

Argumentation in Divine Theology

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Abstract: To those who are not ready to remind of God through innate gnosis or their doubts avoid them of paying attention to innate gnosis; our discussion should be based on logic. This logical way is offered under the name of “Argumentation” and “Disputation”.

In “Argumentation”, we try to prove the existence of the creator of the world...

In “Disputation”, in which the addressee stands against God he will negate the views of his addressee and rejecting his doubts, and through this way, a way to understanding of God will be opened for him. And if the addressee be obstinate and stubborn his detrimental and negative effect of him on others will be nullified and the richness of the religious teachings will be clarified for others. In Islamic text, “Disputation” Should be the best and to this end, some conditions are obligatory which are introduced here.

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Introduction

In our previous articles, we talked about innate gnosis of God and the ways of reminding this knowledge. In this article, we will discuss on the place of “argumentation” and “disputation” which are logical matters and the relationship between “argumentation” and “disputation”, and innate gnosis of God.

A. Argumentation

Adduction of argument for the purpose of proving some desired thing is called Argumentation. By argument is meant proof and evidence.¹

It has come down in “*Mu’jam Maqaiyes al-Lugha*” as follows:

The true meaning of *Haj* is ‘to resolve’ and the reason why proof is called as “argument” is because the desired truth is resolved by means of proof.

Thereafter, he interprets argumentation as “gaining predominance” through proof.²

Thus, argumentation is the very literal rationalization i.e., the absolute adduction of proof for proving a claim which finally leads to the victory of one party and the submission of the addressee.

Inasmuch as the parties to the argumentation are diverse, the nature of argumentation, too, differs. In a general classification, we can say: The addressee is either devoid of

¹ - al- Mesbah al Munir, p. 661; al-Sihah Vol.1, p.304 & Lisan al-Arab Vol.3, p.54.

² Mu’jam Maqaiyes al-Lugha Vol.2,p.3; Lisan al-Arab Vol.3, p.54.

mental, spiritual and ethical obstacles where discussion in this case takes place as ‘special argumentation’ or the addressee possesses one of the aforesaid obstacles where in such a case, we name this as “disputation”. Disputation itself is of two types.

A- Special Argumentation

*I*n this argumentation, the addressee lacks full preparedness for remembering and finding the path of true innate gnosis. On the other hand, he personally seeks rational proof about God. In this case, the Creator of the phenomenon (i.e., God) is rationalized through the phenomena. As a matter of fact, God has made the genetic signs a proof of His own existence where, someone describes them in the form of rational proof and the addressee admits to God’s existence by pondering in these signs.

This argumentation possesses certain characteristics as follows:

1. For those desirous of seeking the truth, contemplation and reflection in the genetic signs is a bridge carrying them to the true gnosis. Argumentation and rationalization by means of the genetic signs takes effect for the purpose of eliminating the mental obstacles and preparing an individual in acquiring a loftier gnosis.

In the famous hadith-*Ehlilajah*¹, it has come down that Mufazzal in a letter to Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) informs the latter that a group of people deny God and in this connection, they

¹ Concerning the importance and authenticity of Hadith-Tauhid Mufazzal and Hadith-Ahlilajjah, refer to Bihar al-Anwar Vol.3,p.55 (Explanation and footnote by Allama Majlisi)

engage in debates and discussions. Thereafter, he requests Imam to present him some matter through which he could argue and refute them.

In reply, Imam (p.b.u.h.) at first sets forth innate gnosis and the divine pledge as the audible proof for all and then trains Mufazzal in rationalizing through the genetic signs:

“We praise God for His bounties; His audible proofs; His praiseworthy trial and tribulations enjoyed by all---the elite and the common people. Then, amongst His lofty bounties is this that He has set His Divinity in the hearts and taken a covenant from the people concerning His Ma’refat (gnosis)”.¹

2. Argumentation through the signs is easy to grasp and a little deliberation in them can lead to the acknowledgment of the Creator. In other words, the innate and sound intellect discovers impromptu the Cause through the effect and the Creator through the creatures. Of course, the more the deliberation on the effect and creature, the more evident will be the proof of existence of God. This point is evident in all the verses and traditions related to this discussion. Basically, the use of words like “*Ayat*” ²(signs) in the Quran with respect to the creatures and their emphasis that they (i.e., the signs) are clear and manifest denotes this very matter.

This point has also come down in an explicit manner in numerous and renowned traditions:

“Is there a construction without a constructor or a crime without a criminal?!”³

¹ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.3, p.152.

² For example, see the holy Quran (2:164);(3:190);(45:3-6) &(10:6 & 101).

³ Nahj al-Balagha , Sermon 185; p. 271.

“A dropping proves a camel’s existence; excrement proves the existence of an ass. A footprint reveals the passer-by. So, how come that the creation above (the heavens) with all its delicacy and tenderness and the center below (the land) with all its compactness and viscosity does not reveal the existence of an All-Aware and All-Subtle God?!”¹

3. This kind of argumentation does not require any elementary and complicated sciences and is free from the philosophical rules and preliminaries. In other words, it has not taken shape on the basis of any particular philosophical school and so, anybody could easily grasp and perceive it.

4. In this type of reasoning, one cannot deliberate about the essence of God.

Rather, pondering in the creatures is the basis of acknowledging and confessing the Creator. Thus, in the traditions, contemplation of the divine essence has been forbidden and reproached while contemplation of the creatures has been praised and encouraged. Below, we shall mention two such traditions:

“Beware of pondering about Allah.”²

A tradition has come down from Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) as such:

“Whenever your discussion climaxes with (the entity of) Allah, end your talks at once. Talk about what is below the Throne (Arsh) not what is above it.”³ Argumentation should occur without leading to anthropomorphism, depiction and description of the divine essence and His attributes except

¹ Jameh al-Akhbar; p. 35.

² al-Amali, al-Saduq; p. 340.

³ Bihar al-Anwar Vol. 3, p.259.

within the bond of “*Absolving God from two constrictions*”. This matter was explained in the first stage of the topic concerning “*rational recognition*”.

5. Considering that this kind of argumentation is easy to perceive, if someone fails to confess to God through this method, it is either due to non-deliberation on his part about the proof or because of his involvement in sins. In continuation of the passages from *Hadith-Ehlilajah* which was narrated in the preceding pages, it has come down as such:

“I swear by my life that the ignorant have not gained this ignorance from their Lord. This is because they witness the clear proofs and decisive signs (of God’s Power) in their own creation; in the kingdom of the heaven and earth and in the astonishing creatures which proves the Creator’s existence. But they are those who have kept open the doors of sin and made easy for themselves the path of passion. So, their carnal desires have overcome their hearts.”¹

This matter will be elaborated in the discussion on “*Obstacles to guidance and submission*”.

B- Disputation

*D*isputation on the measure of fe’al² is of one the infinitives from the mode of mofaele³ and it means argument and dispute between two parties where normally, one is on the side of the truth and the other on falsehood.

¹ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.3,p.152.

² Name of an infinitive, conjunction of verb, In Arabic

³ Name of an infinitive, conjunction of verb, In Arabic

Thus, the addressee is not speechless and does not merely seek to learn. As such, the one who disputes with a believer possesses such ideas that prevent him from accepting guidance. These mental hindrances are either in the form of refutations vis-a-vis the divine beliefs or in the form of fancies that hinder him from accepting the realities.

In the first case, the rightful disputer should reply to his opponent's refutations. In fact, he should create a dent in his refutations and finally exhibit the true matter which is devoid of any blot.

In the second case, he should create a dent in the false reflections of the addressee and render them null and void. In both the instances, the obstacles lying on the path of guidance are done away with.

In the entire disputations which the Infallibles (p.b.u.t.) have had with their opponents, one comes across rationalization through the genetic signs and the order prevailing in them. Thus, in few of these debates, aside from the fact that the addressee's points were refuted, the addressees were also reminded about God through these very ontological signs.

The above matter is true to the one who wishes to seek the truth. However, if he is obstinate and refuses to accept the truth (even after argument has been finalized) and continues the discussion for enfeebling the divine faith of the Muslims, then, in such a case, dispute with him occurs only for the purpose of defending and manifesting the divine faith and the addressee himself is not of any concern.

Ibn Abi al-Auja says: "He (i.e., Imam al-Sadiq) counted for me so many signs vis-a-vis God's Power that I felt God

would manifest at this very moment before us.”¹ Although, a few of his companions brought faith and turned Muslims, he was reluctant to submit himself before God as, according to Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.), he was blind (by heart). This expression has also come down in the Quran² and other heavenly books.³

Good Disputation and Its Conditions

*I*n numerous verses and traditions, disputation on divine beliefs has been forbidden and reproached. On the other hand, in few other verses and traditions, disputation has been considered lawful and in certain cases, even enjoined.

There were a few debaters who earned the praise of the Infallibles (p.b.u.t.).

Contemplation in all these verses and traditions reveal that the circumstances under which disputation is enjoined and forbidden are different. Disputations are of various types; some being blameworthy while some are acceptable and even obligatory.

According to Verse 124, chapter (Surah) Nahl, disputation is of two types: Good disputation and bad disputation. Good disputation has certain conditions which will be discussed in brief as follows:

¹ al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p.76.

² The holy Quran (2: 18 & 171); (7: 64); (27:66 & 81); (30:53); (41:17) and (47: 23).

³ When Christ debated with the obstinate Roman soldiers in Jerusalem, they said: ‘Show us your God so that we turn into Jews. Then, the Prophet of that time replied: If you had eyes to see, I would show Him to you. But, since you are blind, I cannot show Him to you.’ (Gospel; chapter 152, p. 310)

First Condition

Before disputation, a debater has acquired the true matter and gnosis. He seeks to prove and manifest that matter and disprove the refutations through disputation and discussion. Thus, in the traditions, that disputation is praised which is based on the Quranic sciences and knowledge of the Infallibles (p.b.u.h.); and is not used as a means for discovering the mental obscurities.

Basically, disputation in the divine religions is a way for defending the truth and not a means for discovering the divine gnosis. Thus, disputation is not a haven for divine gnosis. Rather, reliance on disputation is a means of going astray.

“No nation went astray except when it relied on disputation” (and considered it a means for discovering the realities) ¹

Kulaini narrates in his honourable book “*Kafi*” as such:

Once a Syrian who reckoned himself to be a theologian approached Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) for a debate. Imam inquired: Are your words from the Prophet (p.b.u.h.) or from yourself? He said: From both. Imam (p.b.u.h.) rebuked him and hinted that a speaker’s words should be derived from the Prophet. Then, he addressed Yunus Ibn Ya’qub one of the attendants in the gathering as such: If your debate was good, you could have debated with this man. Yunus said: You have told us to refrain from debates in religious matters. Imam (p.b.u.h.) replied:

Woe betides any speaker who forsakes our sayings and uses his own personal sayings...²

¹ Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p.138.

² al-Kafi, Vol. 1, p. 171.

This hadith and the subsequent one shows that in the pre-discussion stage on any subject-matter, the speaker should know before hand, the knowledge and beliefs of the Infallibles (p.b.u.h.) vis-a-vis that subject-matter. Besides, he should engage in disputation on the basis of their sayings and with the objective of manifesting their truthfulness.

Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) addressed a few of his companions as such: Engage in argumentation with the people on the basis of my sayings because, in case you lose it is me who has lost (i.e., I stand surety for your action) ¹

“...the path of guidance on which you traverse; manifest it for the people”.²

The last two traditions reveal that the purpose of speech and disputation is manifestation and not the discovery of guidance and truth.

Imam al-Sadiq (p.b.u.h.) said: “Forsake those who debate with you but lack the knowledge concerning the topic of debate”³

Second Condition

Aside from the fact that a disputer’s basic principle and objective should be based on divine gnosis, his method, in proving the truth and contravening falsehood, should also be through the divine way. Whatever he claims, should be proved by utilizing correct points.

¹ Tashih al-E’teqad-be-Sawab al-Enteqad; p. 56.

² Same source.

³ Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p.129, tradition 12 and p. 139, tradition 59. Knowledge of Quran is one of the conditions of disputation.

The above condition along with its logic has come down at length in a tradition.

The last part of his hadith also substantiates the first condition.

One question that may arise here is this: If only true matters are to be adapted in the method of disputation then why Prophet Abraham (p.b.u.h.) in his disputation, while referring to the stars, moon and sun said: this is my Lord.

This question was raised by Ma'mun before Imam al-Ridha (p.b.u.h.) to which the latter replied:

“Prophet Abraham’s statement is in the form of denial and inquiry and not a confession or a declaration”.¹ In other words, Prophet Abraham (p.b.u.h.) explained at first the atheist’s sayings and then contravened them. While expressing their views, he did not accept their words. Rather, it was like asking them: ‘Is this my Lord?’ And this interrogative remark was in the form of negatory inquiry and not a declaration of his personal belief.

Third Condition

The one entering disputation should possess the ability and power to debate. He should be acquainted and rather thoroughly conversant in the style of starting and ending the discussion. For this reason, in most case, the Infallibles (p.b.u.t.) have forbidden disputation and allowed only a few individuals to enter debates and disputation with the opponents. In certain instances, they have trained these individuals with the method of a good debate and then tested them and pointed out to them their weak points. This matter has come down in the tradition of Yunus-ibn-Ya'qub which

¹ Tawhid, al-Saduq; p. 74

was explained in the first condition. In this regard, one can come across other traditions too.¹

Fourth Condition

*B*efore anything else, disputation should be useful. Secondly, the time, place and condition of the disputer and addressee should be conducive to a good debate.²

Fifth Condition

*T*here should exist a need for disputation. In numerous traditions, dispute and hostility in religious matters has been forbidden. Abandonment of dispute is declared to be one of the signs of piety and perfection of belief. Besides, a rightful disputer too has been forbidden from dispute and numerous rewards are enumerated for those who forsake it.³ Likewise, in these traditions, doubt, discord, sedition and mischief are recognized to be the outcome of dispute.

¹ Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 2, p.136.

² Same source; p. 130

³ Basically, in the Book and sunnah on Ma'ref, inasmuch as there exists scope for acquiring the lofty Ma'ref, we come across such terminologies as remembrance, reminiscence, conversation etc instead of concepts like lesson, discourse, dispute and debate. This shows the special style adopted by the Prophet in forwarding the desired truth. (Refer to Bihar al-Anwar Vol.1,p.198-206; chapter concerning discourse on knowledge; hadith 6, 8, 11, 17, 18, 21, 26, 36, 37 and al-Kafi Vol.2, p.186-188

Taking into account the numerous traditions on dispute and debate and the limited scope of this treatise, we shall restrain ourselves by mentioning the references only.¹

From the verses, traditions and historical evidence, we realize that disputation has not been propounded in the divine religions as a primary principle. From the viewpoint of history too, disputation made its debut in the Islamic gatherings only when alien thoughts and false reflections began to penetrate the divine beliefs of the Muslims. The reason for such an affair too becomes clear in the preceding discussions.

¹ Bihar al-Anwar Vol.2, p.124; chapter 17. Sixty-one traditions have come down in this regard. Amongst them: traditions 3-14, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 30, 31, 32, 47-56, 58, 59 and 61.