observed. Advanced brain imaging technologies can track neural activity, but they do not explain how or why neural processes give rise to subjective experience, emotions, or self-awareness. The key restrictions of empirical science are its materialist or physicalist framework—and its assumption that reality remains confined to physical entities, an assumption that cannot be proved scientifically and remains as a philosophical stance. Metaphysical perspectives, such as idealism (which posits that consciousness is fundamental and matter is derivative) or panpsychism (which suggests that some form of consciousness exists at all levels of reality), challenge the idea prevalent in modern science that consciousness is merely a by-product of complex neural computations.[17] Science cannot adjudicate between these competing ontological perspectives without abandoning its primary premise that reality is entirely composed of matter, even if quantum mechanics complicates the very notion of "matter."

The reality of consciousness lies outside the scope of empirical science, which leads to a conundrum: science itself depends on consciousness, yet consciousness remains the very thing science struggles to explain. That is, scientific theories, models, and experiments are all formulated, interpreted, and understood by conscious beings. This paradox raises deeper questions: If all scientific knowledge gets mediated through consciousness, can science truly step outside consciousness to study it objectively?[18] Or is all empirical knowledge ultimately conditioned by the very phenomenon it seeks to describe? These limitations reduce consciousness to mere patterns of information processing and representation, neglecting the complexity of human consciousness, which Islamic philosophers view as a presence or ḥuḍūr—a nonrepresentational, self-illuminating reality.[19] They view consciousness as inseparable from self-knowledge, which precedes any mental states or reflective acts. Unlike modern theories that often emphasize subjective experiences, or qualia, Islamic philosophers characterize consciousness as the very foundation of selfhood, transcending all forms of representation. This has profound implications for contemporary debates, especially regarding the limits of AI, because true consciousness cannot be replicated through symbolic or algorithmic processes. In other words, even if we can replicate or simulate aspects of consciousness on a computer screen, they will still lack causal power. For example, while ChatGPT (or any such model) can simulate many conscious behaviors, it nevertheless lacks genuine causal power.[20]

An intellectually honest approach, whether one is arguing for—or against—the existence of God, would begin from a set of assumptions or certainties.

Moreover, phenomena such as the nature of selfhood, free will, moral responsibility, and the meaning of existence lie beyond the domain of empirical verification. While psychology and cognitive science can analyze behavior and decision-making, they do not resolve philosophical debates about whether free will is real or an illusion, whether morality is objective or constructed, and whether subjective experiences indicate deeper metaphysical realities. Philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have critically examined these epistemological and ontological assumptions, revealing the limitations that confront modern scientific inquiry.[21]

IV

The limitations of naturalism and empirical science in understanding being can be traced back to assumptions formulated by the eighteenth-century philosopher Immanuel Kant. Atheist philosophers tend to believe that Kant's objection to the arguments for God's existence was so devastating that it rendered the entire question philosophically irrelevant. In *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (*Critique of Pure Reason*), Kant asserts that ontological arguments are tautological or analytic, maintaining that being is not a *real* predicate. Existence, says Kant, does not add anything to the concept of a thing—that is, it provides no new information about its properties. A predicate describes or adds to the nature of a subject. For example, if we say, "A triangle has three sides," the predicate ("has three sides") tells us something essential about the nature of a triangle.

However, Kant argues that being (existence) does not function in the same way as these predicates because it does not describe or modify the subject. For instance, says Kant, the concept of one hundred dollars in the mind is identical to one hundred dollars in the real world; the concept does not change whether the dollars exist or not, and the dollars do not gain any new intrinsic property when they move from concept to reality. Thus, he concludes that existence adds nothing to the concept and remains only the instantiation of that concept in reality.[22]

Despite the contention of many atheist philosophers that Kant's objection rendered the question of God's existence irrelevant, countless philosophical debates continue to this day. Not long ago, I watched a lengthy debate online between the atheist philosopher Graham Oppy and the Christian philosopher Edward Feser, who were vigorously discussing their own writings, which document numerous contemporary arguments and counterarguments regarding God's existence. One can also point to the works of Alvin Plantinga and William Lane Craig, as well as numerous contributions from non-Western philosophical traditions, all of which continue to engage deeply with this enduring question.[23]

A pervasive double standard in modern philosophical discourse concerns the disproportionate level of scrutiny brought to arguments for God's existence compared with other metaphysical claims.[24] The critique demands that any argument for God's existence must meet rigorous empirical or logical criteria, such that it provides the certainty one expects from a scientific law or a mathematical theorem. Yet this demand is hardly invoked when analytic philosophers disagree on significant matters ranging from the nature of causality, modality, and identity to questions about the mind-body problem, the nature of mathematical objects, and the interpretation of quantum mechanics. These disputes do not lead philosophers to dismiss their own discipline as futile because they do not meet empirical or logical criteria; rather, the disputes are seen as intrinsic to philosophical inquiry. Yet when debating God, the philosophical dispute itself invalidates the argument for God's existence.

The case of Kurt Gödel's ontological proof for the existence of God reveals much about the double standard. Gödel, one of the most influential mathematicians and logicians of the twentieth century, developed a formulation of the argument based on modal logic and axiomatic reasoning.[25] Gödel's proof follows the formal rigor expected in mathematics and logic, yet it rarely merits serious consideration in mainstream analytic philosophy. Instead, Kant's critique gets invoked as an ideological shortcut to dismiss any ontological argument and to avoid engaging with the rigorous logical structure and premises of Gödel's formulation. Such appeals to Kant's critique function less as substantive philosophical engagements and more as a rhetorical anchor point—a way of foreclosing debate. Philosophers simply do not apply the same epistemic humility and methodological pluralism to arguments for God's existence that they do to other unresolved philosophical questions. That double standard reveals a deeper philosophical bias: a reluctance to seriously entertain the possibility that God's existence might be a legitimate metaphysical question rather than a relic of pre-Kantian thought.

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The Sun, Edvard Munch, ca. 1910

existence of God, would begin from a set of assumptions or certainties. Even though contemporary philosophers may be reluctant to invoke the notion of first principles, such assumptions remain inescapable. A more productive approach, then, would be to acknowledge these foundational certainties explicitly and undertake a thorough analysis of them.

V

Beginning with a set of assumptions about being that are different from Kant's, we can consider the many arguments for God's existence in the Islamic tradition, especially those of Avicenna and Mullā Ṣadrā, which stand out as the most salient. Avicenna presents what can be called the most sophisticated "onto-cosmological" proof in *Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* (The pointers).[26] It answers a key question: Can a series of contingent beings, even if infinite, explain itself without requiring something beyond it? That is, what matters is the distinction between contingency and necessity and the metaphysical difference between that which must exist and that which might not have existed. Now, physicists like Stephen Hawking may invoke the "no-boundary proposal"—the idea that space-time is not delimited by an original singularity—to support the notion of a self-caused universe.[27] However, the empirical validity of such a speculative extrapolation by scientists and philosophers from current physical theories remains widely contested and shows the double standard regarding the point about "evidence." In any case, for Avicenna, contingency can only become necessity through another entity, which is a point of deep contention between contemporary naturalists and nonmodern philosophers (roughly, philosophers before Descartes). Unlike Avicenna and other nonmodern philosophers, naturalists may accept an initial causal state that is both natural and contingent—contingent either because the entities involved are themselves contingent or because some of their properties are.[28]

For Avicenna and many others in the Islamic tradition, by contrast, contingent beings, by definition, lack what can be called *eternal necessity*, meaning they require an external cause that possesses necessity in itself. Only being (*wujūd*) fits this criterion.

To illustrate the concept of eternal necessity, consider a triangle, which possesses an *essential* but not an *eternal* necessity. That is, in every possible world, the definition of a triangle will hold, but this does not necessitate its eternal existence. That definition, as a logical truth, holds in every conceivable world—whether on earth or in heaven. However, the triangle as an actual existing thing does not necessarily exist at all times or in all worlds, which means that its concept is necessary but its existence is contingent.

So, even if we grant an infinite chain of contingent beings, the series cannot become necessary except through another cause. Avicenna's argument from contingency ultimately demonstrates that a series of contingent beings must terminate in a being whose existence is necessary in itself—that is, God.[29]

We should note that in contrast to philosophers like Avicenna, who use the concept of the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) to establish God's existence, there are those such as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī who challenge the adequacy of this approach. Al-Qūnawī argues that the idea of a first cause or Necessary Being, based on the claim that the chain of causality originating from contingent things cannot regress indefinitely, does not constitute a conclusive proof. Moreover, it fails to illuminate the true essence of ontological necessity and contingency.[30]

According to al-Qūnawī, the concepts of contingency and necessity should be understood in terms of the relationship between the limited and constrained (*muqayyad*) and the limitless and absolute (*muṭlaq*). More specifically, he seeks to replace the Avicennan distinction between contingency and necessity with a more nuanced framework: the distinction between determination (*taʿayyun*) and non-determination (*lā taʿayyun*). The more specific and determinate a thing is, the more limited and constrained it becomes in relation to other things and, consequently, the more it depends on the principles that define its particular mode of determination. Thus, every act of determination implies a restriction in relation to the underlying, unrestricted principles.

This can be illustrated by how light gets refracted through a prism. If one were to ask what causes the different rays of light produced in the prism, an answer might be the prism itself and, ultimately, the sun. This follows Avicenna's line of reasoning, in which each effect is traced back to a first cause. Al-Qūnawī, however, shifts the focus. Rather than asking what caused a specific ray of light, he asks how such a ray can be a determined expression of undetermined light. Thus, al-Qūnawī's critique does not deny causality but rather deepens metaphysical analysis. That is, instead of proving God by rejecting infinite regress, he seeks to show that every limited and determinate thing points back to the unlimited, not just as its origin but as its ontological ground.

For this reason, al-Qūnawī even identifies Being—conceived as the immediate principle of existence—with "determination itself." Being, in his view, encompasses all potential determinations within itself without being confined to any specific mode. However, while al-Qūnawī considers all entities dependent on this "first determination" (*al-taʿayyun al-awwal*), he does not regard it as the ultimate foundation of reality. This is because the first determination still bears some degree of contingency, arising from its own determinate nature. As such, it excludes the "indeterminate" or "nonmanifest" and cannot serve as the absolute principle of all reality, since it does not encompass reality in its entirety.

Consequently, al-Qūnawī asserts that the fundamental principle of reality must transcend all limitations, making it absolute, infinite, and all-perfect. True absolute freedom resides only in the state of complete non-determination, which alone describes the Divine as the indeterminate reality underlying all determinate things. For al-Qūnawī, the deepest way to understand the relationship between contingency and necessity is to recognize that all determinate realities are necessarily grounded in non-determination. This harks back to the notion of divinity as meta-personal that was delineated earlier.[31]

Be that as it may, another argument that I find compelling, provided one accepts the distinction between the concept and reality of Being, is Mullā Ṣadrā's argument from the primacy of being, best understood using the analogy of the "dark room" as described below.[32] This argument can be structured as follows:

> Premise I: Everything other than being actualizes its reality through the mediation of Being (without Being, entities would be pure non-existents). Likewise, traces and accidents of things become real through the intervention of Being.
>
> Premise II: A principle that acts as an agent of making everything else real must be "real by itself," which is to say, it must be principial or primary (*aṣīl*).
>
> Conclusion: Being is real by itself—that is, principial. Its actualization occurs in and by itself, and it can dispense with the determining mode (*ḥaythiyya taqyīdiyya*) while "existing" in contrast to other entities. That is to say, to predicate "being" of Being, we do not require any conditioning factor, since it is a self-existing principle by definition.

Let us illustrate Mullā Ṣadrā's argument from the primacy of being with a relatable example. Imagine a dark room where nothing is visible. Now, suppose we turn on a

lamp. The moment light spreads, objects in the room become visible. Without light, those objects still exist, but they lack *actualized* visibility; they remain in a state of darkness, effectively nonexistent from our perspective. Similarly, consider how this analogy maps onto Mullā Ṣadrā's argument:

> Premise I: Just as objects in the room require light to be seen, all entities require being to be real. Without light, the objects might as well not exist for us; similarly, without being, entities are mere non-existents.
>
> Premise II: The lamp itself does not depend on any other source of illumination to be light; it is the origin of visibility in the room. Likewise, being or existence does not derive its reality from something else—it is real by itself, making everything else real.
>
> Conclusion: Light is self-illuminating as it does not need another source to be what it is. Similarly, being does not require an external condition to exist. It is self-subsistent, while everything else derives its reality from it. Just as we do not need to impose an additional condition to say that light is bright, we do not need an external factor to predicate existence of being, since it is real by itself.

This analogy illustrates why, for Mullā Ṣadrā, being is the fundamental reality, and everything else depends on it.[33] It means that, contra Kant, Ṣadrā sees being as a "real predicate," because it constitutes the very structure of reality itself rather than a mere conceptual attribution. Being is not a static, neutral predicate but an active, dynamic principle. Unlike Kant, who views existence as merely positing something without adding or modifying, Ṣadrā views being or wujūd as the most fundamental reality. He distinguishes between mental constructs and real existence and contends that every determination and property appears through the intensity and gradation of being.[34] For example, existence in its fullest sense, such as divine existence, remains qualitatively different from contingent existence. Ṣadrā's doctrine of the gradational nature of being (*tashkīk*) means reality is not a collection of discrete, static entities but a continuum of different intensities of being. Since all qualities and perfections emerge from this gradation of being, it must be real, not a mere conceptual placeholder.

Moving beyond these philosophical proofs, one must take seriously what arises from following a spiritual path—the argument of finding God within. While sacred scriptures like the Qur'an may not present philosophical proofs for God's existence, they constantly point to natural phenomena and processes as signs (or proofs) of God for those capable of reflection and intellection. Rather than focusing on the mere existence of things, the Qur'an emphasizes the intrinsic order and harmony of the universe, which necessitate recognition of a creator. In doing so, the Qur'an integrates elements of both the cosmological and teleological arguments, reinforcing them with its call to seek God within the depths of the human soul. Sufism, drawing from the Qur'an and hadith, appeals to both visual and auditory intuition, guiding the seeker on a Platonic ascent from love and beauty in the phenomenal world to their eternal archetypes in the divine principle.[35]

In any case, from Mullā Ṣadrā's perspective, Kant's objection to the ontological argument is flawed because he fails to distinguish between mental and external existence

(*wujūd dhihnī* versus *wujūd khārijī*). In Ṣadrā's philosophy, being is the very ground of reality, and different modes of existence are metaphysically significant. Moreover, Avicenna's onto-cosmological proof demonstrates God to be not merely necessary for the existence of the contingent world but a metaphysically Necessary Being, which is to say that God's existence is not simply a matter of definition but an intrinsic ontological reality. All of this underscores the fact that God's existence remains a topic of enduring philosophical inquiry.

VI

The Enlightenment project, with its emphasis on reason, often severed reason from belief—and this idea still shapes contemporary discourse.[36] The assumption that religious belief is inherently irrational while reason is the domain of science and modern philosophy no longer holds up under scrutiny. Empirical science itself has inherent limitations, particularly in addressing questions of being, consciousness, and ultimate reality. The methods that define modern science are ill equipped to explore the foundational nature of existence, yet many continue to privilege scientific inquiry as the only legitimate avenue for truth. This selective application of reason creates a double standard: theists are expected to provide demonstrable proof of God's existence, while atheists do not bear the same burden of proof to ground their own metaphysical commitments.

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In much of contemporary discourse, the default position regarding belief in God is assumed to be atheism or agnosticism, despite the fact that most human beings throughout history affirmed some form of transcendence, as they do today. As philosophers have noted, the expectation that arguments for God should meet the same standards as empirical science ignores the fact that reason itself is not reducible to the methods of empirical inquiry. Moreover, there is no universal rational standard that resolves philosophical disputes, as seen in the persistent disagreements among philosophers on fundamental questions of metaphysics, mind, and existence. Yet when it comes to God's existence, disagreement is often taken as proof of failure rather than as evidence of an enduring and meaningful inquiry.

This tells us that the debate over God's existence is not merely a question of logic or evidence but of *underlying assumptions*. The dismissal of classical proofs for God often rests on ideological commitments rather than rational objections. However, if one takes a step back from this ideological entrenchment, it becomes evident that the Enlightenment framework itself no longer provides a sufficient basis for adjudicating between reason and belief. Empirical science has no doubt discovered and revealed much that has helped humanity, but it does not—and cannot—exhaust the full scope of rational inquiry. There remain fundamental aspects of human experience—consciousness, morality, meaning, and metaphysical necessity—that lie beyond the

reach of empirical science. More importantly, the recognition of reason's limits does not entail the abandonment of reason but rather its expansion beyond the restrictive methodologies of naturalism.

If anything, the continued engagement with arguments for God's existence, from Avicenna to Mullā Ṣadrā, from Gödel to Plantinga, suggests that this debate is far from resolved. Rather than dismissing belief in God as an antiquated relic of premodern thought, we ought to consider whether the very structure of reality points beyond itself, not as a mere intellectual exercise but as a genuine philosophical and existential exploration. Instead of an outdated Enlightenment opposition, we might envision a more integrated approach to knowledge, one that recognizes the full depth of human inquiry, whether empirical and secular or rational and spiritual.

Notes

1 See, for instance, Lawrence M. Krauss, *A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing* (New York: Free Press, 2012). For a critical evaluation of Krauss's thesis, see David Albert, "On the Origin of Everything," *New York Times*, March 23, 2012, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/books/review/a-universe-from-nothing-by-lawrence-m-krauss.html.

2 For more information on all these topics, see Muhammad U. Faruque and Mohammed Rustom, *From the Divine to the Human: Contemporary Islamic Thinkers on Evil, Suffering, and the Global Pandemic* (London: Routledge, 2023).

3 For some surveys, see Hannah C. Erlwein, *Arguments for God's Existence in Classical Islamic Thought: A Reappraisal of the Discourse* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019); Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017).

4 For instance, in the Christian tradition, philosophers frequently refer to ontological arguments, e.g., Anselm's "greatest possible being" or Plantinga's "maximal greatness" argument, and cosmological arguments, e.g., Aquinas's argument from essence and existence.

5 For some classic references on this, see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902); W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960); Steven T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Robert K. C. Forman, ed., *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Reza Shah-Kazemi, *Paths to Transcendence: According to Shankara, Ibn Arabi, and Meister Eckhart* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2006).

6 This view is shaped by my study of Sufi metaphysics, particularly as it is represented by the school of Ibn ʿArabī. For more information on Sufi metaphysics, see Muhammad U. Faruque, "Sufi Metaphysical Literature," in *Brill Handbook of Sufi Studies*, ed. Alexander Knysh and Bilal Orfali (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

7 This is inspired by the Light Verse in the Qur'an (24:35). Throughout history, the Light Verse has been interpreted in various spiritual, ontological, and cosmological ways. The concept of light served as the scriptural foundation for the School of Illumination, a branch of Islamic philosophy that views all existence as different degrees of the same fundamental reality, i.e., light. As this light moves further from its divine source, God, the *nūr al-anwār* (the Light of Lights), it becomes interwoven with darkness. The symbolism of light has also played a central role in theological, philosophical, and Sufi traditions, representing the relationship between God and the different levels of creation. Paradoxically, the divine light is so pervasive that it conceals as much as it reveals. Ibn ʿArabī captured this mystery when he wrote, "Glory be unto Him who is hidden by that which is none other than Himself." For some notable commentar-

ies on the Light Verse, see al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, trans. David Buchman (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998); Mulla Sadra Shirazi, *On the Hermeneutics of the Light Verse of the Qur'an*, trans. Latimah-Parvin Peerwani (London: Saqi Books, 2004).

8 More importantly, most historical arguments for God's existence are based on the radical contingency of the world. This holds true whether one considers the world through the Aristotelian framework of potentiality and actuality, the Neoplatonic understanding of the composite, or the Avicennan and Thomistic view of beings as composites of essence and existence.

9 See Alex Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life without Illusions* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

10 Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory* (New York: Dover, 2010).

11 Jennifer Chu, "Scientists Make First Direct Detection of Gravitational Waves," *MIT News*, February 11, 2016, https://news.mit.edu/2016/ligo-first-detection-gravitational-waves-0211.

12 Another key example is the Higgs boson, predicted by the Standard Model of particle physics. In the 1960s, Peter Higgs and others developed mathematical models suggesting the existence of a fundamental particle responsible for giving mass to other particles. For decades, the Higgs boson remained a theoretical entity, until its discovery in 2012 at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN. The ability of mathematical physics to predict the existence of such a particle well ahead of its empirical discovery demonstrated the power of scientific modeling. See, e.g., Dave Goldberg, *The Standard Model in a Nutshell* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

13 I will refrain from "defining" what science is, since there is little consensus on this issue and engaging it will take us too far afield. The literature on the nature of the scientific method is vast. For debates and discussions involving positivism, realism vs. anti-realism vs. instrumentalism, falsificationism, the demarcation problem, evidence, the hypothetico-deductive method, the sociology of scientific knowledge, statistical methods, abduction, etc., see Rudolf Carnap, *Der logische Aufbau der Welt* (Berlin: Bernary, 1928); Karl Popper, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft* (Vienna: Julius Springer, 1935); Carl Hempel, "Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 41, no. 11 (1950): 41–63; "The Concept of Cognitive Significance: A Reconsideration," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 80, no. 1 (1951): 61–77; Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988); Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation* (London: Routledge, 2004); and J. Martin Curd, J. A. Cover, and Christopher Pincock, *Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013).

14 John Leslie and Robert Lawrence Kuhn, eds., *The Mystery of Existence: Why Is There Anything at All?* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

15 This is acknowledged in Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 173–74.

16 David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

17 See, for instance, Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

18 Muhammad U. Faruque, *Sculpting the Self: Islam, Selfhood, and Human Flourishing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021), 30–32.

19 Muhammad U. Faruque, "Immortality through AI? Transhumanism, Islamic Philosophy, and the Quest for Spiritual Machines," in *Transhumanism, Immortality, and Religion*, ed. Timothy Knepper (New York: Springer, forthcoming).

20 Muhammad U. Faruque, *Why Read Mullā Ṣadrā Today?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

forthcoming), chap. 3.

21 See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970); Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings* ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (Albany State University of New York Press, 1989).

22 See, for instance, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A599/B627.

23 Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

24 See, for instance, Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *The Many Faces of Realism* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987).

25 C. Anthony Anderson and Michael Gettings, "Gödel's Ontological Proof Revisited," in *Gödel '96: Logical Foundations of Mathematics, Computer Science, and Physics—Kurt Gödel's Legacy*, ed. Petr Hájek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 167–72.

26 See Avicenna, *Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1957), 3:15–27. For the standard commentaries on the *Ishārāt*, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, ed. ʿAlī Riḍā Najafzādah (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āṯār wa-Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 2005); Ṭūsī's commentary is included in the Sulaymān Dunyā edition cited above.

27 See Hawking, *Brief History of Time*. For an illuminating discussion of the issues concerning the "origin of the universe" from a physicist's point of view, see Hawking's colleague George Ellis's article "Before the Beginning: Emerging Questions and Uncertainties," in David L. Block et al., eds., *Toward a New Millennium in Galaxy Morphology* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2000), 693–720.

28 See Graham Oppy, "Uncaused Beginnings," *Faith and Philosophy* 27, no. 1 (2010): 61–71, and *The Best Argument against God* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

29 For an extended analysis of Avicenna's proof, see Mohammad Saleh Zarepour, *Necessary Existence and Monotheism* An Avicennian Account of the Islamic Conception of Divine Unity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). Additionally, Avicenna offers another proof: while everything is composed of essence and existence, God is the one reality whose very essence is existence, requiring no external cause.

30 Muhammad U. Faruque, "Sufism and the Anthropocosmic Self," in *I of the Heart: Texts and Studies in Honor of Seyyed Hossein Nasr*, ed. Muhammad U. Faruque, Atif Khalil, and Mohammed Rustom (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

31 See Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Metaphysical Anthropology* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 84–85. Cf. al-Qūnawī, *Iʿjāz al-bayān fī tafsīr umm al-qur'ān*, ed. Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī (Qum: Būstān-i Kitāb, 2003), 88ff.

32 Muhammad U. Faruque, "Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 27, no. 2 (2017): 269–302.

33 Needless to say, this analogy has its own limits, because the lamp "existed" before being turned on. On the notion of the "primacy" of being, see Ibrahim Kalin, *Mulla Sadra* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014), chap. 3.

34 For an analysis of "gradation" or *tashkīk*, see Sayeh Meisami, *Mullā Ṣadrā* (London: Oneworld, 2013), chap. 2.

35 See, for instance, Ibn ʿArabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Cairo, 1911; repr., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, n.d.).

36 For more information, see Paul Hyland, Olga Gomez, and Francesca Greensides, eds., *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* , 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006).