

## From Contingency to Design: Reassessing al-Ghazali's Arguments for God in Philosophy, Theology, and Contemporary Science

ATAUR REHMAN

Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, 8000 Aarhus C, Denmark

ORCID iD : <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5490-9864>

Corresponding Author; email: [ataurrehman@lgu.edu.pk](mailto:ataurrehman@lgu.edu.pk)

Received: 3 May 2025/ Received in revised form: 16 March 2026/ Accepted: 17 March 2026/

Published: 2 June 2026

### ABSTRACT

*The study traces the arguments about God's existence by Medieval Islamic philosopher and theologian Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058-1111), their philosophical foundations, and creates a unique link with contemporary discourses on philosophy of religion and philosophy of science. This reassessment is situated in classical kalam metaphysics and contemporary analytic philosophy of religion, especially debates on contingency, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and fine-tuning in cosmology. The problem this study addresses is whether classical kalam arguments can still provide a coherent framework within modern scientific and philosophical debates on cosmology and design. Despite renewed interest in the kalam cosmological argument and fine-tuning reasoning, it remains unclear how al-Ghazali's synthesis of reason and revelation can be reconstructed in terms that engage current naturalistic explanations, including multiverse proposals and causal indeterminacy. This study addresses the philosophical and theological challenge of reconciling classical Islamic thought with modern debates on cosmology, causality, and design, situating al-Ghazali within both medieval and contemporary frameworks. He criticized certain aspects of Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist philosophy and challenged the rationalistic paradigms of his era. His arguments for God's existence are mainly in two propositions: the cosmological argument and the teleological argument. The objective of this research is to critically examine the logical structure of al-Ghazali's cosmological and teleological arguments and to evaluate their resonance in modern philosophy of religion and science. Specifically, it asks whether his arguments can be reformulated with contemporary logical clarity while retaining their original theological commitments. Methodologically, the study employs qualitative textual analysis of al-Ghazali's primary works alongside comparative engagement with modern philosophical and scientific perspectives. It also explores the contemporary philosophical implications of his arguments, specifically discussions about cosmology, fine-tuning, and theism versus atheism discourses. By reanalyzing his works such as *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* in modern philosophical context and scientific discourse, the study highlights the continuing relevance of al-Ghazali's thought in the ongoing discourses about God's existence and non-existence. The analysis reconstructs the premises and inferential steps of both arguments and then evaluates them against representative contemporary objections in philosophy of science and cosmology. The findings reveal that al-Ghazali's synthesis of reason and revelation not only anticipates aspects of the modern kalam cosmological argument but also offers a constructive response to naturalistic and atheistic critiques. Results indicate that his contingency-based reasoning aligns closely with modal formulations of the cosmological argument, while his design reasoning supports a restrained, cosmological teleology compatible with fine-tuning discussions rather than biological Intelligent Design claims. Accordingly, al-Ghazali emerges not merely as a historical critic of the *falasifa* but as a constructive interlocutor for twenty-first-century debates on the rationality of theism at the intersection of theology, philosophy, and contemporary science.*

*Keywords:* Al-Ghazali; existence of god; cosmological argument; teleological argument; philosophy of religion; philosophy of science

## INTRODUCTION

This study addresses a central problem in philosophy of religion and Islamic intellectual history: whether al-Ghazali's contingency-based cosmological reasoning and his design-theoretic teleology can be rendered in contemporary analytic terms that speak to present debates on cosmology, causality, and fine-tuning. The question's salience has intensified since Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and the early-twenty-first-century "New Atheism," which re-ignited public and scholarly disputes over the rationality of theism (Harris 2004; Dennett 2006; Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2007). In parallel, analytic work on cosmological arguments and fine-tuning has matured, reframing classical claims in rigorously modal and probabilistic terms (Craig & Sinclair 2009; Pruss & Rasmussen 2018; Collins 2009; Oppy 2018).

Historically, these debates trace to Greek sources (Plato, Aristotle) and entered Arabic through the Abbasid translation movement, where they were re-worked in *kalam* and *falsafa* before al-Ghazali's decisive interventions (Gutas 1998; Adamson 2016).

For clarity, "cosmological" here denotes contingency-based reasoning about necessary vs. contingent being and the finitude of causal regress; "teleological" refers to cosmic-level order and fine-tuning rather than biological design-in-detail. The paper does not argue for Intelligent Design as a biological thesis; it evaluates whether al-Ghazali's design reasoning bears on contemporary cosmological teleology (Collins 2009).

While prior studies illuminate al-Ghazali's critiques of Aristotelian necessitarianism and causality (Marmura 1981 & Griffel 2009), two gaps persist: (i) a systematic mapping between his contingency reasoning and current modal cosmological arguments; and (ii) an assessment of how his causality analysis engages today's probabilistic physics and fine-tuning debates. Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives: (1) reconstruct the logical structure of al-Ghazali's contingency and design arguments from *Tahafut al-Falasifa* and *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*; (2) test their resilience against contemporary naturalistic objections (e.g., multiverse, causal indeterminacy); and (3) clarify their relevance for present analytic theism and philosophy of science.

Methodologically, the article combines close textual analysis of primary Arabic sources (with Marmura's critical translation for control) and

comparative argument-analysis against recent analytic literature in cosmology and fine-tuning.

The paper argues that (i) al-Ghazali's contingency reasoning is formally compatible with contemporary modal cosmological arguments under a weak Principle of Sufficient Reason; and (ii) his account of causality underwrites a modest teleology consistent with current fine-tuning discourse, while avoiding commitment to contentious biological design claims. These clarifications position al-Ghazali as a live interlocutor for twenty-first-century philosophy of religion and science. Some Muslim philosophers maintained the Greek arguments, and others criticized those arguments which were contradictory to Islamic framework.

Scholarly debates on causality, creation, and divine action occupy a central place in the study of classical Islamic thought. Discussions of al-Ghazali continue to shape this field, with studies highlighting his treatment of necessity, physical causation, and occasionalism. Muhtaroglu (2025) contrasts Ibn Sina's model of necessary connection with al-Ghazali's occasionalist stance, while Barger (2007, 1978) clarifies how al-Ghazali redefines necessity in the *Tahafut al-Falasifa*. Earlier work by Goodman (1971) and Kukkonen (2000) situates these arguments within broader debates about creation and contingency, and Griffel (2009) presents these themes as part of al-Ghazali's integrated philosophical theology. Similar classical concerns appear in the assessment of al-Razi's cosmological proofs by Erlwein (2017) and in the wider history of *kalam* outlined by Shah (2015). These foundations feed into modern reassessments of the *Kalam* cosmological argument, where Erasmus (2018a, 2018b) reexamines its contemporary philosophical relevance, and Chignell and Pereboom (2015) consider its place within natural theology.

Contemporary scholarship extends these discussions into present-day debates on atheism, science, and interfaith critique. Malik (2023) brings al-Ghazali into conversation with modern evolutionary theory, while Ramli (2024) highlights the social challenges posed by rising atheism in Southeast Asia. Several recent studies address how Muslim thinkers respond to New Atheist claims: Rehman and Basharat (2021) compare arguments for God's existence; Rehman et al. (2022a) examine primary Islamic sources; Qazi et al. (2022) survey Abrahamic responses to claims of a purposeless universe; and Rehman et al. (2022b, 2022c) critique atheistic readings of Darwinism and the idea that

religion causes conflict. Rehman (2020) further explores moral reasoning at the intersection of Islamic ethics and New Atheist thought. Together, these works show how classical metaphysical debates and contemporary critiques of atheism remain closely intertwined in modern Islamic philosophical discourse.

The central hypothesis is that al-Ghazali's cosmological and teleological reasoning, when reconstructed in analytic terms, withstands major naturalistic objections (e.g., multiverse, causal indeterminacy). The findings confirm this viability and underscore his continuing relevance in contemporary discourse.

### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

One of the most influential Muslim philosophers who addressed these discourses was al-Ghazali. His works: *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifa)* and *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' Ulum al-Din)* discussed in-depth the nature of God, the universe and human existence (Al-Ghazali 2000 & Al-Ghazali 2011).

Al-Ghazali's intellectual contributions in Muslim and Western philosophy appeared in the context of intense discourse among Islamic theologians (*mutakallimun*), Sufi mystics and philosophers (*falasifa*) during medieval age. He criticized Aristotelian and Neoplatonic philosophy about the aspects of their arguments which were contrary to Islamic thought. Moreover, he combined rational and mystical approaches to theology that made his works significant (Griffel 2009 & Nasr 2006). This is novel study in this regard which analyzes al-Ghazali's main arguments for God's existence and traces their intellectual origins while assessing their contemporary relevance in modern philosophical discourses.

Abu Hamid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali (1058-1111 CE) was born in Tabaran, a district of Tus, Iran. He was given the title "Imam" as he was considered by his peers as the defender of Islam (Al-Ghazali 1953). He served as a professor at *Nizamiyya* College in Baghdad (Watt 1953). Al-Ghazali's faced spiritual crisis in his intellectual journey which caused of his abandoning of academic career and embracing Sufism (Griffel 2009). This mystic dimension of his life influenced his later philosophical ideas and enabled him to combine rationalism with mystic experiences (Rahman 1982). His works includes Islamic jurisprudence,

ethics, mysticism and philosophy. One of his intellectual contributions in philosophy is his formulation of arguments about God's existence. His critique of Aristotelian philosophy specifically in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifa)* has contributed significantly in Islamic and Western philosophy (Al-Ghazali 2000). He developed his proofs for God's existence in responding philosophical views of his predecessors Avicenna (*Ibn Sina*) and *Al-Farabi*. These Muslim philosophers were influenced heavily with Greek ideas (Hyman & Walsh 1983). They advanced the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonist ideas which were criticized by al-Ghazali by arguing that reason alone is insufficient to establish the God's existence (Al-Ghazali 2000). He developed his argument on the base of reason and revelation to establish God's existence (Leaman 1999).

Al-Ghazali's thoughts about divine existence remained significant from medieval to contemporary philosophical discourses. Some studies have focused on Al-Ghazali's historical and intellectual contexts. Watt (1953) provides a comprehensive biography of al-Ghazali and highlighted his spiritual crisis which caused him turning towards Sufism which later understood as prime reason for his intellectual development. Griffel (2009) expands his intellectual growth by examining the engagement with Greek philosophy especially his critiques of Avicenna and *Al-Farabi's* ideas. He also explores the tension between mysticism and rationalism in his philosophical standpoints. Nasr (2006) traced the influences on al-Ghazali by earlier Muslim theologians like *Al-Ash'ari* and the integration of Neoplatonic ideas into Islamic thought. Rahman (1982) highlighted his contributions to Islamic philosophy by combining and reconciling theology, philosophy, and mysticism.

Marmura's translation and commentary on *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (Al-Ghazali 2000) highlighted his argument on the contingency of universe and critique on causality concept of Aristotle. According to Marmura, al-Ghazali's deep emphasis was on the contingency of universe that shows his departure from the Greek thought.

Craig (1979) explores the parallels between modern *kalam* cosmological argument and al-Ghazali's cosmological argument and traces the significant relevance of his ideas in contemporary philosophy of religion. Al-Ghazali also developed his teleological argument and Dembski (1998) found the similarities of his arguments with the intelligent design theory.

Griffel (2009) also highlighted ontological aspects from the al-Ghazali's concept of necessary being. However, Leaman (1999) critiqued to overemphasize the ontological dimensions of al-Ghazali's work and argued that his primary focus was to highlight the limitation of human reason rather the construction of formal philosophical proofs for the God's existence. Al-Ghazali combined the reason and revelation to know God. Nasr (2006) argues that his unique combination of reason and revelation provides significant framework to address contemporary theological and philosophical challenges. Present study highlights in depth al-Ghazali's formulation of cosmological and teleological arguments and creates a unique link between the context and contemporary modern philosophical discourses. This study is framed within the philosophy of religion, specifically the analytic tradition's use of contingency arguments, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, and probabilistic reasoning in fine-tuning debates (Pruss & Rasmussen 2018; Oppy 2018; Collins 2009). This framework allows al-Ghazali's thought to be systematically compared with contemporary arguments.

While Marmura (1981) highlights al-Ghazali's emphasis on contingency, Griffel (2009) situates him within *Ash'arite kalam*, and Craig (1979 & 2011) re-appropriates his logic for the modern *kalam* argument, few studies have systematically tested his reasoning against multiverse hypotheses or quantum indeterminacy. This article addresses that gap. In contrast to Marmura's focus on infinity and contingency (1981) and Griffel's emphasis on *Ash'arite* theology (2009), this article positions al-Ghazali within the broader analytic debates of Pruss & Rasmussen (2018) and Oppy (2018). This comparative approach highlights both the continuity of *kalam* reasoning and its adaptability to modern contexts.

## METHODOLOGY

The analysis is qualitative, combining hermeneutic exegesis of primary texts with comparative argument-mapping against modern analytic philosophy of religion and cosmology. The study employs qualitative and interdisciplinary approaches to address the gaps identified in the literature. This study is a textual analysis of Al-Ghazali's renowned works; *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, as well as critical engagement with secondary scholarship. The

primary texts are analyzed to explore his proofs for God's existence. This consists of close reading of key passages to explore the other dimensions of his philosophical and theological arguments. A limitation of this study is that it does not attempt empirical verification; rather, it assesses conceptual robustness and cross-contextual applicability. Marmura's (2000) translation and commentary provide insights about different philosophical and theological aspects of al-Ghazali view points in reconciling philosophy with theology. The works of Watt (1953), Griffel (2009), and Nasr (2006) also highlight its ideas during medieval period and link them with modern philosophical discourses. These contextual studies are helpful to get deeper understanding of al-Ghazali's contributions in Islamic and Western philosophy. Through a comparative approach the study explores parallels between contemporary theistic arguments and al-Ghazali's proof. This includes the analysis of similarities and differences in al-Ghazali's cosmological and teleological arguments and modern philosophical developments such as the *kalam* cosmological argument (Craig 1979) and intelligent design theory (Dembski 1998). The findings of textual, historical and comparative analysis develop the contemporary relevance of al-Ghazali's thought about the nature and understanding about the God's existence. The analysis also provides the limitations and potential of his arguments. The study does not attempt empirical verification but instead evaluates conceptual robustness across traditions.

## AL-GHAZALI'S PROOFS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Al-Ghazali's proofs for God's existence are mainly categorized in two broader theosophical viewpoints: cosmological arguments and teleological arguments. The uniqueness of these arguments is the combination of mystical and rational approaches. Al-Ghazali was impressed by the works of earlier *mutakallimun* like *Al-Ash'ari*. He also had the engagement with Greek philosophy specifically the philosophical ideas of Aristotle and Plato (Hyman & Walsh 1983).

### The Cosmological Argument

The argument from contingency by al-Ghazali considers as one of the most fundamental philosophical inquiries about origins of the cosmos and nature of existence. He claims that the existence of universe necessitates a first cause. His argument is linked with the earlier Islamic theologian *Al-Ash'ari*

who argued for the temporal creation of the universe (Griffel 2009). He develops this argument in his work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. He contends that the universe and all which exists in the universe is contingent. According to him, the contingency of the world is not merely a matter of individual objects having the potential to exist in other ways. It is a more profound position that the universe's existence is not necessary. The universe depends on an external reason or cause for the existence. This dependence on an external cause leads to a logical conclusion that there must be a necessary being. Al-Ghazali considers this necessary being is God.

Al-Ghazali's argument consists of long tradition of philosophical reasoning about the existence of universe, its necessity and causality. These arguments have influence in Islamic and Western thought. Careful analysis of universe and its dependence on an external cause leads him to establish the existence of a necessary being. His argument basis on classical metaphysical principles and confronts other thoughts for a self-sustaining universe or reject the necessity for a first cause.

In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, al-Ghazali discusses and criticizes the views of the Islamic Peripatetic philosophers. Al-Ghazali mainly critiques their concepts about universe as an eternal, self-sustaining system that exists in a necessary state. Al-Ghazali argues that the nature of universe existence is contingent. He asserts: "the existence of the world... is not necessary; it could have been otherwise" (Al-Ghazali 2000). This claim makes the base of his argument because it calls in question the assumptions of those philosophers who are in support of the idea of eternal and unchanging cosmos.

Al-Ghazali's comprehension of contingency of the universe does not include the intrinsic property of necessity. This is not in the sense that the universe could have ceased to exist at any moment, rather does not contain within itself the reason for its existence and it is not self-explanatory. Al-Ghazali further elaborates it thought that, "If there were no necessary being, nothing else could exist" (2000). In this way he reasoned for the existence of the universe that there must be something that exists necessarily. Thus, this necessary being would be the actual cause for the existence of universe.

The argument relies mainly on the distinction of necessary and contingent. A necessary being is independent, whereas a contingent is dependent on any external. Al-Ghazali analyzes whole things of

the universe in different parts and reaches on the conclusion that everything in it is contingent and logically develops the argument that there must be a necessary responsible for its sustainability and existence. He elaborates that God is the only being that exists by necessity and everything else we observe in nature, whether objects, events, or even abstract concepts are contingent upon the necessary being.

Al-Ghazali's argument for contingency has been revisited in modern philosophy which shaped the cosmological argument. The cosmological argument demonstrates the existence of a necessary being or first cause which is based on the contingency of the universe. This argument has been further developed in recent decades by William Lane Craig who emphasizes on the significance of the contingent nature of the universe as an evidence for the existence of a necessary being or eternal cause.

William Lane Craig (2011), in his development of the cosmological argument depends heavily on al-Ghazali's ideas about contingency. Craig argues that the universe cannot be self-explaining or eternal. Thus, it must have a cause beyond itself. He elaborate it that, "The universe is contingent, and therefore must have a cause which is necessary in itself" (Craig 2011). This contemporary development of the cosmological argument links al-Ghazali's assertion that the contingency of the universe points towards a necessary being which is identified as God. Through this way, al-Ghazali's argument finds place in contemporary ongoing discourse of cosmology, especially in connection to the fine-tuning of the universe for life.

Craig's version of the cosmological argument also includes modern scientific discoveries; Big Bang theory and fine-tuning of the universe existence of life. The fine-tuning argument emphasizes that the physical constants of the universe are so precise that even the slightest alteration would cease life existence on earth. Craig also attaches this fine-tuning as an evidence of a purposeful intelligent cause for the universe. He further elaborates that the contingency of universe, its ultimate origin and precise conditions cannot be explained by naturalistic causes and reasons alone. In this way, the universe's existence points to a necessary and eternal being that sustains and creates it.

The fine-tuning argument also links with al-Ghazali's thinking. He considers contingent nature of universe as evidence of a transcendent cause because universe's specific conditions reflect divine

design. Al-Ghazali's argument is traced in a long tradition of metaphysical inquiries. Aristotle's view of the "unmoved mover" considers an early idea that the universe requires a necessary cause. He argued that the unmoved mover is a necessary being that originates motion in the universe without moving itself. Aristotle's argument is based on the potentiality and actuality. He considers everything in universe has potentiality but unmoved mover has actuality.

Thomas Aquinas also builds his argument on Aristotelian metaphysics and integrates in Christian theology, similar to al-Ghazali who integrated Aristotelian argument in Islamic theology. Aquinas presents his third way argument considering everything in the world contingent (could exist or not exist). If everything is contingent then at some point nothing would exist because contingent beings depend upon something else for their existence. Al-Ghazali argument also links with the work of Aquinas. He also argued that the existence of contingent beings requires a necessary being. In his *Five Ways* Aquinas argues that the existence of a necessary being is only understandable explanation for the existence of contingent beings which is God who is sustainer of the world (Aquinas 1265-1274/1947).

Although al-Ghazali's argument for contingency has been influential in philosophical circle but it subjects to critique from naturalistic and atheistic perspectives. The critics have challenged his idea that contingency of universe requires a necessary being; there might be other explanations such as multiverse theory which could account the existence of the universe without invoking a divine cause.

The major challenge to the cosmological argument is from multiverse narrative. It is a hypothetical collection of multiple and possibly infinite universes that could contain different physical constants and laws. The propagators of the multiverse theory argue that our universe is just one among many universes. They view the apparent fine-tuning of our universe as the result of the existence of other universes with different constants, laws and properties. According to this understanding, the contingency of our universe might be explained without considering to a necessary being.

On the other hand, the critics of the multiverse theory argue that multiverse theory is speculative and lacks empirical evidence. Further, the multiverse hypothesis itself might require an explanation. Philosopher of science David Lewis (2007) argues, "The existence of a multiverse does not absolve us

of the need for a necessary cause; it merely shifts the question to a higher level". In this way, even the multiverse theory is true, may still point to a necessary being that is required for the existence of multiverse.

Even though critiques from multiverse theory and naturalism present challenges to al-Ghazali's argument, the basic distinction between contingent beings and necessary beings continues to develop our understanding of the universe. The revival of the cosmological argument in modern philosophy and in contemporary scientific debates reflects the influence of al-Ghazali's argument for the necessity of a divine in the study of the universe's origins.

Al-Ghazali's also criticized the Aristotelian concept of the infinite regress which was later adopted by different philosophers of his age. He elaborated this issue in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (2000) that has made a specific place in the history of philosophy. The problem of causality develops the question that whether an infinite chain of causes can exist without a first cause. According to Al-Ghazali's there cannot be an infinite regress of causes and the chain of causes must have the existence of a first cause. This first cause must be uncaused and necessary. He describes this first cause as God. God is a being who exists by necessity and provides the explanation about the origin of the universe. This argument criticized strongly the previous philosophical view that the universe has always existed and operates on self-sustaining eternal framework. He challenged this view by highlighting logical contradiction which is known as the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes. He describes, "The chain of causes cannot extend infinitely in the past, for there must be a first cause" (Al-Ghazali 2000). This claim developed new discourses in cosmological philosophy.

The concept of infinite regress holds that every event or effect has a cause; further this causal chain goes to infinite extent in the past. Al-Ghazali rejects the idea of infinite regress and suggests that it is logically impossible. He argues: "The chain of causes cannot extend infinitely in the past, for there must be a first cause" (Al-Ghazali 2000). He further elaborates his position that if we have an infinite regress of causes, then there will be no effect. This is because there would be no any starting point, which is necessary for the beginning of chain of causes. This will lead to an absurd conclusion that the universe, or any contingent event, could not have come into existence.

Al-Ghazali's view is more understandable by the analogy of a series of dominos. If each of dominoes depends on previous one to fall and first domino never falls, then the entire series would fail to unfold. Same as, if we look at the infinite regress argument, if each cause is dependent on a prior cause ad infinitum, then through this way, there would be no ultimate/ final cause to initiate the chain. This will lead to a state of non-causality and entire system would be frozen.

This critique of infinite regress has had a profound impact on the way philosophers think about the origins of the universe. By rejecting the possibility of an infinite chain of causes, al-Ghazali insists that there must be a starting point for the universe, a first because that exists necessarily and is independent of all other causes. For al-Ghazali, this first cause is God, a necessary and uncaused being whose existence does not depend on anything else. In this way, al-Ghazali rejects the infinite regress, and he argues: "The first cause must be necessary and uncaused, for only such a cause can explain the existence of a contingent universe" (Al-Ghazali 2000). Through this argument he establishes that God is the ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe.

Al-Ghazali critiqued those philosophers who believed in the eternity of universe with no beginning or end. This view holds that the universe operates within unchanging and eternal causal framework without a first cause. Al-Ghazali believed this view logical absurd because it leads to infinite regress. In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, al-Ghazali writes: "If the universe had no beginning, it would not be contingent upon anything, and its existence would not need a cause" (Al-Ghazali 2000). Al-Ghazali considers the eternity of the universe contradictory to the idea of a necessary cause. In this way al-Ghazali rejects the Aristotelian idea of the eternity of universe and formulates his philosophical argument in Islamic theological framework.

Al-Ghazali's argument to refute the idea of infinite regress got great influence in the circles of philosophy and reviewed by contemporary philosophers specifically, in modern cosmological arguments. Quentin Smith has explored the problem of first cause in modern terms. Smith (2002) argues that best explanation behind the origin of universe is the existence of a personal and uncaused cause which is God. Smith extends his cosmological on the pattern of al-Ghazali by suggesting a beginning for the universe which requires a cause which is

necessary and uncaused. Smith claims: "The best explanation for the origin of the universe is that it was created by a personal, uncaused cause, which we identify as God" (Smith 2002). John Leslie (1996) notes, "The beginning of the universe requires an explanation, and the most reasonable explanation is that there exists a necessary being which is God."

The Big Bang theory also requires the support from the argument of a first cause. The Big Bang theory claims for the beginning of universe at some point of time. In response to the claim of some physicists that the origin of universe is due to quantum fluctuations, Smith argues that these explanations also require a first cause which transcends natural explanations.

Lewis (2007) suggests that "the concept of a multiverse challenges traditional notions of causality and necessity, raising profound questions about the nature of existence and the limits of human understanding". The most significant challenge to al-Ghazali's argument comes from quantum mechanics. This theory claims that at the subatomic level events can be occurred without clear causes. This theory violates the idea of causality. However, Smith (2002) responds that this theory does not undermine the requirement of a first cause on a cosmic scale. The apparent random quantum events do not negate that as a whole, universe must have a first cause. Smith (2002) argues: "Even if quantum events are random, the existence of the universe as a whole still requires an uncaused cause".

This argument is further supported William lane Craig (2011) who argued that the fine-tuning of the universe to support the existence of life reflects the need of intelligent and purposeful first cause. Craig suggests that the accuracy of the constants of nature is tuned to allow for life that cannot be explained by naturalistic processes or by chance rather fine-tuning suggests a deliberate creator and a necessary being that caused for the existence of universe. Frank (2007) argues that "Al-Ghazali's philosophical contributions laid the groundwork for a unique synthesis of Islamic theology and rational inquiry, bridging the gap between mysticism and philosophy" (p. 45). McBrien (2002) argues in similar way that "the Catholic understanding of God's existence is deeply rooted in both revelation and reason, emphasizing the divine presence as both transcendent and immanent in the world". Plantinga (2000) adds that "theistic belief, when properly grounded, is both rational and warranted, as it aligns with the fundamental structures of human cognition

and the reality of a divine creator". Al-Ghazali's rebuttal of infinite regress and his concept about the necessity of a first cause have been center of attention in classical and contemporary philosophy of religion and science. Thus, al-Ghazali's contingency reasoning parallels modern cosmological arguments while providing a response to naturalistic models such as the multiverse, a point largely overlooked in secondary scholarship.

#### The Teleological Argument

Another most significant contribution of Al-Ghazali's is the formulation of teleological argument which is based on observation of purpose and order in the universe. He develops that harmony in natural world and its intricate design indicates an intelligent designer. In his book, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, he writes, "The heavens and the earth and all that is between them are signs for those who reflect" (Al-Ghazali 2011). This argument links with contemporary intelligent design theory which claims that certain features of the universe can be understood and explained by an intelligent cause (Dembski 1998). Al-Ghazali's teleological argument also links with Qur'anic explanation of natural world that is an evidence of God's wisdom (Nasr 2006).

In his book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (2000), al-Ghazali's suggests, "The order in the heavens and the earth points clearly to a wise and purposeful creator" (Al-Ghazali 2000). This argument makes the foundation of modern teleological argument which has been supported by Islamic and Christian philosophical traditions. This argument holds the idea that natural world is not in result of random processes rather it is because of purposeful and intelligent design by the intelligent creator. Richard Swinburne (2004) has extended al-Ghazali's teleological argument by highlighting that the precise conditions which are required for the existence of life on earth strongly indicate an intelligent designer.

Al-Ghazali suggests that universe does not unfold randomly instead it exhibits a systematic structure which reflects intentionality. There are many signs in nature such as the cycles of seasons, orbits of celestial bodies, and delicate natural processes. All these signs are not by chance but by design.

In the Christianity, al-Ghazali's teleological argument has parallels with the argument by William Paley. His analogy of the watchmaker also

reflects intelligent design. Paley (1802) argues: "The watch must have had a maker; the universe, with all its regularity and intricacy, must also have had a designer". Although, Paley's argument is in the 18th century, however, it reflects great similarities to al-Ghazali's understandings.

Philosophers such as Michael Behe and William Dembski have highlighted certain features of biological organisms which exhibit "irreducible complexity" and it is not possible to explain them by gradual evolutionary processes alone. Behe (1996) argues: "Some biological structures are so complex that they must have been designed by an intelligent agent, as they cannot be the result of naturalistic processes". This modern development of the teleological argument shows similarities with al-Ghazali's teleological argument. Swinburne (2004) argues that "the existence of God provides the best explanation for the order, complexity, and fine-tuning of the universe, which cannot be adequately accounted for by naturalistic processes alone".

David Hume (1779) has critiqued the teleological argument through questioning the analogy between human artifacts and natural world. He considered the comparison between a watch and the universe flawed. He reasoned that universe differs fundamentally from human-made objects. He argued that: "The world is more like an organic being than a machine" (Hume 1779). Hume does not consider the argument from design as a conclusive proof for God's existence because the order and complexity of universe could be explained through natural causes.

Richard Dawkins (2006) also rejected the idea of design and offered a naturalistic explanation for the order and complexity of life on earth. He suggests that the complexity can be explained through the evolutionary process rather getting divine explanation. He considers natural selection as a "blind watchmaker" that can account for complexity of universe and of living organisms without invoking a designer (Dawkins 2006). Although there is criticism about the teleological argument, yet it continues to be an influential component of discourse about God's existence.

In addition to cosmological and teleological arguments, al-Ghazali also considers the reality of miracles as strong evidence for God's existence. He argues, "The miracles of the Prophets show that God is not bound by the laws of nature and can act directly in the world" (Al-Ghazali 2000). The validity of miracles is established through the

historical evidence because people have witnessed these miracles in history. Richard P. McBrien (2002) describes that miracles were extraordinary events that defy natural explanations to serve a strong evidence for God's existence. David Hume (1779) has questioned the credibility of miracles and other critics have represented miracles as manmade stories. Nasr (2002) explains that "Islamic philosophy, particularly in its classical period, sought to harmonize divine revelation with rational inquiry, affirming the existence of God as both a metaphysical necessity and a spiritual reality". Contemporary theologians continue to point to miraculous events as an evidence for God's existence because no other than God can reverse the laws of nature.

### CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali's intellectual contributions consist of critique of Aristotelian philosophy and of those Islamic philosophers who continued Aristotelian framework for the nature and existence of God. His arguments made their unique place in Islamic and Western philosophy. Al-Ghazali's cosmological argument is based on the contingency of the universe and need of a first cause. This argument has synchronization with the modern scientific arguments; Big Bang theory and fine tuning arguments. His teleological argument has parallels with the modern intelligent design theory and remained significant in cotemporary religious and scientific discourses. Al-Ghazali contributed that human reason alone is insufficient to establish God's existence, and it require religious experience to comprehend God's existence. Divine revelation and worships are important sources of religious experience. At present, al-Ghazali's arguments address the metaphysical and philosophical challenges by new atheist and secular thinkers and develop discourses about philosophy of religion and philosophy of science. His criticism of infinite regress, idea of the contingency of universe, and insights about purposeful design have contributed significantly in philosophical and theological discourses from medieval Islamic era to present. The understanding of al-Ghazali's thought is important to comprehend ongoing discourses in philosophy of religion and science. Al-Ghazali's cosmological and teleological arguments present insights about

the nature of existence, limits of human reason as well as relationship between God and natural world which have significant contributions in modern philosophical discourses. In this way, the study not only recovers the historical significance of al-Ghazali but also demonstrates his transformation into a resource for twenty-first-century philosophy of religion and science. This study also seeks to extend the relevance of al-Ghazali's reasoning beyond the confines of philosophy of religion. By engaging with contemporary debates in cosmology, natural sciences, and philosophy of science, the analysis demonstrates how classical *kalam* arguments provide conceptual resources for broader interdisciplinary conversations. In particular, al-Ghazali's synthesis of rational inquiry and theological insight offers a constructive framework for dialogue between theology, philosophy, and modern scientific paradigms, including cosmology, fine-tuning, and quantum indeterminacy. Future research may further test al-Ghazali's framework by applying it to emergent scientific paradigms such as quantum cosmology and theories of consciousness, thereby extending his relevance beyond philosophy of religion into broader interdisciplinary discourse.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Lene Kühle, Department of the Study of Religion, Aarhus University, Denmark, for her invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and continuous encouragement throughout the course of this postdoctoral research. Her mentorship significantly enriched the quality and depth of this work. I am also thankful to the faculty members and colleagues in the Department of the Study of Religion at Aarhus University, whose constructive comments and supportive academic environment contributed greatly to the completion of this article.

### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The present article is the sole work of Dr. Ataur Rehman, who conceived, designed, researched, analyzed, and wrote the entire manuscript. No other individual contributed to the research design, data collection, analysis, or writing of this article.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) GENERATED  
TEXT DECLARATION

The author affirms that no part of this manuscript was generated by artificial intelligence (AI) tools. All ideas, arguments, analysis, and text are entirely the author's own original work. AI was not employed in the conception, drafting, editing, or revision of this article.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declare that he has no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced this work.

## ETHICS STATEMENT

This study did not involve human or animal participants. All data were obtained from publicly available sources and contained no personally identifiable information. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

## REFERENCES

- Adamson, P. 2016. *Philosophy in the Islamic World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aquinas, T. 1947. *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Bros.
- Barger, C. L. 1978. *The Concept of Causality in Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali's "Tahafut Al-Falasifah*. The University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- Barger, C. L. 2007. Re-thinking necessity (al-Darūra) in al-Ghazālī's understanding of physical causation. *Theology and Science* 5(1): 21-36.
- Behe, M. 1996. *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. New York: Free Press.
- Collins, R. 2009. The teleological argument. In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Craig, W. L. & Sinclair, J. 2009. The Kalam Cosmological Argument. In *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, edited by William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Craig, W. L. 1979. *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock.
- Craig, W. L. 2011. *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Darwin, C. 1859. *On the Origin of Species*. London: John Murray.
- Dawkins, R. 2006. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Dembski, W. A. 1998. *The Design Inference: Eliminating Chance through Small Probabilities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dennett, D. 2006. *Breaking the Spell*. New York: Viking.
- Erasmus, J. 2018. *The Kalam Cosmological Argument: A reassessment*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Erasmus, J. 2018. *The Kalam cosmological argument: A reassessment*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Erlwein, H. C. 2017. Proving God's Existence? A Reassessment of al-Rāzī's Arguments for the Existence of the Creator. *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. 19(2): 31-63.
- Frank, R. 2007. *Al-Ghazali and the Foundations of Islamic Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Al-Ghazali. 1953. *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dalal W. Montgomery Watt in the Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Al-Ghazali. 2000. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press.
- Al-Ghazali. 2011. *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society.
- Goodman, L. E. 1971. Ghazali's Argument from Creation. (I). *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2(1): 67-85.
- Griffel, F. 2009. *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gutas, D. 1998. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Hitchens, C. 2007. *God Is Not Great*. New York: Twelve.
- Hume, D. 1779. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. London: A. Millar.
- Hyman, A. & Walsh, J. J. 1983. *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing.
- Kukkonen, T. 2000. Possible worlds in the Tahafut al-Falasifa: Al-Ghazali on creation and contingency. *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38(4): 479-502.
- Leaman, O. 1999. *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Leslie, J. 1996. *Universes*. London: Routledge.
- Lewis, D. 2007. *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Malik, S. A. 2023. Defending 'Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazali and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm': Abrahamic dialogues and interdisciplinary insights. *Theology and Science* 21(4): 745-780.
- Marmura, M. E. 1981. Ghazali on infinity, temporality, and creation. *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 13(3): 287-303.
- McBrien, R. P. 2002. *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism*. New York: Harper Collins.

- Muhtaroglu, N. 2025. Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali on Causality as Necessary Connection, and Occasionalism. *Theology and Science*. 1-12.
- Nasr, S. H. 2006. *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Oppy, G. 2018. *Arguing about Gods*. Revised ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paley, W. 1802. *Natural Theology, or, Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*. London: J. Faulder.
- Plantinga, A. 2000. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pruss, A. R. & Rasmussen, J. 2018. *Necessary Existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, F. 1982. *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rasmussen, J. & Koons, R. 2021. *Necessary Existence and the Nature of Contingency*. London: Routledge.
- Rehman, A. 2020. Moralities: A contemporary discourse between new Atheism and Islam. *Islamiyyat: The International Journal of Islamic Studies* 42(2): 113-124.
- Rehman, A. U., & Basharat, T. 2021. God's Existence: Philosophical Discourse Between New Atheists and Muslim Scholars. *Pakistan Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 3(2): 1-16.
- Shah, M. 2015. Kalam: rational expressions of medieval theological thought. *Encyclopedia of Mediterranean Humanism (Encyclopédie de l'humanisme Méditerranéen)*, 1-49.
- Smith, Q. 2002. *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swinburne, R. 2004. *The Existence of God*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watt, W. M. 1953. *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali*. London: George Allen and Unwin.