

IS UNIVERSE PURPOSELESS? JEWISH, CHRISTIAN AND ISLAMIC VIEWPOINTS ON ATHEISTS' IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

The study seeks to explore the Islamic teachings about the atheists' ideology that there is no purpose behind universe. Atheists claim that universe has come from nothing and deny the creator force behind its existence. This is qualitative research and data is gathered from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Qur'an, The New Testament, The Old Testament and Hadith whereas secondary sources include books, articles and online sources. The study investigates that atheists' objection is irrational and illogical. God has created the universe with a purpose and human spend purposeful life to be successful here and hereafter. By believing on God's existence, one also believes the ground objective meaning and purpose within universe. True meaning of life can only come from God who has made creation of universe with meaning and significance.

Keywords: Purpose of Universe, Purpose of Human's, Creation, Islamic Perspective, Christian Perspective, Jewish Perspective, Atheism, Qur'an, Hadith, Old Testament, New Testament.

INTRODUCTION

Atheists deny the existence of God through different kind of arguments. Dawkins (1995) claims that "*the universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference*". Daniel Dennett is renowned atheist philosopher and expert in the field of cognitive science. He is the author of book 'Darwin's Dangerous Idea' in which he explains that all human existence is through natural selection instead of God. He further argues that:

What we have to realize is that even the very first living things, things like bacteria, were tremendously complex and it was as if they had minds. They were very competent at staying alive and reproducing. And what Darwin showed and has been confirmed 100 times, 1000 times over ever since is that a completely natural, material, purposeless, God-less process of natural selection has generated over billions of years, ever increasingly complex minds, brains. And we human being are the possessors of the most amazing minds of all (Dennett, 2017).

Atheist wants to remove God and religion from every sphere of human life. They propagate the belief that universe has been created without God, without any specific purpose. This study analyses the atheist objection in view of Abrahamic religious literature.

Jewish Perspective

The goal of Jewish life includes Torah, the living word of God that addressed to all creation through the life of the Jewish people. Rabbi Lewis Eron discusses the goal of Jewish life that “*We have come to embody Torah; we have become part of Torah, and, through Torah*” (Eron, 2021). Same as Rabbi Hillel Rotenberg argues that Jewish purpose of life is to serve God, to reach the world to come and to study Torah and to overcome the yetzer hara (Evil inclination) (Rotenberg, 2009).

Similar to other religions, Judaism presents a range of viewpoints on the afterlife, including some concepts about heaven and hell familiar in popular Christian religion. Mostly, modern Jewish thinkers prefer to follow the biblical model that focuses on earthly life.

R. Isaac of Vienna studied with prominent rabbis of Germany and France, and he was also a disciple of R. Judah b. Samuel (popularly known as R. Judah he-Hasid)- the pious’), a key thinker of the movement known as German Pietism (Hasidut Askenaz), that reached on its peak in the era between the mid-twelfth and mid thirteen centuries.

The book of the pious (Sefer Hasidim) describes the objective of life in Judaism. According the Book of the Pious, followers are required to transcend the letter of the “*law of the Torah*” and also adhere to the supreme spiritual and moral ‘law of heaven’ in their communal and individual lives. According to Fishbane “*German Pietism focused on a mission: fulfilling God’s will by attaining a higher standard of piety. While other movements within Judaism champion different approaches to fulfilling divine purpose, the fundamental idea that human perfection is advanced by living a purposeful life is one of the pillars of the Jewish intellectual tradition*” (Fishbane, 2020).

According to the teachings of Judaism, God has created the universe purposefully and made human His vicegerent on earth. Human has been bestowed with intellect and free will to choose his way. Through divine commandments, he has been directed to do well and avoid from evil doings. God’s directions for humanity are just and beneficial for the prosperity and progress of individual as well as society. Religious teachings create optimism and motivates for doing good to be enter in everlasting paradise.

Christian Perspective

According to Christianity God created the world and gave humans a special purpose and place in it. According to Bible: “*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them*” (Genesis 1:27). This verse does not mean that humans have physically similar appearance like God, but they have certain characteristics that they share with God such as being loving. Book of Genesis describes “*Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’*” (Genesis 1:26). Many Christians take this verse as evidence that human has

power or dominion over God's creation. From this, they derive that humanity's purpose is to take care of world's resources that God has created as stewards or caretakers because creation belongs to God instead of people.

Christianity believes that God exists as an aggregate of goodness and a personality with unlimited power and unlimited intelligence. Secondly, God is considered as the first cause behind the existence of everything. The scripture says: "*All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made*" (John 1:3). The monograph does not explain the minute details how God went about the creation. This question was left for scientists to investigate. The monograph simply declares that God did it. Jesus Christ (A.S) described God's love with three illustrations: the love of father with his son, the love of a bridegroom for his bride, the love of a shepherd with his sheep (Alexander, 1969). In another illustration Christ (A.S) said man loves himself more than he loved with his creator. Thus he rebels against God, so breaking the loving relationship that originally united them. Christ said the sheep had gone astray (Alexander, 1969).

According to Moses the objective of individual man should be obedience of God's commandments "*Hear, O Israel: The lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all you might*" (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5). Jesus Christ elaborates the objective in similar way:

And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, "*which commandment is most important of all?*" Jesus answered, "*The most important is, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*" (Mark 12: 28-30).

Jesus addition is "*with your entire mind*". Loving God with your heart refers to loving God with the emotions and the will. Loving God with your soul refers to the personal relationship with Him that attains from faith. Loving God with all your strength is to serve Him with actions. Finally, loving God with your entire mind refers to thinking about God, being conscious of God in daily life, contemplating His goodness and His presence, saturating minds with His Word (Veith, 2003).

Atheists also raise objections against the religious education of children and suggest developing critical thinking in children instead. According to Deuteronomy "*And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*" (Deuteronomy 6: 6-7). Thus, the text commanding that God's Word be discussed by adults and be taught to children, is the foundation of Christian mission statement.

In wider Christian culture, commonly it is believed that heaven and hell are essentially deserved compensations for the earthly life we live. People with good character will go to heaven as a deserved reward for virtuous life and wrongdoers will go to hell for spending an immoral life. So in Christian perspective man has a specific purpose to spend good moral life according to divine commandments to enjoy eternal happiness in paradise.

Islamic Perspective

God is real and one. He is worthy of veneration and worship. He is All-Seeing, All-Hearing, All-Knowing and All-Loving. He is the owner of everything in the universe. He controls everything and wants people to believe in Him. Humans necessarily require God's guidance to spend good life. The objective of a Muslim is to become a faithful servant of Allah by worshipping Him alone and submitting to His Will.

According to Islamic literature which basically derives from Qur'an and Hadith, the universe has been created by God with a purpose and humans are required to spend a purposeful life. Holy Qur'an states the purpose of the creation of universe and human existence in several places. The basic objective of human life is "*We have created jinn and human beings only that they might worship me*" (Abul-Qasim, 1997). Then Allah says that this life is a trial for all humans and through this trial he will observe who serves him best to get the eternal reward in shape of paradise; "*He who created death and life to test you (as to) which of you is best in deed, and He is Exalted in Might, the Forgiving*" (Qur'an 67: 2). Thus human life has a specific purpose to do good with humanity and God. Moreover, everyone has to face death and no one can return to worldly life again, in this regard it is our temporal stay and test. Moreover, Qur'an also tells the nature of test which human has to face: "*And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but give good tidings to the patient*" (Qur'an 2: 155). This is divine scheme of test and through this God will know to those who remain patient and thankful to God and those who go astray. Those who fail the test would enter in hellfire and those who pass the test would enter paradise eternally in the afterlife.

If we observe universe in-depth, everything in the earth and heavens including sun, moon, stars, galaxies, mountains and animals are in a state of submission to God and are at the disposal of Allah and His Laws. Allah says in Qur'an: "*To Him submits whatever is in the Heavens and the Earth*" (Qur'an 3: 83). Nature functions according to the fixed laws set by Allah and is not capable to deviate from those laws. The sun knows the cycle of its rotation and work as a giver of heat, energy and light on earth. Similarly, the earth works according to the set rules and patterns by God. Human eyes, brain, heart, entire body and all of its components are working according to the natural laws, and have no choice but to work as they are intended. So, in this way all the God's creation follow Him and worship Him in a manner appropriate to their situation. The glorious Qur'an says: "*Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the Heavens and whoever is on earth and the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, the Mountains, the Trees, the moving creatures and many of the people? But upon many, the punishments have been justified. And he whom Allah humiliates, for him there is no bestowed of honor. Indeed, Allah does what He wills*" (Qur'an 22: 18).

God expects man to worship and praise Him, similar to the surrounding creations are praising God in humility; in a way we may not understand. Qur'an describes: "*The seven heavens and the Earth and whatever is in them exalt Him. And there is not a thing except that it exalts (Allah) by His praise, but you do not understand their (way of) exalting. Indeed, He is ever Forbearing and Forgiving*" (Qur'an 17: 44).

All the creations of the universe have been designed with a specific purpose. The Qur'an states, "*Our Lord, You did not create this (world) aimlessly*" (Qur'an 3:191). Human is most

superior creation of universe and God has commanded to do good deeds and avoid wrong doings. On the Day of Judgment, everyone will be accountable for the deeds of whole life. Qur'an says *"Did you think that we created you uselessly and that to us you would not be returned?"* (Qur'an 23: 115).

All the creations knows their purpose and mission, as physical world submits to God, human must submit to the laws and will of God. Man has been gifted with the extra-ordinary qualities of understanding, intelligence, ability to comprehend and wisdom to ponder his life purpose and creator (Purpose of life, 2021). Moreover, human has also been gifted with the capability of making decisions, choices and beauty of expression. Qur'an states the beauty of human's creation: *"We have certainly created man in the best of stature"* (Qur'an 95: 4).

The concept of God is in the innate nature of human and he is able to seek God and recognize him through pondering his own creation and the things of universe surrounding him. Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) described: *"Every child is born in a state of fitrah (a natural belief in God), then his parents make him a Jew, a Christian or a Magian"* (Saheeh Muslim, 6423).

Islam addresses such questions appropriately; what is purpose of his existence? Why man created? What man is doing in this world? How to be successful here and hereafter? What would lead him towards failure?

While thinking about the nature of Islamic teachings; God commanded those things to do which are beneficial for the individual and whole society. The teachings motivate to help others, thanking people, removing objects from people's life, etc. Every human has moral conscience in his inner self, through which he calculate about the right and wrong.

Allah invites people to ponder His signs in nature. He refers to think about the creation of the earth, the moon, the sun and the emergence of the day into night and night into the day and the change of weathers; all are miraculous evidences and signs of a creator. All his creation is perfect and flawless. Allah says: Have they not looked at the heaven above them, how we structured it and adorned it and (how) it has no rifts (Qur'an 50:6). In another place, Qur'an states: *"We will show them our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the truth. But is it not sufficient concerning your Lord that He is, over all things, a Witness?"* (Qur'an 41:53).

Atheism leads towards the denial of God. Materialistic attitude about life is restricting human about the purpose of his life and recognizing God. Qur'an states: *"How can you disbelieve in Allah when you were lifeless, and He brought you to life; then he will cause you to die, then He will bring you to (back) to life, and then to Him, you will be returned"* (Qur'an 2:28).

God's commandments which prohibit from doing evils are also in the benefit for humanity. If man will refrain from wrong doings; it would make one's life comfortable, easier and lighten the burdens. According to Qur'an: *"And Allah wants to lighten for you (your burden/difficulties), and mankind was created weak"* (Qur'an 4:28).

God promises for the better life in this world and after this world for those who act upon his commandments. Qur'an describes this: *"Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer, We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward (in the Hereafter) according to the best of what they used to do"* (Qur'an 16:97).

God directs human towards His remembrance in every matter of life. The Satan and evil forces resist man for remembering God, when cognizance of God is lost or weak. Allah says in Qur'an: "*Satan has overcome them and made them forget the remembrance of Allah. Those are the party of Satan. Unquestionably, the party of Satan, they will be losers*" (Qur'an 58: 19).

Islamic teachings are in line with the teachings of Christianity and Judaism regarding the objective of creation of universe and human. Human is commanded to spend life purposefully according to divine instructions given in Qur'an and by the teachings of Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAAS).

CONCLUSION

Atheists believe that universe is purposeless however; individual man can spend his life purposefully. Atheism provides no guidance about how to set purpose of life? If someone spends life purposefully; what reward he will get? Such questions are answered in detail by religions. Judaism, Christianity and Islam represent more than 55 % of world's population. According to these revealed Abrahamic religions; God has created the universe with a specific purpose. Human is best creation of God and has given intellect and free will. Through, divine books and Prophets, God conveys the purpose of Human's creation. This world is a trial place for human. God has sent his commandments how to spend this worldly life, what to do and what to avoid. Those people who do good deeds would get eternal reward in shape of paradise. Those who do wrong doings would enter in hell fire. These religions have common teachings about the purpose of creation of universe and human. God wants his servants to follow his commandments and to be worshipped. Human are directed the details how to spend life successfully through the verses of divine books and the practical teachings of Holy Prophets. Atheism develops pessimistic view of life and creates hopelessness; however, religion provides all the details necessary for humanity and objective moralities which are impossible without an arbitrary authority (God). Moreover, religion motivates for good deeds and gives hope of eternal bliss (paradise), and warns those who do evils. Hope and fear are necessary elements for a person to work in positive way. So, teachings of religions are logical and necessary for humanity.

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