

God and His Attributes

Lesson 1: The Existence of God



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ENRICHING THE SOUL

Introduction

- In its modern usage, the word ایمان translated as “belief” or “faith” is defined as “the acceptance that something exists or is true without evidence.
- Richard Dawkins once said “Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence.”

Introduction

- From an Islamic perspective, belief or إيمان is the acceptance of something as truth based on knowledge/evidence.
- Knowledge is a prerequisite to belief
 - we must know what truth (=reality) is
 - only then can we accept it

Introduction

- The sophistication behind the Quranic concept of ایمان is further apparent from a wide range of verses addressing the manner of seeking knowledge, which together establish a robust set of epistemological criteria for distinguishing between truth, falsehood and justifiable belief.

Introduction

- The Quran repeatedly condemns any sort of blind belief and calls for attestation to the truth with certitude based on rigorous intellectual inquiry.
- The Quran warns against reliance on conjecture rather than sure knowledge:

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وَإِنْ تَطَعُوا أَكْثَرُ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يُضِلُّوكَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ

“Most people are such that if you follow them they will lead you away from the right path, because they rely on conjecture only.” Quran 6:116

Introduction

- It goes so far as to condemn following anything without knowledge of it:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ
كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

“Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the ear, the eye, the heart, each will be questioned.” Quran 17:36

Introduction

- The Quran also condemns favoring certain ideas due to one's own prejudice or desire:

إِن يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ

"They follow but conjecture and that which their souls desire." Quran 53:23

Introduction

- This leads us to the Quran pointing out the necessity of accepting only that which is based on sound evidence:

أَنْ لَا يَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ

“...that they would speak nothing concerning God except the truth?” Quran 7:169

Introduction

بَلْ كَذَّبُوا بِمَا لَمْ يُحِيطُوا بِعَلْمِهِ

"In fact they denied that of which they had no knowledge." Quran 10:39

- The general warning here is to avoid making hasty judgments without sound and conclusive evidence.

Introduction

- In connection with this, the Quran confirms the danger and unacceptability of blind conformity to the structures or ideas into which one has happened to be born into - a matter that many contemporary Muslims are sadly oblivious to:

Introduction

قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا أَوْلَوْا كَانُوا آبَاءَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئاً وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ

"We follow the traditions of our forefathers. What! Even though their forefathers did not use their intellect and had no guidance." Quran 2:170

- The irrational allegiance to established traditions, cultures and systems without sound evidence is seen here as a serious problem

Introduction

- This is also linked with the blind following of influential personalities and figures.

وَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا أَطَعْنَا سَادَتَنَا وَكُبَرَاءَنَا فَأَضَلُّونَا السَّبِيلَا

"Our Lord! We obeyed our leaders and great men who misled us from the Right Path." Quran 33:67

Introduction

- Here, the importance of sincere and relentless independent thought is stressed in the Quran's rejection of irrational conformity to famous or powerful personalities, without developing one's own inward knowledge and understanding.

Introduction

- Together, these Quranic verses establish five principles of authentic intellectual activity, as follows:
- 1) refraining from conjecture, assumption and reliance on anything of which one has no knowledge.
- 2) being conscious of one's own prejudices, preferences, or desires.
- 3) not forming hasty opinions - not believing anything without proof of it, and not denying anything without proof against it.
- 4) avoiding blind conformity to existing traditions, cultures or systems.
- 5) no blind following of influential, powerful or famous personalities.

Modes of Understanding

- How can we acquire knowledge of the world around us and beyond?
 - **Sensory experience:** namely the faculties of hearing and sight.
 - **Rational thought:** the intellect allows us to derive universal principles from particular experiences
 - **Revelation:** available to gifted individuals and enables them to understand realities beyond the empirical world and reason.

Modes of Understanding

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُم مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

“And God has brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and vision and intellect that perhaps you would be grateful.”

Quran 16:78

Modes of Understanding

- “Hearing and Vision” are references to knowledge gained through sensory experience.
- God has endowed us with five senses but most of our learning occurs through the faculties of hearing and vision

Modes of Understanding

- The word **وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ** literally means “hearts” but in this context refers to the intellect.
- Thus, this verse highlights two of the three modes of understanding:
 - Sensory experience
 - Rational thought

Modes of Understanding

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَاسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ
الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

“And We sent not before you except men to whom We revealed. So ask the people of the message if you do not know.” Quran 16:43

The Existence of God

- One of the most contentious areas of discussion in philosophy
- Interestingly, the starting point for all discussions on the Islamic belief system is the Oneness of God.
- The first of the roots of religion is monotheism
- Why not begin by first proving God's existence?

The Existence of God

- Only a few verses of the Quran address the topic of God's existence.

أَمْ خُلِقُوا مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ الْخَالِقُونَ

“Were they created of nothing, or were they themselves the creators?” Quran 52:35

The Existence of God

أَفِي اللَّهِ شَكٌّ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

“Is there a doubt about God, The Originator of the heavens and the earth?” Quran 14:10

وَلَئِن سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ

“And if you asked them, “Who created the heavens and the earth?” they would surely say, “ God.”

Quran 39:38

The Existence of God

- The Quran highlights two types of indicators of God's existence.

سَنُرِيهِمْ آيَاتِنَا فِي الْأَفَاقِ وَفِي أَنفُسِهِمْ

“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves.” Quran 41:53

The Existence of God

- There are two indicators of God's existence according to this verse:
 - 1. Internal Indicator
 - 2. External Indicators

The Existence of God

- Innate recognition of God (Fitrah)

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ
عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ

“So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth. [Adhere to] the fitrah of God upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of God.” Quran

30:30

The Existence of God

- Underlying this “innate inclination to God” is an innate consciousness of God; i.e., every person, in his natural state knows God.
- Humans are endowed with presential knowledge of His existence.
- We feel/experience God even before conceptualizing Him as when we turn to him in our hour of need.

The Existence of God

أَنَّهُ سَأَلَ مَوْلَانَا الصَّادِقُ عَنِ اللَّهِ ؟
فَقَالَ لِلسَّائِلِ : " يَا عَبْدَ اللَّهِ ، هَلْ رَكِبْتَ سَفِينَةً قَطُّ " ؟

قَالَ : بَلَى .

قَالَ : " فَهَلْ كُسِرَ بِكَ حَيْثُ لَا سَفِينَةٌ تُنَجِّيكَ ، وَلَا سَبَاحَةٌ تُغْنِيكَ " ؟

قَالَ : بَلَى .

قَالَ : " فَهَلْ تَعَلَّقَ قَلْبُكَ هُنَاكَ أَنَّ شَيْئًا مِنَ الْأَشْيَاءِ قَادِرٌ عَلَى أَنْ يُخَلِّصَكَ مِنْ
وَرَطَّتِكَ " ؟

قَالَ : بَلَى .

قَالَ الصَّادِقُ : " فَذَلِكَ الشَّيْءُ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْقَادِرُ عَلَى الْإِنجَاءِ حِينَ لَا مُنْجِيَ ، وَ
عَلَى الْإِغَاثَةِ حِينَ لَا مَغِيثَ

The Existence of God

- *“A man told Imam al-Ṣādiq, ‘O Son of God’s Messenger! Guide me to God, for there are many who debate with me, and they have confused me.’ He replied, ‘Have you ever ridden in a ship?’ The man said, ‘Yes.’ He continued, ‘Did your ship ever wreck such that no lifeboat could save you and even your ability to swim failed you?’ He said ‘Yes.’ The Imam continued, ‘At that point, did your heart reach out and know that there was a thing that could save you from your ordeal?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ Imam al-Ṣādiq said, ‘That “thing” was God who is able to save you when nothing else can save you.’”*

The Existence of God

- **If God's existence is so obvious, why do some seem not to know Him innately?**

The Existence of God

- 1. Because His existence is constantly evident
 - We perceive the sun because it shines and disappears; if it only shone, we would easily overlook its existence
 - God is the Light of the Heavens and Earth through which all things exist; because the light of His existence never fades, we easily overlook it and take it for granted

The Existence of God

- 2. Because we learn to be skeptical. Doubt is a good place to start but not a good place to dwell. Skepticism must be followed with investigation, research and reflection.

The Existence of God

- What is the purpose of this innate knowledge?
 - it provides us with an initial impetus to seek and know God
 - it provides us with an initial gut feeling that God exists

The Existence of God

- Note:
 - Our innate recognition of God (Fitrah) is not meant to be used as an argument to prove to oneself or to others that God exists
 - for this we must engage our intellect through logical argumentation

The Existence of God

- Rational Arguments for the existence of God
- There are many so we will only focus on two.
 - 1. Cosmological argument**
 - 2. Teleological argument**

The Cosmological Argument

- **First Premise:** Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- **Second Premise:** The universe began to exist.
- **Conclusion:** Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The Cosmological Argument

- Is the first premise true?
- If something can come into being from nothing, then why don't we see this happening all the time?
- Everyday experience and scientific evidence confirm our first premise.
- **If something begins to exist, it must have a cause.**

The Cosmological Argument

- Is the second premise true? Did the universe begin or has it always existed?
- For centuries, Atheists have asserted that the universe has always existed.
- “The universe is just there and that’s all.” – Bertrand Russell

The Cosmological Argument

- In 1929, Edwin Hubble measured the red shift in light from distant galaxies which not only confirmed that the universe is expanding but that it also sprang into being from a single point in the finite past. Put simply, the universe had a beginning.

The Cosmological Argument

- Scientists *“can no longer hide behind a past-eternal universe. There is no escape. They have to face the problem of a cosmic beginning.”* - Alexander Vilenkin (Professor of Physics and Director of the Institute of Cosmology at Tufts University)

The Cosmological Argument

- Since the first two premises are true, the conclusion must be true.
- Since the universe cannot cause itself, its cause must be beyond the space-time universe.
- It's cause must transcend space and time, be immaterial, uncaused and unimaginably powerful.

The Cosmological Argument

- Referenced in some hadith. When a Bedouin Arab was asked how we can know God existed. He replied:

البَعْرَةُ تَدُلُّ عَلَى الْبَعِيرِ، وَالْأَثَرُ يَدُلُّ عَلَى الْمَسِيرِ، فَسَمَاءُ ذَاتُ أَبْرَاجٍ، وَأَرْضُ ذَاتُ
فِجَاجٍ، أَفَلَا تَدُلُّ عَلَى الْعَلِيِّ الْخَبِيرِ

- “Camel droppings point to the camel. Footprints point to a walker. Do the heavens with its constellations and the earth with its paths not point to the Most High, the Well Acquainted?”

The Teleological Argument

- Argument for the existence of an intelligent, purposeful creator
- Also known as the “Argument from Design”

The Teleological Argument

First Premise: purposeful/functional order can only exist if it is caused by an “ordering force” who has the intelligence to create the order for the intended purpose

Second Premise: purposeful/functional order exists throughout the cosmos

Conclusion: the purposeful/functional order of the cosmos, and hence the cosmos itself, must have an “ordering force” who has the intelligence to create the order for the intended purpose

The Teleological Argument

- Is the first premise true?
- Everyday experience confirms that every design has a designer, and order requires an organizer.
- Is it possible for a tornado to rip through a junk yard and assemble a car?
- A car with all of its complexity and functionality indicates the existence of skillful engineer

The Teleological Argument

- Is the second premise true?
- *“This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets could only proceed from the council and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.”* – Isaac Newton

The Teleological Argument

- A protein in the smallest living cell has about 400 known amino acid links.
- Each amino acid link must be in the right order for the protein to function. Its like the alphabet. To make words the letters must be in a particular order.

The Teleological Argument

- What is the probability that 400 amino acid links arrange themselves in the right order?

The Teleological Argument

- the teleological argument tells us a little about the attributes of this Designer:
 - He is intelligent
 - He is purposeful
 - He is powerful
 - He is sensitive to the needs of his creatures

The Problem of Evil

- Of the most common arguments against the existence of God is the Problem of Evil Argument.
- The argument was first introduced by the Greek philosopher, Epicurus nearly 2300 years ago.

The Problem of Evil

- 1. If God exists, then God is All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and morally perfect.
- 2. If God is All-Powerful, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
- 3. If God is All-Knowing, then God knows when evil exists.
- 4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil

The Problem of Evil

- 5. Evil exists
- 6. If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
- 7. Therefore, God doesn't exist

The Problem of Evil

- There are two types of evil:
 - **Moral Evil:** evil actions deliberately carried out by people that brings suffering to others e.g. murder, rape, theft, war
 - **Natural Evil:** suffering caused by natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, etc

The Problem of Evil

- We must understand the purpose of Man's creation and the nature of this earthly life.
- **1. Man's Purpose:** to experience unlimited happiness and pleasure.
- This can only be achieved through عبودية or servitude to God.

The Problem of Evil

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ

“I did not create the jinn and the humans except that they may worship Me.” Quran 51:56

-The Quran mentions the vehicle that allows us to achieve the goal of our creation.

-This unlimited joy can only be experienced when the soul achieves purity

The Problem of Evil

- **2. The Nature of Life:** God never promised that this life would be free of suffering and hardship.

• لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ

- “Certainly We created Man to endure hardship.” Quran 90:4

The Problem of Evil

قُلْ
وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ وَالثَّمَرَاتِ
وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ

“We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good news to the patient.”

Quran 2:155

The Problem of Evil

- The purpose of this life is to facilitate our spiritual growth and enable us to acquire noble traits.
- This would not be possible without hardship, trials and tribulations.
- In fact, a test/trial without suffering and hardship would be too difficult and would lead to the destruction of our souls

The Problem of Evil

لولا ثلاث ما طأطأ ابن آدم رأسه : الفقر والمرض والموت ، وإنه مع ذلك
لو تاب

“If it were not for three things, the son of Adam would never lower his head [in humility]: poverty, sickness and death...” - The Holy Prophet

The Problem of Evil

- Furthermore, the Quran asserts that much of the evil and suffering that exists is actually self-inflicted. In other words, human beings bring about misfortune upon themselves.

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ

“Whatever affliction that may visit you is because of what your hands have earned.”

Quran 42:30

The Problem of Evil

- Saint Augustine's response to the Problem of Evil:
 - 1. Evil is the result of human error
 - 2. Human error results from free will, since it is impossible to grant free will and prevent someone from choosing evil
 - 3. Without free will humans would be robotic
 - 4. God prefers a world of free agents to a world of robotic beings

The Problem of Evil

- 5. Evil is therefore an unfortunate outcome of free will
- 6. God's foreknowledge of our deeds does not deny our freedom. If God intervened it would negate our free will
- 7. Therefore, God is neither responsible for evil and not guilty of neglect for not intervening.

The Problem of Evil

- A lifetime of suffering is a brief moment when compared to eternal life.
- Ex. When a doctor gives a child a shot, they typically say, “This will only hurt for a second.”
- Dunya will only hurt for a second. We were all created to endure hardship because through it the soul develops.

Evolution and Creationism

- The theory of evolution by natural selection, first formulated in Darwin's book "On the Origin of Species" in 1859, is the process by which organisms change over time as a result of changes in heritable physical or behavioral traits. Changes that allow an organism to better adapt to its environment will help it survive and have more offspring.

Evolution and Creationism

- This theory is often proposed as an alternative to a belief in God.
- Evolution does not address the origin of life; this is the realm of biochemistry

Evolution and Creationism

- Christian Creationist viewpoint
 - Evolution is a baseless idea that contradicts the word of the Bible

Evolution and Creationism

- Quranic viewpoint:
 - The Quran has no issue with the theory of evolution helping us explain the origin of life
 - The Quran has no issue with the theory of evolution offering an explain for the process of adaptation, diversification, and speciation
 -

Evolution and Creationism

- The one aspect of the theory that is problematic is its explanation for the origin of humankind.

إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَىٰ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ

“Jesus in God’s eyes is like Adam: he created him from dust and then said to him, “Be,” and he was.” Quran 3:59

- This verse conclusively rejects that Adam was born to parents

Evolution and Creationism

أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ

“...Will You place on [earth] one who will spread corruption and shed blood?” Quran 2:30

- If Adam was the first human being, why do the angels assume him and his progeny will spread corruption and shed blood?