

327584 - From Eternity to Here: Islamic View

the question

I, praise be to Allah, am a person who believes in Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. We know that Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has no beginning and that He exists from eternity. But in the field of mathematics and linear numbers, we have learned that what is from past eternity is described as negative infinite. If this is the case, how did we get to the present time, meaning how did we arrive from negative infinite to zero, when this is mathematically impossible in terms of time? I hope that you can resolve this confusing issue for me.

Summary of answer

It is possible that before our universe there were other universes, and before them were other universes, until past eternity. In other words, Allah creates creation after creation. This is the famous issue of the sequence of creations.

Detailed answer

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Abstract numbers do not exist except in the mind

Abstract numbers are not connected to anything tangible, and they exist only in the mind. We did not arrive from past eternity to zero or anything else.

What you have learned about mathematics does not mean that it exists in reality; rather it is something in the mind that is purely hypothetical.

Note: Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in as-Safadiyyah (2/279): “These philosophers very often get it wrong, as they think that what exists in their minds [what is hypothetical] actually exists in reality, such as the mistake made by the first of them, Pythagoras, and his followers regarding abstract absolute comparative numbers, as they thought that they existed in reality, in isolation from items and things.”

It says in Dar Ta‘arud an-Naql wa’l-‘Aql (4/173): “These abstract quantities and numbers only exist in people’s minds and words.”

The visible universe has a beginning

We and the entire visible universe have a defined beginning. Allah created the Throne and the Pen, then He created the heavens and the earth, as He, may He be glorified, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days – and His Throne had been upon water.} [Hud 11:7]

Muslim (2653) narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘As said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) saying: “Allah wrote the decrees of creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth.” And he said: “And His Throne is above the water.”

This has to do with our creation and the [visible universe](#), the heavens and the earth, as we believe that Allah, may He be exalted, is the First before Whom there is nothing, and that He never stopped creating, and that it is possible that before our [universe](#) there were other universes, and before them were other universes, until past eternity. In other words, Allah, may He be glorified, creates creation after creation. This is the famous issue of the sequence of creations.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The Lord, may He be glorified, is perfect in His [attributes](#), [names](#) and actions. Therefore it is inevitable that His attributes will have an impact on the universe. He is merciful, and it is

impossible that there could be mercy without there being anyone to whom mercy is shown. He is the provider, so there must be those to whom He grants provision. He is oft-forgiving, most forbearing, most generous and most kind to His slaves; He gives and withholds, gives abundantly, lowers and raises, honours and humiliates. These names and attributes require things to which they apply, and on which they have an impact. So there must be creatures who are subjected to the impact of these names and attributes otherwise these attributes will become idle and irrelevant, so there should be creation to reflect the impact of these names and attributes.” (Shifa al-‘Alil. 2/143)

Shaykh Muhammad Bukhayt al-Muti’i, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, said:

“There is no proof to suggest that it is not possible that there has been a sequence of creations from past eternity, even when the famous view suggests that this sequence is impossible. Believing that there is a sequence of creations after creations from eternity does not contradict ‘aqidah (Islamic belief), unless we say that a particular creation has no beginning, in the sense that there is no beginning to its existence. This is something that no one has ever said; rather everyone agrees that everything other than Allah, may He be exalted, that existed or exists now, is contingent, meaning that it came into existence after it did not exist, regardless of whether the sequence of creation has a particular time at which it started in the past and a particular time at which it will end in the future, or it, or it does not have a particular time either in the past or in the future, or it does not have one of them.

Do you not see that there is consensus that the delights of paradise are infinite and will not cease to exist at any point in the future, after they had been contingent in the sense that they existed after they did not exist? So it does not matter if you say that there is no end to it, in the sense that the delights of paradise will not cease to exist and will not have an end. But if we say that there is no end to them (the delights of paradise), in the sense that their existence is necessary because of what they are, then that constitutes disbelief.

Similarly, when we refer to the past, we may say that there was a series of creations that had no beginning, in the sense that the sequence of creations does not have a starting

point in the past, yet each of them existed after it did not exist.

If we say these creations have no beginning to their existence and no starting point, that suggests that they existed from eternity, and this constitutes disbelief (kufr).

You should read two books: *al-Qawl al-Mufid* and *Hawashi al-Kharidah.*" (Nihayat as-Sul fi Sharh Minhaj al-Usool, 2/103)

And Allah knows best.