

**NATURAL THEOLOGY AND MODERN SCIENCE: AN EXPOSITION
ON EMERGING SCIENTIFIC PROOFS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE IN
CHRISTIANITY**

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Abstract

The existence of God has been a subject of much debate in the history of Philosophy and for the problem to still be generating papers in the contemporary circle reveals that the problem is far from being solved. This paper examines Natural Theology which is the attempt to provide rational proofs for God's existence without the standpoint of any religion. Science, on the other hand has played significant roles in the history of religion, while developments in the sciences have contradicted biblical claims. This paper discusses the meeting point in religion and science, with a view to discussing the new proofs emerging from the domains of science for the existence of God. This is done by discussing natural theology and its journey so far, which includes the various arguments philosophers have employed to prove God's existence. This paper also discusses the nature of the unique relationship between science and theology. The strengths and weaknesses of these arguments are analyzed and conclusion drawn from them. This paper employs Ian Barbour's Critical Realism Theory which is the correspondence of truth with reality and the key criterion is agreement of theory with data to assess the emerging scientific proofs of God's existence. This is done with a view to drawing the conclusion that God's existence is a reality.

Keywords: *Natural Theology, Science and Theology, Scientific Proofs, God's Existence, Christianity*

Introduction

God's existence has been a subject of debate over the centuries and history reveals the role science has played in questioning God's existence, a belief previously taken for granted in religious circles. Science poses a major threat to religion as a result of human inquisitiveness and natural thirst for knowledge. Discoveries in science contradicted a number of claims in the Bible, such as Galileo's claim that the earth was moving which contradicted the biblical claim that the earth sits motionless in the centre of the heavens. Also, we find the three storey universe of the biblical cosmology with heaven in the sky above our heads, hell in the ground beneath our feet and the sun circling the earth but halting in its course at Joshua's command, no longer credible in the light of

modern scientific knowledge.¹ These positions of science which contradict biblical claims have made it necessary to question other religious beliefs especially the existence of God, making it important to provide rational explanations for the existence of God which is the thrust of natural theology. Natural theology, though not totally successful in convincing the atheists, skeptics and agnostics that God exists because of its conclusions which are sometimes an appeal to faith, has developed valid arguments to prove God's existence, known as theistic arguments.

However, it has made an interesting detour in contemporary circles because of recent scientific discoveries and its positive implications for theology. History reveals that science has been a major basis for atheology, but it is now used as a premise for God's existence. This paper will be examining this interesting turn of events in natural theology which centres on emerging scientific proofs of God's existence. A discourse of this nature cannot be done in isolation, therefore, the meaning of natural theology and its journey thus far in the theistic hypothesis will be discussed. Also, modern science and its relationship with theology will be examined, thereby, forming a foundation for the discussion on emerging scientific proofs for God's existence. Since this is a philosophical discourse, the strengths and weaknesses of the scientific proofs of God's existence will also be examined, with a view to drawing a conclusion for the paper.

Natural Theology and Its Journey in the Theistic Hypothesis

Natural theology is a branch of theology and philosophy that examines the existence and attributes of God or gods (in a polytheistic tradition) through experience and reason. This discipline is often confused with revealed theology, which depends for its sources on special revelation from the scriptures or religious experience.² Natural Theology is also defined as the practice of philosophically reflecting on the existence and nature of God independently of real or apparent divine revelation.³ Natural theology attempts to determine the truth of theism without assuming the standpoint of a particular religion, knowing God independently of any religious authority.⁴

Natural Theology can broadly be understood as the systematic exploration of a proposed link between the everyday world of our experience and another asserted transcendent reality. This is an ancient idea that achieved significant elaboration in the works of the early Christian fathers and continues to be the subject of much discussion today.⁵ Natural Theology infers the existence of God from the order and beauty of the world. William Paley is so strongly identified with Natural Theology that he is sometimes thought to have invented it when he published a book entitled *Natural Theology* in 1802.⁶

Two basic types of arguments are used to claim rational certainty of God's existence. The first is *a-posteriori*; argument, proceeding from effect to cause and the other is *a-priori*, argument proceeding from cause to effect on the

idea of God.⁷ There are three popular kinds of arguments that seek to demonstrate the existence of God; Ontological, Cosmological and Teleological arguments or Design arguments. In contemporary circles, Moral arguments and arguments from religious experience are also added to the popular ones to explain the existence of God.

There are several forms of the Ontological arguments but the most famous was first developed by St. Anselm, the eleventh century Archbishop of Canterbury. Ontological arguments are *a-priori* arguments because the basis for the existence of God is inferred from the idea of God Himself. According to John Hick, Anselm begins by concentrating on the Christian concept of God into a formula: “a being than which no greater can be conceived”.⁸ Ontological arguments attempt to show that the very concept or idea of God implies His reality. Since we cannot think of any greater than God, we can therefore infer that He exists. Various versions of the Ontological argument were defended by Gottfried Leibniz and Rene Descartes. Also, philosophers like Charles Hartshorne, Norman Malcolm and Alvin Plantinga defended contemporary versions of the Ontological arguments.⁹ The Ontological argument holds that existence is entailed by the concept of God, if God exists in our understanding, He must exist in reality.

The Ontological argument has been criticized; in fact, Karl Barth interprets Anselm’s argument not as a proof but as an attempt to understand more deeply what is accepted by faith.¹⁰ There are obvious weaknesses in the Ontological arguments and this could have influenced the premises of some Cosmological arguments, which are developed using the concept of the world and what is seen in it as basis for God’s existence rather than use the concept of God to prove His existence as it is used in Ontological argument.

The Cosmological argument holds that the world and everything in it, depends on something for its existence. This ‘something’ must be God.¹¹ The Cosmological argument has been traced to the Greek Philosophers Plato and Aristotle, which on this note are older than the Ontological arguments. Thomas Aquinas made the argument popular, while Duns Scotus, Samuel Clarke and Gottfried Leibniz also defended it and in contemporary discussion by Richard Taylor and Richard Swinburne among others.¹² The Cosmological argument of Aquinas is quite famous and it is known as the first three ways of his five proofs of God’s existence: The Unmoved Mover, the Uncaused Efficient Cause and the Necessary Being (argument from Contingency). The Cosmological argument was criticized by David Hume and Immanuel Kant.¹³ What moved the First Mover? What caused the First Cause? A Necessary Being does not necessarily have to be God.

The Teleological argument holds that the natural world appears to have been designed or created by a Designer. Some forms of the argument hold that the world was created to serve a divinely inspired end (*telos*).¹⁴ In a broad sense, Teleological arguments are also Cosmological arguments, because they too are

premised on the existence of the cosmos. However, Teleological arguments are concerned about the orderly character of the universe and the most popular version is William Paley's. Also, the fifth way of Aquinas is a Teleological argument and in contemporary discussion by Richard Taylor, F.R Tennant and Richard Swinburne.¹⁵ David Hume, Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution have made serious critiques of the Teleological arguments.¹⁶

The Moral arguments featured in the history of Natural Theology long after the Ontological, Cosmological and Teleological arguments have been used as proofs of God's existence. However, the Moral arguments have been traced to Plato's conviction that the source of reality must be the "form of the good". Kant developed a type of Moral argument, but he did not claim that the existence of morality was theoretical evidence for the truth of theism, but rather that moral obligation makes it necessary to postulate God's existence. A more theoretical version was developed by C.S Lewis.¹⁷ The basis of the Moral argument is the general assumption that voice of conscience is the voice of God, therefore creating a platform to prove His existence. However, like other theistic arguments, the challenges of the Moral argument are Cultural relativism- what is immoral in a culture may not be an issue in another; Individual relativism- the issue of morality is subjective; and Natural humanism- moral obligations can be explained naturally without God.

Religious experience as a theistic proof is the claim that knowledge of God's existence can be premised on the direct experience of God. This includes miracles, visions, voices and other special acts of God. Religious experience is the origin of Christianity and is seen as a reasonable basis to prove God's existence especially in contemporary circles. Philosophers like John Bailey, Richard Swinburne and William Alston have used religious experience as a premise to prove God's existence.¹⁸ Like other theistic arguments, religious experience as a theistic proof has a number of challenges which include the problem of hallucinations, mistakes, illusions, the fact that such experiences are not universally shared, the failure of inter-subjective verification among others and the fact that it may be seen as revealed theology and not natural theology in some quarters.

The history of natural theology has shown that theistic arguments have been the target of incessant philosophical, scientific and theological scrutiny. Throughout late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, different versions of natural theology were developed, but orthodox believers were reminded that such arguments were only supplementary to what was found in the Bible.¹⁹ In spite of the severe criticisms faced by natural theology, it remains vibrant and it has in fact taken a new turn in contemporary circles as one of the bases of its rejection is now used as the basis of its acceptance, which is science.

The history of religion and science reveals a stormy journey between these two important fields of human endeavour and recently, philosophers, theologians and scientists are finding a meeting point in the positions of these two fields. Barbour's methodological *bridge* between science and religion is Critical Realism which creates a meeting point between these two fields.²⁰ Critical Realism is the correspondence of truth with reality and the key criterion of truth is agreement of theory with data, where networks of theories are tested together and fruitfulness serves as a criterion of truth.²¹ This meeting point forms the thrust of this paper, which is an exposé on emerging scientific proofs for God's existence.

Science and its Relationship with Theology

The connection between religion and science is of course, not simply a historical curiosity, but also one of substantial contemporary importance. However, some pertinent questions emerge in the history of religion and science. Is there a relationship between these two fields? What is the nature of this relationship? Is there a conflict between the two? How can these two important aspects of human life be managed? All these questions and many more are the various issues discussed in Religion and Science dialogue. Since the Renaissance, scientific information about the world has steadily expanded in fields such as Astronomy, Geology, Zoology, Chemistry and Physics; and contradicting assertions derived from the Bible rather than from direct observation and experiment.²²

The challenge of science to religion therefore, created a dilemma, especially for believers and a greater burden for Christian scientists, seeing the undeniable proofs of science. This dilemma is expressed in three different ways; **Inevitable conflict**- According to this view, the claims of religion and science are polarized and therefore, conflict is inevitable. According to John Worrall, science discredits religion and science and religion are in an irreconcilable conflict.²³ **Independence**- This is the notion that science and religion can live in a state of peaceful coexistence because they are independent of one another in ways that prevent conflict. One can easily argue that science and religion cannot overlap because they treat distinct domains. Religion concerns supernatural reality, while science describes and explains the natural world. **Potential conflict**- This position is that science makes some claims that in principle could contradict religious claims and vice versa. Thus, it is necessary to admit that there is a potential for conflict embedded in these two domains and see how best the relationship can be handled.²⁴

These three ways form the basis of the different reactions to the connection between Religion and Science and the different models adopted by different philosophers on the subject of the unique relationship between religion and science and in this context, theology and science. However, the last two models will be adopted while engaging the role of science in natural theology.

Emerging Scientific Proofs for God's Existence

Scientific evidences for God's existence are *a-posteriori* proofs because the conclusions are drawn from experience and in this case, scientific experiments or exercises. These are attempts to make meaning of a metaphysical claim, God's existence, from the domain of empirical knowledge. This on its own is a challenge and the more reason why it is a worthwhile endeavour. The following arguments are a few of the emerging proofs from the purview of science on God's existence:

The Big Bang Theory: The Belgian Priest, Abbe George- Henri Lemaitre solved Einstein's equations of the general relativity for the universe as a whole. He came up with the solution that the universe should be expanding from an original 'creation event' which is now known to have occurred some 14 billion years ago. This is known as the Big Bang Theory, a phrase coined by atheist British cosmologist Fred Hoyle, who opposed the idea of the universe having a beginning which implied God created it. Edwin Hubble, years later corroborated the position of Lemaitre.²⁵ The Big bang Theory is the scientific evidence indicating that the universe began to exist in a great explosion called the Big Bang. The Big Bang Theory can be summarized in this argument -Whatever begins to exist has a cause. The universe began to exist. Therefore the universe has a cause.²⁶ This is a valid argument and a creator is inferred from the conclusion, since something cannot come out of nothing, thus only a supernatural being could have caused the universe to exist. The theological explanation of the Big Bang Theory is that if it is agreed that the universe had a beginning, then we could suppose that it had a creator, who has been inferred to be God. The Big Bang theory can be used successfully to prove that the world has a creator but it can be criticized as having issues in proving that this creator is God.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics: This law states basically that certain kinds of processes happen only in one direction. We see irreversible processes all around us. We do not grow younger; ashes in fireplaces do not turn back into logs, they happen in only one way- time flows from past to future. What causes this irreversibility? This cause has been identified as God.²⁷ This law is quite metaphysical because we cannot deny the obvious expression of this second law of thermodynamics in our world. One may wonder at the force responsible for this "irreversibility" around us, this is the basis for the metaphysical conclusion, that a "God" must be responsible for this.

Entropy: The entropy of anything is the extent to which it has been left to disorganize or disintegrate. Physicists discovered that whatever is left unattended to tend to become damaged, decayed and eventually may cease to exist. The inference from the entropy argument for the existence of God is that this world has neither disintegrated nor come to destruction, therefore, there must be a force behind the continued effective functioning of the world, and that force is called God.²⁸

Seven Cosmological Evidences: These are occurrences of cosmological conditions essential for the sustenance of life on earth which only imply an element of supernatural fine tuning. These are: (a) **Matter-** Why is matter organized into sub-atomic particles that follow laws permitting them to form more than 100 elements that provide the matter for the universe as well as the atoms, molecules and chemical changes for life? Matter could just be chaotic without laws. These laws suggest intelligent planning. (b) **Forces-** These are precise values for the basic forces in Physics which are just right to permit a universe that is suitable for life to exist. Such precisions indicate a specific design by a Being. (c) **Life-** The simplest living organisms are so intricate and complex that it does not seem possible that they could have originated without intelligent planning. (d) **Organs-** All organisms have systems with irreducible complexity; they have independent parts that cannot function independently e.g. a hand is useless if detached from the body. This fact requires planning by a designer. (e) **Time-** Calculations indicate that the age of the earth is thousands of billions of times too short for the average time to produce a single protein molecule. A single protein molecule could not have been produced by natural processes alone. Thus, the existence of a Supernatural Being is necessary to explain the production of protein molecules. (f) **Fossils-** There are emerging fossils which negate the theory of evolution and make the existence of a designer possible. (g) **Mind-** The mind has characteristics that science has great difficulty in analyzing. This fact points to a reality beyond the naturalistic level and to a transcendent Being.²⁹

The Mathematical Explanation of the Ontological Argument of St. Anselm- The Ontological argument of St. Anselm and a more recent version of Kurt Godel are mathematical in nature.³⁰ Kurt Godel used the framework of modal logic to explain the ontological argument of St. Anselm.³¹ The Ontological argument proposes that one can prove the existence of God by simply analyzing the concept of God. Godel's aim was to strengthen this medieval argument by adapting mathematical logic. The Ontological argument derives the existence of God *a-priori* just as mathematical proofs devise mathematical theorems *a-priori*.³² Godel's use of modal logic in mathematics to explain Anselm's Ontological argument of God's existence is quite unusual and takes a lot of mathematical inclination to decipher its meaning; this task is no doubt a remarkable feat which is also not free from criticisms.

The Anthropic Principle: The Anthropic Principle is the belief that the universe in its present organization was created as it is now, in order to meet the needs of man's existence.³³ The universe is the way it is in order for the tribe of humanity to evolve. It is not a surprise therefore, that we find ourselves in a world so suited for us. Our universe has been anthropically selected for us, life is extremely sensitive and the slightest change would have meant we would not be here.³⁴ A very simple question emerges from the anthropic principle, who did this selection? The most straightforward answer is God. Using the conclusion of this argument, one could wonder at the level of serious crises Nigeria, like any other

developing country would have had to grapple with if some basic necessities of life had not been settled anthropically regardless of government. This fact points to the obvious facts of life which are naturally taken for granted and to a Reality beyond this natural world.

Ozone Gas Layer: Arthur Brown argued that when God finished creating the world, he put the ozone gas layer between the sun and the earth in order to protect the earth from the heat generated from the ultra-violet rays of the sun. This ozone gas layer is the concrete proof of a Benevolent and Merciful Creator.³⁵ This is an interesting proof of God's existence, the same premises used to prove God's existence may be used to attack the conclusion of the argument, that an omnipotent God could have created a perfect world that would not need an additional ozone layer which unfortunately is gradually being destroyed.

Evidences of Special Fine-tunings and Design Parameters in the Universe: Astronomers have discovered that the universe, our galaxy and our solar system are so finely-tuned to support life and the only reasonable explanation for this is the fore-thought of an intelligent creator, whose involvement explains the degree of fine-tunings which require power and purpose.³⁶ We cannot deny the special fine-tunings and design parameters in the world and at the same time, we cannot also deny the disorderliness in the universe which may suggest haphazardness and a basis to defeat the conclusion of this argument.

Molecular Teamwork of DNA, RNA and Protein: The three molecules namely Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), Ribonucleic acid (RNA) and Protein occur together as a team to produce and sustain life. DNA which is the master molecule of life occurs in the genes, it contains instructions needed for producing proteins and the RNA is needed to receive and carry out the instructions. Without their functioning as a team, life could not exist.³⁷ Oladele asks two valid questions to explain this molecular teamwork: How did these three molecules and their indispensable teamwork emerge? Could it be a spontaneous event or a product of design emanating from an imaginative and creative mind? He goes further to answer that the logical answer points to an intelligent and purposeful Creator, the Almighty God.³⁸

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Scientific Proofs of God's Existence

The greatest strength of the scientific proofs of God's existence is the methodology of these arguments. It is a great challenge and an enormous task to draw a metaphysical conclusion from a naturalistic purview. It is also a greater task for scientists to arrive at the conclusion that God exists in spite of the enormous pressure of secularism and the hitherto beliefs that God does not exist inferred from scientific discoveries that contradicted traditional religious beliefs.

Science is also seen as a discipline that cannot deductively prove that God exists. This is because science deals with the physical universe and with the regularities we call "laws of nature", but God is not an object or phenomenon, or regularity within the physical universe, so science cannot say anything about

God. Science is also an empirical and inductive discipline; it is always open to new data and discoveries which could alter its previous explanations.³⁹ These arguments can serve dual purposes. On one hand, the scientists who have developed the theories used as scientific theistic proofs should be applauded for using laws of nature to justify a supernatural existence. On the other hand, if science is an inductive discipline, it will have serious problems in the Theistic hypothesis, an endeavour in which the arguments are deductive, where the premises render the conclusion necessary and not probable.

The weakness of these scientific proofs of God's existence is derivative from the peak of the strengths of the arguments. No matter how well sustained, these arguments can succeed excellently as a proofs of a designer, but may fail in some quarters that this designer is God. All the same, one may ask, who else is this designer if it is not God?

Conclusion

According to H.D Lewis as quoted by Oshitelu, there can be no evidence, in the strict sense, for the existence of God. This statement could be challenged if the terms "evidence", "existence" and "God" were all subjected to scrutiny.⁴⁰ This shows the serious issues associated with proving the existence of God. Nonetheless, a scientific approach in addressing the theistic problem is worthwhile especially in this age and generation which is science-driven. Also, the history of natural theology reveals the severe criticisms the arguments of philosophers and theologians have been subjected to, in spite of the obvious strengths and validity of these arguments. Therefore, buttressing the fact that proving God's existence is in itself problematic. These criticisms highlight the beauty of philosophy and bring to the fore, the uniqueness of philosophy as a discipline.

This paper has discussed natural theology and its history in philosophy of religion, reviewing different arguments put forward to prove God's existence; Ontological, Cosmological, Teleological, Moral and Religious Experience. This paper has also discussed the nature of the relationship between science and theology and in closing, the new proofs emerging from the domains of science as bases for God's existence. Ian Barbour lists four criteria for assessing theories in normal scientific research:

(a) Agreement with Data which is the most important criterion. (b) Coherence: A theory should be consistent with other accepted theories and, if possible, conceptually interconnected with them. (c) Scope: Theories can be judged by their comprehensiveness or generality. A theory is valued if it unifies previously disparate domains (and in this case, religion and science), if it is supported by a variety of kinds of evidence. (d) Fertility. Is the theory fruitful in encouraging further theoretical elaboration, in generating new hypotheses, and in suggesting new experiments?⁴¹

These criteria can be used to assess the success of the different scientific evidences discussed in this paper as proofs of God's existence, in order to determine the truth of God's existence. The supposition of Barbour is that the meaning of truth is correspondence with reality and the criteria of truth must include all four of the criteria mentioned above. The criteria taken together include the valid insights in all these views of truth. Because correspondence is taken as the definition of truth and this is critical realism because a combination of criteria is used.⁴²

In conclusion, the real process of assessment of the truth of God's existence is at a personal level and at this level, one would weigh the consequences of one's judgment against each other. What are the implications of God's non-existence? What would be the effects on human character? What would be the basis of a life after death on which reward and punishment is premised? What then would be the real essence of life? God's existence is a fundamental religious belief that answers various questions of life. This paper has discussed the emerging empirical evidences for God's existence, courtesy of science and if the methods of science are seen as valid and dependable sources of truth, the findings of science can be relied on to serve the metaphysical function of the reality of God's existence.

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