

Rethinking the God of the Gaps Argument: An Islamic Philosophical Critique of New Atheism

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Abstract: The persistent claim by New Atheists that belief in God merely functions as a placeholder for ignorance—commonly referred to as the "God of the Gaps" (GOG) argument—has significantly influenced contemporary discourse on the relationship between science and religion. This view asserts that the more science progresses, the less necessary God becomes, thereby reducing divine agency to an explanatory tool for unresolved phenomena. This article aims to critically examine the logic and epistemological assumptions behind the GOG argument, especially as articulated by figures such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens. Employing a qualitative method through critical literature analysis, this study draws on primary texts from New Atheist thinkers and philosophical responses from both Western and Islamic traditions. The analysis incorporates logical critique, especially identifying fallacies such as appeal to ignorance, false dichotomy, and strawman argumentation, and integrates Islamic epistemology, particularly the distinction between rational-metaphysical knowledge (*‘ilm al-ma’rifah*) and empirical knowledge (*‘ilm al-ma’lūmāt*). The findings reveal that the GOG argument relies on a reductionist worldview that fails to account for the metaphysical dimensions of reality. As a contribution, the paper offers an Islamic philosophical framework that transcends the false dichotomy between science and religion, proposing a coherent epistemology rooted in *tawhīd* that sees science as a means to understand—not replace—divine order.

Keywords: God of the Gaps; New Atheism; Science and Religion; Islamic Epistemology; *Tawhīd*

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, the relationship between science and religion has come back into the academic and public spotlight, especially with the emergence of the *New Atheism* movement that blatantly rejects all forms of theistic claims. Figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett have argued that God is only used as a "filler of the gaps" in human scientific knowledge—a concept known as the *God of the Gaps* (Dawkins, 2006; Hitchens, 2007; Harris, 2004; Dennett, 2006). They believe that the more science develops, the narrower the space for God's existence. This idea creates the impression that religion and science are in permanent conflict. In this context, belief in God is considered a symbol of ignorance or intellectual laziness. This raises epistemological unrest for religious people, who are often not ready to respond to scientific



challenges with the right philosophical and theological approaches. Therefore, this phenomenon demands a critical reading of the basic assumptions of GOG as well as the reconstruction of science-religion relations based on a more comprehensive and integrative framework of thinking.

Studies on the relationship between science and religion have been conducted by a wide range of academics across disciplines. Ian Barbour (1996) offers four models of relationships: conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration, which are widely used as basic references in advanced studies. Haught (1995) and Stenmark (2004) enriched this typology by adding existential and hermeneutic dimensions. Meanwhile, Henry Drummond (1894) has long warned that limiting God only to areas that have not been explained by science is a form of theological error. This idea was reinforced by Charles A. Coulson (1961), who stated that the gaps that were considered to belong to God would soon shrink due to the progress of science. On the other hand, an integrative approach is offered by figures such as Francis Collins (2006), John Polkinghorne (2001), and John Lennox (2019), who seek to avoid the pitfalls of GOG while maintaining the authority of faith in the interpretation of reality. However, studies that raise Islamic epistemology, such as those developed by Al-Ghazālī (1983) and Al-Attas (2019), as a critique of GOG are still very limited in the mainstream literature.

The purpose of this study is to examine the *God of the Gaps argument* used by New Atheism thinkers, as well as provide a critical response from the perspective of Islamic epistemology. This study aims to dismantle logical fallacies such as *appeal to ignorance* and *false dichotomy* in the GOG argument (Bennett, 2012), as well as show that the approach ignores the metaphysical dimension of reality. In addition, this research aims to affirm that in the Islamic view, science is not a separate entity from revelation, but part of a whole system of truth. By examining the thoughts of figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, and Sam Harris, as well as examining the work of John Lennox, Francis Collins, and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, this study proposes an alternative framework based on *tawhīd* and the integration of knowledge. The study also seeks to expand the debate on science and religion into the space of contemporary Islamic philosophy, which has often been overlooked in global discourse.

This research departs from the assumption that the *God of the Gaps argument* is a reflection of epistemological reductionism that only recognizes the validity of empirical science, while rejecting revelation and metaphysical reason as legitimate sources of knowledge. As a result, God is positioned as an emergency solution that only appears when science fails to provide an explanation. This approach results in a false dichotomy between science and religion (Barbour, 1996). In contrast, in Islamic epistemology, God is the foundation of reality itself, not merely a complement to human ignorance. The main hypothesis of this study is that the structure of Islamic knowledge, in particular the division between *'ilm al-ma'rifah* and *'ilm al-ma'lūmāt*, is able to answer the challenges of the GOG philosophically and theologically. Thus, this approach not only avoids the trap of GOG but also offers an integrative framework between faith and rationality (Al-Attas, 2019; Zarkasyi et al., 2019)..

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Origins and Evolution of the God of the Gaps Argument

The concept of the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) finds its earliest manifestations in ancient mythologies, particularly in Greek cosmology, where deities were invoked to explain natural phenomena beyond

human comprehension. Thunder was attributed to Zeus, the sea to Poseidon, and death to Hades—illustrating how divine agency functioned as a placeholder for ignorance (Grant, 2007; Guthrie, 1962). This practice reflects a pre-scientific worldview that relied heavily on myth rather than empirical investigation. As philosophical reasoning emerged in the 6th century BCE through figures like Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes, explanations began to shift from mythos to logos, marking a transition toward naturalistic inquiry (Mohammad Hatta, 1986). The pre-Socratic thinkers' efforts to ground cosmic phenomena in natural elements such as water or air laid the epistemological foundations of modern science, which increasingly marginalized supernatural explanations. In the early modern period, Isaac Newton's invocation of divine order in planetary motion was still framed within a theistic paradigm, but figures like Pierre-Simon Laplace began to exclude God explicitly from scientific models, claiming no need for “that hypothesis” (Newton, 1999; Ferngren, 2000). This intellectual trajectory set the stage for later critiques of religion as epistemically unnecessary in scientific discourse.

In the 19th century, the term *God of the Gaps* was explicitly formulated and criticized by theologians themselves. Henry Drummond, in *The Ascent of Man* (1894), warned religious believers against the temptation of inserting God only where scientific knowledge was absent. He observed that some believers “ceaselessly scan the fields of nature and the books of science in search of gaps which they will fill up with God,” suggesting that this approach reduced God to a temporary, expendable hypothesis. Later, Charles A. Coulson reinforced this criticism by stating that God should not be “invoked only in those areas where science fails,” because such gaps inevitably shrink with the progress of knowledge (Coulson, 1961). As science matured in disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and cosmology, explanations previously attributed to divine action—such as creation, natural order, or human consciousness—were increasingly interpreted through evolutionary and mechanistic paradigms. This led to the widespread assumption, especially in secular and positivist circles, that God's role is inversely proportional to scientific discovery (Barbour, 1996; Richardson & Bowden, 1969). Consequently, GOG became both a theological and philosophical vulnerability, used by critics of religion to portray faith as anti-scientific and intellectually regressive.

2.2. New Atheism and the Rejection of Divine Explanation

The New Atheism movement, which gained traction in the early 21st century, launched a systematic critique against religion, particularly targeting what they perceive as intellectually dishonest attempts to use God as a default explanation for scientific unknowns. Figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett argue that invoking divine agency in the face of scientific uncertainty undermines rational inquiry. Dawkins, in *The God Delusion* (2006), famously mocked the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) as an “intellectually lazy” approach, asserting that religious believers exploit gaps in current scientific understanding to assert the existence of God. He writes, “If an apparent gap is found, it's assumed that God, by default, must fill it” (Dawkins, 2006). Sam Harris, in *The End of Faith* (2004), goes further by asserting that religion obstructs human progress by clinging to supernatural explanations where empirical ones suffice. This epistemological stance assumes methodological naturalism as the only legitimate framework for knowledge production, relegating metaphysical or theological explanations to the realm of superstition (Dennett, 2006). In this view, as scientific knowledge expands, religious belief must necessarily recede, rendering God obsolete in the modern intellectual landscape.

However, critics argue that New Atheism often commits the same fallacies it attributes to religious thought, particularly through its aggressive rejection of metaphysical reasoning. Christopher Hitchens, in *God Is Not Great* (2007), equates all religious explanations with primitive myth-making, ignoring nuanced theological traditions that distinguish between empirical causality and metaphysical grounding. New Atheists tend to treat all references to God as instances of GOG reasoning, failing to recognize theological frameworks where God is not invoked merely as a “gap-filler” but as the ontological foundation of existence itself (Lennox, 2019). This oversimplification leads to a strawman fallacy—misrepresenting religious arguments to make them easier to refute (Bennett, 2012). Moreover, by positing science as the sole epistemic authority, New Atheists risk falling into scientism, a belief system that overextends the domain of science into areas where it lacks methodological competence, such as ethics, meaning, or metaphysics (Haught, 1995). As a result, while New Atheism challenges superficial uses of divine explanation, it often fails to address deeper philosophical and theological arguments that see God not as a stopgap for ignorance, but as the grounding of rationality and existence.

2.3. Integrative and Islamic Epistemological Responses to GOG

In response to the reductionist assumptions of the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument, several thinkers advocate for an integrative approach that views science and religion as addressing distinct but complementary domains of reality. John Polkinghorne, a physicist and theologian, argues that science explains the mechanisms of the universe, while theology addresses meaning and purpose (Polkinghorne, 2001). Similarly, Francis Collins, director of the Human Genome Project, promotes *BioLogos*, a perspective that harmonizes evolutionary science with a belief in divine design without resorting to GOG reasoning (Collins, 2006). John Lennox critiques GOG by distinguishing between types of causation: science explores *mechanism* (how), while theology addresses *agency* (why) (Lennox, 2021). These approaches maintain that invoking God is not about plugging gaps in knowledge but affirming a metaphysical foundation that underlies natural law itself. By reframing divine agency as ontologically prior rather than epistemologically supplementary, these thinkers reject both scientism and fideism. Thus, integrative models challenge the binary assumption in GOG—either science or God—by proposing a layered understanding where empirical knowledge and metaphysical belief are not mutually exclusive but mutually enriching (Barbour, 1996).

From an Islamic perspective, the critique of GOG is addressed not only through integrative reasoning but also through a distinct epistemological framework rooted in *tawḥīd* (divine unity). Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas proposes a dual typology of knowledge: *‘ilm al-ma’rifah* (knowledge of meaning) and *‘ilm al-ma’lūmāt* (knowledge of information), where empirical inquiry is subordinated to metaphysical truths derived from revelation (Al-Attas, 2019). Within this framework, science is considered a *fardhu kifāyah* (communal obligation), while knowledge of God and metaphysical realities is *fardhu ‘ain* (individual obligation), underscoring the hierarchical ordering of epistemic domains. Al-Ghazālī similarly argued that causality in nature does not operate independently of divine will, emphasizing that all physical events are contingent upon God as *al-Muḥarrik al-Awwal* (the Prime Mover) (Al-Ghazālī, 1983). This theological paradigm prevents the compartmentalization of knowledge and safeguards against the fallacy of attributing divine presence only where science is absent. Consequently, Islamic thought does not frame God in contrast to scientific explanation, but rather positions Him as the necessary ontological ground from which both

natural order and rational inquiry derive coherence and meaning (Zarkasyi et al., 2019). This renders the GOG critique largely irrelevant within Islamic epistemology, which integrates revelation and reason without epistemic conflict.

3. Methods

3.1 Material Object

This study focuses on the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument as the material object, particularly how it is articulated and contested within the discourse of New Atheism. The GOG argument is treated not only as a rhetorical claim but also as a philosophical construct embedded in a specific worldview. The analysis seeks to uncover the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind the argument and its implications for the science-religion relationship.

3.2 Research Design

The research adopts a qualitative, philosophical-analytical design, with a focus on conceptual critique and comparative epistemology. It uses critical literature analysis as the main strategy to interrogate arguments, assess logical consistency, and evaluate foundational assumptions. The design is structured to contrast Western secular-naturalistic approaches with Islamic metaphysical perspectives, aiming to demonstrate the coherence and superiority of integrative frameworks over reductionist dichotomies.

3.3. Data Sources

Primary data are drawn from foundational texts of New Atheist thinkers, such as *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins and *God Is Not Great* by Christopher Hitchens. Secondary data includes scholarly responses from both Western and Islamic perspectives, notably works by John Lennox, Francis Collins, Al-Ghazālī, and Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. Relevant journal articles and encyclopedic entries related to science, religion, and epistemology are also included.

3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through purposive sampling of texts that directly engage with or critique the GOG argument. Emphasis was placed on selecting works that represent various philosophical traditions and methodological commitments. The researcher identified recurring themes, key terminologies, and representative critiques to ensure the relevance and depth of the materials reviewed. No interviews or empirical fieldwork were conducted, as the study is purely theoretical and text-based.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using philosophical-epistemological frameworks, combining logical analysis with comparative worldview critique. Logical fallacies such as appeal to ignorance and false dichotomy were identified within the GOG argument using Bo Bennett's taxonomy. Islamic epistemology, particularly the distinction between *'ilm al-ma'rifah* and *'ilm al-ma'lūmāt*, was

employed to highlight the limitations of naturalistic reasoning. The analysis aimed to propose a coherent metaphysical alternative that transcends the GOG narrative.

4. Result

4.1 Beyond God of the Gaps: Bridging the Tension Between Science and Religion

The tension between science and religion has been going on for a long time, and is often understood as a conflict that asserts each other. This is reflected in two historic issues of *Time* magazine; the first titled "Is God Dead?" (1966), reflecting skepticism of God's relevance in the era of scientific advancement, and three years later was changed to "Is God Coming Back to Life?" (1969), showing a return to attention to the relationship between faith and science. This polemic is even sharper in the *discourse of God of the Gaps* (GOG), which assumes that God is only needed to explain what science has not been able to explain (Drummond, 1894; Coulson, 1955). Scientists such as Bertrand Russell (2004), Sigmund Freud (2008), Carl Sagan (1995), and Steven Weinberg (1977) carry a naturalistic paradigm, rejecting the role of religion as unempirical, and considering science as the only source of truth. This view reinforces the notion that God is just a filler of the gap in ignorance that will continue to narrow. Such a view is rooted in Western secular epistemology that is reductive to the meaning of reality and knowledge.

On the other hand, there are scientists who accept the role of religion without rejecting the validity of science. Isaac Newton saw the laws of nature as a reflection of divine order (Brooke & Cantor, 1998), while Albert Einstein judged that religion gives meaning and ethics, while science provides a method of understanding reality. John Polkinghorne rejects the logic of GOG and states that God is the foundation of natural law itself (Polkinghorne, 2000). William Dembski also denied that the complexity of nature could be explained entirely by natural causes, thus opening up the possibility of intelligent designers. This integrative approach is reflected in the typology of Ian Barbour (2000): conflict, independence, dialogue, and integration; as well as John Haught's (1995) and Mikael Stenmark's (2004) versions, which offer a relational scheme between these two domains of knowledge. In Indonesia, the pattern of integration is more dominant in the academic narrative. Meanwhile, *the wave of New Atheism* popularized by Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens revived the science-religion dichotomy to the extreme, promoting an exclusive naturalism that rejected the possibility of divine explanations within a scientific framework (Dawkins, 2006; Hitchens, 2007).

The debate about the relationship between science and religion indirectly leads us to the fundamental problem in the GOG argument. GOG arises when scientific ignorance is used as a justification to present God in an ad hoc manner, as if God is only relevant as long as human knowledge is incomplete. Richard Dawkins (2006) called it sarcastically: "I don't understand it, therefore God did it." However, this approach does not take into account that in some traditions, such as Islam, God is not just the "explainer" of emptiness, but rather the foundation of existence itself (Al-Attas, 2019). John Lennox (2019) emphasizes that the real conflict is not between God and science, but between two worldviews: theism and naturalism. GOG is the result of a secular framework of thought that separates metaphysical reality from scientific discourse. Thus, instead of being a valid argument for the existence of God, GOG reflects the epistemological limitations of radical naturalism that fail to understand the integration between faith and reason in a more complete and comprehensive way.

4.2 God of the Gaps: Between Scientific Criticism and Theological Relevance

The *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument states that science's inability to explain certain phenomena is evidence of God's existence. In this sense, God is presented to "fill the gaps" in human knowledge that have not been reached by the scientific method. According to Richardson and Bowden in *the Dictionary of Christian Theology*, the term GOG is often used pejoratively to describe God as an actor who only works in areas that have not yet been explained by science (Richardson & Bowden, 1983). The main criticism comes from the *New Atheism* movement, which makes GOG a target in attacking supporters of creationism and *intelligent design* (Dawkins, 2006). They consider that using God as an explanation for ignorance is only a way to delay a more valid scientific explanation. Therefore, GOG is considered not only unscientific but also philosophically dangerous because it simplifies God's role into a mere emergency solution when science has not yet provided an answer.

The origins of GOG can be traced back to the ancient Greek era, when gods were used to explain natural phenomena that could not be rationally understood, such as lightning and storms. This phenomenon was then considered to be the initial form of the GOG argument. However, since the 6th century BC, there has been a great shift in the way of understanding reality: from mythology to logos and natural explanations. Philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes began to interpret nature based on rational principles and basic matter such as water and air, rather than the will of the gods (Russell, 1945). This shift paved the way for modern science and reduced reliance on religious explanations. Later, advances such as the theory of evolution by Charles Darwin and the reinterpretation of *intelligent design* by Richard Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986), reinforced the view that God was no longer needed as a scientific explanation. In this paradigm, the advancement of science is actually considered to eliminate the relevance of God's role in understanding the cosmos and life (Dawkins, 2006).

Some criticism of GOG comes from theologians and scientists themselves. Isaac Newton, for example, is considered by some critics to be a classic example of a scientist trapped in GOG logic. In *Principia Mathematica*, he states that the solar system could not have come into existence without God's design (Newton, 1687/1999). However, Stephen Meyer considers that Newton's explanation needs to be equipped with a complete theological framework so that it does not appear to only patch up the shortcomings of science (Meyer, 2009). Henry Drummond (1894), Scottish theologian, was the first to popularize the term "God of the Gaps" and criticized it as a mistaken form of theology. According to him, God does not live in the abyss of ignorance, but is present in the entire structure of human understanding. A similar criticism was made by Charles Coulson, who stated that the knowledge gap will naturally "shrink" as science develops, and that God should not be associated only with unknown territory (Coulson, 1955). Dawkins (2006) even equates GOG with mythological gods because they are both used as explanations for phenomena that have not yet been understood. Therefore, an integrative and non-reductionistic theological approach to the relationship between God and nature is needed.

4.3 Criticism of New Atheism and the God of the Gaps Argument: An Epistemological and Theological Review

A number of 20th-century philosophers and scientists, such as Bertrand Russell, Anthony Flew, E.O. Wilson, and Richard Dawkins, stated that making God the principle of explanation is incompatible with the scientific approach. Richard Dawkins, in *The God Delusion*, explains explicitly that creationists tend to look for "gaps" in scientific knowledge and insert God in them (Dawkins, 2006). He considers that *God of the Gaps* (GOG) is a strategy to delay a more valid scientific explanation. This argument assumes methodological naturalism as the only valid approach in science and rejects the possibility of a metaphysical explanation. However, this kind of criticism ignores a theistic perspective, including in Islam, which sees God not as a filler of the gap, but rather the foundation of the natural law itself (Al-Attas, 2019). Thus, Dawkins' critique of GOG reflects more the limitations of his naturalistic framework than the inherent weaknesses in theism.

Dawkins gave an example of how a creationist concluded that since scientists could not explain the joint structure of a weasel frog, intelligent design must have been correct. He calls this argument a form of logical fallacy: the failure of theory A does not necessarily prove the truth of theory B (Dawkins, 2006). However, this analogy is also problematic because it equates all theistic arguments with GOG logic, creating overgeneralizations and false dichotomies between scientific and supernatural explanations. In Islamic epistemology, for example, empirical observation and revelation are two complementary sources of knowledge, not contradictory (Al-Ghazālī, 1983; Al-Attas, 2019). Therefore, attacks on GOG often deviate from true theistic arguments and instead form an easily destructible *strawman*. The fundamental weakness of Dawkins' approach is not only in the substance of his argument, but in his basic assumption that only legitimate science explains everything.

The views of Dawkins and other New Atheists, such as Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, and Sam Harris, consistently reject God-based explanations because they are considered to limit the progress of science (Hitchens, 2007; Harris, 2005). They equate belief in God with ignorance or even delusion. Dawkins states that jumping from ignorance to a supernatural entity is as stupid as believing in magic after seeing magic tricks (Dawkins, 2006). Claims such as "I don't know, therefore God did it" have been criticized for closing the way for scientific exploration. However, these atheists show weakness by using the word "eventually" or "in time", which shows that they do not know for sure, and still believe in science speculatively. Carl Sagan (1995) and Stephen Hawking (2010) even claim that the universe is everything that exists and does not need God. However, such claims actually reveal that they carry a total naturalistic assumption, which closes itself off from the possibility of non-material reality, an attitude that also leaves room for criticism of religious epistemology.

4.4 Questioning God of the Gaps: Between Godhead Reduction and Epistemological Misconceptions

The view that science and God are at odds often arises from erroneous definitions of God, especially in the framework of *God of the Gaps* (GOG). GOG assumes that God is only present to explain phenomena that science has not yet been able to explain, and will be eliminated as scientific knowledge progresses. J.B. Stump and Alan Padgett (2012) explain that accusations against GOG arguments are often presented in a reductive and simplistic manner. The definition of God in the GOG

does not reflect a deep religious understanding, but rather a caricatural version that is easily criticized by atheists. By defining God solely as a "filler of the gap," public debate is forced to choose between science and God, whereas in many religious traditions, including Christianity and Islam, God is understood as the creator and sustainer of natural law, not just an ad hoc entity to answer ignorance. Therefore, GOG is a strawman argument that ignores the deeper philosophical and theological nuances in the conception of divinity (Stump & Padgett, 2012).

Scientists and thinkers such as John Lennox, Francis Collins, and John Polkinghorne rejected the basic premise of GOG. Lennox (2019) states that science answers the question of "how", while religion answers "why". The two need not be contradicted, as they work at different levels of explanation. Francis Collins applies the principles of BioLogos in the human genome project, combining science and faith as a form of holistic understanding of the universe (Collins, 2006). William D. Phillips, Polkinghorne, and John Houghton also affirm that the advancement of science does not remove the role of God, but rather deepens the understanding of His presence in the cosmic order. Dietrich Bonhoeffer criticized the use of God as a secondary cause because it precisely positioned God as a temporary hypothesis that was easily abandoned, as Laplace stated to Napoleon. Rather, God should be the center of the meaning of life, not the solution to the impasse of science. Thus, these thinkers emphasize that GOG is a misguided approach to the relationship between science and faith, as it reduces God to an emergency explanation of natural phenomena.

According to Lennox (2019), the real conflict between science and religion does not lie in methodology or empirical findings, but in the difference in *worldviews* embraced by scientists. Those who reject God generally hold a naturalistic-materialistic worldview, that is, the belief that the universe is autonomous and does not require transcendent explanation. On the contrary, scientists of faith are based on theism, which believes in the existence of God as the first cause (*causa prima*) of all that exists. Historical data even show that between 1901–2000, more than 60% of Nobel laureates were Christians, showing that faith does not stand in the way of scientific achievement (Barrow & Tipler, 1986). Therefore, the claim that one must be an atheist to be a credible scientist is a false assumption. The real conflict is a clash between naturalism and theism, not between science and religion. With this in mind, it appears that the GOG argument is often used unilaterally to discredit religion in public debate, when philosophically and empirically, the premise is weak and can be responded to scientifically and theologically.

4.5 God of the Gaps and the Fallacy of Logic: Deconstructing Criticism of Smart Design

The *God of the Gaps* (GOG) statement is often used as the main weapon in rejecting the intelligent design argument. Richard Dawkins (2006) asserts that proponents of intelligent design only use gaps in scientific knowledge as justifications for the existence of God. According to him, as long as a scientific explanation has not been found, it should not be concluded that God is the answer. This kind of criticism tends to accuse theistic parties of using ignorance as the basis for theological claims. However, as Larmer (2002) explains, even Newton himself never took God's intervention as proof of scientific ignorance, but rather as a philosophical conclusion about the order of nature. Mark Isaak (2007) also states that this kind of criticism often misunderstands the position of proponents of intelligent design, because they do not use the "emptiness of knowledge" as the basis of the argument, but rather complexity that cannot be reduced naturally. The accusations against GOG are often unfairly simplistic and fail to capture the deeper arguments of the theistic position.

The GOG argument is often seen as undermining the position of theism because it is assumed to rest only on a knowledge gap. However, this kind of approach actually presents a number of logical *fallacies*. According to Bo Bennett (2012), a fallacy is a thinking error that makes an argument seem right but is actually wrong. In the context of GOG, the first fallacy is appeal to *ignorance*, which is to conclude that God exists only because there is no scientific explanation—a form of argument from ignorance. The second is *the false dichotomy*, which is forcing a choice between science or religion, when both may be ontologically coherent. Third is *confirmation bias*, which is the selective use of data (such as Newton's quotes) while ignoring other data that may contradict the basic assumptions of atheism. These errors suggest that the GOG argument, when positioned as the main criticism of theism, is actually weak and problematic philosophically and methodologically.

One of the most prominent fallacies in the GOG argument is the *strawman fallacy*, which is when atheists reduce the argument about the existence of God to a weaker version that is easily attacked. In this context, GOG is often used as a single representation of theistic arguments, as if all belief in God is just an attempt to patch the gap in science. In fact, classical theistic arguments—both in Christian and Islamic theology—do not rely on the emptiness of science, but on metaphysical principles about existence and order (Craig & Moreland, 2003). Thus, GOG's accusations not only fail to capture the depth of philosophical arguments but also tend to manipulate discussions to favor naturalistic positions. In healthy intellectual debate, arguments should be responded to in their entirety, not simplified to be easily refuted. Therefore, the claim that all forms of theism fall within the GOG is an exaggerated generalization that does not represent the complexity of religious tradition or alternative epistemology to modern science.

4.6 Islam and Criticism of the God of the Gaps: Towards the Epistemology of Tauhidik

In the Islamic intellectual tradition, reality (*wujūd*) is not limited to the physical aspect alone, but includes the metaphysical aspect, where God is the Absolute Reality from which all things originate. Therefore, the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument that places God as the "explainer of the emptiness of knowledge" is a one-sided and reductive assumption. Science in Islam is classified into two: *'ilm al-ma'rifah* (spiritual knowledge through revelation) and *'ilm al-ma'lumat* (empirical knowledge through reason and senses), as explained by Al-Attas (1995). This distinction shows that proving God through the scientific-empirical method is inadequate. GOG, as a Western discourse, arises from an epistemology that limits knowledge to only what can be empirically tested. Within the framework of Islam, as practiced in the integrative curriculum in a number of Islamic universities in Indonesia, God is not positioned as a "filler of the gap," but as the center of the meaning of science and the universe.

Islam rejects the dichotomy between science and religion that is at the root of the GOG argument in Western epistemology. The concept of *tawhid* not only emphasizes the oneness of God as *Ilāh* and *Rabb*, but also positions Him as the source of all knowledge and existence. John Lennox (2009) and Muslim scholars such as Al-Ghazālī criticize the atheistic view that makes God merely an emergency hypothesis. In the Islamic view, nature does not stand independent of God, but is a manifestation of His will and design. Thus, the conflict between science and religion does not come from scientific methodology itself, but from the difference in *worldview* between naturalism and theism (Lennox, 2019). The root of the conflict is not in God versus science, but in a fundamental assumption: whether

reality is limited to the physical or beyond that. Islam views that the two complement each other, not contradict each other.

Al-Attas (1995) explained that knowledge in Islam can be analogous to the *process of ta'wil* to the kauniyah verses in the universe, where science functions to interpret the signs of God. The *verses of muhkamât* and *mutasyâbihât* in the Qur'an are also found in nature, which requires a rational and spiritual approach to understand. In this context, science is not just the study of empirical objects, but part of the theological reading of creation. Al-Ghazālī (2000) states that all creation is *hādiths* (created) that have a *cause*, and that the first cause is God (*kāri' al-wujūd*). In the study of Islamic cosmology, the order of the universe is never considered autonomous, but always in absolute dependence on its *Khāliq*. Thus, in the Islamic view, the relationship between science and religion is integrative and non-dualistic. Science is the way to admire the greatness of God, not to deny Him, as concluded in the Islamic conception of *'ilm* as a *fardhu kifayah* to understand the signs of God in nature.

5. Discussion

The results of this study confirm that the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument is a form of reductive thinking that dichotomizes science and religion. First, the tension between science and religion is nurtured by some scientists who adopt naturalistic worldviews, such as Bertrand Russell, Carl Sagan, and Richard Dawkins, who believe that science will completely replace the role of God (Dawkins, 2006; Sagan, 1995; Russell, 2004). Second, historically, GOG emerged from a theistic tradition that relied on explanations for ignorance, but the term was later popularized negatively by Henry Drummond (1894) and reinforced by Coulson (1955), who suggested that the gap in science would continue to shrink. Third, GOG contains various logical fallacies, such as *appeal to ignorance* and *false dichotomy*, which make the argument philosophically flawed (Bennett, 2012; Larmer, 2002). Fourth, Islamic epistemology that integrates revelation and reason—as developed by Al-Attas (2019) and Al-Ghazālī (1983)—is able to avoid the trap of GOG, because God is not positioned as a temporary solution to ignorance, but rather as the ontological foundation of the whole of reality.

These results reflect that the debate about God's role in science is not just a matter of scientific data or methodology, but a reflection of fundamental differences in the way we view reality and the source of knowledge. This reflection suggests that the conflict between science and religion is more epistemological than empirical. The naturalistic worldview demands that all explanations be in the realm of material cause-and-effect, while the theistic view—especially in Islam—opens up the possibility of metaphysical realities that go beyond the bounds of observation (Haught, 1995; Al-Attas, 2019). Therefore, the tension between the GOG and science is not because God is at odds with the scientific method, but rather because the concept of God in the GOG has been wrongly narrowed. In Islam, God is not an entity that competes with the laws of nature, but rather the maker of those laws (Al-Ghazālī, 1983). This reflection also shows that reductionist approaches such as GOG are incapable of adequately answering human existential and teleological questions, something that has historically played a role in religion. This means that GOG is not only theoretically wrong but also fails to answer fundamental human spiritual longings.

An interpretation of these findings shows that GOG is not only weak in argument but also shows ignorance of the complexity of theistic epistemology, particularly in Islam. When Dawkins (2006) states that God is only present to explain something that science cannot explain, he ignores that in

Islamic epistemology, knowledge does not stop at *'ilm al-ma'lūmāt* (factual knowledge) but continues to *'ilm al-ma'rifah* (knowledge of meaning), which is sourced from *the khabar ṣādiq* (revelation) and rational reason (Al-Attas, 2019). GOG fails because it forces all arguments about God to be subject to empirical logic, when God cannot be approached with a mere device of empiricism. In this context, John Lennox's (2019) approach is also in line with that God does not compete with science in explaining "how", but rather answers the question of "why". This interpretation reinforces the claim that science and religion can be coherent if they are positioned epistemologically proportionately, where science answers the mechanisms of phenomena, and religion answers purpose and meaning. Therefore, GOG is an epistemological narrowing that reflects a particular worldview bias, not a weakness in the concept of religion itself.

In comparison, New Atheism's approach to GOG is at odds with the integrative approach proposed by scientists such as John Polkinghorne and Francis Collins. New Atheism carries methodological naturalism exclusively and tends to reject the validity of metaphysical explanations. While Polkinghorne (2000) emphasized that science and religion collaborate in the search for truth, and Collins (2006) in the BioLogos project showed that faith and scientific discovery can go hand in hand. On the other hand, the Islamic approach is more comprehensive because it not only rejects the science-religion dichotomy but also establishes an ontological and epistemological framework that integrates the two inherently (Al-Attas, 2019; Zarkasyi et al., 2019). This difference shows that GOG is a typical phenomenon of the secular Western tradition, not part of Islamic theology. Therefore, making GOG a universal argument for rejecting God is a categorical error that fails to read a different intellectual context. Islam offers an alternative paradigm that avoids the traps of GOG while remaining rational, scientific, and spiritual.

This research paves the way for further studies in the fields of Islamic philosophy, theology, and science. First, a deeper exploration of how Islamic epistemology can shape a scientific methodology that is not confined by modern reductionism is needed. This can be realized through the development of an integrative curriculum in Islamic universities, as has been applied in several universities in Indonesia. Second, it is important to examine how the GOG narrative influences the religious perception of the younger generation in the digital age, especially through popular media that brings a new atheism discourse. Third, research can focus on a systematic comparison between the theistic worldview in Islam and Christianity against the GOG argument, in order to build a more robust interreligious response framework. Finally, it is important to formulate an approach to *da'wah* and religious education that is able to explain the existence of God not as a "filler of the void," but as the foundation of all forms of knowledge and reality. Thus, this research encourages the deconstruction of GOG discourse while opening up new possibilities for the integration of knowledge in Islam.

6. Conclusion

This study found that the *God of the Gaps* (GOG) argument is a form of deviation that stems from the reductionist and naturalistic worldviews that are dominant in modern Western thought. This argument places God as a temporary solution to scientific ignorance, and is therefore increasingly displaced as science advances. This approach has been proven to contain various logical fallacies such as *appeal to ignorance*, *false dichotomy*, and *strawman fallacy*. On the other hand, Islamic epistemology, as explained by Al-Ghazālī and Al-Attas, offers a more comprehensive framework in

which empirical and metaphysical knowledge complement each other in understanding reality. By placing God as the ontological foundation of nature and not merely an explanation of scientific emptiness, Islam is able to avoid the GOG trap systematically and philosophically. Therefore, the conflict between science and religion, as assumed in the GOG, is not an inevitable epistemic conflict, but rather the result of a difference in worldview.

The main contribution of this research lies in the preparation of a philosophical critique of GOG from the perspective of Islamic epistemology. This article expands the discourse of philosophy of science and religion by presenting alternative arguments derived from the Islamic scientific tradition, which have rarely been explored in global academic discourse. By combining critical logic, the history of the development of GOG, and the concept of *tawhīd* in Islam, the study shows that the dichotomy between science and God is a product of a secular construct, not a universal inevitability. This study also makes an important contribution to the development of an integrative approach in Islamic higher education, especially in the context of curriculum development based on knowledge integration. Thus, this research not only provides a rebuttal to contemporary atheistic arguments but also strengthens the position of Islamic philosophy as a relevant and critical system of thought in response to the issues of modern civilization, especially those concerning the relationship between faith and rationality.

This research opens up wide opportunities for more in-depth and comparative follow-up studies. First, further studies can focus on comparative analysis between Islamic epistemology and Christian epistemology in responding to GOG, thereby enriching interfaith discourse on the relationship between science and religion. Second, it is necessary to conduct empirical research on the influence of GOG arguments on the perception of the younger generation of God and science, especially in the digital age that is full of secular information. Third, follow-up studies can also explore how *tawhīd-based* integrative approaches can be applied in scientific research methodologies in various disciplines such as biology, physics, or psychology. Finally, it is important to examine how popular narratives such as the works of Dawkins and Hitchens influence public opinion, as well as how Islamic intellectual responses can be packaged more communicatively and strategically. Thus, future research is expected to be not only theoretical, but also solutive and applicative in bridging the tension between science and faith.

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