

A Comparative Study of Argument from Primordial Nature and Argument from General Consensus on the Demonstration of Existence of God

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Abstract:

Historical evidences suggest that human beings have been always in search of God in some form. Some believe that man is born with this divine sense. This ubiquitous quality of human beings is called primordial nature (*fitrah*). Many scholars have tried to demonstrate the existence of God through this shared quality of human individuals. In Islamic thought this latter intellectual effort has been designated as "argument from primordial nature" and in western theological and philosophical thought it is known as "argument from general consensus". Although these arguments have some differences in their general settings and attitudes; but they both resort to human general divine attitude to demonstrate the existence of God. In this essay we have sought to propound the views of those scholars who have dealt with this argument at length. Reflecting on the general form of the expositions shows that the expositions of argument from primordial nature and argument from general consensus cannot demonstrate the existence of God without basing themselves on the principle of causation or human existential poverty. Via comparative assessment of these two arguments we have turned to the critiques which have been leveled against them and laid bare their similarities and differences. Of course there are some differences between the argument from primordial nature in Islam and the argument from general consensus in west. This essay seeks to assay the key expositions which have been offered of these arguments in Islamic and western philosophies. It seems that among Moslem philosophers, Mulla Sadra from the early generation, Allameh Tabatabaei, Imam Khomeini, Jawadi Amuli and Mutahari from later generation, have paid more attention to this argument. Among western scholars one can mention William James, Charles Hodge, James Joyce, Paul Tillich and Seneca who have made more direct remarks on this argument. John Locke is also against this argument. This is why we have devoted this essay to the key views developed regarding these arguments.

When we put together different expositions of the argument from primordial nature and the argument from general consensus we reach to a general principle which constitutes the foundation of both arguments; i.e. the existence of a common sense in all human individuals in all times and places. To put it differently, both argument are founded on the idea that there

is an inborn disposition in man which pushes him/her toward the Supreme and this disposition has existed in all times and places. But when we analyze the theories one by one we become aware of the slightest differences and similarities.

It seems that the second type biological expositions are nearer to the exposition of argument from primordial nature based on correlation. We mean those expositions which regard the generality of belief in God an indication of a primordial disposition toward God. The first type of expositions which interpret the enthusiasm for God in terms of instinctual needs cannot be an indication of primordial nature; since primordial nature is an exclusive faculty of humanity. Of course it is also noteworthy that the primordial nature to which the argument from the general consensus refers is a potentiality which needs to be actualized while Islamic thought suggests that primordial nature exists in all human individuals in a fulfilled form even if it is neglected now and then.

As to anti-skeptistic expositions we have to say that this exposition has one premise to the effect that all human beings who believe in God have accepted his existence in a rational way; particularly James Joyce who is the main proponent of this exposition believes that all human beings are open to their creator due to the decisive and clear call of reason. Thus it seems that this exposition of the argument from general consensus is similar to the third form of the argument from primordial nature; since in both the infallibility of human inner sense has been taken into account; though this infallibility is attributed to primordial nature in Islamic argument but Joyce regards it a quality of human reason as such. Then it remains to be asked that if primordial nature as understood in Islam is the same thing Joyce calls it reason? It is not definitely so as primordial nature in Islamic thought is envisaged as an exclusive quality of human being which is divine, fulfilled and inborn; but reason despite its inhabitation in human inside has to search the inside and outside for God. In other words, reason is a means with which one searches for Divine Essence; but primordial nature is an expression of human existential need; and being an inner call it invites the man toward God; primordial nature works through intuition and presential knowledge while reason bases itself on intellection, research and reflection.

KeyWords: argument from primordial nature, argument from general consensus, the principle of causation, existential poverty, love

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