

Philosophy Working Paper

Reality as the First Philosophical Datum

Dependence, Meaning, and the Question of Why Anything Exists

A systems-philosophical inquiry into existence, source, consciousness, moral recognition, and human responsibility

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The Syed Group | 2026

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Abstract

This paper argues that reality is the first philosophical datum and that the question of why anything exists is prior to later disputes about belief, identity, morality, and human responsibility. The paper does not begin with a confessional conclusion or with the defense of a tradition. It begins with a structural claim: every serious account of human meaning presupposes an account of the reality in which meaning is supposed to occur. If reality is treated as accidental, self-contained, or finally unintelligible, then the concepts that human beings rely on - truth, dignity, obligation, consciousness, moral accountability, and purpose - are left without a stable metaphysical ground. If reality is dependent, ordered, and intelligible, then the question of source becomes unavoidable.

The inquiry proceeds through six philosophical lines: contingency and dependence; causality and origin; order and intelligibility; consciousness and interiority; moral recognition and normativity; and the human demand for justice beyond the visible order. The aim is not to force a single argument to carry the whole burden of metaphysics, but to show that several independent features of human experience converge on the need for a ground that is not reducible to the visible system it explains. The paper uses systems thinking as a philosophical method: not as a substitute for metaphysics, but as a disciplined way of asking what a system requires in order to exist, cohere, and generate responsibility within it. The conclusion is methodological before it is doctrinal: the question of existence must be restored to first place, because later questions become unstable when the first question is ignored.

Keywords

Existence; metaphysics; ontology; philosophy of religion; contingency; dependence; sufficient reason; causality; consciousness; moral realism; meaning; human responsibility; Islamic philosophy; systems thinking; source; Syed Raheel Shahzad.

Author Note

Syed Raheel Shahzad is the author of The Source of Truth System and related philosophical and theological works on existence, revelation, Tawheed, human formation, responsibility, and prophetic models. This paper is written as a standalone philosophy paper and is not a book overview. The author maintains an official author platform at syedraheelshahzad.com and an institutional platform through The Syed Group at thesyedgroup.com. Author identifiers include ORCID 0009-0001-7323-1577, ISNI 0000 0005 3022 8433,

Wikidata Q139548931, and Google Scholar profile nRC4eGEAAAAJ. The Syed Group Ltd is registered in bibliographic systems under ISNI 0000 0005 3027 5408 and Ringgold ID 850493.

Suggested PhilPapers Categories

Primary: Philosophy of Religion; Metaphysics; Ontology. Secondary: Meaning of Life; Philosophy of Mind; Moral Realism; Islamic Philosophy; Philosophy of Action; Religious Epistemology.

1. Introduction: The First Question Before Every Later Question

The most difficult philosophical question is not always the one that appears most advanced. It is often the one that appears too simple to deserve serious attention. A person asks why anything exists at all and is quickly encouraged to move on to more manageable matters: how societies should be organized, how identities should be respected, how minds arise, how ethical obligations should be defended, how religions should be compared, or how personal meaning should be constructed. These questions are serious, but they do not float independently. They require a reality in which truth, value, selfhood, and responsibility can stand. The question of existence is therefore not one philosophical topic among many. It is the ground beneath them.

This paper begins from the claim that reality must be treated as the first philosophical datum. By datum, I do not mean a scientific measurement or an inherited dogma. I mean the unavoidable given before which every act of thought already stands. A person may doubt interpretations, traditions, institutions, texts, and theories. They may doubt their own confidence. They may doubt whether the world is being understood correctly. But even doubt occurs within existence. The doubter exists, the act of doubting occurs, and the reality in which the act occurs cannot be avoided by the doubt itself. Existence is therefore not an object waiting politely at the edge of philosophy. It is the condition under which philosophy becomes possible.

Modern thought often begins too late. It begins with the human subject, the social order, the linguistic frame, the biological organism, the political wound, or the psychological need. These starting points produce real insight, but they also carry a danger: they can make the human being appear as though they are the first reference point. The human being is not the first reference point. The human being arrives already placed within a reality not of their making. They awaken inside dependence before they create a vocabulary for it. They receive existence before they interpret it. They meet moral weight before they know how to ground it. They desire meaning before they know whether meaning is possible.

The first philosophical task is therefore not to defend belief but to recover the conditions under which belief, doubt, morality, identity, and responsibility can be coherent. This recovery requires a disciplined return to the question that ordinary life postpones: why is there anything rather than nothing? The question is not a decorative mystery. It is structurally decisive. If no answer is available, or if the answer is that reality is a brute and self-contained fact without ground, then every later claim must operate inside that metaphysical poverty. If, however, reality points beyond itself because it is dependent, ordered, intelligible, and productive of conscious moral agents, then philosophy cannot remain satisfied with surface description.

The aim of this paper is not to prove a complete religious system. It is not a substitute for theology, revelation, or tradition. Its aim is narrower: to show that a serious account of human responsibility requires a serious account of reality, and that a serious account of reality cannot permanently avoid the question of source. This is why existence must come first. Not because belief is unimportant, but because belief without reality becomes psychology; morality without reality becomes negotiation; identity without reality becomes performance; and responsibility without reality becomes pressure without foundation.

2. Method: Systems Thinking as Philosophical Discipline

The method used here may be called systems-philosophical analysis. The expression should not be misunderstood. Systems thinking does not replace metaphysics, nor does it settle theological questions by managerial language. It provides a disciplined habit of attention. It asks what components are present, what dependencies hold them together, what assumptions make the whole possible, what breaks when one foundational element is removed, and whether later functions can remain coherent when earlier conditions are ignored. Applied to the question of existence, systems thinking becomes a way of refusing fragmentation. It does not permit consciousness, morality, purpose, causality, and intelligibility to be treated as isolated islands.

Every system requires ground, order, relation, boundary, and function. A system that cannot account for its own ground may still operate locally, but it has not explained itself. A human being may function without reflecting on reality. A civilization may function without explicit metaphysics. A scientific discipline may produce powerful descriptions without asking why there is an describable order in the first place. But function is not foundation. The fact that a system works within its own limits does not mean it has explained the conditions that allow it to work at all.

This distinction matters because many modern accounts of reality confuse operational explanation with ultimate explanation. To explain how one state of the universe follows another is not yet to explain why there is a universe. To describe neural correlates of experience is not yet to explain why subjective interiority exists. To trace the social emergence of moral language is not yet to ground moral obligation. To map human longing as a psychological event is not yet to account for why the human being experiences finite goods as insufficient. Systems thinking helps by asking whether a local explanation is being asked to do a global task it cannot carry.

The paper therefore proceeds by examining six lines of philosophical pressure. These lines are not presented as separate proofs that must each conclude in isolation. They are treated as converging indicators. The first line concerns contingency and dependence: the visible order appears not to contain the explanation of

its own existence. The second concerns causality and origin: the world of effects points beyond itself. The third concerns intelligibility and order: reality is structured in ways the mind can discover. The fourth concerns consciousness: interior experience resists reduction to exterior description. The fifth concerns moral recognition: human beings encounter obligation not merely preference. The sixth concerns justice and accounting: the moral structure of the human condition appears incomplete if death is final closure.

The argument is cumulative, but not because weakness is being added to weakness. It is cumulative because reality itself is not a single-feature object. A world that contains order, conscious subjects, moral recognition, dependence, longing, and injustice cannot be assessed adequately from one narrow angle. The method therefore refuses premature closure. It asks what kind of ground could make sense of the whole field of experience without reducing the most important features of that field to illusions, accidents, or linguistic habits.

3. The Displacement of Metaphysics in Modern Life

Metaphysical questions have not disappeared from modern life. They have been displaced. The language has changed, the institutional home has shifted, and the pressure of the question now often appears in psychological, social, or political form. A person says they are anxious, empty, unanchored, overinformed, morally exhausted, or unable to decide what matters. The surface problem appears practical. The deeper structure may be metaphysical. The human being has not stopped asking what is real; they have merely learned to express the question as stress, identity confusion, moral uncertainty, or spiritual restlessness.

The displacement is intensified by the success of the sciences. Scientific explanation has rightly become powerful in describing mechanisms, patterns, and relations within the world. But the power of internal description can create the illusion that metaphysical inquiry has been made unnecessary. Because science can explain many processes inside reality, it may be assumed that the question of reality itself has been answered. This is a category mistake. The description of change within a system is not the explanation of why the system exists. A map of internal movement does not explain the being of the map, the territory, or the laws by which movement becomes measurable.

A similar displacement occurs in culture. Where metaphysical foundations are absent, cultures do not stop making claims about value. They simply make them without admitting the weight they require. They speak of dignity, rights, justice, progress, equality, harm, authenticity, and freedom. These words carry moral seriousness, and they should. But their seriousness cannot be generated by social preference alone. If morality

is only the current settlement of power, language, and feeling, then moral critique loses its strongest ground. The oppressed person does not merely mean that the oppressor violates a local preference. They mean that something real has been violated.

The human subject also becomes overburdened. When reality is no longer treated as an intelligible order with a source, the individual is asked to manufacture meaning from within the self. This task is often presented as freedom, but it can become an unbearable demand. A finite being is asked to create the significance that used to be received, discover the value that used to be grounded, and stabilize the identity that used to be situated within a larger order. The result is not liberation alone. It is fatigue. The self becomes the factory, judge, priest, audience, and product of its own meaning.

The recovery of metaphysics is not a nostalgic return to abstraction. It is a response to a structural failure. Human life cannot be sustained indefinitely by fragments. The question of existence returns because it was never optional. It returns when information does not become wisdom, when choice does not become purpose, when freedom does not become peace, and when moral language becomes more intense while its ground becomes less clear. The first question is therefore not old because it belongs to the past. It is old because it has always been beneath the present.

4. Contingency and the Problem of Self-Explanation

A contingent thing is a thing that exists but does not contain within itself the reason why it must exist. It is there, but it might not have been there. It depends, receives, changes, and can be conceived as absent without contradiction. Much of the visible world appears this way. Stars, organisms, societies, selves, languages, and events arise within conditions they do not create. Each can be studied in terms of causes and relations, but none appears to be the final explanation of itself. The world is filled with beings that point beyond themselves by the simple fact that their existence is received rather than owned.

The question then widens. If every visible thing is contingent, can the totality of visible contingent things be treated as self-explanatory? One may say that each thing is explained by another thing inside the chain. This may work locally. A tree is explained by seed, soil, water, light, and biological process. The seed is explained by a previous tree. The previous tree by previous conditions. But the chain of local explanations does not explain why there is a chain at all. The total system of dependent realities does not become independent merely by being large. Multiplication of dependence does not produce self-sufficiency.

This is where the appeal to brute fact often enters. One may say that reality simply exists and that no further explanation is available or required. The position has a certain austerity. It refuses speculative inflation and pretends to be disciplined. But it carries a cost. To stop at brute fact is not to solve the question of existence; it is to declare the question closed by refusal. The refusal may be chosen, but it should not be mistaken for explanation. If the universe is brute, then the deepest level of reality is unintelligible. Reason is permitted to work everywhere except at the foundation of the whole.

The difficulty is not merely intellectual. A brute reality creates downstream instability. If the ground is finally without reason, then intelligibility becomes partial and accidental. Human inquiry becomes an astonishing local success inside a reality that is, at base, closed to explanation. The mind discovers patterns, laws, mathematics, and causal relations, but the existence of the whole field remains exempt from reason. This creates a philosophical asymmetry: reason is trusted as long as it remains inside the world, but it is suspended when it asks why the world exists.

A systems-philosophical approach resists that asymmetry. It asks whether a system constituted by dependence can be its own ultimate ground. If the answer is no, the inquiry is directed toward a non-dependent ground. This ground cannot be one more contingent object inside the system, because that would simply extend the chain. It must be that by which the system exists without itself requiring the same kind of explanation. The move is not a leap from ignorance to doctrine. It is the recognition that dependence, taken seriously, points beyond the dependent order.

5. Causality, Origin, and the Boundary of Scientific Description

Causality is one of the most basic structures through which the human mind encounters the world. Events are not experienced as isolated flashes. They are understood as linked, conditioned, produced, constrained, or permitted by other realities. The principle is so basic that even the attempt to deny it depends on patterns of reason that assume order and consequence. A person offers an argument because they expect reasons to produce understanding. They investigate because they expect conditions to explain outcomes. Causality is therefore not merely a scientific instrument. It is part of the intelligibility of the world as such.

At the level of ordinary inquiry, causal explanation moves from event to event. A glass falls because it was pushed. A body lives because organs function. A society changes because institutions, beliefs, pressures, and decisions interact. These explanations are valid within their domains. But the question of origin asks something different. It asks whether the total field of events can be explained only by events inside it. If every

event depends on prior conditions, and if the world itself is a field of such dependencies, then the origin of the field cannot be explained by merely pointing to another event of the same order without raising the same question again.

The beginning of the universe is often discussed in scientific terms, and rightly so. Cosmology has opened magnificent ways of describing the development of the observable universe. But scientific cosmology, by its own method, investigates the structure and development of the physical order. It can describe early states, expansions, symmetries, energies, particles, and mathematical relations. It may even revise our understanding of time and beginning. Yet the metaphysical question remains: why is there a physical order capable of such description? Why is there a reality within which equations apply, states occur, and causal structure can be traced?

To say that the universe came from nothing often conceals an ambiguity. In ordinary language, nothing means no thing: no matter, no energy, no field, no law, no possibility, no potential, no condition. In some scientific or popular uses, nothing may mean a physical vacuum, a quantum field, or a mathematically describable state. But those are not nothing in the philosophical sense. They are already something. They are already structured. They already belong to an intelligible order. The metaphysical question is not answered by renaming a subtle something as nothing.

The argument from causality should therefore be stated carefully. It is not that every scientific gap must be filled by a divine cause. That would make metaphysics dependent on the temporary limits of science. The better argument is that the very existence of a causal and describable order raises a question that science cannot replace, because science operates within the order whose existence is in question. The source sought here is not a rival event inside the universe. It is the ground by which a universe of events, laws, relations, and intelligibility can exist at all.

6. Order, Intelligibility, and the Mind-World Correspondence

The world is not merely present. It is intelligible. Human beings do not simply receive sensations; they discover structures. Mathematics applies with remarkable reach. Patterns repeat. Laws can be formulated. Predictions can be made. Hidden relations become visible to disciplined inquiry. This fact is so familiar that its philosophical strangeness is often lost. The mind is able to grasp aspects of the world because the world is graspable. Reality is not experienced as a total chaos on which the mind imposes arbitrary order. It presents order that the mind can uncover.

This intelligibility raises a question about correspondence. Why should the internal structures of reason find purchase in the external structures of reality? Why should mathematics, developed by finite minds, be so effective in describing phenomena far beyond ordinary experience? Why should the universe be readable at all? One may answer that minds evolved inside the universe and are therefore adapted to it. This explains some practical forms of cognition. It does not fully explain the reach of abstract reason, the depth of mathematical applicability, or the human capacity to ask questions far beyond survival utility.

Order by itself does not immediately prove purpose. The argument must avoid overstatement. A structured world is not automatically a world with the full meaning already interpreted. But order does undermine the claim that reality is finally irrational. A world that can be investigated, measured, interpreted, and partly understood is a world that carries intelligible form. If the foundation of reality were ultimately indifferent to reason in the strongest sense, the success of reason would be surprising. The order of the world and the order of the mind appear at least compatible, and perhaps rooted in a deeper unity.

The problem is sharpened when order is treated as accidental. If all order is ultimately the product of blind necessity or chance, then intelligibility becomes a fact without a reason. The mind works because it works; mathematics applies because it applies; the universe is readable because it is readable. This may be a position one adopts, but it again resembles refusal more than explanation. It leaves the most astonishing fact of rational inquiry unexplained: that there is a stable relation between thought and reality.

A systems approach sees intelligibility as a signal about the kind of system reality is. A system that generates conscious knowers capable of discovering its structure is not adequately described as mere extension or mechanism. It is a field in which truth can be known. This does not abolish scientific explanation. It deepens the metaphysical frame within which science becomes meaningful. The intelligibility of reality suggests that reason is not a foreign accident within the world. It is somehow at home there. The question is why.

7. Consciousness and the Interior That Cannot Be Eliminated

Consciousness is not an optional ornament added to an otherwise complete account of the world. It is the condition under which the world appears to anyone at all. A universe without consciousness might still contain structures, events, and relations, but it would contain no experienced meaning. It would not be seen, loved, feared, questioned, regretted, or morally interpreted. Consciousness is the interior dimension through which

reality becomes present as lived experience. It is therefore one of the most important features any account of reality must explain.

The difficulty is well known. Physical descriptions of the brain can identify processes, regions, signals, correlations, and functions. Such descriptions are valuable and indispensable. But the description of exterior process is not identical with the experience of interior life. A pain can be correlated with neural activity, but the felt quality of pain is not captured by the third-person description alone. A thought can be associated with brain states, but the first-person presence of thinking remains a different kind of datum. The inside of experience is not eliminated by mapping its exterior conditions.

Reductive accounts often attempt to treat consciousness as an emergent property of matter. The word emergence can be helpful when carefully used, but it can also become a placeholder for the very problem it is meant to solve. If matter is conceived as wholly non-conscious, purely exterior, and without interiority, then the emergence of subjective experience requires explanation. How does the purely non-experiential produce experience? At what point does the inside appear? Why should arrangement generate awareness rather than only complex function?

The point is not to deny dependence between consciousness and the body. Human consciousness, as experienced in ordinary life, is clearly embodied. Injury, sleep, chemistry, development, and environment affect experience. But dependence is not identity. The fact that consciousness operates through bodily conditions does not prove that consciousness is nothing but those conditions. A radio depends on physical parts to receive a signal, but the dependence of reception on circuitry is not the same as proving that the entire source of the signal is the circuitry. The analogy is limited, but it illustrates the distinction between condition and full explanation.

Consciousness matters for the question of existence because it reveals that reality contains not only things but subjects. The world includes beings for whom existence is not merely there but meaningful, painful, morally charged, and open to truth. Any metaphysics that reduces consciousness to accident must also explain why the accident becomes the site of reason, obligation, longing, responsibility, and philosophy itself. A source adequate to reality must be adequate not only to matter and motion, but to interiority. The existence of conscious subjects is therefore one of the strongest pressures against a flattened metaphysics.

8. Moral Recognition and the Reality of Obligation

Human beings do not merely prefer some actions and dislike others. They recognize obligation. They encounter certain acts as wrong even when those acts benefit the powerful, satisfy desire, or receive social approval. The word wrong here is not reducible to inconvenience. It carries a claim that reaches beyond personal taste. Torture of the innocent, betrayal of trust, deliberate humiliation, cruelty toward the helpless, and murder of the vulnerable are not merely unpopular arrangements. They are encountered as violations of what ought to be.

Moral subjectivism attempts to reduce this recognition to feeling. Social constructivism attempts to reduce it to historical formation. Evolutionary accounts may explain why moral dispositions have survival value. Each of these approaches can illuminate part of the moral field. Feelings matter. Societies shape moral vocabulary. Biological development affects sympathy, cooperation, and aversion to harm. But none of these explanations, by itself, grounds the authority of moral obligation. The origin of a belief in a biological or social process is not the same as the truth of the belief. To explain how moral awareness develops is not to explain why a moral claim is binding.

The distinction becomes clear when moral critique is directed against society itself. If morality is only social agreement, then a society cannot be genuinely unjust; it can only violate another society's preference or a future society's revision. But human moral consciousness refuses this reduction. When we condemn slavery, genocide, exploitation, or systemic cruelty, we do not mean merely that our group dislikes them. We mean they were wrong even when accepted. We mean that the victim's dignity was real even when the law denied it. This requires a moral reality deeper than consensus.

The attempt to ground morality in human autonomy alone also faces difficulty. Human beings can legislate rules, but the authority of those rules depends on more than the fact that humans made them. If a human will can create value, another will can deny it. If dignity is assigned, it can be withdrawn. If obligation is contractual, those outside the contract remain exposed. The strongest moral language assumes that persons possess worth before social recognition. That assumption is metaphysical. It implies that the human being is not merely a functional organism, political unit, or bearer of negotiated rights.

Moral recognition therefore points beyond the visible order in a specific way. It does not merely say that people have feelings. It says that reality includes an ought that judges desire, power, and preference. A source adequate to reality must be adequate to this normativity. If reality is finally indifferent, then moral obligation

becomes difficult to secure. If reality is grounded in a source that is not morally empty, then the moral structure of human experience becomes more intelligible. The argument does not claim that every moral judgment is correct. It claims that the existence of moral judgment as a binding category requires a ground stronger than social habit.

9. Longing, Incompletion, and the Human Reach Beyond the Finite

There is a form of longing that ordinary satisfaction does not close. Human beings desire food, shelter, safety, companionship, achievement, recognition, beauty, knowledge, and love. Many of these desires correspond to real goods, and their satisfaction matters. Yet even when several goods are present, a remainder often persists. The person who receives success may still feel unfinished. The person who has comfort may still ask why comfort is not enough. The person who is admired may still feel unseen. This recurring incompleteness is not a trivial emotional defect. It may be a philosophical clue.

The human being appears structured toward more than finite acquisition. Every finite good can be received, enjoyed, lost, outgrown, or discovered to be insufficient. This does not mean finite goods are false. It means they do not carry ultimate weight. A meal answers hunger but not mortality. Social approval answers loneliness imperfectly but not the demand to be known truthfully. Wealth answers some vulnerabilities but not guilt, death, or meaning. Knowledge answers ignorance in part, but every answer opens further questions. The finite good is real, but it is not final.

One may explain longing psychologically. It may be said that human dissatisfaction is produced by desire, comparison, scarcity, memory, trauma, or evolutionary pressure. These explanations often have truth in them. But they do not fully account for the structure of the longing itself. The longing is not only for more of the same. It is often for completion, rest, truth, permanence, and reconciliation. It reaches toward a good not exhausted by any available object inside ordinary life. The question is whether this reach is absurd or whether it corresponds to something real.

If reality is closed, then the deepest human longing is a misfiring engine. The human being is structurally oriented toward a fulfillment that does not exist. The more sensitive, truthful, and morally awake a person becomes, the more they may feel a longing that the world cannot satisfy. This would be a strange arrangement: the highest interior movements of the human being would be the least connected to reality. One may accept that conclusion, but it should be seen clearly. It means the human being is most deceived precisely where they seem most profound.

If reality has a source, the longing can be read differently. It may be the sign of an orientation beyond the finite. It may not prove every doctrine about fulfillment, but it shows that human beings are not built as closed systems. They receive finite goods while remaining open to the infinite. This openness matters philosophically because it connects meaning, desire, and metaphysics. The question is not merely what the human being wants. It is what kind of reality would produce a being whose deepest desires exceed the world while still being awakened by the world.

10. Injustice, Death, and the Demand for Accounting

The problem of injustice is often discussed as an argument against belief in a good source. The force of the problem should not be minimized. Suffering, cruelty, and apparently unanswered evil raise real philosophical and existential difficulty. Yet the problem of injustice also creates pressure in the opposite direction. The very protest against injustice assumes that injustice is real, not merely disliked. It assumes that victims matter even when power erases them. It assumes that hidden crimes are still crimes. It assumes that death should not have the final authority to silence moral truth.

In the visible world, justice is radically incomplete. Some victims are never heard. Some perpetrators die honored. Some lies shape entire generations. Some acts cannot be repaired by any court because the person harmed is gone. Even when human justice functions well, it is partial. It can punish, compensate, record, and deter. It cannot restore every loss, reveal every secret, heal every wound, or weigh the inner truth of every action. The moral consciousness of the human being often demands more than history can provide.

If death is final closure, then countless injustices remain permanently unresolved. One may say that this is simply tragic reality. But the moral protest within us resists that finality. We do not experience unrepaired injustice as merely unfortunate. We experience it as a debt. The language of debt is significant. It suggests that moral reality has an accounting structure. Some things ought to be answered for. Some victims ought to be vindicated. Some truth ought to be disclosed. The visible order, however, often lacks the capacity to complete that accounting.

This does not mean that one can leap directly from injustice to a detailed doctrine of afterlife. The argument should remain disciplined. It says that the human demand for justice is difficult to reconcile with a closed metaphysics in which death permanently ends accountability. If moral obligation is real, and if persons truly matter, then the incompleteness of justice becomes metaphysically significant. It asks whether reality

includes a dimension in which moral truth is not finally defeated by biological death, social power, or historical forgetfulness.

The demand for accounting is therefore not merely emotional consolation. It is connected to the structure of moral realism. If wrong is real, and if persons possess objective worth, then a reality in which wrong can triumph forever is morally fractured at the deepest level. A source adequate to moral reality would not be indifferent to that fracture. The philosophical question becomes whether the world is morally incomplete because justice is impossible, or incomplete because visible history is not the whole court.

11. Source Rather Than Gap: Avoiding a Weak Form of Argument

The argument advanced here must be distinguished from a weak appeal to gaps. A gap argument says: here is something currently unexplained; therefore insert a source. This kind of reasoning is unstable because gaps may close. Scientific, historical, or philosophical progress can explain what was previously obscure. A serious metaphysical inquiry should not depend on ignorance. It should not place source only where knowledge has not yet arrived. The source sought in this paper is not a filler for missing mechanism. It is the ground of mechanism, intelligibility, subjectivity, normativity, and existence itself.

This distinction changes the role of evidence. Consciousness is not used here because neuroscience has failed to complete its work. It is used because first-person interiority is a basic feature of reality that any complete account must include. Moral recognition is not used because sociology has no account of moral formation. It is used because obligation as obligation cannot be reduced to formation without losing its authority. Contingency is not used because cosmology has unsolved questions. It is used because dependent reality, however scientifically described, still raises the question of ground.

The source is therefore not one explanatory item among others inside the system. It is that by which the system can exist as a system. The difference is crucial. A cause inside the world competes with other causes. A metaphysical source does not compete with creaturely causation any more than the existence of an author competes with the grammar inside a sentence. The grammar explains how the sentence works internally. It does not explain why the sentence exists as an authored act. The analogy is limited, but it helps preserve categories.

This category distinction protects both philosophy and science. Science should not be forced to stop inquiry because a metaphysical source is affirmed. If reality has a source, scientific investigation becomes

more meaningful, not less, because the world is intelligible and worth studying. Philosophy should not be forced to pretend that internal mechanisms answer ultimate questions they do not address. Each discipline must be allowed to perform its proper function without being inflated into the whole.

The strongest version of the argument is therefore modest in form but deep in consequence. It does not say that every unsolved problem proves source. It says that reality as a whole - contingent, causal, ordered, intelligible, conscious, morally charged, and existentially incomplete - is more adequately explained by a source than by brute fact. The argument is not a retreat from reason. It is reason refusing to stop before the most fundamental question.

12. Meaning, Responsibility, and the Reordering of the Human Question

Once reality is placed first, the human question changes. The person is no longer an isolated self trying to invent meaning inside a neutral universe. The person becomes a dependent being within an intelligible order. This does not automatically answer every practical question, but it changes the frame in which practical questions are asked. Identity is no longer merely self-description. Morality is no longer merely preference. Freedom is no longer merely the multiplication of options. Responsibility is no longer merely social pressure. Each is situated within reality.

Meaning becomes received before it is constructed. This does not eliminate human agency. It protects it from becoming absurd. A person can still deliberate, choose, create, interpret, build, love, repent, and act. But these actions no longer have to manufacture the entire value of existence from nothing. They respond to an order already there. The self is not crushed by reality; it is relieved from the impossible burden of being its own source. The human being becomes answerable because life is not self-originating property. It is received participation.

Responsibility also becomes deeper. In a closed metaphysics, responsibility can be treated as social necessity, psychological maturity, or evolutionary cooperation. These are partial truths. But if existence is received from a source, responsibility is not only horizontal. It is vertical before it is social. The person is responsible not only to other persons, not only to law, not only to conscience, but to the ground of existence itself. This is the philosophical root of accountability. The human being is not merely managing consequences. The human being is answering for a received life.

The order of questions is therefore transformed. Instead of asking first what identity one prefers, one asks what reality requires. Instead of asking first what society permits, one asks what truth is. Instead of asking first how desire may be satisfied, one asks what desire is for. Instead of asking first how suffering may be minimized, one asks what suffering reveals about dependence, limitation, and responsibility. This does not produce a simplistic life. It produces a more serious one.

The return to reality is not escape from the world. It is the recovery of the world as meaningful. Ordinary life becomes charged with philosophical weight because every act occurs within dependence. Work, speech, promise, family, power, knowledge, and worship all become sites where the received nature of existence is either honored or denied. The first question therefore does not remain in abstraction. It descends into life. To ask why anything exists is eventually to ask why I exist, what I owe, and how I must live.

13. Philosophy of Religion Without Premature Confession

The paper belongs to philosophy of religion, but it does not begin by assuming the truth of a particular religious system. This is important both methodologically and ethically. A serious inquiry must not demand assent before examination. It must allow the reader to follow the structure of the argument, test its claims, and identify the exact point at which they agree or disagree. The question of source can be approached philosophically before later questions of revelation, scripture, law, ritual, and communal belonging are addressed.

This order is especially important because many discussions of religion begin too late. They begin with institutions, inherited identities, historical conflicts, rituals, sectarian disputes, or social consequences. These matters are real, but they are not first. Before asking whether a specific revelation is true, one must ask whether reality is the kind of reality in which revelation would be possible and needed. Before asking whether a tradition has authority, one must ask whether authority can have a metaphysical ground. Before asking what a human being should obey, one must ask what the human being is.

This does not make revelation secondary in value. It makes it secondary in the order of inquiry. The question of existence prepares the field. If reality is brute and closed, revelation appears as a human projection or cultural artifact. If reality is dependent upon source, ordered, intelligible, morally charged, and populated by responsible conscious agents, then revelation becomes a serious next question. The issue shifts from whether human beings like religious language to whether the source of reality has addressed the beings made responsible within reality.

In Islamic philosophical terms, this order has deep resonance. The Qur'anic address repeatedly invites attention to the heavens and the earth, the alternation of night and day, the human self, moral accountability, and signs within creation. The invitation is not anti-rational. It asks the human being to observe, reflect, and return. The metaphysical question is therefore not foreign to religious inquiry. It is the doorway through which the seriousness of revelation becomes visible.

The contribution of this paper is to keep the doorway clear. It does not collapse philosophy into preaching. It does not reduce religion to private feeling. It does not treat metaphysics as optional decoration. It argues that the human being must begin with reality because every later claim depends on it. If the inquiry leads toward source, the next philosophical task is not to stop thinking. It is to ask what source implies about guidance, authority, and responsibility.

14. Objections and Clarifications

A first objection says that the paper simply restates old cosmological and moral arguments in new language. There is continuity, and that continuity is intentional. Philosophical seriousness does not require pretending that earlier thinkers never asked the question. But the systems-philosophical frame changes the emphasis. Instead of isolating one argument and asking it to carry the whole metaphysical burden, this paper reads several dimensions of experience together. Contingency, causality, intelligibility, consciousness, normativity, longing, and justice are treated as mutually illuminating features of one reality.

A second objection says that brute fact is enough. Perhaps reality simply exists, and the demand for explanation is a human habit projected beyond its proper domain. This objection is possible, but it comes at a cost. It requires reason to declare itself invalid at the point where its question becomes most fundamental. The principle of intelligibility is permitted everywhere except at the foundation. A person may choose that limit, but it is not obvious that the limit is rationally required. It may be an act of philosophical exhaustion rather than discipline.

A third objection says that source does not solve the problem because one can then ask what explains the source. The objection is powerful only if the source is imagined as one more contingent object inside the same order. But that is not the claim. The argument points toward a non-dependent ground, not an additional dependent being. To ask what caused an uncaused ground is to misdescribe the conclusion. The ground is not invoked as a larger object in the chain. It is invoked as that by which chains, objects, laws, and dependent realities can exist.

A fourth objection says that moral and existential features are too subjective to bear metaphysical weight. Human beings may feel obligation, longing, or injustice, but feelings can mislead. This is true. But the argument does not rest on the infallibility of every feeling. It rests on the presence of categories that structure human life: truth, obligation, dignity, accountability, and meaning. The fact that moral judgments can be mistaken does not prove that moral reality is unreal. Error is meaningful only against the possibility of truth.

A final objection says that even if the argument reaches a source, it does not establish a complete theology. This objection is correct. The paper does not establish a complete theology. It establishes the philosophical need to restore existence and source to the first position in human inquiry. That conclusion is significant enough. It reopens the questions that modern thought often closes too quickly and prepares the ground for further inquiry into revelation, guidance, and the responsibilities of the human being before the source of existence.

15. Conclusion: Restoring Reality to First Place

The question of why anything exists is not a marginal curiosity. It is the first question because every later question depends on the answer that is given or refused. If reality is accidental, self-contained, and finally without explanation, then meaning, morality, consciousness, and responsibility must be interpreted within that closure. If reality is dependent, ordered, intelligible, and morally significant, then the human being lives inside a very different philosophical world. The difference is not abstract. It shapes identity, obligation, hope, and action.

This paper has argued that reality should be treated as the first philosophical datum. The argument does not rely on one narrow proof. It follows several lines of pressure: contingent existence points beyond itself; causality raises the question of origin; order and intelligibility suggest that reason is not alien to reality; consciousness reveals an interior dimension that resists reduction; moral recognition points toward objective obligation; longing discloses the insufficiency of finite goods; and injustice demands an accounting that visible history does not complete.

Taken together, these lines do not produce a mechanical demonstration that cancels all doubt. Philosophy rarely works that way at the deepest level. They produce a rational convergence. They show that brute fact is not the only serious option and that a source of reality may be the more adequate explanation of the world we actually inhabit. The source is not inserted to fill gaps in knowledge. The source is sought because knowledge, order, consciousness, morality, and existence themselves require a ground.

The practical consequence is a reordering of the human being. A person is not first a consumer of meanings, a maker of identities, or a negotiator of values. A person is first a dependent being within reality. To exist is already to have received what one did not create. The first philosophical movement is therefore humility before reality. The second is inquiry into source. The third is responsibility before whatever the inquiry discloses.

The question remains open not because it is weak, but because it is alive. Every generation must ask it again, not as a performance of doubt but as an act of intellectual honesty. Before belief, before denial, before identity, before argument, there is reality. And before the human being can know what to do with life, the human being must ask why there is life at all.

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Declarations

Declaration of interest: The author declares no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper. The author is affiliated with The Syed Group, identified for author affiliation and institutional context only.

Funding: This research received no external funding. The paper was prepared independently by the author.

Ethics approval: Not applicable. This is a conceptual and theoretical paper in metaphysics, philosophy of religion, moral philosophy, and systems thinking. It does not involve human participants, animal subjects, clinical data, patient information, surveys, interviews, or experimental research.

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Type	Preprint / Working Paper
Year	2026
Abstract	Use the abstract on page 2 of this document.
Keywords	Existence; Metaphysics; Ontology; Philosophy of Religion; Contingency; Dependence; Consciousness; Moral Realism; Meaning; Human Responsibility; Islamic Philosophy; Systems Thinking
Primary Categories	Philosophy of Religion; Metaphysics; Ontology
Secondary Categories	Meaning of Life; Philosophy of Mind; Moral Realism; Islamic Philosophy; Religious Epistemology

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This paper presents a philosophical inquiry into why reality must be placed before later questions of belief, identity, moral responsibility, and religious understanding. It argues that human meaning becomes unstable when the question of existence is postponed, and it develops a systems-philosophical account of dependence, intelligibility, consciousness, moral recognition, longing, injustice, and source. The paper is intended as a standalone philosophy working paper, distinct from book-summary or bibliographic-overview formats.

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