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# Analysis and Examination of John Charlton Polkinghorne's Theology of Divine Action

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	As philosophy of religion is concerned, divine action has been one of the challenges which has received much attention on how God does His actions within the natural order (within the human and physical world). John Polkinghorne seeks to address
Article History: Received: 19 November 2024 Revised: 31 December 2024 Accepted: 01 September 2024 Published Online: 11 June 2025	this issue with a quantum perspective. Given Polkinghorne's background as a scientist and theologian, he addresses divine action due to his understanding of God's involvement in the mundane world. The research aims to clarify Polkinghorne's complicated views on how God acts within the physical world. John Polkinghorne compares the relationship between God and the world to the relationship between a watchmaker and a watch, although he considers science and religion to be two
<b>Keywords:</b> Divine Action, Science, John Polkinghorne, Javadi Amuli, Quantum physics.	complementary approaches for understanding the world. There is some kind of contradiction in the Polkinghorne's theological approach to the divine intervention in the natural world, because he states, on the one hand, that God works in nature without violating the freedom of creatures in the physical world; on the other hand, he sees a kind of determinism in all three categories of actions that he considers for God. Although he acknowledges relative independence to some physical events in the special acts of God, this relative independence is the predestination that exists in the quantum space and chaos theory.
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# Introduction

The concept of divine action in the natural world is one of the most polarizing topics that distinguishes scientists from theologians, and theologians from theologians. In fact, discussions about divine action have divided theologians of the same religions, leading to the formation of entirely distinct schools of thought. For example, the Mu'tazila (the most extinct rationalistic Islamic school of thought founded by Ibn Athar) is distinct from the Asha'ira (the literalistic theological school of Sunni thought which forms the majority of Sunni Muslims to this day), primarily due to their belief that God has no hands in the actions of day to day happenings of the universe, while they later believed that God is directly responsible for each and every minor detail that occurs, might occur, and could occur in the universe. Theologians generally believe that everything that occurs in the world occurs one way or another through the direct action of the divine (Al-Ghazzali, 1993, Vol. 1), since even the rationalists believe that what set all actions into motion is the divine. Scientists, on the other hand, mostly hold that the natural order is the result of natural forces that all together came into being as a result of the big bang, and thus, are completely incidental; neither intended nor ordered particularly (Darwin, 1859). Understanding the concept of divine action, therefore, lies at the center of theological inquiry, seeking to explain the ways in which the divine interacts with the natural world. In the midst of this discourse, the theological views of John Charlton Polkinghorne is proven to be a highly significant framework for examining the delicate edges of divine agency. As a distinguished physicist-turned-theologian, Polkinghorne sails through the storms and high waves of science and religion with a profound depth of insight and intellectual integrity. His theological contributions serve as a bridge between theological reflection and scientific inquiry.

This research explores John Polkinghorne's theology, focusing on his concept of divine action as presented in works such as "The Faith of a Physicist," and "Belief in God in an Age of Science." The present study aims to clarify his theological framework and contribute to the dialogue between theology and science. Polkinghorne balances divine sovereignty with the natural world's integrity, advocating for a view of divine action that aligns with the universe's laws, while allowing genuine divine interaction. The study examines themes such as divine intervention, prayer, and human roles in divine providence, ultimately comparing Polkinghorne's views with those of Ayatollah Javadi Amuli and other scholars.

# **Background of John Charlton Polkinghorne**

John Polkinghorne, a British scholar who wore the dual hat of a physicist and a clergyman, championed the harmonization of scientific and religious viewpoints. Born into a deeply religious Christian family in 1930, he demonstrated exceptional prowess in mathematics, earning several degrees from Trinity College at Cambridge. He began his career teaching mathematical physics and later promoted to the rank of professor. In a significant career shift in 1982, he was ordained as a clergyman and pivoted towards the study of theology, eventually serving in various scholastic and ecclesiastical roles. Polkinghorne's unique blend of scientific and theological knowledge has prompted thoughtful examination of his views on God's intervention in nature. However, some detractors suggest that his religious convictions may color his interpretations.

#### **PURPOSE of the RESEARCH**

The purpose of this research is multifaceted, and it encompasses several key objectives:

**Clarification and Interpretation:** The primary aim of this research is to clarify, in a very simple and reader-friendly manner, the basic theological grounds of John Polkinghorne regarding divine action in the natural order.

**Contribution to Scholarship:** This paper aims to contribute to the existing discourse on divine action and to further the frontiers of this discourse to better influence the daily quality of human life.

**Integration of Disciplines:** Given Polkinghorne's background as a scientist and theologian, this research aims to close the gap between modern science and theology. The importance in bridging this gap lies in the fact that theology provides a very useful moral and ethical framework as well as the motivation for orderly behavior which is deemed necessary for human development and peaceful dwelling, while science provides the daily tools and basic survival amenities that the humans require. In the event where the human race strays too far away from either of the two disciplines, the progress

of humanity could then be said to be threatened. Therefore, a balance is required, and for the balance to be achieved, an understanding of where exactly theology meets science is essential, just as the language of theology and the language of science must be defined for the understanding of the other.

**Practical Relevance:** Beyond academic discourse, this research also aims to explore the practical implications of Polkinghorne's theology for religious belief and practice. By addressing questions related to prayer, providence, and human agency, it offers insights that can inform religious communities and individuals grappling with these issues in their lived experiences. There is no doubt that finding a balance between faith in providence and duty could be highly valuable for personal development and progress.

**Stimulating Further Inquiry:** Finally, the purpose of this research is to challenge the human mental faculty beyond its comfort zones and to discover new information that might be uncomfortable but is otherwise useful. By raising important questions and identifying areas for future research, hope could be retained in that progress would be ongoing as the human mind seeks to foster ongoing exploration and engagement with this complex theological theme.

# **Theological Framework of John Polkinghorne**

Polkinghorne addresses the divine's agency in the world based on natural theology. He believes that divine intervention in the physical world has continued over time, and on the other hand, he emphasizes that God is not a determinist and his actions do not jeopardize the free will of his creatures. He is also inclined toward process theology. Although Polkinghorne is not a process thinker in the sense of what is common in the intellectual space of philosophy, he acknowledges the relevance of this perspective (Dibaji, 2021)

In summary, John Polkinghorne theological framework could be argued to be deeply rooted in his physics background and his belief in the unity of truth across science, philosophy, and theology, while that of Ayatollah Javadi Amuli is based largely on philosophy, theology and Islamic divine texts. The framework of Polkinghorne could be summarized as follows.

# **Science and Religion Interplay**

Polkinghorne sees no conflict between science and religion. Instead, he views them as complementary paths to understanding the truth. He became a leading voice in explaining the relationship between these two areas. He contends that science requires a leap of faith (Polkinghorne, 2007) and demands that the universe be without purpose or intelligibility (Markham, 1998). He argues, however, that there is a need for intelligibility and order for things to work properly. He states that, "even mathematics requires an act of commitment as to its ultimate consistency (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 6).

# The Influence of Quantum Theory

His work in quantum theory, especially on how fundamental particles behave in high-energy collisions, significantly influenced his theological views. He saw a connection between the doctrine of the Trinity and the complex world of quantum theory, viewing them compatible with the entangled universe.

#### **Understanding of Human Nature**

In contrast to Cartesian dualism which saw the human as a composition of soul and body (Descartes, 1901), Polkinghorne saw the soul as a unity of mental and physical aspects, and the heart as a combination of cognitive, emotional, and volitional activities (Polkinghorne, 1989).

#### Harmony of Science and Religion

He imagined a world where science and religion coexist and contribute to a unified culture. Although it could be argued that the extent to which he succeeded in bridging the gap between science and religion is sketchy at best and almost a failure in other instances.

#### **Concept of Top-Down Causation**

A recurring theme in his work is 'top-down causation,' the idea that larger systems can influence the behavior of their parts. This concept highlights his holistic view of causality within complex systems.

"In practice, working scientists... adopt a skeptical and qualified realism, according to which their theories and models are proposed and regarded as 'candidates for reality (Polkinghorne, 1984, p, 14).

# God as the Creator and Sustainer

We have already argued that Polkinghorne views God as the creator of the cosmos and what lies in it, though, he views the creation process in a highly different way than what orthodox Christians interpret. The difference between Polkinghorne's view and orthodox Christians' does not lie in the question of 'where does the universe come from?' since they both agree that the universe was created by God. The difference between them lies in the question, "how was the universe created?"

In light of this, much may not be said regarding God as the creator from the perspective of Polkinghorne. In his book, Searching for Truth: Lenten Meditations on Science and Faith, he states: "We praise you, O God, for the order and fertility of your creation, for the discoveries of science about its history and pattern, and for the insights of those who have seen your hand at work as its Creator (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 37).

There is no need to further commentary on this statement, since it explicitly calls God as the creator.

However, on the question of how does the universe sustain itself, or how does God sustain His creation, Polkinghorne had the following to say:

We see, emerging from this study of the dynamics of complex systems, just those characteristics of structured openness which seem to offer hope that those supercomplex systems, which are ourselves, might indeed manifest the freedom within regularity which is our basic human experience. And might not one go on to suppose that similarly the super-super-system of the cosmos might be capable, in an analogous way, of sustaining the operation of the acquiescent, economic and purposive wills of its Creator, within the flexibility of its lawful process (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 29).

Comparing human beings to other entities which are self-sustaining, such as the universe and even machines created by humans, one would see that all of them run on energy which gives them the ability to be self-sufficient and self-sustaining. Polkinghorne, therefore, believed that it is plausible to state that humans also operate in the same manner by the intended will of God.

#### **Islamic Philosophers**

In contrast to Polkinghorne, there have been discussions about divine agency by Islamic Philosophers such as Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra, Javadi Amuli, and Mutahari. They are among the Islamic philosophers who have addressed this issue accordingly. The discussion about divine agency is important not only from a philosophical point of view, but also from a theological and mystical point of view. A correct understanding of how God's power is applied in the world can help deepen faith and human's relationship with God.

When it comes to the creation of the universe, they posited that the universe is eternal just as God is eternal. Although, being an effect and not the cause, the being of the universe depends on the being of God for its existence; and since God is eternal and his attributes are not separate from his essence, his attributes are therefore also eternal. Since the title of "creator" is one of God's attributes, there could not be a time or situation under which God is not creating, since excusing himself from creating would disqualify him from answering to the title of "the creator." Therefore, God, as He ever was, was always the creator and shall remain the creator. His creation, no matter what it was, must therefore be eternal.

Mutahari (2009) clarifies that, being eternal does not equate with being uncreated, rather being without cause is what equates to being without a creator; since the universe is caused by God, it is therefore created and yet, eternal. It is worth noting that Mutahari does not recognize the need for time within which creation would take place, which would necessitate the being of the cause in time before the coming into being of the effect; this would disqualify the universe from being eternal.

In the Quran, Allah is the absolute Creator as well as the eternal Creator. In the Quran, there is no difference whether the universe is constrained by time or not. Therefore, even if the universe were unconstrained in time, then creation in it

would also be endless. We say: 'O Eternal of Benevolence,' meaning, 'O One whose benevolence has been forever,' for He is exalted and His benevolence is perpetual (P. 161).

In conclusion, one can say that the difference between views of Islamic scholars and Polkinghorne lies largely in ascertaining when the universe began. Polkinghorne believes that God created the universe and all that is in it purposively in time, while Islamic scholars hold that God created the universe in eternity. There hasn't been a moment when God existed without the universe also existing. Both of them, however, agree that God continues to play a creator role in these creations every single moment. Islamic scholars maintain that God also continues to sustain his creation, while Polkinghorne holds that it sustains itself.

#### **God's Action in Evolution**

When looking at evolution, Polkinghorne does not view it as an upfront to creation, rather he believes that evolution explains the creation process which has, for long, eluded the human understanding. In this case, Polkinghorne engages with evolution in stages:

**Grasping Evolution:** Polkinghorne starts by recognizing the scientific theory of evolution, which explains the development and diversification of life on Earth over billions of years through mechanisms such as natural selection, genetic mutation, and adaptation. He acknowledges the substantial evidence that supports evolution as a credible scientific explanation for the variety of life forms on our planet. He states: "The cosmic explosion of the Big Bang gifted to the cosmos systems as complex and as interesting as humans themselves. This explosion was hot enough to fill the entire cosmos with a sustained nuclear reaction for an estimated three minutes. Now called the anthropic principle, these three gifted minutes produced a tightly knit world of highly particular characteristics that allowed for the evolution of life (Polkinghorne, 1986, p. 67).

Particular characteristics that allowed for the evolution of life include:

**Divine Intervention:** Next, Polkinghorne explores the theological issue of how God interacts with the world, including the natural processes of evolution. He dismisses the idea of a remote, deistic God who merely initiated the universe and then retreated from active participation. Instead, he advocates for a view of God as deeply involved with creation, constantly maintaining and directing the natural world. Polkinghorne does warn against looking at God's actions in terms of human actions, since humans are limited while God is not and since humans are in need, while God is not:

We have been exploring how analogies with human action might be used to cast light on divine interaction with the world. We need also to recognize the differences which limit the applicability of such analogies. As physical systems, we humans operate in ways which must be consistent with general physical principles, such as the conservation of energy and the thermodynamic relations (due to Brillouin and Szilard) which link information processing and storage to the necessary expenditure of a minimum quantity of energy (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.32).

Having said that, he further explained that God's actions are so subtle and stealthy that humans might not readily perceive them; nonetheless, his influence and constant actions are present in his creation: "If God acts in the world through influencing the evolution of complex systems, he does not need to do so by the creative input of energy. Of course, such divine energetic interaction is not to be excluded theologically, and it could be so hidden in complex processes as not to be perceivable scientifically, but we have no need to invoke it. Moreover, it is probably wise not to do so, since it would risk turning God into a demiurge, acting as an agent among other agents.

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that a subtle and respectful balance is required if the flexibility of physical process is to accommodate both God's action and our own and also the freedom of the universe to explore its own potential. How these intertwine and how each finds space for its own fulfilment without usurping the room necessary for the others, is a profound problem beyond our power to resolve in detail (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 21).

He believes that God has given the world the freedom to be independent, but not to the extent that it should merely become a barrier between an encouraging God and a despotic, tyrannical God who intervenes in every detail. God is involved in the processes of the world and is never separated from it. In fact, Polkinghorne acknowledges the divine agency in the physical world much more than the God accepted in process theology. Hence, we must distinguish between creator and creation, as in classical theology (Polkinghorne, 2007).

Polkinghorne disputes a simplistic interpretation of divine action as direct, miraculous interventions in the natural order. He proposes that God's activity in the world is more nuanced and indirect, operating through the inherent regularities and contingencies of natural processes rather than contravening them. This perspective corresponds with the concept of God as the ultimate origin of order and creativity in the universe.

Polkinghorne posits that God's action in evolution is manifested through the inherent creativity and emergent properties of natural processes. Evolutionary mechanisms, such as mutation and natural selection, function within the framework set by God, leading to the emergence of new species and biological complexity over time. In this manner, God's creative influence is expressed through the progression of evolutionary history.

Polkinghorne underscores the openness of the evolutionary process to future possibilities, reflecting God's ongoing engagement with creation. While evolution adheres to certain principles and constraints, it also displays unpredictability and contingency, allowing for the emergence of novel life forms. This openness mirrors God's invitation for creatures to participate in shaping the future of the natural world through their own agency and creativity.

#### Non-coercive Divine Action in the Process of Evolution

Polkinghorne, in order to solve the problem of God forcing things into being according to the directions that he chose, thereby making irrelevant the creation process which he has championed, explained that there is no coercion in the creation process; rather, it comes about as a consequence of its nature. He explained that God's action in the process of nature bears semblance to the action of humans within themselves and beyond. He contends that, even though the creation of things is ongoing, humans still have actions which they take intentionally, thereby affecting whatever it is that they affect through their willful action and not as a result of God forcing that action through them. He holds that 'will' must be true, since humans know that there is an element of intent and will that derive their actions. God therefore may not be said to have coerced the actions of humans, and in the same way, He did not coerce evolution into being; so he quotes Schrödinger in his book to draw parallels between these two situations of whether the evolutionary process is coerced or not:

My body functions as a pure mechanism according to the Laws of Nature. Yet I know, by incontrovertible direct experience, that I am directing its motions... from which he reached the astounding conclusion that the only possible inference from these two facts is, I think, that I—I in the widest meaning of the word, that is to say every conscious mind that has ever said or felt "I" am the person, if any, who controls the "motion of the atom" according to the Laws of Nature (Polkinghorne, 1889, p. 24).

Polkinghorne contends that though it is God who made the process, he only put it into motion while leaving the possible outcome out of his own hands and into the hands of creation. This makes it possible for the end results of any of his creations, which he has put in motion, to be anything and at any time undetermined by God. This very position that he has taken is the direct consequence of "divine kenosis," which Polkinghorne himself had put forward. Divine kenosis simply says that God himself willfully emptied himself of some future knowledge in order to allow for greater freedom and participation in the creative process by creation itself (Polkinghorne, 1984). In other words, God is not omniscient, but only out of choice and self-limitation, and not out of weakness and inability.

He thinks that God's purposive action within the flexibility of process may be expected to bear some analogy with our human experience of willed activity, for which we know that there must be such flexibility, since we exercise it all the time. How can we picture its coming about? The answer will lie in such modest understanding as we may possess of how our psychosomatic unity is realized within the physical world (Polkinghorne 2007).

We then conclude that Polkinghorne believes that evolution, as a creative process, was put in motion by God through the Big Bang, and it culminated in the advent of the human being as the

purposeful fulfillment of that creative process which began with the Big Bang; however, the creative process and evolution, in itself, were not determined by God; rather, he simply put it in motion.

# Mutahari's Approach to Evolution

While Polkinghorne recognizes the big bang and evolution as a true explanation for the origin of species, Mutahari does not. He posits that the theory of evolution takes a simple natural phenomenon which occurs in limited boundaries, but expanding it to the extents where it does not apply. Mutahari recognizes the role of environmental conditions in shaping the anatomy of species; however, he does not recognize its ability to influence such changes as would completely transform one species into another. He also holds that all of these changes occur as a result of an ultimate cause which causes those small changes. He states:

We do not view the theory of evolution as sufficient without introducing a supernatural element. Unless we acknowledge the origin of the final cause or the existence of a controlling force in the living organism, we cannot direct a theory of the evolution of species. We acknowledge the influence of environmental factors on humans and animals, but not to the extent that all different kinds of animals are absolutely under the influence of that factor (Mutahari, 2009, p. 222).

Despite the fact that he does not believe in absolute evolution, and that he views the theory of evolution as a theory with shortcomings, he does not view the theory of evolution as one that contradicts monotheism in any way.

Furthermore, the first principle in this theory is based on the belief in the variability of types of living beings. Is there a relationship between the issue of mutability and immutability and the issue of monotheism and belief in the existence of God? It has been argued that there is no relationship between a person's belief in the existence of God and his belief that species are subject to change.

He goes as far as to state that: "A person may believe -and this is a naive belief- that it is necessary to believe in the existence of God, to hold that he alone is the cause of everything and nothing else has effects in how things run. That is to say, he rejects cause and effect (Mutahari, 2009)

#### **Miracles and Divine Intervention**

Polkinghorne believes in miracles; however, he does not see it as a magical occurrence. Instead, he views miracles as the advent of the unexpected within the realm of what we know: "The miraculous is simply the providential in unusual circumstances" (Polkinghorne, 1989, PP. 18, 25, 29, 32).

In contrast to the above, he ascribes to 'providence' the discovery of what we do not know: "Secondly, those laws of nature that we do know do not imply that there is no flexibility for action, both human and divine, within the process they describe. The pursuit of the first point opens up the possibility for what is usually called a miracle; the pursuit of the second point opens up the possibility for what is usually called providence" (Polkinghorne, 1989, 25).

Furthermore, he states, in a rather sharp contrast to his laid-back style, aggressively that, "Miracles are seen, not as celestial conjuring tricks, but as signs, insights into a deeper rationality than that normally perceptible by us" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 90).

This, of course, raises questions regarding the reconciliation between what he believes to be a miracle and the supposed resurrection of Jesus which, by all accounts, appears to be magical and not just unexpected. To resolve this seeming contradiction, Polkinghorne posits that the 'resurrection and ascension' of Christ was an act of transcendence and not merely a miracle. I think he is trying to convey that the great symbol of the ascension of Christ is that humanity is taken into the divine nature. As part of that mystery, the eternal accepts the experience of temporality (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 34). This means that while miracles might be eternal truths, they are not to be expected everyday in our lives, nor should we expect magical resolutions of problems in the names of miracles; rather, it is the unexpected within the known that might be called miracles.

#### Human Free Will in Polkinghorne's Theology

God's action in the world and our human free actions are not precluded by scientific laws. Polkinghorne argues that the laws of science do not prevent God from acting in the world, nor do they

limit our human freedom. He suggests that divine action and human free will can coexist with the laws of science.

Quantum theory, which is inherently indeterministic: Quantum theory, a fundamental theory in physics, is inherently indeterministic. This means that it allows for multiple possible outcomes and does not predict a single definite result. Polkinghorne uses this aspect of quantum theory to argue that it leaves room for divine and human actions.

Chaos theory, which demonstrates inherent unpredictability: Chaos theory deals with systems that are highly sensitive to initial conditions, leading to long-term unpredictability. Polkinghorne suggests that this inherent unpredictability in nature, as described by chaos theory, also allows for the possibility of divine and human actions.

In summary, Polkinghorne uses principles from quantum and chaos theories to argue that scientific laws do not preclude the possibility of God's action in the world or human free will. His perspective is one of harmony between science and faith, rather than conflict.

#### Ayatollah Javadi Amuli's Approach to Free Will

According to traditions and rational proofs, the creator of the entire universe, its resourcefulness and its survival depend on divine's providence. Therefore, in the universe, nothing can be enforced except by God's permission, and everything that has ever existed has a time.

Therefore, Islamic philosophers and theologians have put forward their reasons and justifications to explain the levels in divine actions. Islamic intellectuals have put forward different views about the reality of divine actions, which clears the doubt of predestination and abandonment or entrusting in human action (Javadi Amuli, 2008, vol. 1). It is obvious that believing in the reality of the interordinating matter leads to proving the levels in divine actions. Of course, it is clear that the existence of levels in the divine actions does not lead to the attribution of divine actions to time. Believing in the reality of the inter-ordinating matter means that God is both the creator and the agent of human action; hence, it leads us to the conclusion that human action has different levels and stages. These levels represent different stages that the intellect takes to attribute phenomena to the supreme being and it does not require any change in its essence. Javadi Amuli argues that based on the theory of personal unity of existence, the pluralities of existence are the manifestations of the oneness of being (Javadi Amuli, 2007, vol. 10), and this is much more compatible with the religious phenomena. He states that though pluralities drive from the oneness of being, they are independent, portraying their own way (Javadi Amuli, 2007, vol. 10).

According to Ayatollah Javadi Amuli, many verses in the Holy Quran indicate that creatures are the signs of God. Some of these verses are:

"And within the universe are some signs for the faithful ones, and so within

yourselves, won't you perceive." (Dhariyat 51:20-21).

For that matter, it is out of the free will of humans that they choose what to do in the circumstances they find themselves, thereby ensuring that human does not have absolute free will; rather, they have free will only in their specific choices. The circumstance and situations in which humans might find themselves may not be as a result of their choice, but what they choose to do then in those circumstance would determine what their recompense would be. Mutahari says: It is similar to an examiner or a teacher who, even though he may already know which of his students will achieve first class honors and which will achieve second, still conducts a test among them to make the truth clear to others and remove any doubt ... God does not test His servants to learn something unknown to Him (Mutahari, 2009, p. 195), as He states in the Quran:

"Indeed, we have created man and knew what his soul whispers to him" (Qaaf 50:16).

Through the passage of time, human being reveals their true essence and hidden nature no matter what (Mutahari, 2009).

#### **Prayer and Divine Response**

When it comes to prayer and its effects on the natural flow of events, and whether prayer may alter natural patterns, Polkinghorne has a very interesting perspective on this matter. He divides prayers into different categories and argues that certain types of prayer are meaningful, even if those prayers do not alter the natural patterns dictated by natural law. Moreover, if prayer were to interfere with the natural order of events, wouldn't that upset the known laws of physics and undermine any hopes of having order in the human realm? "I don't think that the effect of purely physical causes is drawn so tightly that it rules out either human choice or divine providence" (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 99).

Polkinghorne divides prayer into various categories such as Praise, Confession, meditation, and petitionary prayers. However, he concludes that it is petitionary prayer that is most troubling to most people; they' will rather things just went as they would and they feel as though it is childish to ask God for something to change or be provided in a world that is already known to work in accordance with certain laws and orders and does not give way to faith.

- 1. What happens when two contradictory prayers are offered? Would God change summer into spring because of a prayer? He answers these as follows: The motions of the solar system are mechanical in nature, with a predictability over long periods of time which permits the construction of almanacs. Thus, the succession of the seasons will be guaranteed by transcendent divine reliability and it would indeed be foolish to pray for their alteration (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 32).
- 2. "Petitionary prayer is real, but it is not as crudely mechanical as that" (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 25).

However, when it comes to Praise, he seems to wonder, are we not to be grateful for a favor we did not ask for? Or rather, should we be grateful for a favor we did not ask for?

Polkinghorne believes that divine agency can be applied in three ways: special, general, and miraculous. In His general act, God manage the world through the laws embedded in nature. The special agency includes the manner of special actions; for example, a physical event is organized differently from the whole natural accident, and miracles are also based on unnatural matters and are beyond human power (Dibaji, 2001).

The laws embedded in nature are the same laws that can be defined within the Newtonian physical framework. For example, in this framework, the relationship between mass and the speed of objects follows specific and well-defined formulas. Based on this understanding, divine agency in the universe suggests that God has created and governs the world in a manner that presents these definite physical formulas, which can be derived and predicted.

What is meant by divine special agency is the non-deterministic physical situations that are formed based on a kind of relativity. He posits that in quantum space, as well as in situations defined by chaos theory, the circumstances differ from those of Newtonian physics, where humans encounter a form of uncertainty. This uncertainty represents a realm that God has reserved for Himself, allowing Him to exercise His agency in the world. Miracles fall within the third category of divine agency, often referred to as unnatural phenomena (Dibaji, 2021).

This perspective of Polkinghorne aligns with Brummer's theory of God's agency in the world, particularly in the context of answering prayers or performing miracles. Brummer asserts that both scenarios involve uncertainty, through which God manifests His agency in the world (Nabavi Meibodi & Koochanani, 2011).

#### **Summary of Key Findings**

Polkinghorne compares the relationship between God and the universe as the relationship between a watchmaker and a watch, while Ayatollah Javadi Amuli considers this analogy incomplete and believes that the relationship between God and the universe is the relationship between the creator and the created. The criticism of Polkinghorne's views, from the perspective of Ayatollah Javadi Amuli, helps to understand the relationship between science and religion more deeply. This criticism indicates that Polkinghorne's views may not align with certain divine attributes and philosophical foundations. His transition from the realm of physics to that of theology offers a distinctive lens through which to examine divine intervention, merging the domains of theological inquiry and scientific discovery while striving to maintain harmony between God's sovereignty and the independence of the natural order. Conversely, Mutahari posits that the cosmos is without beginning or end, reflecting the timeless nature of divine creation. The act of creation is a fundamental aspect of God's nature; thus, God is in a constant state of creation. However, the eternal existence of the universe does not negate its reliance on and origination from God.

# **Polkinghorne's Theological Approach**

Drawing from his scientific expertise, Polkinghorne advocates for a harmonious relationship between science, philosophy, and theology. He sees these disciplines as complementary avenues for seeking and understanding truth, and he encourages their collaborative interaction.

# The Concept of Top-Down Causation

Polkinghorne proposes the concept of top-down causation, suggesting that larger systems can shape the actions of their individual components. This idea mirrors his belief in the presence of the divine in daily existence.

# **Polkinghorne's Conception of God**

Polkinghorne perceives God as transcendent, separate from the universe, and highlights the supremacy of the divine. He acknowledges the inadequacy of human language to fully capture the essence of God and portrays God as a personal entity, steering clear of human-like representations.

#### **Polkinghorne's View on Evolution**

Polkinghorne embraces the theory of evolution as a credible scientific account for the emergence and progression of life, tracing its origins back to the Big Bang and the subsequent evolution of complex organisms over eons.

#### Mutahari's Critique of Evolution

While Mutahari recognizes the role of environmental factors in shaping species, he disputes the notion that these influences can lead to the complete transformation of one species into another. He contends that a divine or ultimate cause is at play and maintains that this view is compatible with monotheistic beliefs.

#### Polkinghorne's Approach to Non-Coercive Divine Action

Polkinghorne dismisses the notion of a deity dictating the course of evolution. Instead, he envisions a process driven by natural forces, with divine influence subtly interwoven within the laws of nature, thus allowing for the inherent flexibility of natural processes. Mutahari, on the other hand, views free will and divine tests as mechanisms for humans to recognize their own actions and outcomes, emphasizing that free will is limited and shaped by circumstances.

# Conclusion

Polkinghorne adopts a scientific theological approach in his effort to explain the involvement of divine agency in the material world. In his theological framework, he seeks to navigate a path between classical theology and process theology, while his scientific perspective focuses on new theories in physics. Not all aspects of contemporary physics fall within his area of theorizing; rather, he concentrates on those relevant to his commentary, specifically the physics of indeterminacy.

To reconcile classical and process theology, he categorizes divine agencies into three types: general agencies, special agencies, and miracles. However, this classification presents a certain contradiction. On one hand, he asserts that divine agencies in nature do not violate the freedom of creatures; on the other hand, he acknowledges a form of predestination within all three categories of divine agency that he attributes to God. Although he believes that there is relative independence in certain divine actions concerning some physical events, this relative independence corresponds to the indeterminacy present in quantum space and chaos theory. Divine intervention in these physical phenomena is directed and specified by God; thus, it ultimately falls under the same predestination and deterministic reality that he seeks to avoid.

Javadi Amuli views science and religion as two separate domains of knowledge, asserting the objectivity of the universe. In contrast, Polkinghorne considers science and religion to be complementary approaches to understanding, believing that the universe exists objectively and independently of the human mind. While Javadi Amuli also acknowledges the objectivity of the universe, he asserts that it is dependent on God's will. Therefore, the systematic creation of this universe and its temporal characteristics, which change in every aspect of its phenomena, falls under

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the perfect design of divine agency. For example, gradual and progressive agencies, such as anger, illustrate this concept. Satisfaction and answering the prayers of his servants, does not mean that, the attributes of God are also changing; rather, it indicates the different levels of divine agency and action which are manifesting and appearing in the material world gradually over time.

Theologically, divine action, such as creation, sustenance, life giving and taking is one of the inherent attributes of God, which has been emphasized in religious texts, especially in the Holy Quran.

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