

# **Teleological Argument for the Existence of God: Critical Analysis of Atheism Objections from an Islamic Perspective**

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**Abstract:** "Existence of God" has been part of the common intellectual quest of every human civilization. Human intellect (Philosophy) put forward three arguments for the existence of God. These are: Cosmological, Ontological and Teleological. The Teleological Argument had its roots deep in ancient history and can be traced in the modern era. This argument is also known as an argument from design, posits that the order, complexity and purpose observed in the universe suggest the existence of an intelligent Designer - God. On the other hand, atheists have always objected to this argument. This paper offers a critical analysis of atheists' objections to the Teleological Argument, focusing particularly on how Islamic philosophy and theology respond to such critiques. After careful study of classical and modern Muslim Thinkers, the study explores how design in the universe is interpreted through Quranic Revelation and rational theology. The study highlights how Islamic and some Western philosophers articulated arguments that parallel and transcend classical Western theistic perspectives.

**Keywords:** Teleological Argument, Atheism, Muslim Thinkers

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## **1. Introduction and History**

The question of God's existence has been central to philosophical and theological inquiry across cultures throughout human history. Among the classical arguments for the existence of God, the teleological argument or the argument from design remains one of the enduring. Rooted in the perception of order, harmony and purpose in the universe, the teleological argument claims that such complexity is unlikely to have arisen by chance and instead implies an intelligent designer - God. This argument has a long and evolving history spanning ancient Greek philosophy, Muslim rational theology and philosophy, medieval Christian theology and modern scientific debates.

In ancient Greece, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle advocated this idea about the existence of a designer. Socrates said that the order in nature implies an intelligent designer. Plato expanded on this idea, arguing that the cosmos reflects a rational design governed by eternal forms. The universe is self-generated and self-explanatory, and symbolically likens it to a living organism, order and intelligence and created by a benevolent master craftsman [1]. Aristotle introduced the

'First cause', asserting that everything in nature has a purpose, reinforcing the idea of an intelligent designer. Later on, Thomas Aquinas in the medieval period included that teleological argument in his five arguments to prove God's existence in his book *Summa Theological* [2].

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, the concept of Tawhid (Oneness of God) finds affirmation through various forms of teleological reasoning. Thinkers such as Imam Ghazali, Ibn e Rushd and Fakhr ud din Al Razi in the classical period engaged with argument, integrating it with a theological perspective. Contemporary figures like Allama Iqbal, Syed Hussain Nasr, Dr Fazal ur Rahman and Haroon Yahya have contributed significantly to the discussion.

In the modern era, William Paley famously presented the watchmaker analogy in his work, *Natural Theology* (1779) [3] to support the teleological argument. He argued that just as a watch implies a watchmaker, the complexity of nature implies a divine designer. In the 20th century, the fine-tuning argument emerged, suggesting that precise conditions necessary for life indicate an intentional designer.

However, modern atheism is influenced by thinkers like David Hume, Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins, posing robust objections often rooted in naturalism, evolution and multiverse theory. David Hume critiqued the argument in 'Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion', [4] questioning whether apparent design truly necessitated the intelligent cause. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* introduced natural selection, challenging the idea that biological complexity requires a designer.

The teleological argument remains a central topic in philosophy, theology and science, evolving with discoveries and critiques. The significance of this topic lies in its multi-disciplinary nature. It bridges the philosophy of religion, Islamic Theology (Kalam), cosmology and contemporary debates in science and metaphysics. The aim of the study is not only to defend the teleological argument from the Islamic standpoint but also to provide a meaningful dialogue between faith and reason in the modern context.

### ***1.1 Research Questions:***

- 1:** How do Islamic theologians articulate the teleological argument?
- 2:** What are the atheistic objections (Hume, Dawkins, multiverse theory) against the teleological argument?
- 3:** What are the Islamic theological and Quranic responses to these objections?

## 2. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and comparative methodology. Primary sources include the Qur'an, classical tafsir literature, and key Islamic philosophical works by al-Ghazālī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and contemporary thinkers such as Muhammad Iqbal. Secondary sources include contemporary Western literature on the teleological argument and atheist objections, such as works by David Hume, Richard Dawkins, and Daniel Dennett. The analysis focuses on tracing theological, philosophical, and epistemological assumptions underlying each position.

The approach is both historical and critical. It begins with a textual study of the argument as presented in Islamic sources, followed by a thematic analysis of atheist objections. Thereafter, these objections are analyzed in light of Islamic metaphysical principles, concluding with an evaluation of the argument's continued relevance.

## 3. Literature Review

The teleological argument has undergone significant evolution from classical to modern times. William Paley's watchmaker analogy in *Natural Theology* epitomised the classical design argument, arguing that the intricate design of a watch necessitates a watchmaker, just as the universe requires a divine designer. In Islamic tradition, teleological reasoning is rooted in Qur'anic appeals to natural signs:

(“Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for people of understanding.”) [5]

Al-Ghazālī emphasised that natural phenomena reflect divine wisdom. In his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, he critiques the Aristotelian model while upholding the idea that the world's purposeful order reveals the intentionality of a Creator.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī advanced a kalāmīc version of the argument by stating that design cannot arise without intention, which implies a knowing agent. Similarly, Muhammad Iqbal in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* reinterprets teleology within an evolutionary and dynamic universe guided by divine will.

Modern atheists like Dawkins and Dennett reject this view. Dawkins argues in *The Blind Watchmaker* that natural selection is a sufficient explanation for the complexity of life. Dennett views evolution as an algorithmic process devoid of purpose.

### ***3.1 Islamic Representation of Teleological Argument***

The Islamic intellectual framework originated from the Quran and Sunnah. Teleological presentation in Islam is rooted in the Quran, which repeatedly invites believers to reflect on the natural world. Verses such as those found in Surah Al Baqarah and Surah Al Mulk [6] suggest that the phenomena of day and night, the alteration of seasons and the structure of the Cosmos are signs pointing towards the deliberate and wise creator. For many Muslim Thinkers, these verses form an experiential and evidential basis for the teleological arguments. The Quran established that nature is not a random occurrence; instead, everything in creation bears the mark of intelligent design and precision. This narrative encourages intellectual engagement and leads scholars to integrate empirical observation with philosophical reasoning. Thus, Muslim intellectual history has a dynamic tradition where theology is deeply intertwined with philosophy and even the emerging inquiry of their time.

### ***3.2 Al Ghazali***

One of the most influential thinkers in Islamic theology is Al Ghazali. Although primarily known for his critical work 'The Incoherence of the Philosophers, ' he represents a compelling case for teleology by emphasising that the cosmos operates not merely through material cause but under the direct supervision of an Omnipotent Creator. He writes:

"Observe God's attributes in the constitution of the human body. Its parts cooperate to establish an order (nizam) for its purpose and aim (maqsid). The cosmos is the macrocosm of the human." [7]

He expanded his argument in 'Ihye Ulum Din' in a unified manner and established how the contemplation of God's Work (Sunn' Allah) reveals His wisdom and allows the believer to encounter God's attributes [8]. The teleological argument is at its highest peak in his work 'The Wisdom in God's Creation'. For Ghazali, the beneficial nature of creation and its perfection serve as a sign that points towards God. The most precious of these signs is the human intellect because it is the same time, a supreme sign of God's marvellous handiwork and capable of deciphering God's other signs in the universe [9].

### ***3.3 Averroes***

The most influential philosopher of Muslim intellectual history is, no doubt, Ibn Rushd, famous as Averroes in the West. Even Western intellectual voices have risen for him that he was the most influential Muslim philosopher who shaped Western thoughts and ideas. Averroes, in his

work, put forward the ideas that support the argument of design. According to him, humans are naturally inclined to infer the existence of a magnificent Creator from the magnificent design of the universe. He thought, humans are right to infer because it is the straight path to which God calls men so that they acknowledge Him [10]. According to him, it is the Quran's way of pointing out the necessity of an almighty and benevolent God. He places a range of examples to back this claim up, instances in which he detects teleological arguments either plainly stated or else implied.

"Due to these constitutions, it has become manifest that the proof for the existence of a maker is reduced to these two kinds: the proof from providence and the proof from creation. Moreover, it has been shown that these two ways constitute both the ways of being chosen." [11]

It is clearly shown that the essence of both arguments is teleological. However, he distinguished between Inductive and deductive logic and placed the design argument in the deductive category. He also integrated the prime mover discussion with the design argument. He suggested that purpose and order reinforce the necessity of a First Principle. He also criticised Aveceena's metaphysical proof for God's existence, favouring Aristotle's empirical approach. He recognized that the design argument could serve as a persuasive tool for both scholars and theologians.

### ***3.4 Fakhar ud Deen Al-Razi***

He is a prominent Islamic theologian and engaged deeply with the teleological argument, particularly in his exegesis of the Quran. He explored how the order and complexity of the universe indicate an intelligent designer and aligns with Quranic reasoning.

### ***3.5 Shah Wali Ullah***

He is the most prominent figure of Islamic intellectual history in the Subcontinent. He also engaged with the design argument in his classic work 'Hijja tul Balgha'. His vision of divine design extended beyond the physical world and reached into the very structure of society, morality and human destiny. For him, this universe was not a chaotic accident but a grand orchestration, where every element from the smallest leaf to the most complex human emotions bore the signature of divine intelligence. Unlike some of his predecessors who confined the design argument to astronomy and biology, he saw divine wisdom reflected everywhere in the balance of justice, the purpose of knowledge and the patterns of human society and governance. In 'Hijja tul Balgha', he proposed three attributes of God. He writes:

"The third of these creative attributes of God is divine management (tadbir) of the world of engendered things, and this goes back to rendering the occurrence of this world in confirming with the system which His divine wisdom approved." [12]

Similarly, Allama Iqbal also re-interprets this argument in his famous lectures. Though he accepted this argument, but also has some objections, which are discussed in his third lecture [13]. Wahid ud Deenn Khan also engaged with this argument and in his work 'Religion and Modern Challenges' answered the questions of atheism regarding the design argument.

### ***3.6 Atheism Objections***

The teleological argument has been a cornerstone of natural theologians since antiquity, reaching its classical formulation in William Paley's 'Natural Theology'. This argument posits that the apparent design, order, fine tuning and complexity observed in nature necessitate an intelligent designer- God. However, this argument faces significant challenges from atheists and scientists who propose alternative explanations for apparent design in nature. Three key figures who raised questions and proposed alternative theories against the design argument are David Hume, Charles Darwin and Richard Dawkins.

### ***3.7 David Hume***

David Hume, the 18th-century Scottish philosopher, raised some of the most influential and enduring criticisms of the teleological argument in his work 'Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion'. His objections can be categorized into logical, theological, moral and philosophical. Some of his objections are:

**a) Analogical Weakness:** Hume's first objection to the teleological argument is that it is not based on evidence rather on analogy from inference. He argues that analogy depends on a demonstration of resemblances between two or more objects. We can see that the bigger the sample and the number of reasons recorded, the stronger the inference. In our daily life, we predict and infer many events from our observations and the resemblance between them. So we can say that the more the resemblance, the more the inference; the weaker the resemblance weaker the inference. The same is the case with the Teleological argument, he said. He quotes an example of the house:

"If you see a house..., we can conclude with greatest certainty that it had an architect is builder because this is precisely the species of fact that we have

experienced to proceed from that species of cause. But surely we will not affirm that the universe bears such resemblance to a house that we can with the same certainty infer a similar cause, or that the analogy here is entire and perfect. "[14]

While it is true, houses have builders but we cannot infer that fact alone that the universe also has a designer because the analogy and resemblance of a house and the universe is weak. Machines are products of human experiences and are observed repeatedly. We have no such experience with the universe. So he concludes that the analogy between natural order and human design is stretched beyond logic.

**b) Multiple Designer Hypothesis:** If the world shows evidence of design, it could just as well be the product of many gods or inferior deities, like a building made by a team of workers, not one perfect being. A great number of men join in building the house or ship; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing the world? He concludes that, teleological argument assumes monotheism (One Designer), but design could imply polytheism or imperfect gods.

**c) Problem of Evil:** If the universe is designed, why does it contain so much suffering, disorder and natural evils? He argues:

"Look around the universe and living existences..., how hostile and destructive to each other! How insufficient all of them are for their happiness! How adious to the spectators. The whole presents nothing but the idea of a blind nature. "[15]

He concludes that an Omnibenevolent and omnipotent designer would not allow suffering. The presence of evil weakens the claim of a perfect designer

### ***3.8 Charles Darwin***

Charles Darwin was a famous British biologist and naturalist who presented the theory of evolution on scientific grounds. His famous book 'On the Origin of Species' brought a revolution in the world of biology. Ideas and explanations in rejection of the design argument from atheism now obtain scientific support in the Darwinian theory of natural selection.

**a) Natural Selection:** According to this theory, the living organisms and intricate structure so admired by theologians did not emerge from the care taken by a divine being plotting the course

of its creation, but evolved from a gradual process of species modification over an enormous period of time by adaptations. He named this process Natural Selection. He argues:

"..., but if variations are useful to any organic being, ever do occur, assuredly individuals thus characterized will have the best chance of being preserved in the struggle for life, and for the strong principle of inheritance, this will tend to produce offspring similarly characterized. This principle, or the survival of the fittest, I have called Natural Selection." [16]

**b) Purpose Fallacy:** Darwin also challenged the idea that organisms are designed for a purpose. The teleological argument assumes that life forms serve some purpose. However, Darwin argued that only Natural Selection shapes organisms for survival rather than any divine purpose. Species adapt because of environmental pressure, not because they were planned to exist in certain conditions [17].

**c) Imperfection in Nature:** Another objection of Darwin to the design argument is the state of imperfect nature. He argued that if a divine designer was responsible, nature should exhibit flawless efficiency. He pointed out numerous flaws and imperfections in nature and biological organisms that are better explained by evolution through trial and error rather than intelligent design.

### ***3.9 Richard Dawkins***

Richard Dawkins is a British biologist and writer best known for his advocacy of atheism and scientific scepticism. He is one of the most prominent public figures and thinkers in the field of secularism and atheism. For Dawkins, the universe has no design or designer, no purpose, no evil or good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference. He argues that evolution, not intelligent design, explains the appearance of purpose in nature. He presents his famous blind watchmaker analogy against the teleological argument. He says:

"A true watchmaker has foresight, he designs his cogs and springs, and plans his interconnections with a future purpose in his mind's eye,... A purposeful form of our life has no purpose in mind. It has no mind and no mind's eye. It does not plan for the future. It has no vision, no foresight, and no sight at all. If it can be said to play the role of watchmaker, it is the blind watchmaker."  
"[18]



#### ***4. Muslim Responses to Atheist Objections***

Muslims, affirming the existence of Allah as the Creator, have developed responses to these objections rooted in Islamic theology and philosophy.

##### ***4.1 Addressing the Problem of Evil and Imperfections***

Muslims acknowledge that the world contains suffering and imperfections but interpret these as part of divine wisdom. The Qur'an states:

"And we will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient." [19]

Muslims believe that the apparent imperfections serve purposes beyond human comprehension, such as spiritual growth, testing, or divine wisdom. The presence of evil does not negate God's existence but demonstrates that His knowledge extends beyond human understanding [20]. The argument from imperfection does not disprove a perfect Creator but highlights the limits of human perception.

##### ***4.2 Response to Evolution and Natural Selection***

While Muslims accept the scientific evidence for evolution regarding biological diversity, many argue that natural selection operates within a framework established by Allah. The Qur'an emphasises that Allah is the ultimate cause:

"Indeed, Allah is the Creator of all things." [21]

Muslims often see divine guidance as underlying natural laws, including evolution, rather than opposed to scientific explanations. The concept of Tawhid (the oneness of God) implies that natural processes are part of His creative plan, not independent of it.

##### ***4.3 The Analogy and Infinite Regress***

Muslims reject the notion that the universe's complexity necessitates an infinite regress of designers. They argue that the concept of an untreated, necessary being—Allah—is the ultimate cause that does not require a cause itself [22]. This aligns with the philosophical view of the Kalam cosmological argument, which posits that a necessary being must exist to explain the universe's existence.

##### ***4.4 Fine-Tuning and the Creator's Sovereignty***

Muslims see the fine-tuning of the universe as evidence of divine wisdom and intentionality. The Qur'an states:

"It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days; then He established Himself above the Throne." [23]

Muslims interpret the fine-tuning as part of God's creative plan, emphasising His omnipotence and wisdom. While the anthropic principle offers a naturalistic explanation, Muslims argue that it does not negate divine agency but complements it.

#### ***4.5 The Weakness of Analogies and Evidence***

Muslims contend that the universe's complexity and order are more convincing evidence of divine creation than any human analogy. The Qur'an repeatedly invites reflection on natural signs:

"Do they not look into the realm of the heavens and the earth and all that Allah has created?" [24]

Muslims believe that the cumulative signs in creation point to a wise Creator, and the natural explanations do not fully account for the universe's origin and purpose.

### **5. Conclusion**

The atheistic objections to the Teleological Argument focus on natural explanations like evolution, the problem of evil, and the limitations of analogies. These critiques challenge the notion of a purposeful, benevolent designer behind the universe. Muslims respond by emphasising divine wisdom, the necessity of a necessary being (Allah), and the limitations of human understanding. They see the universe's order and complexity as signs (Ayat) pointing to Allah's existence, which are best understood within the framework of Islamic theology. While atheists argue that natural processes or brute facts suffice to explain the universe, Muslims maintain that divine agency is the ultimate cause. The dialogue continues, but for Muslims, faith in Allah remains rooted in both revelation and rational reflection on creation.

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