

The Rational Psychology of Perfect Being Theology: Towards a New Islamic Hermeneutics

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Abstract

Some of the attributes of a perfect being (e.g. first cause, necessary being, intelligent creator) are established on the basis of theological arguments such as the cosmological and the teleological. At the deepest level, these theological arguments are based on principles of rational psychology such as simplicity and sufficient reason. Moreover, belief that the perfect being is the moral omnipotent God is an act of trust and thus based on the rational psychology of trust. Theists in the Abrahamic tradition subscribe to first cause/necessary being/intelligent creator theology and must therefore remain faithful to any psychological principles (simplicity, sufficient reason, trust) that are the rational grounds for believing in the existence of their God. But such faithfulness results in a deep tension within Judeo-Christian theism. For example, a Christian theist who believes in the Trinity must at the same time remain faithful to the principle of simplicity that rejects the Trinity. Because simplicity is the rational basis for the deeply cherished attributes of the Christian God (first cause/necessary being/intelligent creator), it is argued that faithfulness to psychological principles such as simplicity discipline Christian theistic belief, in particular the belief in the Trinity. Examples of this nature offer a framework for a similar disciplining of Islamic hermeneutics on the basis of rational psychology. Muslim interpreters tend not to systematically engage in the philosophy of religion, and for this reason do not explicitly articulate the psychological principles that gave them their theistic Muslim identity. As a result, they deviate from such principles when it comes time to interpret the original sources of Islam (Quran and Sunna). Consistency is one of the demands of rationality, and it is inconsistent to assume principles in arriving at a theistic Muslim identity and then subsequently fail to apply those principles consistently to the task of textual interpretation.

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