

Eternal Mathematics and Eternal Consciousness: A Philosophical and Islamic Perspective

Introduction

Mathematics has long been regarded as a realm of eternal truths – statements like $2 + 2 = 4$ or the properties of geometric forms seem true in a way that transcends the physical world and any specific time. This apparent timelessness and universality of mathematical truth raises profound philosophical questions: *Can such eternal mathematics exist on its own, or must it reside in some eternal mind?* Interestingly, while relatively few scientists profess religious belief, mathematicians are *more* inclined than other scientists to hold quasi-mystical views about mathematics' independent reality. In one survey of elite academics, only about 14.6% of mathematicians affirmed belief in God (versus 5.5% of biologists), yet **most mathematicians believe in a kind of “heaven” – not of angels, but of abstract mathematical objects** ¹. In fact, roughly three-quarters of top mathematicians consider themselves *Platonists*, meaning they feel that numbers, formulas, and other mathematical entities exist in an immaterial realm of timeless truths ² ³. They often describe their work as *discovering* eternal facts, even “communing” with a non-physical world of forms via a special intuition ⁴. This paradox – believing in a *mathematical heaven* while not necessarily believing in a personal God – sets the stage for an inquiry into the metaphysical and epistemological implications of mathematics' eternity. We will argue that the existence of eternal, non-material mathematical truths is best explained by an **eternal consciousness** that knows them – an ultimate Mind that classical theism identifies as God. In doing so, we draw on Islamic theism and broader philosophical traditions to show that the timeless truths of mathematics point to a transcendent knower.

Mathematics as an Eternal, Unseen Reality

Mathematicians and philosophers have often noted that mathematical truths feel “out there” waiting to be found rather than invented. This view, known as mathematical Platonism, goes back to Plato's idea of abstract *Forms* or ideals. Under Platonism, numbers and mathematical objects exist in an objective, non-physical realm, and our mathematical statements are true or false about that realm. Modern mathematicians, by and large, embrace this intuition. As evidence, when writer Jim Holt polled an international gathering of eminent mathematicians, about **75% identified as Platonists**, effectively conceding that they “feel mathematical entities (numbers, sets, equations) exist in an abstract realm, independent of human minds” ³. In other words, the majority of leading mathematicians are convinced that a **“mathematical heaven” of timeless truths** really exists ⁵. They believe, for example, that the infinity of prime numbers or the properties of a perfect circle are true statements whether or not any human discovers them – as if these truths inhabit a hidden domain of being.

Crucially, this conviction often stands apart from traditional religious belief. The same Jim Holt commentary noted that while mathematicians were more likely than biologists to profess belief in God, the overall number who accepted “the God hypothesis” was still small (on the order of one in seven) ¹. Thus, a typical mathematician might reject the idea of a personal deity, yet simultaneously hold that there is a *non-empirical, transcendent reality* populated by mathematical truths. They may even speak of perceiving this

reality through a kind of insight or **extrasensory intuition** that goes beyond normal sense-perception ⁴ . In essence, many mathematicians have faith in the **unseen** – a purely rational cosmos of numbers and structures – even as they remain skeptical of the unseen as conceived by religion.

This state of affairs presents a philosophical puzzle. If one accepts that mathematical truths exist independently of the material world and of human minds, one must ask: *What kind of existence do these entities have, and how do we access them?* Platonism posits a third realm (neither physical nor mental) where abstract entities reside. However, such a realm is metaphysically mysterious – it is not part of space and time, and these entities do not have causal powers in the usual sense. The epistemology is puzzling as well: How do flesh-and-blood thinkers gain knowledge of truths that reside in an immaterial heaven? Mathematicians' talk of "communing" with the timeless realm ⁶ is suggestive, but it begs the question of what connects the human mind to this abstract reality. The **eternity and invariance** of mathematics cry out for an explanation: Why should such an independent realm of truth exist at all, and how can it align so precisely with our world of experience?

The Metaphysical Need for an Eternal Knower

One classical answer to this puzzle is that *eternal truths require an eternal knower*. In philosophical theology, especially within the Platonic and Augustinian traditions, thinkers have suggested that what Plato called the realm of Forms actually exists in the mind of God – an infinite consciousness that holds all truths. This view, sometimes termed **divine conceptualism**, proposes that abstract truths (like mathematical laws) are not self-subsistent *things* but rather ideas in an eternal mind. Notably, such a perspective resolves the dilemma of where these truths reside and how they can be known: they exist in **consciousness**, and ultimately in the **one consciousness that is infinite, necessary, and eternal**.

To see why an eternal mind is needed, consider the nature of mathematics itself. Equations and numbers are not physical objects – one cannot trip over the number 4 on the sidewalk. Rather, they are more like **thoughts** or propositions. As one commentator succinctly put it, *mathematical formulae and equations are like thoughts, and these only exist in a conscious mind* ⁷ . A theorem, for example, lives as a true idea, which we can write on paper or encode in symbols, but those inscriptions are just representations. The *meaning* – the truth of the statement – ultimately must be grasped by a mind. If we imagine a hypothetical scenario with no minds at all in existence, would the Pythagorean theorem "exist" in any meaningful way? Without any intellect to conceive "the square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the legs," the statement has no mental instantiation. In a cosmos utterly devoid of consciousness, the truth-value of propositions could not be articulated or known; such a universe might contain physical relations, but the **conceptual knowledge** of those relations would be absent. Mathematics, being a system of concepts and logical relationships, seems inherently linked to *mind*. It appears, then, that **mindlessness cannot host mathematics** – *if consciousness does not exist, mathematics cannot be imagined and nothing exists*, as Dr. Zia Shah succinctly observes ⁷ . In short, **thoughts require a thinker**; an equation requires a mind that understands it.

Now, a committed Platonist might object that mathematical truths *would* exist even without minds – they would just float in the Platonic heaven unobserved. But this notion of uninstantiated, unthought truths is deeply perplexing. What does it mean for " $7 + 5 = 12$ " to be *true* if literally no intellect is aware of it? Truth, by definition, is a property of propositions, which are entities that **signify meaning** – and meaning only arises for a conscious knower. The idea of a proposition true in itself without any mind conceiving it verges on a contradiction, or at least empties the concept of truth of any operational meaning. As philosopher Gordon

Clark once argued in defense of divine conceptualism, an eternal truth must be “eternally thought” – otherwise it is an eternal *nothing*. Thus arises the conclusion that eternal mathematical truths point to an **eternal thinker**.

Dr. Shah’s analysis in *The Muslim Times* reaches exactly this point: those 75% of mathematicians who voted for a necessary, independent mathematical reality inadvertently provided evidence for something beyond mathematics. Shah notes that mathematicians find mathematics “necessary” – in the sense of not contingent on our universe – but he counters that *mathematics itself cannot be the ultimate necessary reality, because it depends on consciousness to conceptualize it*. Therefore, mathematics must be **contingent**, not absolute, and “cannot be necessary” in itself ⁸. What, then, is necessary? By process of elimination, we arrive at a **necessary mind**. If abstract truths cannot stand on their own feet, they must reside in a necessary being that is mental in nature. In Shah’s words, this line of reasoning “*makes some ultimate consciousness a necessary existence, to make mathematics and the rest of reality possible*”, essentially replacing impersonal mathematical truth with an eternal Consciousness – “*which the Abrahamic faiths call God.*” ⁹. In summary, the metaphysical and logical necessity of a knower for every known truth leads us to posit an **eternal, uncaused Mind** as the ground for mathematics’ eternal truths. This Mind would harbor all mathematical realities in the same way an architect’s mind contains the complete blueprint of a building before it is built. It is, as philosophers have identified for centuries, what we call God – the **omniscient** foundation of all that is true.

An Islamic Perspective: Mathematics in the Mind of God

The idea that eternal truths reside in an eternal consciousness finds a natural home in Islamic theism. In the Islamic worldview, God (*Allah*) is conceived as **Al-‘Alīm (The All-Knowing)** – possessing complete and eternal knowledge of everything – and **Al-Ḥakīm (The Most Wise)** ¹⁰. The Qur’an portrays God’s act of creation as one done “*bil-ḥaqq*”, meaning “with truth, purpose, and law” ¹¹ ¹². Far from a chaotic or whimsical cosmos, the Quranic cosmos is orderly and runs according to fixed principles laid down by God. “He created the heavens and the earth with truth,” declares the Qur’an (29:44), and it repeats the sentiment that nothing in creation is in vain or unaccounted: “*We did not create the heavens and earth and all that is between them in play. We created them only in truth...*” (44:38–39) ¹³ ¹⁴. These verses emphasize that the universe is not a cosmic accident but a deliberate act of **intelligence**, undergirded by rational laws.

In Islamic theology, those laws of nature are often described in terms of **measure, number, and proportion** – essentially a mathematical conception. The Qur’an states, “*Indeed, We have created everything in precise measure (qadar)*” (54:49) and refers to the movement of the sun and moon “*according to calculation (bi-hisāb)*” (13:2, 55:5) ¹⁵ ¹². One verse even says, “*He has counted everything in numbers*” (72:28), implying that enumeration and quantitative knowledge extend to the entire creation in God’s view ¹⁶. Classical Islamic commentators noted that Allah “*has encompassed everything in knowledge and counted it all precisely*”, suggesting that all facts of the universe are numbered and known by the divine mind. In effect, **reality has a mathematical structure because God conceived it so**. This dovetails perfectly with the earlier philosophical argument: if God is an omniscient consciousness, all mathematical truths (which are part of “everything”) abide in God’s knowledge eternally. What mathematicians call an abstract realm of forms can be understood in Islam as *the knowledge of Allah*, who designed the world by those forms and laws.

Modern Islamic thinkers explicitly make this connection. They observe that the uncanny success of mathematics in describing the physical world – what physicist Eugene Wigner called the “unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics” – makes sense if one presupposes a Creator who used mathematics as His

design language ¹⁷ ¹⁸ . From a secular standpoint, it is astonishing that abstract human thought coincides so well with cosmic reality, as if equations on a blackboard somehow govern galaxies. Wigner himself marveled at this as a “miracle” and “a wonderful gift” beyond human comprehension ¹⁹ . But Islamic philosophy turns this “miracle” into a sign of intentional design: the **same Mind** is behind both the mathematics and the physics ¹⁰ ²⁰ . As one Muslim author put it, “*mathematics existed not in the consciousness of humanity, but in the mind of the All-Knowing Creator*” ²¹ . In other words, before any human ever did math, **divine mathematics** already existed as the blueprint of creation, residing in God’s intellect ²² . What humans eventually discover – the theorems, the ratios, the laws – is merely *uncovering the patterns that God wove into the fabric of reality* ²² . Therefore, the effectiveness of mathematics is not “unreasonable” at all; it is expected, because the cosmos was constructed **mathematically** by a rational Deity. The Qur’an hints at exactly this harmony when it links the truth and order of creation with calculation, stating for example: “*Allah created the sun and moon, each running for a specified term... He created the heavens and the earth in truth... in that is a sign for those who reflect*” (e.g. 13:2, 39:5, 10:5) ²³ . The faithful thus see scientific discovery not as revealing a cold, meaningless universe, but as tracing the **thoughts of God** – each natural law or mathematical harmony is a *sign (āyah)* of divine wisdom ²³ .

A striking resonance emerges between the mathematicians’ perspective and the Islamic one. Recall that those “Platonist” mathematicians speak of a *timeless mathematical heaven* accessible to the mind’s eye. Islamic theology has a comparable concept: the idea that all knowledge, including the decrees and principles of creation, is preserved with God. Metaphorically, Muslims speak of **al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz**, the “Preserved Tablet,” upon which God’s knowledge is inscribed. Dr. Shah notes that it is “strikingly consonant” that mathematicians sense they are *discovering* something transcendent rather than inventing it, since in Islam one would say **mathematical truths pre-exist with God** on that Preserved Tablet of divine knowledge ²⁴ . When mathematicians say they *unlock* a new theorem, one could analogously say they are unlocking a piece of the divine code underlying reality ²⁵ . Indeed, the Qur’an teaches that God decreed the order of the world long before human beings, and that we are simply coming to know bits of what the Creator already perfectly knows. Thus, the secular mathematician’s “Platonic realm” and the theologian’s “Mind of God” begin to look like two descriptions of the same thing. The key difference is that in Islamic (and generally theistic) understanding, the eternal realm of truth is *inhabited by an eternal knower* – it has *agency* and *unity* in the person of God, rather than being an impersonal collection of truths floating in a void.

It is noteworthy that throughout history, many scientists and philosophers in the West also equated mathematical order with the mind of a Creator. Galileo Galilei, for example, famously said that the universe “is written in the language of mathematics” by God – essentially viewing geometry and numbers as God’s script for creation ²⁶ . Sir Isaac Newton saw the laws of nature as emanating from the will of God, and legendary mathematician Leonhard Euler openly argued for the necessity of God to ground the truths of mathematics and logic. In modern times, thinkers like Kurt Gödel (a mathematical logician) were unabashed Platonists who also believed in an ultimate reality beyond the physical – Gödel even believed in an afterlife where the truths of mathematics would be fully known. These examples underscore that the **alignment of eternal truth with a divine mind** is a recurrent theme in broader philosophical traditions, not just Islam. However, Islamic scripture provides a particularly clear framework: it explicitly asserts both the **independence of mathematical order from materiality** and its dependence on a supreme Consciousness. The Qur’an’s vision is of a world created “*bi’l-ḥisāb*” (by calculation) and “*bi’l-qadr*” (by precise measure) under an omniscient Planner – a view that inherently unites mathematics with mind.

Conclusion

We began with a paradox: the idea of eternal mathematics existing in the absence of any eternal mind. Upon examination, this notion appears untenable. The very nature of mathematical truth – abstract, universal, meaningful – points toward **mind** as its locus. An eternal truth that was true “before the universe,” and will remain true even if the universe ends, cannot be grounded in fleeting matter or in human brains that came late to the scene. The most coherent resolution is that such truths reside in an **eternal, uncreated Consciousness**. By positing an eternal knower, we find a home for mathematics’ eternity: the truths were *always known* to an infinite Mind, and thus always true. This conclusion is not only philosophically satisfying but theologically significant. It implies that whenever mathematicians revere the beauty and consistency of their “mathematical heaven,” they are, whether they admit it or not, coming closer to the concept of **God** – the Eternal Being in whom reside all truths. As Dr. Shah observes, once we recognize that mathematics is contingent on mind, the “**ultimate necessary existence**” must be *an ultimate consciousness (God)* that underpins both mathematics and reality ⁹.

In the Islamic tradition, this ultimate consciousness is Allah, in whose knowledge are found all numbers, forms, and laws. The harmony of mathematical law and physical law is thus no surprise: both flow from the same rational source. The eternity of mathematics is, in fact, a reflection of the eternity of God’s knowledge. In a profound sense, *mathematical truth is a facet of the divine Truth*. By acknowledging an eternal conscious knower, we bridge the gap between the abstract and the personal: the eternal truths are not cold and lifeless – they live in the mind of the Eternal One. Consequently, the existence of eternal mathematics is a powerful philosophical pointer toward the existence of God. The timeless theorems and ratios whisper of an **Eternal Thinker**. For the believer, this not only “solves” the riddle of mathematics’ effectiveness ²⁷ ²⁰, but it enriches the pursuit of mathematics itself: to do math is, in a way, to glimpse the work of the Divine Architect.

In conclusion, eternal mathematics does not float in a void; it shines perpetually in the light of an eternal Consciousness. This realization harmonizes with centuries of philosophical insight and is vividly affirmed in Islamic theism. The implication is as elegant as a well-proved theorem: **if eternal truths exist, an Eternal Mind exists** – and that Mind is what we call God.

Sources:

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- Shah, Zia H. “God’s Creation through Law and Mathematics: An Islamic Perspective.” **The Glorious Quran and Science**, June 28, 2025 ²¹ ²⁸.

¹ ² ⁴ ⁶ ⁷ ⁸ ⁹ How Could Most Mathematicians Believe in Heaven, But Not in God? – The Glorious Quran and Science

<https://thequran.love/2024/02/28/how-could-most-mathematicians-believe-in-heaven-but-not-in-god/>

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