

Horse's egg, God **vs.** belief and no belief (Part-I)

(A response to Raihan)

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"Like God, nuclear weapons are free creations of the human mind. Unlike God, nuclear weapons are real."

-Martin Amis, Author

Reading his passionate yet contradictory defense of the Prophet Muhammed and some of the verses in Quran, a few months ago I asked Raihan in *mukto-mona* forum, if he could illuminate me about the kind of God he believes in and, if such God was an anthropomorphic entity as we see in Quran and Bible. If I remember it right, he said he didn't believe in a Quranic/Biblic God. Yet he was a believer, although he didn't describe features of his own God and remained silent saying he cannot illuminate others when he's in search of an illuminated individual himself. I was impressed to hear that as I believe, although the question if God exists is a time aged riddle in the history of philosophy, that not necessarily is a valid point for giving up the debate. As I followed more and more of Raihan's arguments in favor of Prophet Muhammed, Quran; I, however, started losing interest in his articles/rebuttals until recently when I read one titled ***"astikota ebong nastikota: ekti bishleshon"*1*** ('Theism and atheism: an analysis'). Apparently, I hoped Raihan would not care so much about winning the theist vs. atheist debate as he would about maintaining the honesty, consistency and objectiveness in such a debate. But I was disappointed. I found his arguments—contrary to his claim 'a first time ever refutation of some of the logics demonstrated by the atheists' (in response to Avijit's mail in m-m forum)—more characterized by ignorance, lack of scientific analysis, self-contradiction and just-a-matter-of-convenience type logic. His analysis is anything but scientific. Although I wish I could demonstrate fallacy of all his arguments step by step, I am unable to do so due to time constraint (Raihan should not assume, this is another 'common excuse' by the athiests) and fear that readers will find it lengthy and boring. Therefore, I will try to touch upon only some of the core fallacies of his arguments. I shall quote Raihan in English translation. He should correct me, if I misquote him anywhere. Let's get to the points.

Examples of ignorance in Raihan's analysis

1. Ambiguity about the concept of God: In a nutshell, Raihan's whole argument revolves around defending a monotheistic version of God, which he thinks is a much better and superior option than an atheist's stand of 'no God.' The biggest problem, however, is 'God' is one of the most ambiguous terms in English as no two persons may mean same connotation by the word 'God.' He tried to show he is aware of the problem. Sadly, he has totally failed in his attempt. The connotations of the word 'God' Raihan is familiar with seem to be just two: a monotheistic and a polytheistic one. We however know, this is not always the case. For example, I doubt if Raihan knows about Spinoza's concept of pantheism, which is a stark contrast from the views of God held by either a monotheist, or a polytheist. Similarly, Raihan doesn't seem to know it even himself what he's talking about when he quoted Einstein in defense of a monotheistic God. Does he know, Einstein didn't believe in a 'personal God' (one who punishes his creatures by burning alive in hell, etc) and Einstein's concept of God doesn't include any afterlife. Yet Einstein didn't have any problem to appreciate the majesty of nature and the universe, like when he said: *I don't try to imagine a personal God; it suffices to stand in awe at the structure of the world, insofar as it allows our inadequate senses to appreciate it.* **To the contrary, Raihan clearly mentioned he believes it's quite possible that God might have emotions like anger and love at the same time ("why not?" he asks). So how can Raihan equate his own concept of God with that of Einstein? Is it just because Einstein also used the word God when he said "God doesn't play dice."? If so, how is then Raihan different from those uneducated Muslim/X-tian/Jewish Mullahs?**

Similarly, Raihan has continued his lengthy gibberish without ever realizing, just like its counterpart, the word 'atheist' also mean a wide range of people (freethinkers, agnostics, skeptics, secular humanists, etc) who don't believe in an organized religion or belief system. I have yet to meet an atheist who says 'there is absolutely no working and background force behind the mystery of the universe.' Except for a few, it's the scripture based and anthropomorphic description of God and the universe that the atheists don't agree with. For example, most of us from Bangladesh knew late Prof. Ahmed Shariff as a hardcore atheist. But in his last interview with (late) Prof. Humayun Azad, Shariff, upon being asked by Azad if he believed in religion, replied, "there may be a creator, but the scriptures are man-made and I don't believe in the afterlife."^{*2} **Whose view is scientific in this case? Prof. Sharif's view or a Raihan's argument making frequent use of the word 'God' but without ever mentioning if such God is**

indeed a matter, or an organism, or just an energy? What's the basis of Raihan's silly assumption about an atheist's stand on the question of God? I wonder.

Despite being aware of the difference, Raihan went out of context in citing Stephen Hawking in favor of his weak argument when he said, Stephen Hawking has pointed out to the 'God' as one of the causes (toward the universe having a starting point and being created possibly from the outer universe). **May I ask Raihan, who told you Hawkings meant a 'God' here; and even if he did, how are you sure it's the same 'God' that you and your friend believe in?** Is it an example of intellectual dishonesty or pure ignorance?

2. Logical fallacy:

a) Raihan thinks- belief in God is not a *blind belief* and it is nothing like a belief in a horse's egg—a *blind belief* by all means, as Raihan puts it. Clearly, this is not always true. Indeed, the contrary could be true. Look at the example below:

Imagine a person who has never seen or heard of a horse in his whole life and is totally blank about it. Only information we provide him is that- a horse is an animal. Now if we ask him, *does a horse lay egg?* What will he answer? Unless he's supplied with further details such as a horse is also a mammal and mammals don't lay eggs, how can that person rule out the possibility the horse doesn't lay eggs because he knows some animals such as birds do lay eggs? In this case, if the person believes horse's egg indeed exists, I won't call this a blind belief, rather, a lack of information. To the contrary, in case of belief in God, we don't even have preliminary information such as if the God is a He or She, an anthropomorphic figure or just a non-existent entity. What can I base my belief on other than those so called 'indirect manifestations', which are far from a concrete term like 'an animal' in the previous example? Therefore, belief in God, as a logic, is worse than belief of the person in the above example that a horse lays eggs since it's an animal. In the former case, we are totally blank; but in the latter, the person is not saying something blindly.

b) Following is what Raihan thinks proves- sticking merely to logic may make even Einstein 'a donkey.'

"A donkey has no beard. But a donkey is no human! Einstein didn't have beard, thus he was not a human but a donkey!"

Clearly, Raihan's unstated premise here is *every human has beard*; seriously erroneous in itself and probably, would serve as a good

indicator of who the real donkey is. Certainly, it is not the Einstein!

c) Raihan cites what I shall call 'borrowed' arguments (from the evangelists?) which have been already well refuted and answered by the atheists. They are-"science doesn't know everything," "one need to be omniscient (all-knowing) before dismissing the existence of God and an atheist is not omniscient," etc.

Let me address these two often cited arguments:

"Science doesn't know enough about the universe to rule out the possibility of God's existence"

A well-known atheist blog^{*3} responded to this logical fallacy in a following way:

The statement "science doesn't know everything" is obviously true. The believer thinks the corollary is that any idea he likes the sound of, that cannot be proven false, is worthy of consideration. This is wrong. Something is only worthy of consideration if there is a reason to suppose it is true. Usually that means some evidence. **If you don't restrict yourself to things that are backed by some evidence, or if there is at least some logical reason to suppose they might be true, you will believe in absolutely anything.**

Examples

This is a typical version of this fallacy:

Hundreds of years ago we didn't know radio waves existed, but they obviously did exist, so how do you know "qi" (or whatever woo idea they are promoting) does not exist today?

The answer is – we don't. But, no one imagined radio waves existed, or claimed to be using them before they were scientifically discovered either. The thing is, "how do you know "qi" does not exist?" is the wrong question. The question you should be asking is, "is there any evidence for "qi"?"

"Is an atheist omniscient (all-knowing)?"

This time the responses I am citing are from another website.^{*4}

1. When evangelicals say that you need to know every inch of the universe in order to know that there is no evidence for God, he is probably thinking of something like a white raven -- nobody's ever seen one, nobody's ever heard of one, but you would have to search

every cubic foot of the universe in order to know with certainty that a white raven does not exist. But what about a claim such as, "There are no round squares?" Would you have to search the entire universe in order to know that there are no round squares, or evidence for round squares? Of course you wouldn't; you can prove that round squares don't exist without even leaving your chair, simply by showing that the definitions involved are inconsistent and thus round squares are logically impossible.

You still have to be omniscient in order to know that there is no **evidence** for God. That is true, and that is where theists start attacking a straw man of atheism rather than the real thing. This argument might work against someone who does in fact claim that there is nothing in the entire universe that can be construed as evidence for theism, but since very few atheists make such an absurd claim, this has little practical value for evangelism.

2. "I am not **certain** that the Sun will rise tomorrow -- it could extinguish itself overnight or something -- but I am **rationaly justified** in saying that it will. In examining the soundness of a claim, one does not ask whether you can be **certain** of the claim, but whether or not one has good reasons for assuming the claim to be true. If so, then that claim is rationally justified, and if a claim is rationally justified then it can be accepted by any rational person.

Unfortunately, Raihan didn't limit himself to fallacious arguments only. In his crazy drive for an undefined, bizarre yet monotheistic God, he also resorted to science but only in vain. Reading his argument, I seriously doubt about his knowledge in elementary Biology and Chemistry. I will give examples of his lack of knowledge in science in part-2—the concluding chapter as I hope.

Reference:

1. http://www.mukto-mona.com/Articles/raihan/Theism_and_Atheism.pdf
2. http://www.mukto-mona.com/Special_Event_/rationalist_day/shariff_azad.pdf
3. http://skeptico.blogs.com/skeptico/2005/12/the_appeal_to_s.html
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