

## RATIONAL AND SCRIPTURAL PROOFS IN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

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In the sections on *nazar* or speculation in later Ash'arite theological works, such as the *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* of al-Taftāzānī and the *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* of al-Jurjānī, a careful distinction is made between two types of proof which can be used to demonstrate theological doctrines. One of these is the rational proof or *dalīl 'aqlī*, by which is meant a proof based ultimately on premisses which are known to be true through reason or sense perception. The other is the scriptural proof or *dalīl naqlī*, whose premisses are taken from scripture, that is, from the Qur'ān or the *sunnah* of the Prophet.<sup>1</sup>

A rational proof results in certain knowledge if it is based on premisses known intuitively or necessarily to be true. Six varieties of necessary premisses are usually listed although al-Jurjānī following al-Ījī in *al-Mawāqif* and al-Āmidī in his *Abkār al-Afkār* list seven. The six usually given are the following:

1. *Awwalīyāt*, first principles or axioms, such as the statement that the whole is greater than any of its parts.

2. *Qadāyā qiyāsātuhā ma'ahā*, which are propositions containing their own syllogisms, such as the statement that four is an even number.

3. *Mushāhadāt*, or sense perceptions, such as the statement that this fire burns.

4. *Mutawātirāt*, which are historical or geographical facts known through *tawātur* transmission, that is, facts transmitted by a sufficient number of witnesses such that it would be impossible to suppose that they were all lying.

5. *Mujarrabāt*, or facts known through experimentation, such as the statement that scammony is a laxative.

6. *Ḥadsīyāt*, or acute guesses, as for example, the statement that the light of the moon is derived from that of the sun.

The seventh variety sometimes included in this list are *al-wahmīyāt fī al-maḥsūsāt*, or estimations or preconceptions with respect to objects of sense, such as the proposition that every body can be pointed to and is in a direction.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, I, 39-40; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, II, 48-51; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭālib al-Anzār*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>2</sup> See al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn, *Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsīyah*, II, 240; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭālib al-Anzār*, pp. 26-7; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, I, 19; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, I, 123, II, 36; al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-Afkār*, fols. 17b-18a. It should be noted that these six premisses are derived from Ibn Sīnā. See his *al-Ishārāt wa-*

Rational proofs then, if based on any of these six varieties of necessary premisses, result in certain knowledge. Scriptural proofs, on the other hand, since they are not based on any of these premisses which are known necessarily to be true, cannot result in any knowledge at all unless scripture itself, from which the premisses of scriptural proofs are taken, can be demonstrated to be true. This, of course, must be done by means of rational proofs. Thus all scriptural proofs are ultimately based on the rational proofs required to prove the truth of scripture. In other words, in order to use premisses taken from scripture in proofs of theological doctrines, scripture as a whole must be demonstrated to be true by means of purely rational proofs.

Ash'arite theologians thus developed a series of rational proofs which culminated in a proof for the truthfulness of the Prophet; for if the Prophet is telling the truth, then statements contained in the Qur'an and Sunnah are true statements and can consequently be used as premisses in scriptural proofs for various religious doctrines.

This series of rational proofs culminating in the proof for the truthfulness of the Prophet usually included proofs for the following propositions or doctrines:

1. The universe is originated.
2. The universe has an originator or creator.
3. The creator of the universe is knowing, powerful and willing.
4. Prophecy is possible.
5. Miracles are possible.
6. Miracles indicate the truthfulness of one who claims to be a prophet.
7. Muḥammad claimed to be a prophet and performed miracles.<sup>3</sup>

To summarize, one can say that any religious doctrine which is used in the proof for the truthfulness of the Prophet must itself be based on a rational proof, and that this proof must ultimately depend on premisses known necessarily to be true. Other doctrines not required in the proof for the truthfulness of the Prophet, such as God's unity, His having the attributes of sight, hearing and speech, and doctrines concerning the last day and heaven and hell, can all be based on scriptural proofs.

As has been mentioned, rational proofs, if based on premisses known necessarily to be true, result in certain knowledge. The question can be raised, however, as to whether or not scriptural proofs also result in certain knowledge even if the truthfulness of the prophet is established. The answer is "yes" if the particular scriptural proofs in question can satisfy three conditions.

The first of these is that the language of all scriptural statements used in a proof must be known through *tawātur*. By language is meant not only the morphology and syntax of the language but also the definitions of words as used and accepted at the time of the Prophet.

The second condition is that the meaning intended by the Prophet in making a statement must be known. Is a particular statement, for example, to be understood

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*al-Tanbīhāt*, I, 213-219; *al-Shifā'*, *al-Mantiq*, *al-Burhān*, pp. 63-64; and *al-Najāh*, pp. 61-66.

<sup>3</sup> See al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, I, 39-40; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, II, 50-51; al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd*, pp. 462 ff.

literally or metaphorically? This question cannot be answered by means of *mutawātir* tradition but only through the use of *qarā'in*, that is, contextual evidence or other circumstantial evidence which, if available, can be used to determine the meaning intended by the Prophet in any particular statement.

The last condition is the absence of a rational counter argument or *mu'arid 'aqli*, that is, any valid rational proof for a statement that contradicts any of the premisses or the conclusion of the scriptural proof in question. If such a rational counter argument exists it must be accepted and the scriptural argument either rejected or else interpreted allegorically so as to be in accord with what is known through reason. To reject the rational argument in favor of the scriptural argument is impossible, for to do so would not only invalidate reason as a source of certain knowledge but also scripture, since scripture can only be proven true through the use of rational arguments.

A further problem, however, is involved in this last condition that there be no rational counter argument, and that is that in the case of any particular scriptural proof one can never know for certain that a rational counter argument does not in fact exist, since it may be the case that no one has yet discovered one. It was therefore argued by some that no scriptural proof could result in certain knowledge since there always remained the possibility that a rational counter argument did in fact exist which would necessitate the allegorical interpretation of the statements involved in the scriptural proof. On the other hand, since the Ash'arite theologians did not consider legal precepts to be subject to rational counter arguments, this third condition did not apply to Islamic law.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, II, 51-58; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*, I, 40-41; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭāli' al-Anzār*, p. 28.

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