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THE DISTINCTIVE APPROACH TO RATIONAL AND TRANSMITTED PROOFS IN MATURIDI THEOLOGY

Abstract. *This article examines the distinctive approach of Maturidi theology to rational (aqlī) and transmitted (naqlī) proofs. The study begins by defining the key terms dalil (proof), naqlī dalil, and aqlī dalil and then comparatively situates the Maturidi school within the broader typology of methodological approaches to the knowledge of truth. The article traces the five-part classification of epistemological orientations formulated by Imam al-Ghazali, the three guiding principles of Ahl al-Sunna's balanced method, and the specific position of the Maturidiyya as a school that grants wider scope to reason than the Ash'ariyya while maintaining the primacy of transmitted evidence over the Mu'tazila. The conclusion argues that the Maturidi synthesis of reason and revelation constitutes one of the most intellectually rigorous and practically relevant achievements of classical Islamic theology.*

Keywords: *Maturidiyya, rational proof (aqlī dalil), transmitted proof (naqlī dalil), kalam, Ash'ariyya, Mu'tazila, manhaj, epistemology, Ahl al-Sunna, ta'wil.*

INTRODUCTION

All praise is due to Allah, and peace and blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad. May Allah be pleased with the scholars who have protected the Muslim community from going astray.

More than a millennium has passed since Imam al-Maturidi departed this world, yet the teaching he founded has not lost its relevance. The primary reason for this enduring vitality is that Maturidi theology rests on firm foundations for understanding the precepts of the faith. Before entering the main subject, it is useful to clarify several key terms.

A proof (dalil) is defined as follows: «A proof is that whose knowledge necessitates the knowledge of something else» (al-Farhawi, 2012:128). That is, by understanding a proof one arrives at an understanding of the thing to which it points.

A transmitted proof (naqlī dalil), in the technical usage of the scholars of kalam when stated in a general and unrestricted sense, is understood to encompass only the Book (the Quran), the Sunnah, and Ijma' (scholarly consensus) (al-Khan, 2007:32). This is because it is in view of the fact that the establishment of doctrinal matters must rest on a revelatory basis.

A rational proof (aqlī dalil) is «a proof that points to the sought object (matlub) without requiring a linguistic convention (wad')» (al-Khan, 2007:32). That is, in a rational proof one arrives at what the proof indicates through reflection on meanings and essences, without regard to words and phrases.

Having clarified our understanding of the terms, we shall now comparatively examine the place of these proofs in other theological traditions in order to gain a full understanding of their role within Maturidi thought. This will make it vividly apparent what standing rational and transmitted proofs hold in Maturidi theology, for a thing is known through its opposite.

MAIN PART

From antiquity, human beings have striven to comprehend the truth of existence. This subject has always attracted them and prompted deep reflection. Contemplation on existence led to certain conclusions. The common feature shared by all members of humanity in their search for the truths of existence is that they acknowledged the existence of truths and strove to know them. Regrettably, alongside this there also existed categories of people who denied truths, who rejected their existence or their absolute character. In our sources these are referred to as the Sophists (sufastaiyya) (Abd al-Rahim, 2024:107).

The views of philosophers who took reason as their foundation for comprehending the truths of existence began, for certain reasons, to spread among Muslims as well. When this state of affairs began to exert a negative influence on matters of creed, a section of Muslim scholars was compelled to study their ideas carefully and to separate the correct from the erroneous and they performed this task with great success. The result was that the scholars of kalam established a distinctive, balanced, and rational methodology for arriving at truth.

Although the scholars who pursued the search for truth shared a common purpose, they reached different results. The reason for this lies in the fact that the methods and approaches (usul wa manhaj) they followed in this pursuit differed from one another for diversity of method leads to diversity of outcome.

In this way, the methodologies directed towards the comprehension of truth may be grouped under four general headings:

1. A mutakallim (scholar of kalam) one who follows transmitted evidence (naql) and also pursues the path of rational reflection.

2. A philosopher one who, without following transmitted evidence, engages exclusively in rational reflection.

3. A Sufi one who follows transmitted evidence and pursues the path of spiritual discipline (riyāḍa).

4. An Illuminationist (ishraqī) one who pursues the path of spiritual discipline alone, without transmitted evidence, seeking to arrive at truth through divine light (nūr ilahī).

All seek truth that is, the First Cause (the divine principle). But means are necessary to reach the goal. The more correct and reliable the means, the more direct the path and the greater the probability of reaching the goal. In this pursuit, different groups relied on different sources:

Philosophers relied on sensory perception and rational proofs. Among them there were those who also accepted revelation (divine communication), but they acknowledged it as a shahid (corroborating witness) only when it accorded with their own views; otherwise they subjected it to ta'wil (allegorical interpretation).

The scholars of kalam, in addition to rational and sensory proofs, also accepted revelation (naql) as a primary proof (mu'assil). Although the degree of attention given to revelation differed among them, they generally recognized it as the central source.

The Sufis expanded the sources of knowledge, adding to the triad of reason, sensory perception, and revelation that the mutakallimun relied upon the 'ilm ladunī (divinely bestowed knowledge) grounded in divine inspiration and unveiling (kashf). This gave their sources of knowledge a wider scope than those of others.

It is possible to see that the scholars of kalam, in their rational pursuit of truth, also followed transmitted evidence and it is precisely through this feature that they were distinguished from others. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that all scholars of kalam followed one and the same path, for the scholars of the science of kalam differed among themselves in their approaches to proofs.

The kalam methodology is an approach that, while relying on rational reflection to seek truths, does not leave transmitted evidence out of account. Nearly all Islamic currents fall within this methodology, even if they differ from one another in their paths and views regarding proofs for the primary criterion here is the methodology itself, and commonality of

methodology does not mean that outcomes will be wholly identical. Indeed, groups using the same methodology apply it differently according to their own purposes and interpretations.

«There is, at first glance and in outward appearance, a contradiction between reason and transmitted evidence» (al-Ghazali, 1993:15). According to Imam al-Ghazali, the following differences of methodology exist in resolving this contradiction:

1. Those who relied entirely on transmitted evidence and set reason aside.
2. Those who advanced reason alone and denied transmitted evidence.
3. The moderates who endeavoured to bring them together.

The moderates, in turn, are further divided:

- Those who took reason as the foundation and made transmitted evidence follow it.
- Those who took transmitted evidence as the foundation and made reason follow it.
- Those who took both reason and transmitted evidence equally as foundations and sought the path of harmonizing and reconciling them.

When each of these groups is examined separately they fall into five categories. «The fifth category is the group that takes the middle path, proceeding with both rational and transmitted proofs, and regarding both as foundational. They affirm that there is no contradiction between reason and the Sharia, for whoever denies reason has in effect denied the Sharia as well since the veracity of the Sharia is known through reason... If the Sharia has been established by reason, how can reason deny the Sharia?» (al-Ghazali, 1993:19–20). The following passage expresses how demanding this path is for those who take both reason and transmitted evidence as their foundation:

«They those who take reason and transmitted evidence as their foundation are those who have found the truth and who followed a firm path. But they ascended to a high and difficult station and aspired to a great goal, choosing a toilsome way. They devoted themselves to what is hard to attain and walked a difficult road. Truly, in some matters this path was easy, but in many it was hard and burdensome» (al-Ghazali, 1993:20).

In order to resolve problems and to arrive at a correct understanding of questions while maintaining a middle course, defined standards are necessary. From this standpoint, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jama'a, in order to ensure a balanced approach, elaborated principles consisting of three main criteria:

First criterion: Not applying reason in matters that can only be known through transmitted evidence. For matters of this kind lie outside the domain of reflection and are above the

cognitive capacity of the human intellect. In the science of ‘aqida such matters are called sam’iyyat. The sam’iyyat encompass primarily eschatological topics that is, unseen matters such as paradise, hellfire, the punishment of the grave, the scales (mīzan), and the bridge (ṣirat). In this chapter the primary source is not reason but revelation (naql) the Quran and the sound (ṣaḥīḥ) hadiths.

Second criterion: Accepting only statements that have been confirmed by proof and evidence. Ahl al-Sunna values reason and regards it as an important instrument. But this attention is directed not at just any idea, but only at views that are well-grounded and substantiated by evidence. For this reason, in the view of Ahl al-Sunna, reason is a means of accepting ideas formed on the basis of clear evidence and proofs not of conjecture and fancy lacking any proof. This approach serves to maintain the balance between reason and transmitted evidence.

Third criterion: The apparent (ẓahir) meaning of texts is subjected to ta’wil only when it conflicts with both reason and transmitted evidence. In addition, Ahl al-Sunna categorically rejects ta’wil that contradicts reason and transmitted evidence. That is, every word must first be understood on the basis of its lexical its primary Arabic meaning. Only when there is a clear proof deriving from reason or transmitted evidence that contradicts it is ta’wil resorted to. The interpreted meaning must also be in conformity with reason and transmitted evidence. A ta’wil that contradicts reason and transmitted evidence is likewise not accepted (al-Damanhuri, 2018).

Those who sought truth through this methodology are the Ash’ariyya and the Maturidiyya. It is true that there exist certain differing views between them on particular questions no one denies this. What is important is that these differences are in the secondary details of the creed, not in its fundamental principles. For this reason, serious consequences such as innovation (bid’a) or moral deviance do not follow from these divergences.

What is most important for us is that the range of disagreement between the Ash’ariyya and the Maturidiyya is considerably narrower than it is in relation to other groups. The reason for this is that their manhaj that is, their methodology of thought and approach to proofs is built on the same foundation. The closer the methodologies are to each other, the fewer the disagreements; conversely, as the divergences in methodology grow, so too do the differences.

If on a given question the Ash’ariyya happen to share a view with another group while the Maturidiyya holds a different position, it is not possible to say that the Ash’ariyya are closer

to that group. For the fundamental difference in methodology shows that these groups are in reality entirely distinct from one another. Sometimes the outcome may be identical, but this similarity does not signify proximity. For this reason, a deep study of their modes of thinking is of the utmost importance. The scholars have a wise saying on this matter: «Knowledge is not a collection of questions but a methodology.» «Half of knowledge lies in knowing the methodology.»

Up to this point we have examined the differences between the Maturidiyya and the other *firqas* outside of *Ahl al-Sunna*. We shall now set out the differences between the *Ash'ariyya* and the Maturidiyya.

Even though the two schools share the same *manhaj*, differences arose between them because of their differing attitudes towards proofs. It must be emphasized that in Maturidi theology a wider scope is granted to reason than in the *Ash'ariyya*. «It follows from the fact that other obligatory duties depend on rational reflection (*nazar*) that rational reflection is established as the first obligation of the legally responsible person (*mukallaf*)» (Salim, 2024). For this reason, Imam Abu Hanifa explicitly stated that there is no excuse for a person possessed of reason who fails to recognize his Lord. It is also because of this Maturidi attention to reason that the Maturidiyya is considered the school of moderation between the *Ash'ariyya* and the *Mu'tazila*.

«Although the Maturidiyya take reason into account, this does not mean they have no need of transmitted evidence (*naql*). Sound reason is one of the foundations of knowledge, but this does not make the guidance of transmitted evidence unnecessary. This confirms what scholars have said that the Maturidi *manhaj* is a middle (*wasafī*) *manhaj* between the *Mu'tazila*, who place greater emphasis on reason, and the *Ash'ariyya*, who place greater emphasis on transmitted evidence. Accordingly, Maturidi theology is distinguished from the *Mu'tazilites* by giving precedence to transmitted evidence in the domain of knowledge, and from the *Ash'ariyya* by granting wider scope to reason. In their view, reason and transmitted evidence stand at the same level. Both are among the foundational sources through which knowledge is produced. If transmitted evidence points the way, reason is the one who finds the path by its light» (Salim, 2024).

When we carefully examine the foundations of the Maturidi methodology and the place of reason and transmitted evidence within it, we are drawn to two important dimensions: the coherent and harmonious composition of the Maturidi method that is, reason and transmitted evidence combine within a single system to constitute a unified methodology. In essence,

these two are inseparable: sound reason and transmitted evidence the two together are like the sun and its light; neither can exist without the other.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Maturidiyya pays particular attention to maintaining balance between reason and transmitted evidence. The Maturidis accepted reason as a genuine source of knowledge. While strictly adhering to transmitted evidence the Quran and the Sunnah they endeavoured to comprehend them in depth through reason. By choosing the middle path, the Maturidiyya accepts both reason and transmitted evidence as equal foundations, standing in a position of balance not only with respect to the Ash'ariyya but also with respect to the Mu'tazila. Studying this teaching thoroughly in our own day creates the possibility of understanding the errors of those who study religion one-sidedly, sowing discord everywhere, and of being able to offer them reasoned refutations.

May Allah keep us all in the correct belief and protect us from going astray.

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