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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Existence of God in Greek Philosophy and Muslim Theology

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ABSTRACT

The thoughts about the existence of God, the First Mover or the Unmoved Mover are found among Greek schools of philosophy and among Muslim theologians. These Greek philosophers and Muslim theologians made efforts to prove the existence of God through the rational arguments and one of these arguments is known as the cosmological argument based on their thoughts about the cosmos or the universe. This article is about the cosmological argument for the existence of God found in Greek philosophy and Muslim theology. Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle and Muslim theologians like al-Ash`ari and al-Maturidi have presented their thoughts in their respective works about the cosmological argument to rationally prove the existence of God. These Greek philosophers and Muslim theologians reflect on the universe to prove that its existence proves the existence of its creator who is different from the created universe.

Key words: cosmological argument, God's existence, Greek philosophy, Muslim theology

Introduction

The cosmological argument is one of the three philosophical arguments used by philosophers and theologians to rationally prove or demonstrate God's existence. The other two arguments are teleological and ontological. Regarding these three rational arguments used to demonstrate the existence of God, Reese states that the cosmological argument is "one of the three standard arguments for God, along with the teleological and ontological arguments. The cosmological argument argues that the cosmos is not self-explanatory, and requires an unconditioned being, God, as its explanation. Typically, the argument proceeds from the condition of motion, causality, or the contingency of the world to the conclusion that an unmover mover, first cause, and necessary being must exist."(Reese 1980: 108).

The boundary drawn between the cosmological and teleological arguments is "a somewhat arbitrary and hazy" according to W. L. Craig. Both arguments seek "a cause of the world's being a cosmos" but the ontological argument emphasizes "on order, design, and the adaptation of means to ends. The cosmological argument, then, does not necessarily have to conclude to a cause of the universe's existence, for its ancient forms were dualistic and sought merely to account for cosmic motion."(Craig 1986: xi).

Regarding the interest paid by philosophers of religion to these two philosophical arguments for the existence of God, the philosophers of religion have been preoccupied with the ontological argument more than the cosmological argument for the past three decades but lately they have changed their interest to the cosmological argument. Craig expresses this change stating, "For the past thirty years or so, philosophers of religion interested in argumentative theism have been preoccupied with the ontological argument, but interest in that proof now appears to be waning, and if one can judge by the frequency of articles on the subject in philosophical journals."(Craig 1986: ix-x).

Craig poses a question related to the constituents of a cosmological argument saying, "What exactly constitutes a cosmological argument?" He then responds to his question stating, "Probably the best definition is that the cosmological argument is an *a posteriori* argument for a cause or reason for the cosmos." (Craig 1986: x). For Ronald W. Hepburn, "`The Cosmological Argument' is the name given to a group of interrelated arguments that claim to prove the existence of God from premises asserting some highly general fact about the world such as that it exists contingently. It does not attempt (as the Ontological Argument does) to derive the existence of God from an analysis of his essential nature alone, nor does it argues from particular manifestations of orderliness or apparent design in the world's structure to a divine designer."(Hepburn 1972, 2: 232).

The cosmological argument is also called the causal argument. "This argument, like the argument from design, begins from the facts of our experience, from what we observe. We see things move, change, and so on. In order for these events to occur, there must be a cause either in the sense of a prior event, or a reason for the

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occurrence of the event. As we trace back from effects to their causes, we can either continue indefinitely, or there is some ultimate cause that requires no further causal explanation. This ultimate cause is what is meant by God."(Popkin & Stroll 1969: 152). According to Popkin and Stroll, "This argument, often called the cosmological argument for the existence of God, has been employed for a long time by philosophers and theologians…. Although this argument has been subjected to severe criticism it is still accepted as valid and decisive by many philosophers of religion."(Popkin & Stroll 1969: 152-153).

It seems that W. L. Craig has held a very positive view on the cosmological argument after his first encounter with the subject found in the work of Frederick Copleston named *A History of Philosophy* during his student days. Since then he has comprehensively studied the cosmological argument for the existence of God and for him, "The cosmological argument has a long and venerable history, possessing resilience under criticism that is truly remarkable. Its intersectarian appeal is broad, and it has been propounded by Greek pagans, Muslims, Jews, Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, and even pantheists. Among the catalogue of its supporters are the greatest minds of the Western world: Plato, Aristotle, ibn Sina, al-Ghazali, ibn Rushd, Maimonides, Anselm, Bonaventure, Aquinas, Scotus, Suarez, Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley, Locke and Leibniz. The durability of the argument and the stature of its defenders is eloquent testimony to the fact that to man this world is somehow just not sufficient of itself, but points to a greater reality beyond itself."(Craig 1986: ix and xi).

This short article briefly presents the cosmological argument in Greek philosophy and in Muslim Kalam to see if both have similarities and differences. The Greek philosophy is represented here by two Greek philosophers namely Plato and Aristotle since they are among the defenders of the cosmological argument according to William Lane Craig. The Muslim Kalam is represented here by two Muslim Mutakallims namely Abu Hasan al-Ash`ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi since they are considered as the founders of the Sunnite Kalam schools known as Ash`arism and Maturidism respectively. The noun Mutakallim in Arabic is used here as a singular noun and it is made a plural noun by adding s to its singular noun, Mutakallims, instead of the usual Arabic plural noun Mutakallimin for the accusative case or Mutakallimun for subject or active case.

The Cosmological Argument in Greek Philosophy:

Plato (428-348 B.C.) is chosen because he is said to be among the Greek philosophers who have thought about the existence of God, and the natural or rational theology is said to be originated from him. John Hick attributes the origin of the natural or rational theology to Plato stating, "Along with several other of the most important strands of Western thought, `natural' or `rational' theology has its origin in the dialogues of Plato (426/7-348/7 B.C.)"(Hick 1967: 71).

Plato is said to ascribe to God "the changelessness" and he argues that "God is perfect being, and hence incapable of change, since change in what is already perfect could only introduce imperfection. As perfect being God is cause of the good, and of the good only."(Reese 1980: 441). Plato's cosmological argument is used to prove the existence of the unchangeable God. In other words, God in Plato's philosophy is the unmoved mover since if God moves He is imperfect. His cosmological argument is to prove the existence of the unmoved mover that becomes the first cause for all causes and the first mover for all movements.

Plato's work on the cosmological argument for the existence of God is called *The Law*s (Book X). For John Hick, *The Law*s (Book X) is "a dialogue of the last and most mature period of Plato's thought. He directs attention to the fact of motion, … he lists eight different kinds of motion or change--- movement round an axis, movement from place to place, movement which is both from place to place and round an axis, retardation, acceleration, growth, decay, and destruction."(Hick 1967: 71). Two other motions are added by Plato the eight kinds of motion or change. The two are the motion with the capacity or power to move other objects "when it is itself moved by something else", and the motion with the power to move "itself as well as to move other objects." Plato argues that "the power to produce movement is logically prior to the power to receive it and pass it on. In order for there to be causes undergoing and transmitting change there must first be an uncaused cause to originate the movement. And the only kind of reality with the power of spontaneous movement is soul. Therefore the ultimate cause of a universe in motion must be a living soul, and one of a higher order than the human soul."(Hick 1967: 72). The living soul that ultimately causes a whole universe in motion is deemed a god or the first or supreme cause.

Plato's motions are expressed in the dialogues between Cleinias and Athenian Stranger regarding the motions and their natures are taken from observable motions such as the motions of the sun, the moon, stars, years, months, and seasons. For example, Athenian Stranger said: "Everyone sees the body of the sun, but no one sees his soul, nor the soul of any other body living or dead; and yet there is there is great reason to believe that this nature, unperceived by any of our senses, is circumfused around them all, but is perceived only by mind; and therefore by mind and reflection only let us apprehend the following point." Cleinias said: "What is that?"…… Athenian Stranger said: "And this soul of the sun, which is therefore better than the sun, whether

riding in the sun as in a chariot to give light to men, or acting from without, or in whatever way, ought by every man to be deemed a god. Cleinias. Yes, by every man who has the least particle of sense."(Hick 1967: 78-79).

R.W. Hepburn summarizes Plato's cosmological argument as follows: "In *The Laws* (Book X) Plato asks how one can account for the existence of motion in this world. Two kinds of motion are distinguished, motion that is imparted to an entity from other entities, and self-originated motion. To Plato, it is only living beings, beings with souls, that can originate movement. Imparted motion must ultimately depend upon self-originated motion; hence, Plato argues all motion in the world is ultimately due to the activity of soul."(Hepburn 1972, 2:232).

Plato "has rightly been called the creator of philosophical theism" since he has introduced "natural theology into the subject matter of Western philosophy". According to Craig, Plato's cosmological argument is very brief in comparison with his teleological argument for the existence of God. "Plato's theism" is primarily formed by "the presence of teleology in the universe", not by cosmology. "But Plato does have a proof for God or gods from motion, and Cicero was correct in pointing to Plato and Aristotle as the originators of the classical prime mover argument."(Craig 1986: 1).

Plato's cosmological arguments are outlined by Craig in the following eight points:

"1. Some things are in motion."

"2. There are two kinds of motion: communicated motion and self motion."

"3. Communicated motion implies self-motion because: a. Things in motion imply a self-mover as their source of motion *i.* because otherwise there would be no starting point for the motion *a.* because things moved by another imply a prior mover. b. If all things were at rest, only self-motion could arise directly from such a state *i.* because a thing moved by another implies the presence of another moving thing. *ii.* But this contradicts the hypothesis. "

"4. Therefore, the source of all motion is self-motion, or soul."

"5. Soul is the source of astronomical motion because: a. The heavens are in motion. b. Soul is the source of all motion."

"6. There is a plurality of souls because: a. There must be at least one to cause good motions. b. There must be at least one to cause bad motions."

"7. The soul tat moves the universe is the best soul because: a. The motions of the heavens are good, being regular and orderly like those of the mind."

"8. There are many souls, or gods, because: a. Each heavenly body is a source of self-motion."(Craig 1986: 4).

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) is a Greek philosopher and he entered Plato's Academy in Athens about 367 B.C. After Plato's death in 347 B.C., Aristotle left the Academy and "joined a circle of Platonists living at Assos in the Troad under the protection of the tyrant Hermias of Atarneus…. After three years in Assos, Aristotle moved in 345 B.C. to Mytilene on the island of Lesbos…. Then in 342 B.C. he accepted an invitation to supervise the education of the thirteen-year-old son of Philip II of Macedon, the future Alexander the Great, at the Macedonian court at Pella." After three years at Pella, Aristotle went to live at Stagira for five years and then he returned to Athens and opened a new school called the Lyceum. In 323 B.C. he left the Lyceum and took refuge in Chalcis on the island of Euboea. He died in Chalcis in 322 B.C at the age of 62 years old. (Kerferd 1972, 1: 151-152).

According to Reese, Aristotle "believes that God's existence can be proven. The proof begins from his analysis of time. Time can have no beginning because every `now' implies a `before'; and since time is the numbering of motion with respect to before and after, motion must also eternal; hence reality has always been and there was no creation. Now if there has always been change there must also be an eternal cause of change." He thinks of "an unmoved or prime mover" to be the eternal cause of change "imparting motion without itself being moved, and this leads directly to Aristotle's conception of a supreme being as absolutely perfect who moves the world by being loved.".(Reese 1980: 31).

Aristotle identifies theology as one of the three theoretical branches of philosophy. He classifies philosophy into theoretical and applied or practical sciences. Theology is one of the theoretical branches of philosophy. The supreme science is theology since it examines the supreme beings. In his work named *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that "there are three theoretical branches of philosophy; the mathematical, the natural, and the theological. For it is clear that, if the divine belongs anywhere, it belongs inherently to such a nature, the supreme philosophy being the theory of supreme kind of being. The theoretical sciences, then, are preferable to others; and theology, to the other theoretical sciences."(Aristotle 1963: 125). In other words, theology is the most preferred science in comparison with mathematics and physics or natural science in Aristotle's classification of rational and reasonable theoretical sciences. For Aristotle, "Any science, in so far as it is rational and reasonable, is concerned with principles and explanations more or less fundamental and explicit; thus health or any state of well-being has its grounds or causes, and mathematics has its principles, elements, roots, and branches."(Aristotle 1963: 123).

Regarding the first science and its subject-matters, Aristotle writes, "The first science, however, is a theory of entities both independent and immovable. Though all ultimate factors are necessarily eternal, these objects of

first science are especially so, since they explain those divine beings which are accessible to us…."(Aristotle 1963: 124-125).

Aristotle's cosmological argument for God's existence goes far beyond Plato's cosmological argument. "For while Plato first employed the logic of the cosmological argument, it was Aristotle who developed it and argued that even Plato's self-mover must have a cause in an utterly unmoved mover which Aristotle called God."(Craig 1986: 20).

Aristotle's cosmological arguments for the existence of God are outlined by Craig in the following six points:

"1. Everything that is in motion is being moved by something."
"2. This something is itself either in motion or not in motion."
"3. If it is in motion, then it is either self-moved or moved by another."
"4. The members of a series of things each being moved by another must ultimately be in motion only by reference to a self-moved thing."
"5.The members of the whole series of self-movers and things moved by another must be in motion only reference to an unmoved mover."
"6. This first mover must be utterly unmoved and eternal because: a. motion itself is continuous and eternal."(Craig 1986: 23-24).

The Cosmological Argument in Muslim Theology:

Abu Hasan `Ali bin Isma`il al-Ash`ari was born in Basra and died in Baghdad. He was born in 260 or 270 A.H and 873 or 883 A.C. and died in 330/941.(Hye 1963, 1: 222). He has been considered as the founder of Ash`arism. "Ash`arism is the name of a philosophico-religious school of thought in Islam that developed during the fourth and fifth/tenth and eleventh centuries…. It laid the foundation of an orthodox Islamic theology or orthodox *Kalam*, as opposed to the rationalist *Kalam* of the Mu`tazilites; and in opposition to the extreme orthodox class, it made use of the dialectical method for the defence of the authority of divine revelation as applied to theological subjects."(Hye 1963, 1; 220).

It is very reasonable and plausible to stress here that al-Ash`ari's deep interest in the cosmological argument for the existence of God explains why he totally disagrees with some Muslims who do not see any relation or any significance between Muslim theological doctrines and the discussions of the cosmological elements or phenomena such as motion, rest, body, accident, color, space, atom and the leaping of atoms. For al-Ash`ari, the cosmological elements, phenomena or signs are useful and helpful in proving the existence of God and other Muslim theological doctrines.

In his work al-Ash`ari devotes the first chapter for proving the existence of God and His attributes. Among His attributes are the creator and the administrator who creates the creatures and who administers all of them respectively. He writes in Arabic for the first chapter Chapter for the discourse on the existence of the creator or maker and His attributes). It is clear that al-Ash`ari does not use the Arabic proper noun Allah although all Muslims are required to believe in the existence of Allah and His attributes. Why did al-Ash`ari prefer the Arabic noun *sani`* instead of *allah* for the title of this first chapter? Lexically the Arabic noun *sani`* is given four English nouns namely "maker, manufacturer, producer, creator, author".(Baalbaki 1996: 686). The Arabic noun *allah* is given four English nouns namely "God (the One and Only); Allah, the Lord, Deity".(Baalbaki 1996: 162). By looking at the English nouns for the Arabic nouns *sani`* and *allah* respectively, we are able to see clearly that the Arabic noun *sani`* is a common noun in English grammar and it has four different meanings in English. Meanwhile the Arabic noun *allah* is a proper noun in English grammar since it is made to refer to God, Allah, the Lord or Deity and each of them is a proper noun written with the capital letter. It is plausible and reasonable to assume that Al-Ash`ari prefers the Arabic noun *sani`* because he probably wants all human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims, to see or reflect on the cosmological phenomena, signs or elements leading to the establishment of a maker, a manufacturer, a producer, a creator or an author of the cosmos or the creatures. His first chapter is not just for Muslims who have believed in the existence of Allah and His attributes.

In the first chapter of his work, al-Ash`ari wants human beings to see and reflect on three cosmological phenomena namely human phenomena, cotton phenomena and construction phenomena. Al-Ash`ari exhorts all human beings to see and reflect on the processes and changes taking place in all human beings from their first stage creation to the final and last creation to understand clearly that all the processes and changes taking place in all human beings are not of their own making, producing, authoring or manufacturing. For example, an old man cannot make himself a young man even if he wishes and desires since he has no power to change his old body to a young body. A young man cannot escape from being an old man since he not a creator, a producer, a manufacturer or an author of his own body.

Al-Ash`ari starts his first chapter with an assumption that if someone asks about the proof, *al-dalil*, that the creature has its maker who makes it and the creature has its administrator who administers it, say that the proof for that is *al-insan* (human being, human, man, person). A person who has attained the state of most powerful

and perfect state was a sperm then a clot of congealed blood, then an embryo, then a flesh or meat and bone and blood. Indeed we know that that person does not moves or changes himself from a state to another state because we see him at his most perfect body and mind state cannot make for himself hearing and seeing as well as he cannot make for himself a limb or a bodily organ. That indicates that while that person at his most perfect body and mind state cannot do any change to the processes or stages of his creation, he indeed cannot do any change to the processes or stages of his creation while he is at the weak and imperfect state. We see that person when he was an infant, then a young man or a youth, then a middle-aged man then an old man. Truly we know that he does not change himself from the youth state to the old and weak state because that person if he makes efforts to make the old and weak state disappear from himself and push himself back to the youth state, he is unable to do such that. This proves that that person does not change himself by himself into these various states or processes. For him there is a changer who changes him from one state to another and administers him following the states or processes happening on him. It is impossible for that man to change himself from one state to another without a changer and an administrator.(al-Ash`ari 1952: 6).

Al-Ash`ari goes on to the second cosmological element namely the cotton. He states that indeed it is impossible for the cotton to change by itself to spinning thread then to weaving or knitting garment or cloth without a weaver or a knitter and without a maker and without an administrator. Anyone who takes the cotton and then he waits for that cotton to change by itself to become a spinning thread then a waving garment without a maker nor a weaver or knitter, indeed he goes into folly or insanity and takes refuge in ignorance.(al-Ash`ari 1952: 6)

Al-Ash`ari's third cosmological element is a castle. He states that anyone who goes out to a desert or a wilderness where a constructed castle does not exist, then he waits there to see that the mud there changes into bricks and the bricks file up on each other without a maker nor a builder, he is indeed an ignorant. (al-Ash`ari 1952: 6).

In his small treatise, al-Ash`ari refutes some Muslims who think that there is no need to use or utilize the cosmological elements to prove God's existence. Al-Ash`ari stresses that the cosmological elements namely the motion and rest, *al-harakah wa-al-sukun*, both prove God's monotheism, *al-tawhid*, so do the cosmological elements namely the aggregation and segregation, *al-ijtima` wa al-iftiraq*. The aggregation and segregation both prove God's monotheism. In the Koran, there is a story of the Prophet Ibrahim and the movements of the stars, the sun, the moon from location to location indicating that God is impossible to be like any of those cosmological elements. Someone or something that is possible of disappearance and of motion from location to location is not God.(al-Ash`ari 1344: 89).

Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Mahmud al-Maturidi al-Samarqandi died in 333 A.H. or 944 A.C. His birth date is not known but Dr. Ayyub `Ali suggests that al-Maturidi was born in 234 A.H. or 862 A.C. al-Maturidi's death date is agreed by historians and he was buried in Samarqand. If the suggested birth date is considered, al-Maturidi lived nearly a hundred years old.(Khalif 1970: [mim 2 and mim 3).

Al-Maturidi "was born at Maturid, a village or quarter in the neighbourhood of Samarqand, one of the great cities of Central Asia."(Ali 1963, !: 259). Al-Maturidi was able to flourish "under the powerful rule of the Samanids, who ruled practically the whole of Persia from 261/874 to 389/999 actively patronized science and literature, and gathered around their Court a number of renowned scholars."(Ali 1963, 1: 260).

In his work, al-Maturidi provides us with the chapter entitled in Arabic, *al-dalil `ala anna lil-`alam muhditha* (Proof on the creator for the universe or cosmos). To demonstrate that there is a creator for this cosmos or universe, al-Maturidi provides us with cosmological elements or phenomena. First, al-Maturidi states that the proof on the creator for the universe or cosmos is affirmed or established by the creation of the cosmos since we cannot find something visible to our senses that aggregates and segregates by itself. It is affirmed that that something aggregates and segregates by outsider, not by itself. Second, al-Maturidi writes that if the cosmos exists by itself, there would be no time more rightful than another time, no state is more priority than another state, and nor attribute is more deserving than another attribute. When there are times, states and attributes are different it is affirmed that the cosmos does not exist by itself and it does not make different times, states and attributes. If the cosmos exists by itself, it would make for itself all good states and attributes, and there would be no evils and ugliness. Their existence indicates that the cosmos does not exist by itself. Third, al-Maturidi stresses that the cosmos has two types: the living and the death. Every living being is ignorant about its creation, weak from creating something similar to it, and weak from repairing what has been damaged from him even when it is at its powerful and perfect state. Hence it is established that a living being does not create itself but it has been created by other. The death being is deserved to be death. Fourth, al-Maturidi points out that the cosmos is unavoidable for its every substance from accidents imposed upon every substance. A substance needs accidents and the accidents need the substance. Both need each other. Fifth, al-Maturidi explains that every substance has the opposite natures and attributes which do not come together by themselves. It is affirmed the existence of the combiner who combine the opposite natures into a substance. Sixth, al-Maturidi explicates that every substance needs other substances for its food and sustenance while the substance itself does not know how to get all its needs and how to maintain itself. Therefore, there is the wise and knowledgeable being that has

created every substance and its sustenance and maintenance. Seventh, al-Maturidi expresses that if the cosmos exists by itself it would remain forever but it does not. Hence the cosmos does not exist by itself. It exists because the other who makes it exist.(al-Maturidi 1970: 17-18).

Conclusions:

No doubt that the cosmological argument for the existence of God is found in Greek philosophy as presented by the two Greek philosophers namely Plato and Aristotle. The cosmological arguments are also found in Muslim Kalam as presented by the two great founders of the Kalam schools in Sunnism namely al-Ash`ari and al-Maturidi. The cosmological arguments in Greek philosophy are more abstract and sophisticated and they are different from the cosmological arguments in Muslim Kalam in many respects. Plato's cosmological arguments do lead to the affirmation or establishment of a single god but many gods. Aristotle's cosmological arguments lead to the affirmation of a single or one god but that god is without power to create the cosmos in total and every component of the cosmos. Aristotle's perception of God is emanationistic. Al-Ash`ari's cosmological arguments prove the existence of the maker who creates and administers the cosmos. Al-Maturidi's cosmological arguments are more numerous than al-Ash`ari's cosmological arguments. The cosmological arguments presented by al-Maturidi also prove the existence of the powerful, wise and knowledgeable creator of the cosmos. Al-Ash`ari prefers the Arabic noun *sani`* while al-Maturidi prefers the Arabic noun *muhdith* in their efforts to explain the existence of God who creates and administer the cosmos.

The Greek philosophers and Muslim Mutakallims referred in this article are all argue for the existence of the last and final cause for every existent in the cosmos, and the cosmos itself does not exist by itself but it exits because of other existent that is beyond or other than the cosmos. The relationship between the cosmos and its maker or creator is well established by the two Muslim Mutakallims referred here. Al-Ash`ari and al-Maturidi clearly and evidently advocate the creationistic perception in term of the relationship between God and the cosmos. Meanwhile, Aristotle advocates the emanationistic perception.

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