Short Video and Essay: Why is God Necessary?

Abstract:

This article explores why God is posited as the metaphysically necessary foundation of reality, through an interfaith philosophical lens. We begin by introducing **David Bentley Hart**, an Eastern Orthodox theologian and philosopher known for his robust defense of classical theism and Christian metaphysics. We then provide a thematic summary of Hart's discussion in a Closer to Truth episode on the question "Why is there anything at all?", highlighting Hart's insights and direct quotations from the talk. Building on these themes, we examine the contention that **God is metaphysically necessary** as an explanation for the existence of the universe. We engage critically with contemporary skepticism and naturalist accounts that attempt to answer this "ultimate question" without God, drawing on Hart's arguments. Subsequently, we offer a **theological-philosophical defense of divine necessity** from two complementary perspectives. First, we draw on **Islamic metaphysics** – including classical *kalām* arguments on contingency and the concept of a *Necessary Being* (*wājib al-wujūd*) grounded in the doctrine of *tawḥīd* (divine oneness). Second, we incorporate **Christian philosophical** insights – especially the Thomistic contingency argument, Neoplatonic notions of the One, and the classical theist understanding of God as ipsum esse (Being itself). Through this interfaith analysis, we affirm that God, as conceived in these traditions, emerges as the only coherent and sufficient answer to the mystery of existence, countering naturalist objections and demonstrating a deep consonance between Islamic and Christian views on divine necessity. The article is structured with an academic tone, including an introduction to Hart, a summary of the dialogue, thematic sections on metaphysical arguments, and a conclusion underscoring the unity of classical theism across traditions in addressing why anything exists at all.

Introduction: David Bentley Hart and the Question of Existence

David Bentley Hart (b. 1965) is a prominent American Orthodox Christian theologian, philosopher, and cultural commentator renowned for his wide-ranging contributions to contemporary Christian thought [1] [2] . He earned advanced degrees from Cambridge and the University of Virginia and has held academic posts at several institutions, including the University of Notre Dame [3] . Hart's scholarship spans **classical and medieval philosophy**, patristics, and even non-Western religious traditions; his works address topics from ontology and comparative mythology to theological aesthetics [1] . Among his notable books are *The Beauty of the Infinite*, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, *Atheist Delusions*, and *That All Shall Be Saved*, which collectively illustrate his engagement with **Christian metaphysics** and defense of classical theism [2] . An outspoken advocate of the classical understanding of God, Hart aligns himself with the tradition of thought (shaped by Plato, Aristotle, the Church Fathers, and others) in which God is not one being among many but the infinite and necessary ground of all being [4] . In his theological vision – influenced by Neoplatonism and the Christian **doctrine of creation ex nihilo** – God alone is the self-subsistent reality upon which all contingent things depend. This perspective informs Hart's response to one of philosophy's most profound riddles: *"Why is there something rather than nothing?"*

Hart addresses this **"ultimate why question"** both in his writings and interviews. As a contributor to Robert Lawrence Kuhn's *Closer to Truth* series, Hart delved into the question "Why is there anything at all?" with characteristic depth. In what follows, we first summarize the key themes and insights from Hart's discussion in that episode – including his critique of reductively naturalistic answers – and then develop a rigorous argument for God's metaphysical necessity. Drawing on **Islamic and Christian philosophical theology**, we will argue that affirming God as *the* necessary foundation of reality provides the only coherent solution to

the mystery of existence [5] . Throughout, we engage contemporary skepticism, showing why attempts to explain the universe without reference to a necessary divine reality fall short of fully answering why anything exists at all. The aim is an interfaith, intellectually robust defense of the thesis that **God is the *necessary being*** underpinning all contingent existence, in line with the deepest insights of both the Islamic and Christian traditions.

"Why Is There Anything At All?" – Hart's Perspective and Insights

In the *Closer to Truth* interview titled *"Why Is There Anything At All?"*, David Bentley Hart tackles the age-old metaphysical question with clarity and philosophical rigor. At the outset, Hart emphasizes that the question *"Why is there something rather than nothing?"* is not a trivial one – it is "the ultimate puzzle" that **demands some kind of explanation** for existence itself [6] [7] . If, hypothetically, truly nothing ever existed, there would be nothing to explain; but in fact *something* (indeed a whole cosmos of things) does exist, and this brute fact cries out for an intelligible reason [8] . Hart notes that any adequate answer must confront *being as such*, not merely particular beings. Thus, the puzzle cannot be solved by pointing to one more contingent entity or physical event; it requires an explanation that transcends all contingent reality.

Hart distinguishes the **metaphysical question of existence** from any specific question of physics or cosmology. He observes that some scientists misconstrue the query "Why is there *something* rather than *nothing*?" as if it were asking how our universe arose from a simpler pre-existing state. In the interview, Hart critiques such responses (for example, appeals to quantum fluctuations or multiverse cosmologies) as fundamentally missing the point. Explaining how our universe might have emerged from a quantum vacuum or from a "prior" physical condition still leaves unanswered the deeper question: *why does any reality (vacuum, multiverse, laws of physics, etc.) exist at all?* Hart underscores that when physicists like Lawrence Krauss attempt to redefine "nothing" in scientific terms – treating it as a quantum vacuum or a set of physical laws – they are no longer dealing with **"nothing" in the metaphysical sense**, but only with a subtler form of *something*. Any such **cosmological theory, however exotic, remains within the realm of existence and thus "has nothing to do with the metaphysical notion of nothing"** [9] [10] . As Hart succinctly puts it, *"without exception, what they are actually talking about is merely the formation of our universe by way of a transition from one physical state to another, but certainly not the spontaneous arising of existence from nonexistence (which is logically impossible)"* [11] . No matter how minimal or "empty" the physical antecedent (be it a vacuum fluctuation or quantum tunneling event), it is still *something rather than nothing* and thus fails to answer the ultimate question. Hart's insight here is that **science can describe the transitions and states within being, but it cannot by itself account for *Being* with a capital B** – the sheer *existence* of any state of affairs whatsoever [12] .

During the discussion, Hart therefore points toward a **transcendent explanation**. He argues, in line with classical metaphysics, that the existence of the contingent world can only be made sense of if there is a reality that is not itself contingent – a reality that exists *of itself* and provides the reason for everything else. In the video, Hart alludes to the millennia-old intuition that an **"absolute being" or ultimate reality** is required to ground the existence of the cosmos [13] . Importantly, this absolute is not imagined as just another thing within the universe or alongside it, but rather as an entirely different order of reality: the **unconditioned ground of being**. Hart stresses that invoking God in this context is not a convenient metaphysical shortcut or a gap-filler for scientific ignorance; rather, *God (as understood in classical theism) is categorically the kind of reality that could answer the question of existence, whereas finite physical explanations by their nature cannot* [5] . In Hart's view, **only an eternal, self-subsistent source of reality could be the ultimate explanation for why anything exists at all**, because only such a source would carry within itself

the reason for its own existence (and hence for the existence of all else). Any worldview that rejects this move, he suggests, ends up treating existence as an inexplicable brute fact – effectively giving up on the search for explanation at the point where it matters most. Hart's commentary is laced with pointed humor and erudition; at one juncture, he wryly notes that atheistic cosmologists who claim to have answered the question of why reality exists have merely *"produced perfectly delightful books on speculative cosmology"* without actually touching the true ontological mystery [14] [12] . The upshot of Hart's perspective in the video is a robust challenge: **any satisfying answer to the question of existence must lie in the existence of an absolute, necessary reality – what classical theists call God**.

In summary, Hart's thematic message in *"Why Is There Anything At All?"* is that the existence of the universe cannot be ultimately explained by further appeals to contingent entities or scientific models alone. The question demands a **metaphysical answer**, and Hart unabashedly identifies that answer in terms of the divine. He revives the classical contention that **the being of the world points to the being of God** – not as a simplistic plug for ignorance, but as a reasoned conclusion that an **infinite, self-explaining reality** (one whose essence is existence) is *"the only possible answer in principle"* to why anything exists [5] . This conclusion naturally leads us to examine more closely *why* and *how* God is conceived as a metaphysically necessary being in philosophical theology, and to consider supporting arguments from both Islamic and Christian intellectual traditions.

God as the Metaphysically Necessary Explanation of Reality

Engaging with Hart's argument, we now turn to the claim that **God is metaphysically necessary as the ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe**. This claim means that God is not merely a being who happens to exist, but rather a being who *must* exist and whose existence accounts for the being of all other things. In classical philosophical terms, God is said to be a **Necessary Being** – one whose non-existence is impossible and who contains the sufficient reason for the existence of every contingent reality. To say that God is *"metaphysically necessary"* in this context is to say that without such a being, we lack a final answer to the question of why there is anything at all.

The intuition behind this idea can be articulated using the **principle of sufficient reason (PSR)**: the principle that for every fact or existence, there must be a reason or explanation for why it is so rather than otherwise (or rather than nothing). The cosmological question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" essentially demands a *"full, complete, ultimate…explanation of what exists contingently"* [15] . Any contingent being or event (one that could possibly not have existed) begs for a cause or explanation. If we trace the network of causes and conditions for the things we observe – no matter how far back or how broad we extend it – we are compelled, argues the classical metaphysician, to eventually posit a reality that is **non-contingent or self-explanatory**. Without such an ultimate ground, the existence of the contingent world would be a brute fact hanging inexplicably in a void of nothingness, which offends the rational demand for intelligibility. In the words of philosopher Edward Feser (echoing the classical tradition), *"the existence of God, as classical theism understands God, is…the only possible answer in principle to [the question of why anything exists]"* [5] . In other words, if we define God in the classical sense – as the eternal, immutable, simple, and self-sufficient source of all being – then **either such a God exists, or there is in principle no answer to the mystery of existence**. The classical theist contends that the latter is unreasonable, so we must accept the former.

Crucially, the God that functions as this ultimate explanation is not a causal agent within the cosmos like other causes, but *the ontological ground of the cosmos itself*. Classical theism (affirmed in different forms by

many religious traditions) conceives of God as **Being Itself** or the **Absolute Reality** upon which all else depends. Unlike contingent things, whose existence is *received* and could be otherwise, God's existence is understood to be **self-subsistent** (in scholastic terms, God's essence *is* existence). This makes God uniquely capable of serving as the terminus of explanation – a reality that does not require further explanation beyond itself, because it exists *by necessity of its own nature*. All contingent beings, by contrast, exist *by another* (through causes, through a chain of dependencies, or ultimately through the Necessary Being). As long as one refuses to countenance a necessary foundation, one is left with an explanatory deficit. Contemporary naturalist philosophers sometimes argue that the universe (or multiverse) itself might be a brute fact with no further explanation, encapsulated in the slogan "*The universe just is.*" Hart and other classical thinkers find this response unsatisfying, essentially a renunciation of the deepest human quest for understanding [16] . By positing God as the necessary foundation, we uphold the intelligibility of reality: there *is* a reason for existence – namely, an ever-existing **Reality that cannot not exist**, which freely bestows existence on everything else.

It is important to note that calling God "necessary" is not an arbitrary stipulation but a reasoned conclusion drawn from the failure of alternatives. Hart's critique of cosmologists who invoke "nothing" only to smuggle in something (like laws of physics) illustrates that **every attempt to explain existence by reference to purely physical antecedents ends up presupposing existence in another form** [11] [12] . The regress of contingent explanations, if not terminated in a necessary source, either becomes infinite (and still unexplained as a whole) or stops arbitrarily at some brute fact. The classical resolution is that *being* itself has a source that is **unconditioned** – a source which itself requires no cause. This is the role God plays in classical theology and philosophy. Far from being a "gap-filler" for a particular scientific unknown, God (so understood) is a **transcendental explanation**: the answer to *why any explanatory schema (and any world) is possible in the first place*. Thus, the metaphysical necessity of God is affirmed as the keystone that completes the arch of explanation – without it, the structure of reality has no ultimate support.

Having established in general terms why God's existence is seen as necessary to explain the universe, we can deepen our understanding by examining how **Islamic and Christian philosophical traditions** have articulated this insight. Both traditions, drawing on overlapping Greek philosophical heritage and their own theological sources, have formulated sophisticated arguments for a necessary, uncaused reality (God) as the answer to existence. We will first consider the Islamic perspective, rooted in *kalām* theology and the philosophy of thinkers like *Al-Ghazālī* and *Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)*. We will then turn to the Christian perspective, especially the Thomistic argument from contingency and the Neoplatonic vision of the One. Through this, we will see a remarkable convergence on the idea of a single necessary being – a convergence that underscores the rational power of this idea in the face of metaphysical skepticism.

Islamic Metaphysics: Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*) and *Tawḥīd*

In Islamic thought, especially in the classical period (9th–12th centuries), scholars developed profound arguments for the existence of God as the **Necessary Being** (*wājib al-wujūd*) who causes all contingent existence. These efforts took two prominent forms: (1) the *kalām cosmological argument*, advanced by theologians (*mutakallimūn*) like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, which focuses on the universe having a beginning in time; and (2) the *contingency argument*, articulated with particular rigor by the philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), which does not depend on temporal beginnings but on the metaphysical distinction between necessary and contingent existence. Underlying both approaches is the foundational Islamic doctrine of **tawḥīd**, the absolute oneness and unity of God. *Tawḥīd* entails not only that there is only one God, but that God alone possesses self-sufficient being – *all other beings are radically dependent on Him*. As one Muslim

theological text summarizes: believing in *tawḥīd* at the most basic level means affirming *"the Necessary Being, i.e. [that] no being has come into existence by itself except Allah…whose existence is necessary. It is only Allah, the Exalted, whose existence is intrinsically a must, and from whom the other beings take their existence."* [17] In short, only God exists *through Himself*, whereas everything else exists *through God*. This captures the essence of God's metaphysical necessity in Islamic theology.

Al-Ghazālī's kalām cosmological argument proceeds from the finitude of the past and the createdness of the world. Al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) contended that the cosmos is not eternal; it began to exist, and *"everything that begins to exist requires a cause of its beginning"*. Since an infinite temporal regress of causes is impossible (an actual infinite past would entail logical contradictions in *kalām* reasoning), there must be a first cause that brought the world into being [18]. Ghazālī identifies this cause as **Allah (God)**, who alone can originate the universe from nothingness. The Qur'an itself poses a famous rhetorical question that Ghazālī and others often quote: *"Were they created from nothing, or were they the creators [of themselves]?"* (Qur'an 52:35) – driving home that one cannot get existence from sheer nothing, nor can something cause itself. Thus, by process of elimination, the universe must be caused by a reality beyond it. This *kalām* argument has a clear theistic conclusion: a **transcendent Creator** who is uncaused and possesses the power to create ex nihilo. It is an early formulation of what is now known in philosophy of religion as the **Kalam Cosmological Argument**, and it remains influential in both Islamic and Western apologetics. Notably, this argument hinges on the notion of God as the one necessary, uncaused being – the being that simply *is*, with no beginning and no end, who can initiate a temporal series of causes [18].

Avicenna's contingency argument offers a complementary and in many ways deeper analysis. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980–1037) was a polymath of the Islamic Golden Age who formulated an argument for God's existence based on the very existence of contingent beings, irrespective of whether the world had a beginning in time. In Avicenna's metaphysics, all of reality is analyzed in terms of the contrast between *māhiyyah* (essence) and *wujūd* (existence). Contingent beings are those whose essence does not guarantee their existence – they *might or might not* exist. Such beings require an **external cause** to actualize their existence. Avicenna begins by observing that *at least something exists* (this is undeniable). Now, either everything that exists is contingent or there is a necessary being. If, per impossibile, all things were contingent, then the entire collection of contingent things would itself lack a sufficient reason for existing. Even if one posits an infinite chain of contingent causes, Avicenna argues that the *whole chain* is contingent and thus needs a cause outside itself [19]. He reasons: suppose we have an infinite regress of contingent causes C_1 caused by C_2, C_2 by C_3, and so on without end. Consider the entire *set* of these contingencies. This set cannot be necessary (for its existence depends on the existence of its members, each of which is contingent). Therefore, the set as a whole is contingent and requires a cause. That cause, however, **cannot be part of the contingent set** – for if it were, it would be causing itself (an impossibility) [20]. Thus the cause of all contingent reality must lie *outside* the total collection of contingent things. By definition, such an outside cause cannot be contingent; it must be a **Necessary Being** that exists in its own right. In Avicenna's concise conclusion: *"there is a Necessary Being."* [19] This Necessary Being, he then shows, must be one, indivisible, and the source of all that is – attributes that correspond to the monotheistic God. Avicenna's argument is powerful because it does not assume a beginning of the universe; even if one supposed an eternal universe, the eternal existence of contingent things would still need a necessary foundation. Indeed, later Christian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas appreciated and adapted Avicenna's reasoning on contingency [21].

In Islamic creed, these philosophical insights bolster *tawḥīd*. If there must be a Necessary Being, there can logically be only **one** such being – for if there were two or more "gods" each purportedly necessary, neither

would truly be *absolutely* necessary or independent (each would differ by some attribute or limitation). Islamic theologians frequently pointed out that **God's oneness** is implied by His necessity and self-sufficiency: *"no being has come into existence by itself except Allah… [whose] existence is necessary"*, as noted above, and thus *shirk* (assigning a partner to God) is irrational [17] . The Quranic emphasis that *"Your God is One God"* (Qur'an 2:163) is not only a revealed truth but aligns with philosophical reasoning that the ultimate ground of being must be singular and unitary. In effect, *tawḥīd* encapsulates both God's unity and the dependency of all else on God. The Islamic metaphysical picture, then, is one of a **fundamentally two-tiered reality**: the necessarily existent Creator, and the contingent creation which continuously depends on that Creator for its existence. This picture answers the "why anything?" question by saying: *all things exist because God, who cannot not exist, has brought them into existence*. God's **necessary existence** bridges the otherwise uncrossable gap between nothing and something, since from nothing, nothing comes (*ex nihilo nihil fit*) – but God is *never* nothing; He is the eternal fullness of being who can give being without losing anything. As Zia Shah comments, science may illuminate the workings of the cosmos, but questions like *"Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?"* ultimately lead us beyond science's scope – *"These questions ultimately lead us to God"* [22] . The classical Islamic arguments embody this conviction, providing a rational pathway from the existence of the world to the affirmation of a necessary, one, and transcendent God.

Christian Philosophy: Thomism, Neoplatonism, and Classical Theism

The Christian intellectual tradition, drawing on overlapping philosophical foundations, similarly upholds God as the **necessary foundation of all that exists**. Two main streams of thought highlight this: the **Thomistic** (after Thomas Aquinas) and the **Neoplatonic** approaches, both of which are facets of a broader *classical theism* common to historic Christianity. These approaches dovetail with the Islamic arguments discussed above, often directly influenced by them (Thomas Aquinas, for instance, was influenced by Avicenna and other Islamic philosophers [21]). In classical Christian theism, God is understood as *Creatio ex nihilo*'s author – the one who freely creates all things from nothing – and as *ipsum esse subsistens*, the subsistent act of being itself. As Feser notes, classical theism's philosophical core *"just is the development of the implications of there being an ultimate explanation of why anything exists at all"* [23] . We will look at Aquinas's famous argument from contingency and then at the Neoplatonic understanding of God, showing how both converge on the notion of an absolutely necessary divine reality.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) formulated **"Five Ways"** of demonstrating God's existence, the third of which is the *via contingentiae* or contingency argument. Aquinas's Third Way in the *Summa Theologiae* begins much like Avicenna's, by observing that things in the world are contingent: they come into being and pass away. Aquinas argues that if everything were contingent – capable of ceasing to exist – then given infinite time, at some point in the past all things would have ceased, leaving nothing to re-initiate existence [24] . But clearly, things exist now, so not everything can be contingent. Therefore, Aquinas concludes, *"there must exist something the existence of which is necessary"* (a being that cannot not exist). Furthermore, this necessary being must be necessary in itself, not deriving its necessity from another (to avoid an infinite regress of necessary beings depending on more fundamental necessary beings). *"So, there must be something which has its necessity of its own nature,"* Aquinas writes, *"and does not owe it to another, but rather causes necessity in others"* [25] . This being "all people call God." Aquinas here encapsulates the insight that **God alone exists by his own nature, whereas all other necessary things (like perhaps abstract objects or angelic beings, in different contexts) would still depend on God as the source of their necessity**. Aquinas's argument is a specific variation of the contingency reasoning: it adds the insight that contingent

beings are not just logically contingent but temporally finite, reinforcing the need for a self-sustaining source that *keeps* things in existence. God, for Aquinas, is the ever-present **sustainer** as well as the first cause – if God did not exist necessarily at each moment, nothing would exist at any moment.

A key feature of Thomistic and classical Christian theology is the doctrine of **divine simplicity**, intimately tied to God's necessity. Divine simplicity means that in God there is no composition or division; God is not made up of parts, properties, or anything more fundamental. One reason this matters is that any composite being is dependent on the combination of its parts or attributes – which implies contingency. God, being absolutely simple, has no such composition: *His essence just is His existence*. As the First Vatican Council (reflecting Aquinas) taught, God is "self-existent Being" (*ipsum esse per se subsistens*). This teaching aligns with the earlier mentioned idea from Avicenna and Aquinas that in the Necessary Being, unlike in us, essence and existence are identical [26]. The upshot is that God's **necessity is built-in**: God does not "have" existence as a property; God *is Existence Itself*, and thus cannot *not* be. This classical Christian conception dovetails remarkably with Islamic *tawḥīd*: both insist on a single, utterly simple source of all reality. Indeed, historically, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim philosophers often recognized each other as co-defenders of the same classical theistic core. Feser observes that the doctrine of divine simplicity (and the concomitant idea of God as necessary being) was upheld by a wide range of sages "*as diverse as Philo of Alexandria, Plotinus, Augustine, Boethius, Avicenna, Averroes, [Moses] Maimonides, Aquinas, and [Duns] Scotus*" [27]. This highlights a shared philosophical theology: despite dogmatic differences, these thinkers agree that God must be the absolutely simple, independent, and necessary reality that explains why anything else exists.

Beyond the Aristotelian-Thomistic line of reasoning, **Neoplatonism** has also heavily influenced Christian thought on divine necessity. The Neoplatonic tradition, stemming from **Plotinus** (3rd century), envisions an ultimate principle called *the One* or *the Good*, which is **the source of all reality**. Plotinus taught that from the One emanates Intellect, and from Intellect emanates Soul, and so on – a cascading hierarchy of being. Crucially, the One is *beyond all multiplicity and beyond being* (in the sense of beyond conditioned being); it is *utterly simple and necessary*. Plotinus describes the One as *"the source of all things, and the principle of all things"* [28], *"the source of all being, but itself beyond being"* [28]. This paradoxical language ("beyond being") is meant to indicate that the One is not one being among others, but the infinite wellspring from which *being* itself flows. It exists necessarily, overflowing in creative emanation. Early Christian theologians like **St. Augustine** and the **Pseudo-Dionysius** were deeply influenced by Neoplatonic ideas, identifying the One with the Biblical God (Augustine interprets the God of Exodus 3:14, "I AM who AM," as the self-subsistent being, much as Plotinus's One). **Christian Neoplatonism** thus portrays God as the One who is the **Necessary Reality** – *the uncaused cause and unrestricted act of being*. For example, the Eastern Christian theologian **Gregory of Nyssa** in the 4th century argued that God's nature is to be, whereas creation's nature is to come-and-go, again reflecting necessary vs. contingent being. Medieval thinkers like **Dionysius** and later **Meister Eckhart** would even use Neoplatonic formulations: God is the *"ground of being"*, the necessary "One" in whom all things hold together.

In Thomistic synthesis (which itself was influenced by both Aristotle and Neoplatonism), these strands unite: God is *Actus Purus* (Pure Actuality) with no potentiality or contingency, and *causa sui* in the sense of having no cause but being the cause of all. All *perfections* found scattered in creatures (goodness, truth, beauty, etc.) pre-exist in God in a higher, unified way; this too ties to why God must be simple and necessary, for composition or dependency would imply imperfection. If God is the fullness of perfection, God cannot lack existence – non-existence would be an imperfection. Thus, **classical theism in Christianity firmly asserts that God's existence is not a mere fact but a metaphysical necessity**, once one correctly understands what is meant by "God." Hart himself, as a modern Orthodox Christian thinker, operates squarely in this

tradition. He echoes the classical stance that *"the existence of God – rightly understood – is the only possible answer to why the universe exists,"* because God by definition in classical theism is that reality which **must** exist and can impart existence to all else [5] .

To illustrate the interfaith unity of these ideas: a Thomist Christian and an Avicennian Muslim philosopher could largely agree on the proposition that *if anything exists at all, there must exist a single, uncaused cause of being which is itself necessary and eternal*. Thomas Aquinas explicitly acknowledged this convergence, citing "the Philosopher" (Aristotle) and "the Commentator" (Averroes) along with Muslim theologians on various points of natural theology, and even referring to God in one place as *"He Who Is" (Qui est) – whose essence is existence*, much like Avicenna's Necessary Existent. This **shared philosophical monotheism** is a key part of what we mean by "classical theism." It stands in contrast to modern atheistic naturalism, which either denies the need for any such ultimate principle or replaces it with impersonal physical reality. Classical theists across traditions would respond that even an eternal multiverse of physical reality, if it is composed of non-necessary parts, would itself require an external explanation – which can only be provided by a necessary, self-explaining reality (God) [29] [19] .

Answering Skepticism: An Interfaith Defense of Divine Necessity

Having examined the philosophical arguments, we circle back to address contemporary skepticism and naturalist explanations in light of the interfaith perspective we've outlined. The claim that God is the *necessary foundation of all reality* is sometimes met with objections such as: "Why not stop at the universe? Perhaps the universe (or multiverse) 'just is' without explanation." Another common objection is that invoking God is not an explanation at all, or that it raises the further question "Who created God?". Our analysis provides robust answers to these challenges.

First, the suggestion that the universe can be a **brute fact** without explanation is precisely the kind of move that classical metaphysics finds unwarranted. Recall that the *universe*, in the sense of the totality of physical things, is itself contingent – it could be otherwise, it could (conceivably) not have existed. Even if one imagines an eternal universe, its eternity doesn't make it metaphysically necessary; an eternal contingent is still contingent (it would just exist at all times, but it would still rely on deeper principles or conditions). As the **Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy** notes, all cosmological arguments from contingency converge on the insight that *"the universe (as the totality of contingent things) is contingent in that it could have been other than it is or not existed at all"* [30] . It follows that the universe cannot contain the ultimate reason for its own existence. To simply declare "the universe just exists for no reason" is, in effect, to abandon rational inquiry at the ultimate hurdle. By contrast, positing a necessary divine being is not to abandon inquiry but to fulfill it – to find a terminus where the principle of sufficient reason *can* be satisfied (because a necessary being by definition needs no external cause). The Muslim theologian al-Ghazālī confronted an analogous issue when debating Aristotelian philosophers: they held the cosmos might be beginningless, but Ghazālī retorted that even so, it would still depend on God *for its very being each instant*. Modern defenders of the Kalam argument, like William Lane Craig, also argue that it is more plausible to say "the universe has a cause" than "the universe popped into existence uncaused," since out of nothing, nothing comes. Hart's critique of Krauss and others underscores that efforts to get "something from nothing" by physics are actually getting something from *something* (vacuum energy, laws, etc.) [10] [12] . In short, contemporary naturalist scenarios, whether a quantum tunneling universe or an endless multiverse, inevitably presuppose a framework of existence (laws, fields, a sea of possibilities) that itself calls for an explanation. The classical theist refuses to stop the explanatory quest arbitrarily. **God is proposed as the ultimate**

explanation not out of ignorance, but out of a reasoned recognition that the chain of contingency must terminate in a non-contingent source.

Second, the question "Who created God?" misunderstands the concept of God in classical metaphysics. Neither Islamic nor Christian theologians depict God as a caused being. The entire thrust of the **necessary being** argumentation is that God is *uncaused*. God is the uncreated Creator. As Aquinas would say, God is the *First Cause* in the order of existence – not first in a temporal sequence, but ontologically first, the primal source. The **Qur'an** hints at this by calling God *"al-Awwal" (The First)* and *"al-Ṣamad" (The Self-Sufficient, on whom all depend)*. Likewise, the Bible's portrayal of God as "I AM" (the One who is) signals uncreated self-existence. Thus, asking what caused the uncaused cause is a category error. It is akin to asking "What is north of the North Pole?" The answer is: nothing, by definition. Both faith traditions make it clear that *God is eternal* – without beginning or end – and that **time and causation as we know them are features of the created order, not applicable to the Creator**. Hart often emphasizes in his writings that God is not a finite object within the universe, one being among others, but *the infinite actuality underlying all beings*. This conception removes God from the class of things that need a cause. In philosophical terms, God is the *necessary being* whereas everything else is a *contingent being*. So the challenge "who made God?" mistakes God for a contingent entity. Once one grasps the proper definition – that we are positing a reality which must exist and cannot be made or unmade – the question answers itself: **nothing "made" God; God is the unmade Maker**.

Third, some skeptics claim invoking God is not explanatory because it introduces a mystery to solve a mystery. However, the explanatory power of the God hypothesis lies in its **uniqueness**. God, as conceived by classical theism, is not just another heterogeneous element in the chain of causes, but the only kind of thing that *could end the chain*. Consider an analogy: if one asks "Why does this endless chain of gears turn?" the answer might be "because it's connected to an engine that runs of its own power." God is like the engine that imparts motion (existence) to the gears (the world) without Himself needing a further external source of power. Indeed, classical philosophers often refer to God as the **Prime Mover** or **Unmoved Mover** (Aristotle's term) and the **Necessary Existent** (Avicenna's term) to capture this explanatory stopping-point quality. The notion is that **God contains within His own nature the fullness of explanation** – God is *ipsum esse*, the sheer act of to-be, whose essence is to exist. Such a being does not require an explanation beyond itself because it is the paradigm of self-existence. This is a hard concept if one is used to thinking of concrete, limited things (since all limited things do need causes). But part of philosophical training in natural theology is expanding our conceptual repertoire to include an ultimate reality unlike any limited thing. Both Islamic and Christian traditions employ apophatic language (describing God by what He is not, e.g. not contingent, not composite, not finite) and analogical language (describing God as the maximal instance of perfections) to edge closer to an understanding of *necessary being*.

Finally, we consider whether naturalist alternatives like multiverse theories or spontaneous quantum creation can undermine the need for God. As Hart argued, none of these actually address the question of *why there is a reality in the first place*. A multiverse that spawns universes might answer why *this* universe exists with these properties, but then one asks, why does the multiverse exist? If one posits an eternal inflationary cosmos, why does that eternal process exist? Each naturalist answer pushes the question back but cannot kick it out of the room. The ground keeps shifting, but the question remains: why *that* instead of nothing? The classical answer is robust in its simplicity: there is something because an absolute **Creative Reality** exists eternally and freely bestows existence. In Christian terms, "*In [God] we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28); in Islamic terms, "*Allah is the Light (the Reality) of the heavens and the earth*" (Qur'an 24:35), meaning all things are illuminated into existence by Him. Modern scientific narratives, when

properly understood, do not conflict with this view but operate on a different level – they describe *how* the world evolves, given that it exists, whereas theology and metaphysics ask *why* there is a world for science to describe. As Hart eloquently observes, *"no purely physical cosmology has any bearing whatsoever upon the question of existence"*, for the gulf between non-existence and existence is infinite – physics can detail *changes* within existence but not the leap from nothingness to being [31]. In fact, some contemporary physicists and philosophers recognize this limit. The late Stephen Hawking flirted with the idea that a law like gravity could cause a universe from nothing, but critics pointed out that a law of gravity is not "nothing." The law itself is part of the furniture of reality requiring explanation. Thus even the most exotic naturalist scenario cannot circumvent what **Leibniz** called *the principle of sufficient reason*. As long as one values that principle, one is led to a **Necessary Being**.

In sum, when confronted with the question of existence, the **interfaith philosophical consensus** is compelling: **God is the only viable candidate for a self-explaining, necessary reality that could cause a world to exist** [5]. Islamic *kalām* and Christian Thomism converge on this point, providing mutually reinforcing arguments. Both traditions also insist that this necessary reality is one, simple, and perfect – which means it is not an abstract force but aligns with the personal God of monotheism (albeit understood in a metaphysically sophisticated way). This God is the *creator ex nihilo* in Christianity and the *bāri'* (originator) in Islam, who creates without material cause, simply through will and word. Thus, by affirming God's necessary being, believers are not inserting a deus ex machina into science, but rather acknowledging what **reason itself indicates once it contemplates being in totality**. This acknowledgment does not eliminate wonder – on the contrary, it leads to what the medievals called *sacra doxa*, a holy awe, at the realization that all things *really are gratuitous gifts of existence flowing from the Infinite*.

Conclusion: The Necessary Foundation of Reality – An Interfaith Synthesis

Through the course of this exploration, we have seen how **David Bentley Hart's** reflections on why anything exists resonate with a rich tapestry of classical arguments for God as the ultimate explanation. Hart, standing in the Orthodox Christian tradition, revives the venerable claim that **God is not merely a *possible* answer to the riddle of existence but a *necessary* one** – indeed the only answer that fully satisfies the mind's quest for a sufficient reason. Our detailed summary of Hart's dialogue underscored his view that naturalistic accounts inevitably fall short, because they keep the discussion within the domain of contingent states, never arriving at the needed metaphysical breakthrough. That breakthrough is precisely the recognition of a **Necessary Being** upon which all else depends. We then fortified this view by drawing on the classical teachings of Islam and Christianity. The **Islamic metaphysical tradition**, with its principle of *tawḥīd*, rigorously asserts God's necessary existence and unity, as seen in both *kalām* arguments and Avicenna's profound demonstration of a Necessary Existent [19] [18]. The **Christian philosophical tradition**, through Aquinas and the Neoplatonists, echoes the same truth: contingency points to necessity, and all chains of being lead to the One who simply *IS* [25] [28].

It is intellectually and spiritually noteworthy that these two traditions – despite different vocabularies and theological emphases – find a common anchor in affirming a self-subsisting reality as the font of all that is. This interfaith convergence is not coincidental; it emerges from the shared rational insight available to any serious inquiry into existence. When Muslim and Christian philosophers (and indeed their Jewish counterparts like Maimonides) speak of God's necessary being, they are in a sense co-discoverers of a

foundational truth, each expressing it in the context of their faith. Both traditions also temper this bold claim with humility: God's essence is ultimately beyond full human comprehension (*"beyond being"* in Plotinus's phrase, or *lā kayfiyya – without a how –* in Islamic theology), yet reason can know that God *is*.

In responding to **metaphysical skepticism**, our analysis demonstrates that denying the principle of sufficient reason or refusing to posit a necessary foundation leaves one with an arbitrary and unexplained reality – a move that, if universally applied, would undermine the very rationality that science and philosophy depend on. As Hart pointedly remarks, many atheists who pride themselves on empirical rigor lapse into a form of *"magical thinking"* when confronted with the question of existence, effectively positing that "nothing turned into something for no reason" – an explanation that isn't an explanation at all [10] [11] . The classical theist stance, far from being anti-rational, is an insistence on ultimate rationality: reality is grounded in an intelligible source (logos) rather than absurdity. In Islamic terms, *ḥikma* (wisdom) underlies creation; in Christian terms, *Logos* (the divine Word/Reason) permeates being. Both point to an ordering Mind or Power that is self-existent.

Therefore, the rigorous interfaith analysis presented here affirms that acknowledging **God as the necessary foundation of all reality** is not only a matter of faith but also one of reason rightly exercised. It is a stance that survived the challenges of Hume and Kant and today finds new resonance as scientists and philosophers still stand before the same mystery that haunted Leibniz: *"Why is there something rather than nothing?"* After all the revolutions in human knowledge, the answer proposed by classical theism remains as compelling as ever. As Feser summarized on behalf of the tradition, *the existence of God (in the classical sense) is the only possible answer in principle to that question* [5] . David Bentley Hart's contribution is to remind a modern, sometimes skeptically fatigued audience of this fact with fresh language and wit. By engaging thinkers like Hart and drawing on the deep wells of Islamic and Christian philosophy, we reach a unified vision: **God – the One, eternal, self-subsisting source of all being – is real and is the reason that all things exist**. In God, existence finds its **home** and explanation, and without God, we ultimately find ourselves unable to explain existence at all.

In conclusion, the interfaith philosophical journey reinforces what the Abrahamic faiths have long proclaimed: *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"* – a metaphysical as well as theological affirmation that *all things are through Him*, the One who *must be*. That is why there is something rather than nothing. Such an answer not only addresses the mind's question but also invites the heart to wonder and worship, recognizing in the **Necessary Being** not an abstract principle alone but the very ground of our own being, nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

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