

## The Contemporary Natural Theology and God of the Gaps

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**Abstract:** Natural theology has entered a new phase in the contemporary period and empirical evidence or explanatory gaps of the new natural sciences take a significant role in this project. On the other hand, Theism has been wounded by a strategy in which the epistemological unknowns were argued in favor of the existence of God (God of the Gaps). In this article, the problems faced by the strategy of the god of the gaps and their proposed solutions are reviewed, and accordingly, two points are declared: 1) Separation of boundary or limit questions from scientific questions are recognized and accepted, then a criterion is provided for this distinction based on the definition of Muslim philosophers for philosophical statements. 2) The activity of supernatural agents, including God, is comprehensively portrayed from the perspective of Islamic wisdom, and based on it, both the contemporary natural theology and its rival project (naturalism) are rejected.

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**I**ntroduction: In contemporary natural theology, the existence of God is based on events that natural explanations do not explain their occurrence, and it is claimed that the occurrence of these particular phenomena, given the existence of God, is better explained. Therefore, the assumption of the existence of God or the theistic hypothesis is considered as the best explanation for certain phenomena in the world. Such a project faces an old challenge that seeks God in the gaps of knowledge and human ignorance and is called the God of the Gaps (GOG). The question raised here is whether the strategy of contemporary natural theology in focusing on empirical evidence is the subject of the GOG?

There are four different critiques of GOG arguments (Kojonen 2016): The first critique is that GOG arguments are arguments from ignorance, meaning that in them some theistic explanation is argued to be

correct on the basis that we have no scientific explanation of the phenomena. The second critique is more modest than the first: it claims simply that GOG arguments invoke God as an explanation at a point where it would be more reasonable to look for scientific explanations based on our past experience. The third critique is that GOG arguments presuppose a bad theology of divine action. The worry is that GOG arguments wrongly emphasize miraculous divine action and minimize divine action in and through natural processes. The fourth critique of GOG arguments is that they are apologetically and pastorally dangerous, meaning that they threaten the outward credibility and inward stability of religious faith.

**F**indings: I seek the solution of the second and last critique in the distinction of scientific and boundary questions and try to introduce a criterion for boundary questions. It is

argued that in the lack of an appropriate criterion for that distinction, the distinction although fruitful in principle, becomes useless in practice and question-begging.

The criterion is the role of special abstract concepts in all boundary questions which is in common with all philosophical statements. These abstract concepts can only be grasped when the existence of a being is compared with another. The abstract nature of these concepts is the reason for the incapability of natural sciences to investigate the boundary questions. Thus boundary questions are not challenges that can be answered in God's intervention; rather, they are issues on the border of philosophy and science, and the answer to them must be obtained through philosophical investigations.

In considering the third critique, I introduce the scheme of divine action in Islamic wisdom. It is argued that every natural event has a compound direct cause which is constituted by natural and supernatural agents. The immediate and direct causal role of a supernatural agent is an issue different from the familiar doctrine of second-order causation. Therefore, natural events are based on supernatural causes in both direct and indirect forms and at the same time have a role in bringing their natural effects into existence. All natural and supernatural causes are involved in the realization of a natural phenomenon, ultimately depend on the divine providence.

Accordingly, on the one hand, the quest for finding the natural causes for any natural event, in principle, never failed and the burden is on the

shoulder of natural sciences to find the efficient factors and the quality of how they take their role. Thus the explanatory gaps that contemporary natural theologians rely on (for example, the origination or fine-tuning of the universe or emergence of life or conciseness or religious experiences), are the gaps of our knowledge and this strategy, sooner or later, would lead to the god of the gaps upshot. In contemporary natural theology natural causes are replaced with God. On the other hand, there is always an immediate supernatural agent in any genuine natural event. Thus the naturalistic explanation of no natural phenomena is complete. Dependence of any event on that compound cause is found by pure a priori reason and the quality of how they act, can be discovered by

experience in the natural part and by revelation in the supernatural part.

Clearly, the two above arguments have no relation to each other. Although there are some irreducible boundary questions that seek philosophical investigations, the point has nothing in common with the personal explanation of those subject phenomena or the supernatural agents' intervention in those events.

### **D**iscussion and Conclusion:

To conclude, firstly, there are boundary questions that rise from the scientific activity but, due to their abstract nature, experimental science is not able to study them. Secondly, the search for a complete list of natural factors influencing the occurrence of any natural event, in principle, will not reach a dead end, and at the same time, a naturalistic explanation will not be a complete explanation for any

natural event. In effect, contrary to popular belief in contemporary natural theology, the above two results are unrelated, and that an issue is addressed as boundary question does not mean that a supernatural agent is in charge for its relevant event.

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