

THE REALISM OF LOGICAL ARGUMENTATION VERSUS PHILOSOPHICAL RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Ismail Latif HACINEBIOGLU*

ABSTRACT

In this paper realism of the logical argumentations for the existence of God is examined with the conceptual relativity of philosophical religious pluralism. One needs to define and choose his/her philosophical ground in order to establish a logical argument for 'existence'. This ground could be as varied as realistic or relativistic approaches. Existential discussion of an entity is a very crucial problem for any religious argument. Moreover, philosophical interpretation of religion conceptually relies on defining the word "divine". The conclusions of the cosmological and teleological and ontological arguments are based on realistic world views. The First Cause, Intelligent Designer and Necessary Being are amongst those concepts which are derived from these arguments. Pluralism concludes that every human being has their own reflections and experiences of the same Ultimate Reality in different ways with different names and concepts. An exploration of the correspondence of plurality of truth-claims in relation to the realism of the logical argumentations will help to understand how logic of argumentation works through for verifying religious arguments.

Key words: Realism, Relativity, Argumentation, Religious Pluralism, Truth-Claim, Entity, Existence, Persona of God.

Introduction

Religious arguments might in one way or another interact either with building premises or establishing conclusions to produce reflections to express responses to religion. Along with textual interpretations, rational approaches such as logical argumentations and mystical expressions would be accompanied with universal principles and personal experience. The main purpose of this study is to explore the correspondence of theological pluralism's approach to the realism of the logical argumentations for the existence of God. The idea of pluralism is not an entirely new concept, but with recent discussions it can be said that it is counted as a progressive or more likely one of the

*. Assist. Prof. Dr., Suleyman Demirel University, Faculty of Theology, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Isparta / TURKEY. hacinebioglu@yahoo.com

intensely debated contemporary interpretations of religion. In contrast, the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments in this context have a long and controversial history. Those theistic arguments will be referred onwards as ‘the arguments’. ‘The arguments’ have distinct emphasis on a single entity as an inferred God and persona of God in a realistic way of interpreting the existence. The emphasis of ‘the arguments’ has a propensity of demonstrating arguably a strong theistic argument for the existence of God. Pluralism takes for granted the diversity of human experience of Ultimate Reality. In this context, mainly J. Hick’s account of philosophical religious Pluralism will be referred. The challenge of Pluralism can be identified as H. Coward puts it, “superimposing one’s own criteria of validating upon the other religion” (2000:143). A Pluralist interpretation of “existence” avoids the distinct emphasis of abstraction of the concept of God. The emphasis is more on personal religious experience of interpreting the religious phenomena. C. Sinkinson succinctly summarises this point in his analysis of Hick’s model of faith:

“Hick proposes a model of faith that is to do with subjective, personal experience rather than with intellectual abstraction. Our experience leads us to interpret the world around us in the way we do; and faith is this act of interpretation applied to the religious dimension of existence. It is not a response to verbal, doctrinal statements but to the religious significance of the world. Hick argues for this position by showing how all knowledge, religious and otherwise, follows this same pattern: all knowledge is the human interpretation of objective realities” (Sinkinson 2001: 4).

Arguably, ‘the arguments’ do not aim to satisfy validation of this personal subjective experience. Instead of that, this kind of logical argumentation asserts the justification of universal principles such as causality and necessity of existence. ‘The arguments’ advocate a certain epistemological ground for an existence or being while Pluralism is proposing a universal principle for the same pattern of belief for Ultimate Reality. Thus, there is hardly any reference to each other in current discussions (D’Costa 1986, Kaplan 2002, Coward 2000).

The possible reason for the discussion is whether singular ‘Real’ can be both personal and impersonal and being and emptiness at the same time (Kaplan 2002:160, Hick 1989: 236). In Hick’s view the “Pluralistic hypothesis could accommodate either of these models and does not require a decision between them” (1989: 275). Pluralism tries to demonstrate the similarity of truth claims and belief values in the essence of religious experience, whereas ‘the arguments’ claim a

realist and universal view in experiencing the universe so as to reach belief. Therefore, there is a need for analysing arguments in contrast to Pluralism. To examine a correspondence or irrelevance between Pluralism and ‘the arguments’ for the existence of God can give a quite useful task to dwell on and show different types of religious argumentation might interact philosophically.

Justification of Religious Reasoning

Philosophical interpretations of religion have always been a part of theological discussions. Justification of theological issues such as beliefs and doctrines are essential to theology itself. J. D. Roberts argues that justification is crucial to any theological task: “philosophy functions as an instrument for religious understanding once it assumes the reality and validity of religion as an experience to be interpreted, criticized and evaluated” (1991: 12). This instrument does not necessarily conclude same theological conclusions for everyone. Since, the justification of belief has been interpreted on different logical grounds. At this point, the term logic relates to varieties of historical, epistemological and metaphysical arguments.

‘The arguments’ are treated something to be discovered by reasoning for philosophical way of thinking. According to Hick, the major rational theistic arguments fail to demonstrate divine existence and fulfil what they profess to do:

“It seems that it is impossible to demonstrate the reality of God by *a priori* reasoning, since such reasoning is confined to the realm of concepts; impossible to demonstrate it by *a posteriori* reasoning, since this would have to include a premise begging the very question at issue; and impossible to establish it as in greater or lesser degree probable, since the notion of probability lacks any clear meaning in this context” (Badham 1990: 49).

‘The arguments’ are presented as rational inferences, but still they might be false. Those propositions in ‘the arguments’ might be well-formed or ill-formed. For Hick, the propositions can be true or false but they cannot be rational or irrational. “It is *people* who are rational or irrational, and derivatively their states and their actions, including their acts and states of believing” (Badham 1990: 56).

Verification of the belief depends on the logical scrutiny of arguments of religion in the framework of religion itself (Hick 1957: 169). According to A. Farrer, the main aim of philosophising theological statements is to prove theological conclusions through non-theological premises (Farrer 1958: 9). If these theological arguments are not derived from non-theological premises, the

arguments will be self-evident and circular. In fact, historical, epistemological and metaphysical premises of theological arguments are also part of the ground of theological evidences. If one assumes that all arguments somehow have theological dimension in the same level of truth, it would be hard to distinguish methodological differences amongst different approaches to religion. P. Tillich states that “successful research leads to the establishment of methods and criteria which can be used for many objects of inquiry” (1952: 18). Furthermore, it is important to comprehend methodological differences in epistemological and metaphysical grounds of Pluralism in conjunction with ‘the arguments’.

Basis of Pluralism in Logic of Belief

Pluralism presupposes the validity of truth claims of the all world religions for seeking the same Ultimate Reality. In this regard, diversity of epistemological differences are utilised for a certain interpretation of religion (Gillis 1993). Along with this, the historical arguments the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments for the existence of God have profound bearings of epistemological and metaphysical discussions (Davis 1997). Logical ground of belief for the existence of God is demonstrated in those arguments. Thus, the common conclusion is derived from either *a priori* or *a posteriori* premises that logically ‘God does exist’ (Hick 1964, Hick 1970, Küng 1978: 531).

In modern usage, pluralism means more in philosophical evaluation of religion than it is defined in dictionaries. Oxford Dictionary defines pluralism as opposed to monism as “a system that recognizes more than one ultimate principle or kind of being” (1996: 1115). Like many other modern terms, it has been defined and interpreted in different dimensions (Thompson 1988: 10-13). Definitions are only valid, if the concept is properly used for its context. It is the most important and difficult part of this kind of discussion to define the concepts properly on the basis of their epistemological point of view. Sometimes philosophical and theological or socio-anthropological and political dimensions of pluralism are easily confused. Hick seems to do this when he maintains that, “from the point of view of phenomenology, or description, the fact of religious pluralism presents no philosophical problem. It just is the case that there are many different traditions of religious life and thought” (1982: 89). However, the philosophical problem arises “when we add what can be called the basic religious conviction that a problem is generated” (1982: 89). To discuss whether pluralism or the historical arguments for the existence of God

demonstrate valid arguments or not is another task. In fact, both independently require deep examinations, which have been done independently so far.

It is worth mentioning here that there are varieties of ways of interpreting phenomena of religion. According to N. Smart there are seven dimensions to understand that phenomena. These are the doctrinal and philosophical dimension, the ritual or practical dimension, the mythic or narrative dimension, the experimental or emotional dimension, the ethical and legal dimension, the organisational or social component, the material or artistic dimension and political effect of religion (1996: 8-14). Different dimensions of sacred interpretations represent human response to patterns of religious thought. While Pluralism discusses and emphasises the similarities above dimensions in the world religions on the crux of realism and relativism as religious experience, logical argumentations for the existence of God are only part of doctrinal and philosophical dimension in aspect of religious conviction. Yet, those arguments have been only there to demonstrate the logical ground of their truth-claim for belief in God on the basis of realistic interpretation of existence and being. It is not historically misleading to think that ‘the arguments’ maintain a representation of monotheism, in order to demonstrate a persona of God as an inferred entity instead of ‘experienced reality’ as in Pluralism (Badham 1990: 50).

Conceptualisation of Persona of God

Varieties of religions and differences of their living experiences appeal to find a common framework for understanding their essence. Post-modern theological approaches suggest new definitions of religion (Capps 1995). Conceptualisation about the persona of God is not enough to satisfy every theological perspective. To put a belief in a superhuman as a controlling power, especially in a personal God or God who is entitled to obedience and worship may not fulfil many religious epistemologies about conceptualisation of God. Moreover, how to think God as ‘being’ causes categorical confusions (Smith 1970: 108). In this perception, God is more a persona and might be interpreted as Ultimate Reality in ‘the arguments’; however Ultimate Reality in Pluralism does not necessarily represent a persona of God. It might rather suggest a conjugation point for persona and impersona of God. In Pluralism as Hick’s argues that ‘ultimate reality is apprehended as non-personal and as multi personal as well as unipersonal’ (Badham 1990: 64).

When a juxtaposition of concepts of God for all aspects of religion is considered, there are many difficulties to make a single definition for all religions. However, that is very important crux for Pluralism to discover similarities to utilise in order to reach epistemological premises for Ultimate Reality. Theologies of the world religions mainly develop their epistemological systems in their particular spheres for certain emphasises (Dilworth 1989: 141-153). These spheres are not necessarily exactly same or completely different (for comparison a good account of Christian and Islamic perspectives: Aslan 1998). These spheres are nurtured on the ground of creed and sustained by new interpretations and flavoured by culture. Historical contributions sometimes may entirely change the face of religion. By the time the religion framed their creed, their tradition's history had become vague. The concept of God or Ultimate Reality or whatever it might be called as a highest concept in religion is the core element of that religion. Pluralism values all conceptual differences to reach whatever criteria are for the highest concept which is response to Ultimate Reality. Meanwhile, logic of 'the arguments' is to produce a response to the reality of the existence of the universe. Criticisms of 'the arguments' are mainly directed to realism of argument and inference from the experience of universal principles for nature to the existence of God.

Argumentation and Proofs

The classical arguments or proofs for the existence of God try to rationalize the concept of God. The cosmological argument, the teleological argument and the ontological argument are used throughout the history of thought for rational attempt to demonstrate the existence of God (Hick 1964). These arguments can be traced back in earlier philosophies; in particular they were put in argumentative format by Jewish, Christian and Muslim philosophers (Craig 1978). Every religion use certain ways of explanations for their understanding of the concept of God. It is a natural tendency for every religion to explain their divine interpretation. However, 'the arguments' try to endorse a particular approach to understand "God". They are found to be strong or weak demonstration by believers for different reasons. Supporters of 'the arguments' hold that 'the arguments' rightly justify, rationalize and able to prove the existence of God. A general and strong suggestion from the classical arguments is that God, as a first cause, an intelligent designer and a perfect being, exists (Peterson 1991: 68-85). 'The arguments' suggest that the conclusion of the logical examination of arguments requires to be accepted by any rational man. However, some might argue that

believers do not need any logical proof to believe in God. For some believers no theistic proofs are necessary and coercion of logic is not the purpose of faith (Badham 1990: 53). Also, when one does not believe in God, he/she does not verify any types of rational argument. On the other hand, if he/she accepts these arguments on basis of his/her own religious belief and conviction, it does not contribute anything to his/her belief in God. That is to say that ‘the arguments’ are unsatisfactory (Le Poidevin 1996). Surely, there are many objections to the premises and the conclusion of the classical arguments for the existence of God. If one is not convinced by premises, ‘the arguments’ do not seem to be sound for him/her (Mackie 1982: 220). Contrary to historical and modern objections and critiques, ‘the arguments’ attract varieties of subject-matters for rational discussions around reality of the existence to conclude the First Cause, the Intelligent Designer and the Necessary Perfect Being as an existent and being.

The Cosmological Argument

The Cosmological argument for the existence of God is derived from *a posteriori* knowledge which is based on the reality of existence of the universe. It concentrates on “existence”, infers and formulates the existence of God from existence of the universe. The existence of the universe is visible experience and part of universal experience of human beings. There must be the principle of causality in the universe, and cause-effect relation can be rationally perceived. The existence of the universe needs to be rationally explained. The argument is established to demonstrate an unmoved mover, an uncaused cause and the relation of possibility and necessity of existence (Davies 1997: 60-77). The argument asserts a single entity as inferred God. Everything that begins to exist has a cause for its existence. This universe must have been begun to exist. Therefore, the universe must have a cause. This cause is the First Cause. This is a simplified version of the argument which can be extended in different forms such as efficient cause or impossibilities of infinite regress as follow: An actual infinite regress cannot exist. Therefore, the series of causes for the world being as it is now, cannot be in an infinite temporal sequence; in other words, the sequence of causes must be finite. Therefore, the world began to exist at some point in the past. And then, there was a time in the past when one of two states was possible that there may be, or may not be a universe (i.e. the universe is contingent). If it is contingent, it requires a sufficient reason for its existence. It would be suggested that nothing in the universe at our best knowledge has any ability to come to existence itself and to carry

on its existence. Contingency of existent things demonstrates this. The argument concludes that this sufficient reason is the Sufficient Being, God (Rowe 1993: 16-29, Hick 1973: 20-23, Craig 1978, Swinburne 1991: 116-133). If the universe exists, God, the First Cause and the Sufficient Being should exist.

The Teleological or Design Argument

The teleological or design argument for the existence of God also depends on *a posteriori* knowledge. It suggests that well-order in the universe and beauty of the nature requires a designer and an aim to make it possible is the existence of the universe and nature as they are. L. Gracia gives the gist of the discussion in the argument that “positing a personal cause to account for intelligibility and orderliness of the universe would explain the sheer existence of a contingent universe, and the reverse is true” (Gracia 1999: 341). The given natural laws occur wonderfully in the universe. From a smallest thing to a greatest thing, everything in the universe is a part of a great system. Things in the universe by themselves have no ability to do so, or to be in that way. The argument asserts that, it is the Intelligent Designer who is responsible for that (Barrow and Tipler 1988). The design and order of the universe can only be explained through this persona of Intelligent Designer. This persona is to be something experienced in the universe through natural laws (Davies: 119).

The Ontological Argument

The Ontological argument for the existence of God depends on *a priori* knowledge which entails that one can not think of anything greater than “God” itself. God cannot be conceived not to exist. According to this argument, something should necessarily have absolute perfection outside of the existence of the world. The idea presumes to prove the existence of God as a perfect being by thought alone on the basis of existence (Yandell 1971: 67-112). Descartes suggests that it is logically impossible to think of God without its existence; God is the being who has all perfection (Lewis 1965: 167). If one accepts the existence as a logical necessity, it requires a factual necessity and it gives a definition of a perfect necessary being which a being can not be thought of greater than itself and should exist necessarily. The conclusion of the argument is that there is a logically existent being whom neither comes into nor goes out of existence and who does not depend upon anything for coming into or continuing in existence.

I. Kant does not accept the validity of ‘the arguments’, because “God” and its existence cannot be thought separately. According to Kant logical predicate and real predicate are distinctly different. Existence is a real predicate which determines a thing in the statement of “God exists”. Therefore, according to Kant “a mere idea of a proof of the existence of an object correspondence to it” (1993: 411) fails to satisfy healthy common sense. Thus, for Kant the statement does not prove the existence of God on the basis of the relation between existence and reality (S.T. Davies 1997: 32). In both cases either the statement demonstrates the existence of God or not, the idea represents a thought on an entity, which has strong inclination to demonstrate an identity of a singular persona.

The question of whether the concepts are derived in ‘the arguments’ such as First Cause, The Intelligent Designer and Necessary Being can co-operate with the concept of “Ultimate Reality” or not, can be sought in correspondence of Pluralism in conjunction with the realism of logical arguments.

Convergence or Reciprocity?

‘The arguments’ for the existence of God conclude the First Cause, Sufficient Being, Intelligent Designer and Necessary Being as an existent and entity. The cosmological argument refers to unique causality for the existence of the universe. Order and beauty in the universe is attributed to an intelligent designer which is required to have a unique intelligence and power to do so. “God” is whom people think of as the perfection, thus this refers to a unique perfection. The affirmation of ‘the arguments’ has underlying support to each other. If there is a First Cause, it is necessarily exists for the existence of other contingent beings. If there is a Perfect Being it should be a necessary being. If the universe is made by an Intelligent Designer, it is the Cause for its existence. Thus ‘the arguments’ do not give any logical possibility to atheism or pantheist interpretation of God.

It could be accepted that human beings have the same experience of divine all around the world; they may have similar inner-character to respond to religion in a particular ways (O’Leary 1996:27). Arguably, people tend to accept the validity of their religion, wherever they were born. Pluralism takes up this point and considers that one responds to this religion as same as another one who responds to the religion around him by his same inner-character, but in a different environment and different cultural or historical packet (Dupuis 2005: 386). However, both are responding to the same Ultimate Reality. Nevertheless, Ultimate Reality does not have to be

demonstrated as it happens in ‘the arguments’. For instance, there may not be a concept of First Cause for the existence of universe for the principle of causality. Pluralism does not deny the ontological status of divine persona but not necessarily requires this realistic stand. ‘The arguments’ might fail to demonstrate or verify the principles which are derived from nature, but the personal experience of expressing of divine or respond to it cannot be falsified.

It seems that a line between theism and other religious interpretations should be drawn and should be clearly stated for a definition of valid theism. For picturing a divine entity, atheism and theism are logically contradictory as well as polytheism and monotheism. Since Judaism, Christianity and Islam may come to terms to agree upon a singular entity of God – of course controversial interpretations such as humanistic Judaism, non-theistic Christianity and etc. are excluded. Thus, traditionally these monotheistic religions have very similar conceptualisations about existence. The conclusions of ‘the arguments’ can be compatible with the concept of God in those religions although they are logically inferred. That will exclude a substantial part of relativistic approach of Pluralistic view on the conception of God, especially when the idea asserted that the world faiths hold not only that Ultimate Reality differently manifested to humankind, but also their own conceptualisation of God represents the Ultimate Reality (Dupuis 2005: 259).

‘The arguments’ suggest that God is a unique persona in causality, universal order and ontological sense. In this type of argumentation whoever accepts the existence of God through rationalisation, he/she can converge with other believers from other religions on the ground of ‘the arguments’. ‘The arguments’ give only logical demonstration of the existence and a certain profile of God. ‘The arguments’ do not mention proper names such as Jahweh, Heavenly Father, Allah, Vishnu or any other name of any kind of phenomena of God but a unique picture of Ultimate Existence, timeless, uncaused, spaceless, infinite, immaterial, changeless, perfect, omniscient, omnipotent and personal God.

Conclusion

While ‘the arguments’ and Pluralism attempt to define ‘divine’, both utilise different epistemological grounds and employ different conceptualisations. Pluralism focuses on understanding varieties of religions as different conceptual experiences of Ultimate Reality. It might also utilise mystical language for religious experience. Pluralism asserts that the difference amongst the religions is the differences of religious experience. The main concern is in this paper

whether this idea has been the question of the correspondence of this to the arguments for the existence of God such as to the cosmological, teleological and ontological argument. “Ultimate Reality” which is represented in Pluralism in a relativistic approach is different than a definition of realistic view of God in ‘the arguments’.

‘The arguments’ are not epistemologically compatible with plurality of truth-claims and Hick’s Pluralism. They are based on certain realistic world view even some believers may not entirely agree with. ‘The arguments’ present an ‘inferred entity’ instead of ‘experienced reality’ as in Pluralism. ‘Experience’ in ‘the arguments’ is counted as knowledge of the universal natural laws while Pluralism employs ‘experience’ as perception of personal and variable phenomena. On the other hand, it is possible to say that some believers would be more comfortable with the logical arguments over Hick’s Pluralism for several reasons i.e. revelation allows for the role of the intellect in arriving at proofs for the existence of God in some traditions and some traditions would be hesitant to give so much authority to religious experience given humankind’s propensity for evil and distortion of the truth.

The experience of the universal laws of nature in order to interpret a logical entity infers an existent or a being which may not be expressed in personal experiencing and interpreting religious phenomena. ‘The arguments’ depend on the assertion that there exists a complex physical universe (Parson 1989: 74). ‘The arguments’ clearly suggest a defined concept of ‘Ultimate Existence’ and use a realist language. Any religious epistemology has clear ideas about the definition of the concept of ‘Ultimate Existence’ as ‘First Cause of causation of all beings’, ‘Intelligent Designer of the order of the existence’ and ‘Necessary Being as Perfection of being’ can correspond with a ‘defined’ and ‘inferred’ concept of God. However, First Cause of the universe may not necessarily be—as Hick puts— ‘a deity to whom an unqualified devotion, love and trust would be appropriate’, and ‘A Necessary Being, and indeed a being, who is metaphysically absolute in every respect- omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, uncreated- might be morally good or evil’ (Badham 1990: 51). Therefore, the concepts derived from ‘the arguments’ such as First Cause and Necessary Being are far from defining ‘Ultimate Reality’ *per se*. In fact, ‘the arguments’ do not aim to define God with all attributes but only aim to demonstrate God’s existence and beingness.

Thus, an incompatibility of justification of religious belief can epistemologically be viewed in Pluralism in conjunction with ‘the arguments’. Pluralism merely depends upon religious experience while ‘the arguments’ rely on logical demonstration. Reality of God in Pluralism is suggested as ‘personally experienced presence’ instead of a conclusion of logical inference of the reality of the material world.

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ÖZET

Mantıksal Argümantasyon Realizmi Karşısında Felsefi Dini Çoğulculuk

Bu makalede, Tanrının varlığına ait mantıksal argümanlar felsefi teolojik Pluralizmin kavramsal göreceliği ile birlikte incelenmiştir. Varlık'a ait mantıksal bir argüman geliştirmek için kişilerin felsefi zeminlerini belirlemesi ve seçmesi gerekmektedir. Bu zeminler realistik veya göreceli yaklaşımlar gibi çok çeşitli olabilir. Her hangi bir dini argüman açısından 'varlık'ın/'zât'ın varoluşsal tartışmaları oldukça önemlidir. Bunun da ötesinde, dinin felsefi yorumları kavramsal olarak 'kutsal'ın tanımlanması üzerine dayanır. Kozmolojik, teleolojik ve ontolojik argümanlar realistik bir dünya görüşüne dayanmaktadır. İlk Neden, Akıllı Tasarımcı, Zorunlu Varlık gibi kavramlar bu tür argümanlar üzerinden çıkarılmaktadır. Bununla birlikte, Pluralizm, her insanın farklı kavram ve isimlerle birlikte farklı yollarla, aynı 'Nihai Hakikat'i yorumladıkları sonucuna ulaşmaktadır. Pluralizmin doğruluk-iddialarının mantıksal argümanların realizmi ile olan ilişkisi, dini argümanların doğrulama metodlarında argümantasyon mantığının nasıl işlediğini anlamaya yardımcı olacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Realizm, Görecelik, Argümantasyon, Dini Pluralizm, Doğruluk-İddiası, Zât, Varlık, Tanrı'nın Kişiliği.