


The Conception of God in Modernity and Reply

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Abstract: Research on the notion of modernity involves a great deal of difficulty, and that is because it is a term that resists clear definition. It has likewise been associated with other concepts and connotations and has been expanded such that any attempt to arrive at a sufficiently exhaustive definition is incredibly difficult. But difficulty does not imply impossibility, as it is possible to come to some definitions that contain its most distinctive features. This study aims to shed light on the position of modernist theological dogma about the creed system related to issues of the divinity side which are related to the notion of God, the existence of God and self, and it studies the different allegations showing the criticism directed to it.

Keywords: Conception, God, modernity, dogma, existence, criticism.

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Modernitede Tanrı Anlayışı ve Karşı Cevap

Öz: Modernite kavramı üzerine araştırma yapmak oldukça zordur, çünkü bu kavram net bir şekilde tanımlanmaya direnen bir terimdir. Aynı şekilde başka kavramlar ve çağrışımlarla da ilişkilendirilmiş ve yeterince kapsamlı bir tanıma ulaşma girişimini inanılmaz derecede zorlaştıracak şekilde genişletilmiştir. Ancak zorluk imkansızlık anlamına gelmez, zira en belirgin özelliklerini içeren bazı tanımlara ulaşmak mümkündür. Bu çalışma, modernist teolojik dogmanın Tanrı kavramı, Tanrı'nın varlığı ve zati ile ilgili olan ilahiyat tarafındaki meselelerle ilgili itikat sistemi hakkındaki konumuna ışık tutmayı amaçlamakta ve ona yöneltilen eleştirileri gösteren farklı iddiaları incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anlayış, Tanrı, modernite, dogma, varlık, eleştiri.

Giriş

The term modernity lexically is the opposite of what is ancient or prior, and to exist after not existing. It also implies an occurrence at the current moment, or it can imply a new thing or event that has appeared without precedence.

Modernity is for man to place himself at the center of everything, as the measure, the master, and the controller. This occurs for man after achieving the utmost certainty in himself and his knowledge, and his determination to deliberate the affairs of the world. The feature of modernity around which there is some consensus is "to be free from the past and tradition, and to fight it; and to struggle against every ancient and inherited belief or science."

Post-modernity, beyond-modernity - these terms signify philosophical concepts and technical notions that came from the modernist movement, as a reaction to an appraisal of modernism such that it fills in the gaps and corrects its errors, while relying on new foundations that are not contained within modernism, such as the notion of "unreason".

Postmodern philosophy has focused on the denial of a single truth, to affirm the multiplicity of truth, and the reliance upon imagination and whim. In this regard, postmodernism represents the sophists of this age, who rely on skeptical modes of argument to deny realities, reject the notion of complete reality, and affirm epistemological relativism and religious pluralism. Postmodernism, therefore, does not seek final answers as much as it is wrought by the anxiety of questioning and feverish research.

Modernism is not captured by a single trend or current but represents a multiplicity. Each of these trends has its own unique features. For this study, we may distinguish between the following currents:

1. A Critical Analysis of Modernism on the Notion of God:

Modernism holds that, in its values and special characteristics, the invention of many notions that have no extramental reality other

than being invented by human reason to meet specific purposes that emerge as a result of several social, political, and philosophical factors. If we look at the term "God," for example, we find that atheistic modernism has accrued several methods in emptying this term from its contents. They state that this term is nothing but the result of a specific human need, that emerged in specific historical circumstances and drives, that required man to invent the idea of God, and then he endowed it with certain properties that were appropriate to his nature, desires, and goals.

In what follows, we will examine some of the currents that represent this modernist approach that considers "God" to be an imaginary notion with no corresponding reality.

1.1 On the Modernist Claim That the Notion of God is Purely Hypothetical

This is one of the paths of atheistic modernism. Namely, God is a supposition in the minds of the believers, and it is not a real entity that corresponds to existence. It is merely an idea invented by humankind when it saw itself alone, afraid of wild animals, confronted with confusion in the face of events in the world. This idea, they claim, was invented to improve human behavior and establish justice. The notion of God, therefore, is a primitive notion that emerged as a necessary feature in ancient societies.¹ Furthermore, it does not emerge and remain as a result of philosophical veracity, but it reduces to forms of personal justification. The basic notion of God, therefore, evolved out of a primitive state of affairs, and it made its way into the world of ideas in the state of fear,² delusion, and ignorance of the causes and explanations of modern science.³

1.1.1. This Claim is Based on the Following Arguments

First: the gods are several imaginary entities that humanity has

¹ Victor John Stinger, Allah Alfardiat Alfashila, trans. Kamal Tahir, 34.

² Almazughi, Mohammed, Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula, (Beirut: Al-Jamal, 2014), 375.

³ Khan, Wahid Aldiyn, Alislam Yatahada, trans. Zafar Khan, ed. Abd Alsabur Shahin (Maktaba Al-Risala), 15.

agreed to create, and the reason that this occurred is due to man's ignorance, so they conceived of natural forces as gods, in fear of the harmful events that take place in nature in the form of lightning and flooding, and so they worshipped them in fear of the consequences.

Second: There is no meaning to Divine providence, for man is alone in the universe, and he submits to the laws of nature, and his life is in constant flux, and is subject to, like all other living creatures in the universe, catastrophes, tribulations, and bad experiences; and there is no divine power that can preserve man after the death of the body.

Third: there is no divine law. Advancement is the result of individual effort, and values or not true in themselves, they are dogmas invented by mankind.

The gist of this claim is that God is the product of human imagination, used to instill fear in society or to achieve social organization and that science has explained a great deal of phenomena that were once attributed to God, and the phenomena that science has not managed to explain yet, it may be able to discover their causes in the near future.

1.1.2. Criticism of the Belief That God is a Hypothetical Notion

Even if we concede that the idea of God was invented by human beings in accordance with his circumstances and goals, the idea as such remains a possibility to reason, and without it, a man stands before a long series of questions regarding the creator of the universe, and how he appeared in it, and what his destiny is after death.

At the very least, the notion of God explains the world, in contrast to its negation: for the world we observe is incredibly complex, and it requires explanation, and it is no simple matter. So, if we posit the existence of a God with certain attributes, we will have a better capacity to explain the existence of the world before without being faced with the question of explaining the existence of this god, because He exists by necessity.⁴

⁴ Fouda, Saeed, Aladila Alaqlia ala Wujud Allah Baina Al-Mutakalimin Wal-Falasifa

But it is clear that this reply - i.e., that the notion of God entails an explanation of the world is incomplete, because it is based on mere belief in God. It may be the case that it can explain phenomena in the world, but it is not enough to prove the existence of God. Rather, for this approach to be complete, it must be based on a belief in God that is sufficiently grounded and convincing, rather than merely positing the existence of God.

1.2. On Modernist Claim That the Notion of God is Obscure

This claim is one of the main positions adopted in atheist modernism, and it assumes that the notion of God according to those who believe is a notion subject to change following the views of each religion, and this shows that the notion of God is an artificial one that does not apply to any objective reality.⁵

Muslim corporealists said that God is in the image of a young man, and Jewish corporealists believe that He is in the image of an old man. Likewise, they agreed that God was delimited from below. and some said he was delimited in all directions, while others believed God indwells in human beings, and others believed that God was an actual spherical light that shines like a pearl; and yet others rejected all of these ideas, and the disagreement of the believers in God indicates that the notion is incoherent.⁶

This type of argument assumes that the belief in God must be based on direct empirical, observational evidence,⁷ and if it cannot be produced, there is no God. We may present it in the following syllogism:

PI: Knowledge of God must be complete knowledge of His reality.

P2: No one claims complete knowledge of God.

C: There is no knowledge of God.

(Amman: Alasleen,2016), 316.

⁵ Almazughi, Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula, 25-26.

⁶ Almazughi, Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula, 419.

⁷ Almazughi, Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula, 420.

Thus, for one to believe in God, the notion of God must be clear and unambiguous. It would appear that the diversity of views among and within religions has lent credence to this view, as some religions believe in a corporeal God, while others believe God is the term for the laws of the universe.⁸

1.2.1. Criticism of the Obscurantist Notion of God

Knowledge of God's reality is a question of disagreement among scholars. Some scholars have stated that knowledge of God's reality is possible and occurs, and Amidi has spoken on the matter at length, arguing that the difference of opinion among scholars resulted from how the different parties defined the term 'reality'.⁹

Those who denied knowledge of God's reality took it to mean them essence and essential attributes, and on this reading, it would not be possible to cognize its quintessence. While those who said God's reality could be known took it to mean to affirm the attributes of perfection to God and to negate all deficiencies.¹⁰

For it happens that sometimes when we conceive of something, we conceive of (a) its essence and essential elements, while other times we conceive of (b) its properties and concomitants. Thus, it would be correct to deny knowledge of God's reality based on the first interpretation of reality, and it would likewise be correct to affirm knowledge of God's reality on the second interpretation, for it is sufficient to know of God's existence by inference from His effects and attributes, and by that assent obtains, as we will argue in what follows.

Furthermore, the root cause for the modernist objection is their assumption that as human beings we cannot speak coherently of anything that we have not grasped completely, but this is clearly erroneous. For one may believe in an entity, in its existence or some judgments relating to it, or its attributes, without knowledge of its

⁸ Almazughi, *Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula*, 419

⁹ Al-Amidi, *Saif Al-Din Abu Al-Hasan, Abkar Alafkar fi Usul Al-Din* (Cairo: Maktbat Dar Al-Kutub Wal Wathaiq Al-Qawmiyy), 1/481.

¹⁰ Al-Amidi, *Abkar Al-Afkar fi Usul Al-Din*, 482.

quintessence. We likewise affirm with certainty many causes in existence without having full grasp of their realities, like the certainty that scientists have in the existence of a cause for sickness, or some event without precisely knowing the cause nor its reality, but that does not undermine their certainty in the existence of a cause and some of its properties.¹¹

Similarly, the scholars of the kalam judged that it is impossible to reach the knowledge of God's reality in a comprehensive complete sense, and they denied any knowledge of His quintessence, as it is impossible for anyone to know God comprehensively except for God. However, this does not at all imply the denial of the knowledge of His existence and some of the effects of His attributes that indicate He is a necessary being. Thus, there remains an open door for humanity in accordance with their capacities to go further, without that ever meaning to grasp God's reality. But again, this does not disqualify the possibility of speaking of some of the attributes and judgments that relate to God, and in this sense, knowledge of God is realized to a sufficient degree.¹²

Therefore, assent to these judgments is not dependent on the complete apprehension of the divine essence, but only partial apprehension is sufficient for judgment. Therefore, there is no reason to deny the possibility so long as it removes all objections and presents a convincing, sufficient explanation for the existence of a world that demands explanation.

In addition, many empiricist scientists, after studying and observing the material world, attempt to explain the phenomena they have observed with an extrapolative theory, affirming the existence of entities they have not observed and are not observable, and are in that respect absent to them and their instruments, but they are nevertheless compelled to affirm their existence, admit them into their ontology, and turn them into laws, and they refer to them as natural

¹¹ Al-Gazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad, *Almaqsid Alasnaa fi Sharh Maeani Asma Allah Al-Husnaa* (Beirut: Dar Hazim), 54.

¹² Al-Amidi, *Abkar Alafkar fi Usul Al-Din*, 1/482.

laws.¹³ For example, they believe in gravity and the laws of gravity, and the mind and its effects, and the soul, and time, all of which they have no grasp of its reality, which nullifies what they affirm in believing in only what is empirically observable.¹⁴

1.3. The "Death of God" in Modernist Thought

After the scientific revolution in Europe and the domination of the empiricist methodology in all areas of science, a clear conflict began to emerge between these new sciences and Church dogmas. This shook people's confidence in the Church and its clergymen, who were living a life of decadence, monopolizing worldly pleasures within their edifices while at the same time calling people to a life of asceticism, and the Church was thereby viewed as the head of evil and corruption.¹⁵

This was among the reasons that eventually led to the declaration of the death of God - God be exalted above their statements - at the end of Nietzsche and set the stage for the emergence of this school.¹⁶

This school - that is, those who proclaimed the death of God - was known to be a "cultural movement characterized by the retreat of Christian forms from Western civilization as a result of the waning of Christian belief and its transformation into the mere practice of cultural rituals and religious slogans."

The leader of this movement, Nietzsche, called for the "death of God." describing God with the most scandalous of terms, and promoted a new god which was the man himself. People once used to mention God's name when gazing upon the expanses of the sea, but now they can do so in the name of the overman. God is a mere hypothesis, and it is necessary not to allow this hypothesis to overstep its boundaries. This terminology had also been used in the past by

¹³ Al-Maidani, Abd Al-Rahman Hassan Habankah, *Siraa maa Al-Malahida hatta Ala-zim* (Damascus: Dar Al-Qalam, 1992) 90.

¹⁴ Ibrahim, Ahmed, *Ikhtiraq Aql* (Riyadh: Markaz Dalail, 2016), 43.

¹⁵ Mufti, Muhammad Ahmad, *Mafhum Almujtamaa Almadani Waldawla Almada-nia* (Riyadh: Markaz Al-Bayan lil abhath waldirasat), 65-67.

¹⁶ Clollins, Allah fi Alfasafa Alhaditha, trans. Fouad Kamel (Egypt: Dar Gharib), 365.

some ancient theologians "to express the crucifixion of Christ and his burial."¹⁷

In reality, this obscure expression that is in use by Western modernism can sustain several different interpretations for atheism and rejection of religion, as it can be interpreted in the following ways:¹⁸

1. God does not exist and has never existed.
2. Moderns of our age feel that God is silent, hidden, and absent from their lives.
3. There once was a God worthy of worship and praise, but that God does not exist anymore.
4. The notion of God and the Word of God needs to be completely reinterpreted.
5. Christianity no longer has the capacity to save and heal humanity.
6. The deities constructed by man and his actions are false gods that need to be left to die, so that the true image of God may appear.

1.3.1. Criticism of the Modernist Notions of the Death of God

To respond to these claims, we must first clarify the notion of divinity as understood in the West during that period and compare it with the understanding of divinity in Islam. Afterward, we will elaborate further on the meaning of the 'death of god' in Western and Arabic modernism.

1.3.2. The Notion of Divinity in Western Society in Comparison to Islam

Judaism: Judaism believes in God as the ruler of the chosen people, who are the Jews alone, and He is not the Lord of other peoples; and the Jews consider themselves the masters of the world, and the rest of humanity are their servants. Thus, their understanding of di-

¹⁷ Awad, Ramses, *Mulhidon Muhadithon Muasiron* (Beirut: Muasasat Alaintishar Al-Arabi, 1998), 28-29.

¹⁸ Awad, *Mulhidon Muhadithon Muasiron*, 24.

vinity is very narrow, and is not commensurate with the understanding of divinity in Islam who is the Lord of all the worlds, and the God of all humanity, and the creator of everything.¹⁹

Christianity: Christianity is based on the belief in the Trinity, which means God is one and three at the same time, three hypostases of the exact same substance, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father created the world through the medium of the Son, and the Son is the one sacrificed, and the Holy Spirit purifies the soul and life; and these three hypostases all participate in divine activity equally.²⁰

Islam: The notion of God in Islam is a monotheism that is pure of nationalism, to a universal God, and from the God of a people to the God of all people. It is a notion free of anthropomorphism and corporealism to transcendence, and from trinity and unity and mixing between man and God to divine unity, and from sense perception to proof and reason, the highest notion that human reason can reach.

From this exposition, we can see how Western modernism was able to justify its proclamation, but as for Arabic modernism, they have no justification, except perhaps the desire to completely imitate the West. The explanation of the proclamation: that which has died among Western modernist thinkers is the word 'God', or the god that was described by Church authorities and its war against science broadly construed, so the origins of the proclamation of the death of God are in these notions.

As for Nietzsche's intended meaning, it is the first of the possible interpretations, namely, that God does not exist and never has.²¹

And in seeking the motivation for these modernists to make such statements, we found a reason for Western modernists that could justify their position, as Hegel had conceded to the Christian

¹⁹ Al-Khasht, Muhammad Othman, *Tatawur al-Adian Qisat Bahth an Al-Ilah* (Maktabat Al-Sharq Aldwalia, 2010) 219

²⁰ Al-Khasht, *Tatawur al-Adian Qisat Bahth an Al-Ilah*, 229.

²¹ Awad, Mulhidon Muhadithon Muasiron, 24.

notion of God. The death of God for Hegel is a state of transition for the nature of divinity, towards a stage where the spirit is reconciled with itself, and between the divine and the human, for what objection is there for the divine to indwell in another? Indeed, to indwell in all men? For the divine may indwell in any moment and any person, and because God had unified with creation as is the plain sense of Christian dogma in the person of our master Jesus, upon him be peace, and the special characteristics of God were transmitted to man, and it, therefore, laid the groundwork for the death of God.

As for Arab modernists, the circumstances and causes that led to the Western proclamation of the death of God were absent in Islamic environments, so they are nothing but parroting the statements of the West.²²

2. Modernist Thought on the Proofs of God's Existence

Modernist thought did not suffice itself with the rejection of God and reducing it to a manmade production by pointing out its historical development. Rather, it also supported its position by explaining the universe and its emergence and objecting to the arguments for God's existence as propounded by believers. These objections were necessary, logically, for one to concede the modernist project and its position toward God.

2.1. Modernist Explanations for the Emergence of the World: Presentation and Criticism

The religions of the world, according to modernists, have failed in providing a rational and convincing explanation for mankind and his creation. And just as man is nothing but a material phenomenon that came about by chance, and will die by chance, and with his death, he will be nothing but a memory in the archives of life - there is likewise no God, no reward, and no punishment, no Jinn, no angels, and man is the child of nature, creator of himself, he is the only one, the strongest, and the best, and likewise he had come about by chance.

²² Hassan Al-Qari, "Ansanat Alwahi - Dirasa Naqdia", Majalt 26/2 (2010), 408.

Chance alone is a sufficient explanation for the observed order in the earth, and in that vein made a famous analogy: a box of the letters of the alphabet that is shaken up millions of times over time, then it is not impossible for one or more of these shakes produces a written poem of comprehensible language.

2.1.1. Criticism of Modernist Thesis on the Origin of the World

If we look at the notion of chance, we find that the odds that an event occurs is inversely proportional to the number of possible events that can occur, so as the number of possible events decreases, the probability that an event occurs increases, and as the number of possible events increases, the likelihood that a particular possibility obtains decreases. So if the probability that one of two equally possible events is $\frac{1}{2}$ and if it is between 10 possible events, then the chances are $\frac{1}{10}$, and up to this point, the likelihood is similar to the situation with only 2 possible events, even if we go up to 100 or 1000 possible events. But when this number expands exponentially, the probability that one event occurs comes increasingly negligible, indeed, nearly impossible."

If one supposes that the box of letters produces 10 unrelated words, such an event may be believable, but if the result produces a coherent sentence of 10 words, it is highly unlikely and is rather impossible.

And if the letters formed themselves when being mixed around by chance to a complete book of 500 pages, that come together in a coherent unity in word and meaning, then there is no doubt that such an event would be impossible.²³

That, and the discussion at hand is far more complex than the previous examples, for in the example of letters, the letters already are supposed to exist, and they exist next to one another in lines in their boxes, in addition to the shaking. As for the world, the question reaches a degree of complexity that becomes unfathomable for human minds to grasp, for the colossal number of possibilities be-

²³ Hawa, Saeed, Allah Jala Jalaluh (Cairo: Dar Al-Salam, 1990), 35.

comes indefinite, rendering the possibility that such an event obtains impossible.²⁴

They have also ignored the fact that achieving a state of coherence and order does not entail that it should remain orderly and that some other event will not occur and cause that system to return to a state of chaos. Thus, the question is why does such an orderly and precise system remain so after occurring randomly, and it did not quickly return to chaos after it came into existence?

Lastly, those who state that all events in the universe are randomly generated end up giving the system of chance comprehensive knowledge, complete volition, and absolute power, such that it knows and wills and executes, and in all that it acts with greater wisdom than all humanity's power combined, to a degree of infinite intelligence, and it is evident to the mind that when there is precise order, there must be knowledge, power, and life.

Further, these possibilities that they posit to explain the universe cannot be anything more than numbers on a page and ideas in the mind, and the mind can posit what is impossible as well, but in reality, none of it may be possible.²⁵

2.2. The Denial of the Principle of Causality in Modernist Thought

Causality is one of the first principles of reason, and it means the relationship between cause and effect, that is, the continuous and orderly connection between two incipient events. For every incipient phenomenon, then it must depend on a cause. Causality is a certain and evident principle that does not depend on experiment or sense experience, rather, its truth can be grasped by reason alone, by merely apprehending its contents.

The claim that there is no causation derives from Marxist dialectical materialism, and by materialism, we mean that general trend that believes in the eternity of matter, and that nature is sufficient to

²⁴ Hawa, Allah Jala Jalaluh, 37.

²⁵ Khan, Alislam Yatahada, 86.

understand matter and explain it based on purely naturalistic causes, which is matter and sense. Thus, the world emerged as a result of the interaction of existent entities in accordance with certain laws, without the intervention of any external cause.²⁶

Some modernists held that nature was everything, and it is what dictates events in the world following the eternal laws that it does not know of, and likewise, everything happens necessarily and in a certain quantity that cannot be surpassed.

Adil Daher adds another argument for why he believes that contingent events do not need a cause, namely, there is no reason to believe that it is impossible for an infinite series of causal events to occur in the past and into the future. Indeed, the principle of the conservation of energy requires that there is no beginning and no end.²⁷ Therefore, scientific explanations, as opposed to metaphysical explanations, do not seek to explain things in terms of ultimate causes of things, for there is nothing to prevent us from stopping at sub-atomic particles, or anything else of that nature, and declaring that we have reached the ultimate causes in the ontology of the world.

2.2.1. Criticism of Modernist Theses on Causality

For the sake of argument, we may concede this argument and answer by stating: the properties of the world indicate that the cause is not merely naturalistic because the efficacy of natural causes is necessary, direct, and particular, but the phenomena of the world indicate that there is more than one type of cause in the world, indeed, they require the existence a causal agent of a different type, for the explanation to be complete: why did these elements exist and not any other? And why did something contingent in itself come into existence at all? And it is not possible to answer such questions without recourse to the necessary being, and he is a freely choosing agent.

²⁶ Al-Bouti, Muhammad Saeed Ramadan Al-Bouti, *Naqd Awham Almadia Aljadalia* (Syria, Dar Al-Fikir, 1985), 30-31-97.

²⁷ Daher, Adel, *Alfalsafa Walmasaala Aldiynia* (Beirut: Dar Neson, 2008), 87.

Their statement that matter includes two compositions and from it life emerges does not contain an explanation for the appearance of life, rather, it is but a description of living phenomena that we apprehend by sense perception.

This perspective explains nothing that it purports to. It is a mere description. Nor is it an explanation for ultimate causes and a first cause, so to claim that the prime matter has no cause and that it is the basis for all creation is without evidence, for who has brought these laws together in this particularly precise order such that life could emerge? And the mere existence of natural laws that are possible to discover does not explain to us why they exist in the way they do, for description is not an explanation of its cause.²⁸

It also appears that these atheists put these natural laws in opposition to God as if the two were mutually exclusive, such that belief in God entails a disbelief in natural laws, and a belief in natural laws entails a disbelief in God, and the answer to this is simple: God has chosen to direct matters in the world according to these laws, so there is no opposition at all.

As for inferring from the conservation of energy to the denial of a need for a cause, the gist of their argument is that the universe as a whole comprises unchanging eternal laws that do not increase or decrease, and this contradicts the position that the world has a beginning. Therefore, so long as the quantity of energy is constant, then it must be eternally constant, and this entails the denial of a beginning or an end to change.²⁹

The reply to this inference is that we can distinguish between what is empirically necessary, rationally necessary, and rationally contingent. These are three distinct types of entities. Empirically necessary entities by virtue of the empirical observation of the concurrence of two events, such as the falling of heavy bodies towards

²⁸ Al-Akkad, Abbas Mahmoud, *Kitab fi nashaat Alaqida (Manshurat almaktaba alasia)*, 219

²⁹ Al-Senussi, Abu Abdullah, Sharih Sughra Alsughra, ed. Saeed Fouda (Amman: Dar Al-Noor Al-Mubin, 2014), 81.

the center of the earth, and the necessity of a knife cutting a soft body. Rationally necessary entities hold in all cases and can never not be the case, indeed, their negation entails a logical absurdity, like the necessity of a body to occupy space, and the necessity that a part of a thing is smaller than the whole.

As for what is rationally contingent, it is any entity whose existence and non-existence with respect to itself are equally possible. Therefore, no absurdity entails from its existence, nor from its non-existence. This is completely distinct from what is rationally necessary, which must be true and can never be negated; but it is not distinct in its reality from what is empirically necessary, and that is because empirical necessity is dependent on the association and concurrence between two distinct, rationally contingent events, and therefore, empirical necessity falls under the general category of the rationally contingent.

Now we may ask the question of which category the law of the conservation of energy falls under. The law of conservation of energy means that the quantity of energy in a closed system remains constant, and it does not mean that energy has always existed,³⁰ because the principle is empirically necessary and not rationally so because it is possible not to be the case. And what is rationally contingent does not exist by itself, because in itself it neither entails existence nor non-existence and therefore, it must be the effect of an external cause.

2.3 The Denial of Order in Modernist Thought: Presentation and Critique

There are many arguments for the existence of God, and one of the most effective arguments is the argument from design. In contemporary literature, it is known as the intelligent design argument.

The argument points to what we perceive in care and providence for creation in general, and human beings specifically, and the harmony that emerges between these beings, and that can only be the result of an intelligent and willing agent. The proof also includes

³⁰ Ibrahim, *Ikhtiraq Aql*, 144.

an inductive premise taken from the observation of existent things and their purposes and harmony with certain purposes, and that such harmony cannot occur by chance, and therefore there must be a wise and intentional agent behind it.

We may present the premises in the following manner:

1. The world is ordered
2. Every ordered entity needs an ordering agent
3. The world has an ordering agent
4. The ordering agent is God.

Some modernist thinkers have criticized this argument by denying the existence of order in the world, or by stating that order is not comprehensive, and what does exist is by chance.

Some extended the argument by saying it is poorly ordered and does not function properly, and it has a great many defects, and therefore, it is not possible to say that the ordered system covers all particulars in the universe. It is sufficient to refute the design argument to state that some scientists have examined the universe and they have not found wisdom or precise design and that the world came about by chance, and that they have discovered things that have no purpose and no benefit.³¹

Likewise, they held that a well-designed entity can be produced by an unconscious cause, and they cited examples like the precise work of bees and spiders in the construction of their dwellings.

Therefore, modernist thought holds that we cannot infer the existence of an ordering creator from the observation of the world and that there are so many possibilities to consider. For example, the world would have been more perfect had there been no earthquakes, no sicknesses, no birth defects, and so forth.

The implication from their arguments is that the world is not proof of the existence of God unless it existed exactly and perfectly

³¹ Almazughi, *Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula*, 348.

the way we desire the world to be without any disappointing omissions.

It is important to note that there are two crucial points in their argumentation:

First: there is no perfect and comprehensive ordering in the world.

Second: the possibility that a precisely ordered effect emerges from an unconscious agent.

Third: the conclusion of their arguments, namely, that the argument from design does not indicate the existence of God.

2.3.1. Criticism of Modernist Arguments against Order

As for the question of the absence of order in the world, no one can make such a universal negation before completely investigating the purpose of the creator in creation, and discovering the minutiae of the world, and every large and small entity; and so long as the purpose behind these observed deficiencies is unknown, their argument against design fails.

Indeed, it is sufficient to observe order in some elements of the universe to infer a creative designer. For order is evidence of a designer, but the lack of order is not proof for the non-existence of a designer. Thus, if one enters a room, and saw that it was ordered, he comes to know that it resulted from an ordering agent. And if they enter a room and saw that part of it was ordered and part of it was chaotic, the order part of the room would still indicate the existence of an ordering agent. Indeed, even if we assumed that the entire room was chaotic, it may still be the case that the agent had intended it to be so. That is because the absence of order in the universe does not indicate the non-existence of God, just as the existence of an effect indicates the existence of a cause, the lack of an effect does not indicate the non-existence of a cause.

As for bees, it is God that has made it such that it constructs such marvelous dwellings. These things come about by God's crea-

tive act and his guiding of these animals by their natures in a manner that may be described as a kind of natural inspiration.³²

Now it may be the case that a single well-designed effect comes into existence by chance, but for that such a minutely precise and well-designed effect to repeat itself over and over, taking into consideration its benefits and effects, then this is what reason judges to be impossible. In the same sense that this marvelous precisely ordered world can't come about by chance, because with the increase in the possibilities and the complexity, the likelihood of a well-designed effect to obtain entirely by chance drops significantly, and the remaining mathematical possibility does not translate into an actual possibility in reality.

As for the position that the argument from design does indicate the existence of God unless the world was absolutely perfect, then it is beside the point. None of the arguments from design state that the existent world is the most perfect, and that is why it is sufficient to infer from the existence of some order in the universe, and the supposition that some disorderly elements exist in the world does not undermine the argument, and this clarifies the point of disagreement.

2.4 Modernist Perspectives on Scientific Arguments for the Existence of God

This claim, namely, that empirical scientific evidence does not indicate the existence of God, is a statement repeated by experimental and positivist thinkers. They believe that all knowledge is limited to sense perception and experiment, and they reject anything that is not subject to experiment, and therefore, it rejects all religious beliefs that pertain to entities that exist beyond the world of sense, and that is why it is all false because it has no experiential basis.

Positivist epistemology renders the observable reality the only

³² Al-Razi, Fakhır Al-Din Muhammad ibn Omar Al-Tamimi, *Altafsir Alkabir* (Beirut: Dar Al-kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, 2000), 20/236.

basis for knowledge, and they have taken as a slogan for themselves that "what is not observable does not exist." Likewise, they reject any reflection on unobservable entities, God above all. The gist of their argument is simply: we have not observed God, so how can we believe in something that we have not experienced?

2.4.1. Criticism of Modernist Arguments from Empiricism against the Existence of God

The experimental method is restricted to material and sensible entities, and everything that is not observable cannot be subject to this method. This does not entail anything other than this method is limited to a certain set of conditions for its application, but that does not mean the negation of everything that is not observable.

That is why it is worth asking: what is meant by empirical science? Does that mean laboratory experiments? Or what has been discovered through scientific theories? If we mean laboratory experiments, then certainly that cannot provide any evidence for the existence of God, for the existence of God is not something that can be subject to experiment. The second, then they can act as evidence for the existence of God, and that is because a high number of scientific discoveries indicate the existence of God in one way or another.

Furthermore, experiment and observation do not provide indisputable knowledge, nor is knowledge limited to what has been tested and observed.³³ Rather, each type of claim has relevant evidence appropriate to the claim, and it cannot be replaced with another type. This strictly positive approach faces some difficulties in modern science, such as physical concepts that are not testable or observable directly, such as theories of energy, electrons, protons, or any direct observable evidence. It is necessary, therefore, to reject the comprehensiveness of this epistemology, for it is not capable of accessing all types of beings.

Furthermore, God the Exalted does not come under experimentation and observation, because he is not corporeal. If God was cor-

³³ Khan, Alislam Yatahada, 40.

poreal, he would be equal to all other material entities, and therefore, all of His attributes of knowledge, power, and necessary existence would be contingent, and he would be dependent on acquiring these properties from another agent, which is impossible for the necessary being. And if He were a physical entity, He would be contingent, and everything contingent cannot be God.³⁴ So, God is not part of material reality, nor is He similar in any way to created beings, nor does He share attributes with them.

Therefore, the method to know the existence of God must rely on a rational, deductive argument, and it is a higher and more powerful argument form than sensory evidence, for if an experimental scientist spent 1 million years searching for God with his methods, he would never establish His existence. Further, we add: there are a plethora of entities affirmed by experimental scientists that they are not able to prove by experiment, such as time, and if we cannot even discover time as a material entity, how can we expect to discover God in that manner?

3. Modernist Thought on the Divine Essence and a Reply

3.1 Modernist Thought on Divine Unity: A Presentation and Criticism

Sociologists have differed over what came first: monotheism or polytheism.

3.1.1. On the Precedence of Polytheism

Religion began as myth and idol worship, and so the original state of man was one of idolatry, and then man began to refine and develop his religion over generations until it reached the best state that it could. Therefore, man's religion is not unlike his other cultural forms like art, science, and philosophy. Thus religion insofar as it is a human activity has gone through stages of evolution and development from a primitive state to a higher state, beginning with

³⁴ Al-Tilmisani, Sharaf Al-Din, Sharh Maealim Usul Aldin lil Imam Al-Fakhr Al-Razi, ed. Nizar Hammadi (Beirut: Dar Maktabat Al-Maarif, 2011), 170.

a polytheistic view of divinity and finally to a monotheistic view.³⁵

3.1.2. On the Precedence of Monotheism

This perspective agrees with the position of monotheistic religions, and it affirms that mankind began with the idea of monotheism either through reflection or revelation, then humanity deviated from monotheism to polytheism.

The belief in monotheism is thus the oldest religion for man, and idolatrous practices are all incidental to the persisting monotheism that reigns. This school holds that reason presents true notions to man that precede his imaginative faculty, which often presents false notions, and similarly, man began with true religion and monotheistic belief, before moving towards mythological notions produced by the imagination.³⁶

This is also the position held by Islam that we believe in, for the father of humanity Adam, upon him be peace, was a prophet, and believed in one god, and therefore, monotheism was not the result of fear of the unknown, or some other causes other than revelation.

3.1.3. Modernist Thought and Polytheism

Some modernist writers saw polytheism as a precursor to modernity, and its form is what led to modernity. This idolatry was based on pluralism and freedom that stripped kings and gods of their divinity and opened the path to freedom.³⁷

Likewise, monotheism is antithetical to freedom, and there can be no freedom with monotheism, as indicated by the European Renaissance in its revival of the pluralistic and idolatrous civilization, as it is the best articulation of human freedom. But some modernists incline to monotheism and reject polytheism.

3.1.4. Criticism of Modernist Theses on Monotheism

Arab modernist theses on pluralism derive from philosophical

³⁵ Diraz, Muhammad Abdullah, *Aldiyn Buhuth Mumahada Lidirasat Tarikh Aladyan* (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam), 106-107.

³⁶ Diraz, *Aldiyn Buhuth Mumahada Lidirasat Tarikh Aladyan*, 106-107.

³⁷ Aboud, Hina, "Makal Muqarabat Lilhadatha", *Majalat Naqid* 8, 33-34.

pragmatism, a position that does not consider the truth of a proposition based on its benefits for people, and therefore, it has no bearing on what we are studying now. Polytheism and monotheism are on equal footing concerning pragmatism, and this is what leads us to merely point this out and move on, for a claim based on pragmatism is almost to not claim at all.

3.2. Modernist Thought on Anthropomorphic Texts in Revelation

Many modernist thinkers cite erroneous and weak hadith narrations or ones with anthropomorphic content, claiming that these are Islamic beliefs, claiming that "anthropomorphism is apparent in the Qur'an, and is quite prevalent in the hadith canon,"³⁸ and they are both considered sources for Islamic belief and practice.

It is likewise not possible to interpret these sources metaphorically because there are so many of them, and if anthropomorphism was rejected then the prophets would have stated so clearly.³⁹

Some of the narrations that they cited were the shaking of the throne, and the hadith of descent, and so forth.

In sum, we have three elements in their claims:

1. The citation of texts that indicate anthropomorphic beliefs
2. The claim that most of the texts in the Qur'an and hadith canon indicate anthropomorphism.
3. The claim that if the basis was transcendence, it would be necessary for the prophets to make that unambiguous.

3.2.1. Criticism of Modernist Analyses of Anthropomorphic Texts

The position expressed by these modernists about Muslim belief is only held by a small group that deviated from the overwhelming majority of Muslims, and it is inappropriate to uphold their view as if it were true Islam, so long as it is the view of a small minority.

³⁸ Almazughi, *Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula*, 114.

³⁹ Almazughi, *Tahqiq ma lil Ilhad min Maqula*, 115.

As for the citations relied upon by these modernists, the same arguments were made by earlier anthropomorphist thinkers against Ash'ari and the position expressed by these modernists about Muslim belief is only held by a small group that deviated from the overwhelming majority of Muslims, and it is inappropriate to uphold their view as if it were the true Islam, so long as it is the view of a small minority. As for the citations relied upon by these modernists, the same arguments were made by earlier anthropomorphist thinkers against Ash'ari and Maturidi theologians.⁴⁰

The general direction of any religion or ideology can sustain contradictory interpretations. In some matters, there is general agreement, and in others, there is not, and indeed may be rejected by the general approach. Thus, it is not permissible to take up matters of disagreement between the followers of a religion and then attribute them to the whole.

Furthermore, most of the narrations that they cite are not authentic, and do not represent a genuine interpretation of Islam; and those narrations that are authentic are subject to figurative interpretations that do not deviate from the principles of the Arabic language.

In addition, these texts appear in a context that does not signify any kind of corporeal, because they are used in combination with other meanings to indicate metaphoric meanings, and the metaphor is very evident. But if the text is removed from its context, it is only then that it may lead one to believe it is anthropomorphic, as in the example of the hadith qudsi, in which God says "Whoever approaches me by a handspan, I approach him by a cubit, and whoever approaches me by a cubit, I approach him by an arm span, and whoever approaches Him walking, He approaches them in stride (harwala)." Thus, the report in its context does not indicate any physical walking or running, not for man, nor God; rather, it indicates the speed by which God responds to the servant approaching him by means of acts of worship, and the magnanimity with which

⁴⁰ Al-Tilmisani, *Sharh Maealim Alusul*, 170.

God gives his servants on account of their acts of worship. Further, to interpret *harwala*, which means to walk at a fast pace, literally, would be to negate any meaning from the hadith, in addition to being rationally impossible to attribute that to God.⁴¹

This text and ones like it are sufficient to indicate how Sunni orthodoxy has dealt with anthropomorphic content. The claim that the number of these reports leads to confusion is rejected, as it is the prerogative of the Legislator to subject his servants to tests, such that the ones who follow what is clear will be distinguished from those who follow what is ambiguous. Likewise, the earliest generations did not deviate from authentic understanding, because authentic hadiths were the norm, and there did not yet appear hadith collections that contained weak and forged narrations.

To confirm the necessity of following this path in understanding these ambiguous texts, we mention Ghazali's position that the confusion only arose with respect to these texts with the 'collection of the separate, and the separation of the collective,' meaning, that one examines words in separate texts, and each text has its own unique context, then they extract these words from their contexts, and bring them together. For example, they may take the word 'hand' from one verse, and 'face' from another verse, and 'eye' from another verse, and so forth, such as 'ascent,' 'descent,' 'pacing,' from distinct narrations and verses, then bring them together, only then there may obtain confusion as to what is meant but so long as these texts remain in their respective contexts, they do not indicate any anthropomorphic content.⁴²

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⁴¹ Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid Bam Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Aliqtisad fi Alitiqad* (Jeddah: Dar Alminhaj, 2016), 172.

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