THE PROOF FOR THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THE PROPHET

Nicholas Heer

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In order to avoid having to accept revelation as true on the basis of faith alone, later Ash'arite theologians attempted to prove the truth of revelation by completely rational means. To this end they developed a series of rational proofs which culminated in a proof for the truthfulness of the Prophet; for if the Prophet could be demonstrated to be truthful, then all statements contained in revelation, both in the Qur'an and in *ḥadīth*, would be true statements and one could believe in their truth on the basis of reason rather than on the basis of faith alone.

This series of rational proofs developed by the Ash'arite theologians included proofs for the following doctrines or propositions:

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.[1]

According to the theologians each of these propositions had to be demonstrated by what they called a rational proof or *dalīl 'aqlī*. They defined a

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[1] See, for example, al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* I, 39-40; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, II, 50-51; al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ al-Tajrīd*, p. 462.

rational proof as a proof based on premisses known intuitively or necessarily to be true through reason or sense perception, and which as such was consequently said to yield certain knowledge. Six varieties of necessary premisses upon which rational proofs could be based were commonly accepted by the theologians. These were:

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. *Maḥsūsāt*, or sense perceptions, such as the statement that this fire is hot.

4. *Mutawātirāt*, or historical or geographical facts reported 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.[2]

Distinguished from the rational proof was the traditional proof or *dalīl naqlī*, which was defined as a proof containing one or more premisses taken from revelation. Traditional proofs could not, of course, be used in the series of arguments to establish the truthfulness of the Prophet. Once, however, the truthfulness of the Prophet had been rationally demonstrated, traditional proofs could be used in proving additional theological doctrines.

How successful were the Ash'arite theologians, then, in establishing the truth of revelation by means of rational proofs? To their own satisfaction, at least, they were able to formulate proofs for all of the doctrines mentioned above except for the proposition stating that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of anyone claiming to be a prophet. Here they had to admit their inability to come up with any rational proof at all. Nevertheless, in spite of their inability to prove this proposition rationally, they still felt that it was a true proposition. How could people be convinced, however, that it was a true proposition in the absence of any rational proof?

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[2]See al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn, *Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsīyah*, II, 240; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maṭāli' al-Anẓār*, 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-al-Tanbīhāt*, I, 213-219; *al-Shifā'*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Burhān*, pp. 63-64; and *al-Najāh*, pp. 61-66.

One solution to this problem was to resort to the following argument by analogy:

Suppose that a powerful king is sitting on his throne before an audience. A man rises and announces that he is the messenger or spokesman of this king to his people. He then turns to the king and says: Your majesty, if I am speaking the truth with regard to my claim to be your spokesman, then perform some act which is contrary to your usual custom. If the king then performs such an act, all those present will know that the king performed that act only in order to confirm the truthfulness of the man claiming to be his spokesman or messenger. In like manner God performs a miracle by the hand of the prophet and in so doing confirms the claim of the prophet to be telling the truth.

Realizing, however, that this argument by analogy fell short of being a really convincing argument, the theologians attempted another solution to the problem. This was to claim that the proposition that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of a prophet is known necessarily to be true in spite of the fact that it cannot be classed under any of the six varieties of necessary premises commonly accepted as being necessarily true.

The explanation of how such a proposition could be known necessarily to be true and why such a solution was acceptable to Ash'arite theologians, can be found in the Ash'arite doctrine of what can be called immediate causality as opposed to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of mediate causality or *tawlīd*.

As is well known, God's power according to Ash'arite doctrine, is limited only by logical impossibility. God is free to do anything except that which involves a logical contradiction or contrary. He cannot, for example, cause something to exist and not exist at the same time.[3]

God is furthermore the immediate and only cause of everything that exists or occurs in the universe. All effects are caused directly by God rather than by the causes to which we commonly ascribe these effects. Thus, if someone moves his hand on which he is wearing a ring, God is the direct and immediate cause not only of the movement of the hand but also of the movement of the ring. The movement of the ring is not caused by the movement of the hand, nor the movement of the hand by the person who wills to move his hand.

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[3]A full discussion of the limitation of God's power to what is logically possible can be found in al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ Umm al-Barāhīn*, pp. 98-105. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, II, pp. 180-193 and Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 578-589. For a discussion of the limitations on God's power in Judaism and Christianity see Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, pp. 12-35.

Because God customarily acts in accordance with certain patterns and always, or almost always, causes the ring to move at the same time He causes the hand to move, it appears that the movement of the hand is the cause of the movement of the ring. It is, however, entirely within God's power to cause the hand to move without simultaneously causing the ring to move.

Acts of God which are in accord with His customary pattern of acting are known as *'ādiyāt*. Acts which occur counter to this customary pattern are miracles or *khawāriq al-'ādah*, which literally means things which pierce or penetrate or go beyond the customary.

This doctrine of immediate causality is not only used to explain the occurrence of miracles but also to explain how knowledge is acquired. Like everything else knowledge is something created directly by God. If we know that a first principle or axiom is true, it is because God has created this knowledge in our minds following the conception of both the subject and predicate of the axiom. Similarly the knowledge that the conclusion of a syllogism is true is created by God after he has created in our minds the knowledge of the premisses.

This doctrine of God-caused knowledge thus explains how the proposition that a miracle indicates the truthfulness of a prophet can be known necessarily to be true; for when we witness a miracle and hear the words of the prophet, God creates in our minds the knowledge that the prophet is telling the truth.

However, since God is not under any compulsion to act according to His customary patterns and does, in fact, act counter to these patterns in the case of miracles, God can refrain from creating in our minds the knowledge of the truth of a proposition, even though that proposition might be true. Can God, however, create in our minds the knowledge of the truth of a proposition which in itself is false? Can He, for example, create in our minds the knowledge that a prophet is telling the truth when in reality the prophet is lying? The theologians answered this question in the negative on the grounds that such an act on the part of God would involve a logical contradiction in that the prophet would be both telling the truth and lying at the same time. God's power extends only to acts which are logically possible and He consequently cannot create in our minds knowledge of the truth of a proposition which in itself is false.[4]

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[4]For the arguments concerning the proposition that miracles indicate the truthfulness of prophets see al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, pp. 316-324; al-Jurjānī,

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