

A CRITICAL APPROACH TO THE GOD OF THE GAPS ARGUMENT

**Positioning God Through Scientific Boundaries and
Metaphysical Understandings**



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Abstract

This article questions the validity of the “God of the Gaps” argument in the context of the limits of the scientific method and the metaphysical nature of God. It argues that science focuses on the “how” of understanding nature, whereas the concept of God is associated with more transcendent questions such as ‘why’ and “for what purpose.” Based on this distinction, it demonstrates that the God of the Gaps approach, which confines God to areas where scientific explanations fall short, is philosophically inadequate and reductionist.

Keywords: God, Metaphysics, Faith, Philosophy, Rationality, Theism, Science, Philosophical Theology, God of the Gaps, Epistemology, Scientism

Introduction

Today, the dominance of scientific knowledge leads many people to view science as the sole authority in their efforts to understand the universe. However, not every type of knowledge answers the same questions; not every method arrives at the same reality. While science provides guidance on the question “*How does the universe work?*”, questions such as “*Why do we exist?*” or “*Is there meaning behind this order?*” require deeper, metaphysical answers. This is where the concept of God comes into play. Is God a figure who fills the gaps, or a transcendent reality that gives meaning to all of existence? In this article, we will discuss how God should be understood not as a scientific object but as a metaphysical necessity; we will question the superficiality of the “*God of the Gaps*” criticism, the limits of science, and the inevitability of metaphysical thought. Because some questions are grasped not only by measuring but by thinking.

The Metaphysical Nature of God and the Limits of Science

The concept of God is one of the fundamental issues in philosophy, metaphysics, and theology. These fields address questions such as existence, cause, meaning, and purpose, positioning God as the ultimate cause of the universe, the necessary foundation of existence, and a transcendent substance. In this context, God is defined as a transcendent being, not limited by time and space, and therefore not part of the physical universe. Given this definition of God, it is clear that God is neither an experiential phenomenon nor a directly observable object. The necessary acceptance that God is absolute, infinite, timeless, and spaceless clearly demonstrates that God cannot be reduced to any physical form and therefore cannot be grasped by scientific methods.

Science is a systematic effort to explain how nature works. It uses methodological tools such as observation, experimentation, repetition, and causality to understand natural phenomena. The fundamental aim of science is to understand how the physical world operates; this essentially makes it an activity that seeks to answer the question “how.” For example, when trying to understand how a biological process or physical law works, science is not concerned with the meaning, purpose, or reason for the existence of that process. Such questions are outside the scope of the scientific method because science works only with observable and measurable phenomena.

In this context, God is a metaphysical category, not a scientific one. To produce any scientific judgment, positive or negative, regarding God's existence would violate the boundaries of the scientific method. The requirement of observation and experimentation inherent in the scientific method cannot be applied to the evaluation of the concept of God; because, by definition, God is neither experiential nor measurable. If God were an entity existing within time and space, and therefore directly observable, God would lose the attribute of transcendence and could not be defined as God. Therefore, evaluations of God's existence or non-existence can only be possible through philosophical or theological methods

Science attempts to explain the functioning of entities that have form and exist in time and space. The subject of science is always formal, observable, and repeatable natural phenomena. However, science explains these phenomena not only through direct observation and experimentation, but also through formal systems constructed on metaphysical foundations.

Tools such as mathematics, geometry, and logic cannot be directly observed in nature; they are disciplines created by the mind and based on metaphysics. Therefore, science itself is not entirely independent; it requires philosophical and metaphysical foundations.

At this point, an important distinction becomes clear: Science can answer questions such as what, where, when, and how, but it cannot provide explanations for these without metaphysics; however, it cannot answer deeper, purposeful, and existential questions such as why and for what reason. The purpose of science is to explain causal relationships in nature; however, these explanations do not include meaning, purpose, or value. The human mind, on the other hand, tends to question not only how events work but also the reasons and meanings behind them. Philosophy, and more specifically theology and metaphysics, are the subjects that address these types of questions¹

A fundamental methodological error made here is attempting to include God within the realm of science. God is not a scientific entity but a metaphysical one. Therefore, treating God as a scientific object is a categorical error. This kind of approach distorts the meaning of the concept of God and opens it up to discussion in the wrong context. This situation is like playing a game with its own rules using the rules of another game. Such an effort neither helps us understand the concept of God nor constitutes the correct use of the scientific method.

On the other hand, another problematic claim frequently put forward by the modern scientific paradigm is the assumption that science is the sole source of true knowledge. This approach turns science not only into a method but also into an ideology. This ideological stance excludes other types of knowledge—particularly philosophical, religious, and metaphysical knowledge—by dismissing them as invalid. However, reality is too multi-layered and multi-dimensional to be reduced solely to the scientific paradigm. Different paradigms offer different interpretations of reality, and each of these interpretations can be meaningful and consistent within its own context. Therefore, philosophical and theological realities are as legitimate as scientific reality.²

The evaluation of the concept of God is not the domain of the scientific method, but rather of metaphysical and theological thought. Correctly determining the limits and possibilities of science is essential both for the healthy operation of the scientific method and for placing the concept of God in its proper place. The purpose of science is to understand nature, not God. Violating this boundary both turns science into an ideological dogma and leads us to understand the concept of God through a reductionist approach. Therefore, making God the subject of science is not only a methodological error but also a philosophical deviation.

The Fallacies Underlying the God of the Gaps Argument

“*The God of the Gaps*” argument is a criticism put forward by some atheist thinkers, particularly following the rise of natural sciences after the Enlightenment. According to this view, throughout history, humans have attributed every phenomenon they could not explain to

¹ Emrah Bozkurt, “Philosophy, Science, and Theology: What Questions Can They Answer?”, *academia.edu*, January 2025.

² Emrah Bozkurt, “Critique of Science”, *academia.edu*, May 2025.

God, contenting themselves with a supernatural explanation. As science advances, these “gaps” are being filled, and consequently, belief in God is gradually losing its meaning.

This claim was popularized in the 19th century, particularly by figures such as Thomas Paine, Henry Drummond, and later Richard Dawkins. According to these thinkers, God is merely a “temporary patch” introduced in areas where knowledge is lacking. Thus, belief in God is presented as an explanation based on human ignorance, and it is argued that as scientific knowledge increases, God's place diminishes

However, this approach is quite superficial and flawed historically, philosophically, and theologically. The fundamental errors contained in this argument can be explained as follows:

a. Theistic Understanding Based on the Known, Not the Unknown

The God of the Gaps argument is based on a false assumption that reduces belief in God to a lack of knowledge. However, in the classical theistic understanding, God is not only the ultimate cause of things we cannot explain, but of all existence. God is the creator and sustainer not only of the unknown areas of the universe, but also of the known laws of nature. In this context, believing in God is not about patching up the unknown, but about relying on a transcendent principle that gives meaning to everything that exists.

b. Historically, it has been understood not as “God,” but as “God's response.”

Another common mistake in the God of the Gaps argument is historical distortion. It is claimed that primitive societies, unable to explain natural phenomena, directly attributed these events to “God”. However, when anthropological data and mythological narratives are carefully examined, it becomes clear that these societies interpreted natural phenomena as the response or wrath of an existing God. Thunder, lightning, storms, droughts, or earthquakes were not seen as “God” directly, but as God's message, reaction, or intervention. This is different from using God as a “gap filler” because something cannot be explained. In other words, these societies already believed in a God or gods and interpreted natural events within the framework of these beliefs. Thus, God was not seen as filling a void but as a power already believed to exist and interacting with the universe.

c. Today's Theistic Approach is Based on a Rational and Systematic Concept of God

In the modern theistic understanding, belief in God is not because we cannot explain it, but as a necessary consequence of rational thought. Because phenomena such as existence, order, law, and consciousness lead us to a transcendent principle. In this context, God is thought of as a being who gives the universe a functional and holistic system. Within this system, every event operates as a result of the order established by God. When a natural event occurs, a believer says, “*God did this*”, not in the sense of a direct, personal intervention, but in reference to God's systemic order.

For example, when an earthquake occurs, a believer thinks that God could intervene and prevent it from happening if He did not want it to. Based on this thought, they may conclude that “*God must have deemed this appropriate*”. Although this conclusion is subjective and emotional, it is consistent with the belief in God's absolute power. However, this is not a personal interpretation such as “*God sent me a special earthquake*”; it relates to faith in the workings of the system and in God's power.

d. God is a Metaphysical Concept, Not a Subject of Science

As we discussed in detail in the first section, this argument attempts to portray God as a scientific stopgap, while ignoring God's metaphysical nature. God is not an intrinsic part of the universe, but is defined as a transcendent being. Science, on the other hand, only answers the "how" question within the framework of natural laws. Questions such as "*Why do we exist?*" and "*What is the source of existence?*" are not scientific, but philosophical and theological questions.³ Therefore, belief in God does not fill the place of science; it exists in another dimension that transcends its limits.

e. Scientific Explanations Do Not Make God Unnecessary

Science's explanation of any natural phenomenon does not reveal its ultimate cause. Science can explain, for example, how lightning is formed; but it cannot answer questions such as why such a natural order was established or what the source of these laws is. At this point, the concept of God exists not to negate scientific explanations, but to add meaning to them. Scientific knowledge does not replace God; rather, it helps us better understand His systematic creation.

f. God cannot be replaced by "nothingness" because He is the source of everything in the universe

God does not constitute an unknown area in the universe, but rather the beginning of everything and the foundation of existence. In this sense, God is not a lack of knowledge; He is the necessary metaphysical explanation of existence. The argument we call the "*negative proof of God*"⁴ comes into play here: While everything in the universe requires a cause outside itself, a necessary and transcendent being like God must necessarily exist as a principle outside this chain. Therefore, God should not be placed in the place of unexplained things; He should be seen as the source of all existence.

g. Scientific Advances Do Not Weaken Belief in God, but May Strengthen It

The God of the Gaps argument assumes that belief in God will weaken as science advances. Yet the opposite is true: as science advances, the immense order, laws, and delicate balances in nature become clearer, leading us not to chance but to the existence of a conscious and powerful creator. Science does not eliminate God; it merely enables us to discover God's systematic creation.

In conclusion, the God of the Gaps argument contains a serious intellectual flaw by both distorting historical facts and treating the concept of God in a reductionist manner. God is not only the source of the unknown, but also the source of existence, order, and knowledge. Belief

³ Emrah Bozkurt, "Philosophy, Science, and Theology: What Questions Can They Answer?", *academia.edu*, January 2025.

⁴ The term "negative proof of God" refers to the idea that the ultimate explanation for phenomena such as limitation, dependence, change, and causality that we encounter in the universe is only possible through a necessary, transcendent, and independent being, rather than through direct experience or observation. This approach argues that, rather than aiming to prove God directly based on positive evidence, it is necessary to show that there is no self-sufficient being in the universe and to complete this chain with the necessary existence of a transcendent being. Therefore, this proof stems from the idea of a necessary being that makes all existence possible, rather than an attempt to "fill in the unknown gaps" with God.

in God does not conflict with science but rather occupies a metaphysical consistency that transcends and complements it. Believers see God not as a gap filler but as the meaning and foundation of existence. Therefore, this argument loses its validity from both rational and faith-based perspectives and falls into the category of fallacy.

Complementarity Instead of Tension Between Faith and Science

In this context, belief in God should be seen not as an alternative or opposition to scientific explanations, but as a complement that gives them meaning. People turn to God not only when faced with things they cannot explain, but also when they question the ultimate meaning behind the things they can explain. Every gap that science has yet to explain is not a new area where God should be placed; for God is, from the outset, the transcendent and necessary ground of all existence. To view God as a void to be filled with supernatural explanations is both a theological and philosophical misunderstanding. God is not an external part of existence; God is the transcendent principle that makes existence itself possible.

As we have emphasized before, the fact that science explains nature does not render God unnecessary; on the contrary, it deepens belief in God. This is because the laws of nature, understood through scientific methods, reveal the order, integrity, and immense structure behind existence. This structure allows us to bear witness to God's power. In other words, understanding nature means better comprehending God's creation. Throughout history, many philosophers, natural philosophers, and modern scientists have acted on their belief in God, arguing that discovering nature is one of the ways to know God. For these people, nature should be read like a sacred book; every order, every detail in it should be seen as a verse bearing the traces of God.

Indeed, many sacred texts, including the Quran, invite humans to examine both nature and their own nature. Believing philosophers and scientists have made significant contributions to the development of scientific thought. The point we have reached today is the product of their efforts to evaluate reason and revelation together. However, some circles today distort or deliberately ignore these historical facts by turning science into an ideological tool. This approach, which turns science into a tool of ideological blindness, is not an intellectual stance; it is more of a prejudiced and dogmatic reaction.

The underlying basis for such ideological stances is the realization that God is a rationally defensible reality on a philosophical plane. For God is not a scientific phenomenon, but a metaphysical necessity. Rational thought must turn to the idea of God in order to arrive at the ultimate explanation. Those who are uncomfortable with this situation attempt to reduce God to the scientific method; they want to observe, measure, and fit Him into the laboratory. However, this expectation is both a methodological deviation and a philosophical fallacy. To argue that God should be the subject of science actually reveals a fundamental lack of understanding of God's nature. God is not a physical entity; He is not bound by time and space; He is formless. To expect such a being to be visible is not only a methodological error but also an epistemological naivety.⁵

⁵ Emrah Bozkurt, "The Logical Impasse of Atheist and Agnostic Discourse", *academia.edu*, May 2025.

The image of God in these people's minds is often anthropomorphic; they imagine God as a visible being within the universe, limited by the laws of nature. This is not scientific; it is simply a fanciful approach. Trying to dismiss a God they cannot intellectually deny simply because they cannot see Him is not only a philosophical weakness but also an intellectual dishonesty. Because the issue here is not God's existence, but the person's unwillingness to take responsibility in the face of this existence.

Conclusion

Viewing the concept of God as merely a temporary explanation tacked onto the unknown is seriously shallow, both historically and conceptually. The reductionist claim of a "*God of the gaps*" both disregards the real foundations of belief in God and turns science into an ideological tool. Theistic thought, however, grounds God not only as an explanation for phenomena we cannot explain, but also as a necessary and transcendent principle that gives meaning and unity to the whole of existence, beyond even what is known.

God is not a figure thrust into the gaps that science cannot fill; God is a necessary being that makes possible the metaphysical foundations of concepts such as existence, order, consciousness, law, and causality. Therefore, God is not opposed to scientific knowledge; God is part of the intellectual and metaphysical infrastructure that makes science itself possible. In this sense, God should be sought not in the helplessness of the unknowable, but in the necessity of existence.

The scientific method rightly relies on observation and experimentation; however, viewing this method as a universal criterion of knowledge takes science beyond its own boundaries. While science focuses on the question of "*how*" the questions of "*why and for what purpose*" are addressed by philosophy and theology. Attempting to make God the subject of science is as futile as searching for meaning with a microscope. God reveals Himself not in test tubes, but in the metaphysical intuition of the mind and in the holistic meaning of existence.

The notion of the "*God of the Gaps*" is actually a kind of arrogant defense reflex of the modern mind. As humanity realizes that absolute knowledge is unattainable, it dismisses everything unknown with the assumption that it can be explained in the future, saying, "*We can't explain it yet*". This transforms the scientific method from a search for objective knowledge into a belief system. Yet science needs humility, not dogma. Rather than dismissing the unknowable, striving to understand it is the ancient endeavor of philosophy and theology.

In conclusion, the concept of God is not a figure invented to fill scientific gaps, but a metaphysical foundation that human reason, striving to comprehend the meaning of the universe, inevitably arrives at. We must not confine it to the temporary limits of science, but rather think of it as encompassing all dimensions of existence. For God is not only the cause of the inexplicable, but also of the explainable.