

The Arguments for the Existence of God: A Different Approach in Contemporary Islamic Philosophy

Hamidreza Ayatollahy
Professor of Philosophy Department
Allameh Tabataba'ii University
Tehran- Iran

Abstract:

The adventure of arguments for proving the existence of God in later development of Islamic philosophy has quite different line from Western philosophy of religion. One of the most notable answers is the argument called "the *Seddiqin* Argument." This argument is unknown for Western philosophy of religion and I try to explain this argument. The most famous version of this argument has been proposed by *Sadr al-Din Shirazi* (980/1572-1050/1640), called also "Mulla Sadra". This argument has a high place in Islamic philosophy. I am going to introduce this argument and its philosophical foundations in the framework of new conceptions of Western Philosophy. This argument is based on fundamental reality of existence, analogical gradation and simplicity of existence.

I am going to propose other versions of this argument; and after some explanations about Sabzavari's *Seddighin* Argument I will introduce the last kind of this argument in Tabataba'ii's views, which is its simplest version.

I will explain, at the end, the differences between this argument and ontological argument in Western philosophy of religion.

Introduction

It is usual assumed that the arguments for proving the existence of God are just as Kant's classification and they are in Western tradition. The main arguments are ontological, cosmological and design arguments. There are also some more arguments posed after this classification like arguments from religious experience, moral arguments and etc. But all of them are not as important as the first three ones. Every book in philosophy of religion has allocated an important chapter for the arguments for the existence of God. There is also a long adventure for these arguments: some philosophers have developed them and some

others have criticized them. All the debates centers on these three as if there is no other attempt in this regards.

The adventure of arguments for proving the existence of God in later development of Islamic philosophy - which is not in the direction of dead end of Ghazzali's approach and Averose unfollowed philosophy- has quite different line from Western philosophy of religion. These philosophical works in this respect are unknown for Western thinkers. The necessity-contingency argument has different path in contemporary Islamic philosophy nowadays from cosmological argument especially in Leibnizian reading of this argument that is based on "sufficient reason".

One of the most notable answers is the Argument called "*Seddiqin* Argument." Because *Seddiqin* argument is unknown for Western philosophy of religion I try to explain this argument in this paper. This argument has some characteristics and advantages over other arguments. Islamic philosophers have found it a rational way to God and have set forth new aspects in describing it. The most famous version of this argument has been proposed by *Sadr al-Din Shirazi* (980/1572-1050/1640), called also "Mulla Sadra". He set forth his argument and its foundations in detail in his book "*Al-Asfar*". There are some difficulties in understanding his argument and its foundations, which are scattered in this and his other books. This argument is proposed in the framework of Islamic philosophy, which differs from Western philosophy in some aspects. In this paper I am going to simplify his argument, propose it in the framework of Western philosophy.

Mulla Sadra achieved a changing point in philosophy in the light of importance of existence. This changing point was "fundamental reality of existence" or "principality of existence" that refers to the truth of existence not its notion. All philosophers before him had based their ideas on the different conditions of quiddity or thing-ness which means the anticipation of quiddity to the existence that, in their views, is regarded after categorical explanation of all things. If we consider truth of existence in every thing prior to its quiddity (thing-ness) as only fundamental real, then every philosophical explanation will change. He has argued for this important philosophically changing point then he has examined, deeply, all other philosophical subject in the light of this principality of existence. Therefore, all philosophical studies like causality, change and movement, unity and multiplicity and etc. would have new and deeper meaning by acceptance of fundamental reality of existence.

In the light of principality of existence we will have a new philosophical perspective of the world that is deeper and more real. In this light we will have the vision of occupation of real world only of existence and nothing else. All other meanings arise from this vision and they should have their fundamental reality in this light. If we may think in this manner we do not think of meaning of existence (like what happened in ontological argument) but we encounter the truth of existence. This truth is quite different from all starting point in Western philosophy of religion for proving the existence of God. The truth of existence, first of all, refer to its nature that is pure existence, which is not any thing other than richness, then to other limited existent beings, which are not any thing other than poor-ness (not a poor existent being). This is what *Seddiqin* argument wants to demonstrate.

Therefore, in the light of fundamental reality of existence not only we may obtain a deeper idea of God and his relation to the world and a valuable argument for proving His existence but also we may think of other philosophical subjects in a new and deeper meaning and demonstrations.

I hope the reader will try to accompany this argument with patience and deep attention to the core of philosophical foundations of this argument. I believe that if we may contemplate on philosophical subject not as only empirical facts of the world but deeper contemplation in reality it will be possible for us to capture this new vision.

The *Seddiqin* Argument:

The "*Seddiqin* Argument" offered by Mulla Sadra is the result of the development of previous philosophical views in the history of Islamic philosophy. Since the "*Seddiqin* Argument" can have no useful result without its philosophical foundations, the study and scrutiny of these foundations is important to the explanation of the argument and have rendered argument strong in opposition to many criticisms that had troubled others before and after Mulla Sadra. These foundations must be explained in detail in some other larger researches with their necessary demonstration. I explain briefly only those foundations that are important for propounding the argument:

1- To Sadra the "notion of existence" is one of the best known concepts. It is self-evident and is reasonable by itself, because it is self apparent and makes others apparent. But the deepest reality of existence has in the extremity of hiddenness¹. Because its deepest

reality is external, if its reality were to come to our mind as one thing among others this would lose its reality, because the reality in so far as it is reality -in contrast to its notion- must be external and remain outside the mind. Since its deepest reality is external, so it can not be grasped by mind. In this argument the truth and reality of existence is considered, not its notion, which differs from its reality.

2- When we study some evidence of reality like the existence of "I", of "the earth", of a "tree", or of "whiteness" and so on, we realize that we have many conceptions of things like "tree", "earth" , "I", "whiteness" and so on, and each of them differs from the others. But, in spite of their differences they have one similarity, namely that "all of them exist and have reality outside mind." So, we know that we have two notions of things, one of them is notions like tree, whiteness, earth, etc., and the other is the notion of existence or reality that is connected to all of those notions. We name the first one thing-ness, or "quiddity", and the second one "existence".

If we observe carefully we will realize that our mental concept of existence is contrary to the concept of things like tree, the earth, whiteness, etc. to which we ascribe existence. Our reason abstracts quiddity - which is said in answer to the "what?-of-definition" - from existence, conceives it, and then ascribes existence to it in the mind. This means that existence is additional and like an accident to quiddity in the mind, and the concept of that existence is not the same as that of a quiddity or any part of it. This difference can be realized just by surveying our mind and its conception of existence and quiddity.

It must be added that existence has two aspects, one external and the other mental. But even in the mind the separation of quiddity from existence is not conceivable. It is obtainable only by rational analysis and laboring, because what is in the mind is a "mental existence" just as something in the external world is an "external existence". But it is of the very nature of the intellect to notice quiddity in abstraction, totally discarding both modes of existence by not taking them into consideration rather than by simply negating them. In other words, if as a result of hard work by the mind we separate quiddity from both kinds of existence then quiddity would not be existence.

3- There is only existence (its truth not its concept) in the external world. By observing the limitations of existence and its boundaries with non-existence² our mind

makes some concepts of things that are different from each other which these concepts are quiddities. Therefore, what is fundamentally real is existence; quiddity is mentally posited as that which has existence only figuratively. The fundamental reality of existence is the main basis of this argument. This meaning is named "Fundamental reality of existence" or "principality of existence".

The main character of Sadra's philosophy is "fundamental reality of existence" and its results, which affects deeply on other parts of his philosophy. This viewpoint brought about different solution for many philosophical problems³. Distinguishing between the "notion" of existence and its deepest reality is the main subject of his metaphysics. Because, according to his view, confusion between "concept" and "reality" of existence and their specifications will cause basic mistakes. It will be shown that many problems that caused difficulties for others - both Western and Islamic philosophy - arose from this confusion. Therefore, it is emphasized that reader should have accuracy in this subject; and must study carefully that which specification belong to the "notion of existence" and which other belong to the "reality of existence".

4- The reality of existence is one in all beings; in different beings there is not different truth, but all refer to the one truth. Simultaneously, there are multiple beings that have multiplicity in this reality of existence. Since there is nothing in reality other than the truth of existence, so the unifying factor is the same as the distinguishing factor; both are existence. The truth of existence is "one" at the same time that is "many". It has unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity. In existent truths the unifying factor is the same as the distinguishing factor, and differences of "existence" are due to the intensity and weakness, the perfection and imperfection, or priority and posteriority. In fact, intensity and weakness are only about degrees of the one truth in which the unifying factor is the same as distinguishing factor. This view is called "analogical gradation"; therefore, the existence has analogical gradation in reality.

5- The relation of cause and caused in the light of the fundamental reality of existence: the cause is what gives existence to the caused (like you and your imaginary apple that you bring it into existence in your mind). It is not only a mental ascription, but a real external relation between cause and caused. However this does not mean that there are

three things (cause, caused and what that cause gives to the caused) and two actions (giving by the cause and taking by the caused). The caused is not other than what the cause brings into existence, which is just the act of giving, nay, the act of bringing into existence. Therefore, the caused is just what is given by the cause, what takes existence from the cause, and the act of giving and taking. It is our mind that considers causality in several aspects compares it with other things, and then creates several notions within it. In fact, there is nothing in reality but the existence of the cause and dependent existence of the caused. That the caused is a dependent being does not mean that it is a being that has its dependency added like an accident; rather it is not other than dependency and need to the cause. It is just a need, so that its relation to its cause is an illuminative one which has only one side, not a categorical relation that is based on two sides. In the light of the analogical gradation of existence, the caused is a weaker degree of existence than its cause which gives existence to it continually. The cause has some perfection that the caused does not have, because its essential need makes it posterior to its cause. The dependent identity of the existence of the caused that is naught but need posits it in a situation at the boundary of existence and non- existence. As soon as this relation is eliminated, it will be in non-existence, nay it would not be anything to non-exist. Consequently, being caused produces a kind of limitation that makes the caused tangent to non-existence; the quiddity of the caused is what results from these limitations by the mind.

Based on the above foundations, Mulla Sadra's *Seddiqin* Argument can be stated as follow:

A: The truth and reality of existence does not accept non-existence. An existent being in so far as it is an existent being will never be non-existence. Likewise non-existence⁴ in so far as it is non-existence will never be existence. The truth of becoming non-existence in existent beings is the limitation of special existences. It does not mean that existence accepts non-existence which is its contradiction. Non-existence is not a real thing; we comprehend the meaning of non-existence by comparing one degree of existence or its limitations with another degree and its limitations. This is a relative matter.

B: The truth of existence without any respect, relation and dependency that may limit and condition it, is equal to perfection, absoluteness, rich, intensity, actuality, unlimited-ness and glory. But, all of deficiency, weakness, conditionality, poverty,

possibility, limitation and determination are not from the essence of existence, but from non-existences that are the result of being caused. A being, in so far as it is a limited existence and joined to non-existence, has these qualifications, all of which arise from non-existence. The pure truth of existence is opposite to non-existence; the circumstances of non-existence are outside the pure truth of existence and are negated by it.

C: The pure truth of existence exists, because it is just existent; non-existence is absurd for it. The truth of existence in its essence, i.e. in being existent and in its reality, is not conditioned by any nor does it depend on any stipulation. Pure existence exists because it is existence, not by any other criterion or by the supposition of the existence of any other thing. Pure existence in its essence is not conditioned by any condition. On the other hand, completeness, glory, intensity, richness, actuality, being unlimited and independence arise from existence, and have no reality but existence. Therefore, the truth of existence in its essence is equal to unconditionality in relation to any other thing, i.e. eternal essential necessity. It is, also, equal to completeness and independence, etc. Consequently, the truth of existence in its essence without any external determination joined to it is equal to the eternal existence of God. Thus, the fundamental reality of existence guides us directly to God, not to any other thing. This does not result in: "God exists": the result is that "truth of existence in essence is not but God". Other realities than God, which are nothing except His acts, effects and manifestations, must be explained by other reasons.

Mulla Sadra's view can be clarified by an example which in some respects clarifies the argument, but is not similar to our subject in all respects. If we suppose that there is only a luminous source that shines by itself as such (note that to be luminous in essence does not require that this source be unique), then will be a light in the world, but all the lights that we can see do not come directly from the source. There are many other things that have light so they can be seen, but all of these lights that come from different things are dependent lights that are the result of reflection and absorption of the light of the source. Since everything has some characteristics like special shape and quality, so its light will be limited in shining and color. Some of these things reflect the light directly from the source, some others reflect this first reflection, and i.e. they reflect the light of source indirectly. Every lighted thing itself can be a source for other things and makes them bright. When the sun shines, some things get light from it directly and shine - like earth and the outsides of buildings. Some other things get their light from these things which can be the cause of the brightness of others,

and so on until there may be a very weak light in the most inner parts of a house (for example). So, some things have light directly from the source, some others indirectly with one, two, three or more intermediaries.

It is evident that everything like B that has its light from other thing like A as its cause, has a weaker degree of light than the light of its cause. If its cause is combined of three colors, the caused cannot be combined of other colors. The color of that which is caused can only be equal or less than its cause and certainly of a lesser intensity. For a thing which has light in a caused manner this light must be limited and weaker. The limitation and weakness is essential to a caused light and indicates that it is caused as to light. However, the source that has light as such has no limitation in its shining. In physics every source of light shines spherically in all directions without any differences. The philosophical demonstration of spherical shining is that no direction has advantage over others which would make light shine in one direction stronger than another. If it does not shine in one direction there must be an external obstacle. If its shining is not spherical, there must be some reason for it; but spherical shining does not need any reason; the essence of the source of light is unconditional in this respect.

Therefore, there are two types of lights. The first type is light in itself and from itself, and the second is light by something else (that is dependent light). The latter is really the light from a source; it is a representation of the light of the source which in other things is limited.

Now, it can be asked why a certain thing is a special degree of light with a kind of limitation, but there is no way to ask why the source, which is light in itself not by something else, has light. It is unconditional light without any limitation in essence. Every one - even blind people - that only know and believe that there is light in the external world recognize the two kinds of light: first light-by-something-else and second light by essence. It is evident also that light by essence has light, nay, it is light and others have light and appear by it. What is disputable is why a certain light is a weaker grade of light and is limited by darkness. The answer is in the fact that it is light, not in itself, but by something else and this light is caused. Dependency or being caused is the essence of this light; every light that can be supposed to be a caused light will be caused.

Light is similar to existence in some respects, with the difference that there is nothing other than existence externally. There is no limiting factor other than existence, while in the example of light there are many things with their special properties that cause some

limitations for light. There are some other differences including that existence in itself requires unity, while light does not.

3-The Development of *Seddiqin* Argument:

The *Seddiqin* Argument was defined as an argument that proves the existence of God and His attributes by a meditation in the truth of existence. Since this kind of argumentation has more advantages than other kinds of reasoning, some philosophers had tried to state it in other ways. Mehdi Ashtiani in his book "*Ta'liqah Ala Sharh al-Manzumah fi al-Hikmat*" enumerated nineteen statements of the *Seddiqin* Argument as posed by several philosophers⁵. However, this argument obtained a new and promising articulation by Mulla Sadra. After him, two philosophers developed his *Seddiqin* argument and posed it in a new form. Here, we only explain its two statements by Sabzavari (1797-1828) and Tabataba'ii (1902-1981).

Sabzevari's Seddiqin Argument:

Sabzavari has a commentary on Sadra's famous book, *Asfar*. He stated his argument in his commentary on Sadra's explanation of the *Seddiqin* Argument⁶. He noted that all of the foundations that are used by Mulla Sadra for his *Seddiqin* Argument are not necessary for proving the existence of God, although they are useful for the result of this argument, viz. for proving the attributes of God and explaining the kind of relation between God and creatures. These, however, are not necessary in the basic argument. Moreover these foundations also make proving the existence of God difficult and need to be stated with great precision in order to be understood. As was explained, the *Seddiqin* Argument in Sadra's philosophy is based on some foundations like (1) the fundamental reality of existence, (2) the analogical gradation of existence and (3) the simplicity of existence; the argument itself is explained by a meditation on the truth of existence. Sabzavari posed his argument by using only the first foundation of Sadra's argument i.e. the fundamental reality of existence. Therefore his argument is shorter than Sadra's argument. His argument run as follows:

After admitting fundamental reality of existence it can be said that the truth of existence is just the external and the fundamental truth of reality while quiddity is its function and representation. Hence quidditive existent beings are not that truth itself, but a

kind of manifestation of it. So, the truth of existence itself is an absolute truth, not a limited or conditioned truth. It would be absurd for this truth, though not for its manifestations, to accept non-existence because everything that has a contradictory and opposite does not accept its contradictory and opposite. So, the mere truth of existence rejects non-existence essentially (note that this is not conditioned by 'as long as its essence remain', because if this rejection is conditioned by the term 'as long as its essence remains' the mere truth of existence will not be a mere and absolute fact). Therefore, the mere truth of existence is necessary being by essence; and this necessity is not an essential (logical) necessity, but an eternal necessity (or essential philosophical necessity). So, that truth of existence is essentially necessary being.

Seddiqin Argument in Tabatabaii's Viewpoint

Sabzavari's argument made *Seddiqin* Argument shorter than that offered by Mulla Sadra, because there was no need for analogical gradation of existence and its simplicity. The only foundation for Sabzavari's argument was affirmation of the fundamental reality of existence.

However, Tabatabaii made the argument shorter even than Sabzavari, for in Tabatabaii's argument there is no need for any philosophical foundation even for the fundamental reality of existence. His argument can be posed as a first subject in philosophy. He posed his argument in his notes on Sadra's explanation of *Seddiqin* Argument in the *Asfar*⁷. Tabatabaii's argument can be explained as follow:

Before discussing about external reality (that it is existence or quiddity), the reality is accepted. This argument begins with the truth of reality. First of all, it is inescapable for every intellectual to accept reality. Reality cannot be proved, because it is essentially evident. Tabatabaii did not assert that reality is just what we conceive, but he argues that everybody believes that there is something real externally, whatsoever it is, regardless to its specifications or numeral characteristics. If we try to prove the truth of reality we have confessed previously that there are a speaker, a listener, an argument and a relation between premises and result. All of these are realities that are supposed in advance. Therefore, the fundamental reality - in general - is evident and cannot be proved.

This truth of reality cannot decline and does not accept any kind of disappearing; and rejects essentially annulment. Because, if this reality in every condition or stipulation or time or state declines, then there must be really a time or state or condition that this reality has declined in that situation. So, we must accept some other realities by rejection of reality. Even if we do

not state those conditions and say that this reality may decline and become non-reality, we also affirm the reality, because if it declines really and truly then there is a reality and its declination is a reality; and if it does not decline really and we imagine that it declines then the truth of reality will remain and will not disappear. Therefore, it is not possible that the truth of reality declines or accepts nihilism even in supposition. Everything that supposition of its declination requires its existence, its nihilism must be essentially absurd. If its nihilism is absurd then its existence and truth must be essentially necessary. This essential necessity is a philosophical one (not a logical one), and is just eternal necessity. Therefore, there is an essential necessary being which is real in eternal necessity. In studying every being, we understand that neither one of them nor all of them are the truth of reality, because they can be supposed as non-existence while it is not possible to suppose necessary being in this argument as non-real. Those are not the absolute reality but they have reality by that truth of reality. (The reality may not also be the matter of the universe, because it is possible to suppose it as non-real in a special situation. The truth of reality is what is real even in case of supposing all other beings as non-existence). All beings that have reality need it essentially for their reality. They need it to be real and their realities or existences depend on it.

Tabataba'i continued that it became obvious for those who concentrate on this argument that the existence of essentially necessary being is necessary in human belief and arguments that prove his existence are, in fact, give special attentions and notes.

Like Sabzavari's argument, in this argument the difficulty is not in proving the existence of God, but in perceiving the truth of the reality which is called God, for it is difficult to separate "reality" from "what has reality". However, Tabataba'i identifies the reality of existence as God (not God the as reality of existence). His argument needs a precise meditation not about his proof, but about what he intends by the reality of existence that is different from those which have it but are not just it.

4-The Differences between Ontological Argument and the *Seddiqin* Argument

The *Seddiqin* Argument seems, firstly, to be an argument like the ontological one and perhaps as another kind of this argument; but, in spite of some similarities, it differs from the ontological argument. The *Seddiqin* Argument is similar in that it tries not relying on incomplete, weak, poor facts in the world to prove the existence of the most complete being and to make the argument for proving His existence more evident than other beings that are His effects. Yet it differs from the ontological argument in some ways that the most important one is as follow:

The ontological argument begins with the meaning of existence, then the meaning of necessary existence all of which are conceptions in the mind; then it endeavors to make this meaning real outside the mind by some reasons. But in the *Seddiqin* Argument begins with the reality of existence, not its notion; and it continues by searching in this reality. In other words, the pyramid of existence in the ontological argument is built in the mind then the head of this pyramid - the necessary existence- comes out of the mind and is projected into the reality; in contrast in the *Seddiqin* Argument this pyramid is a building in reality; stands on its head, which is also real working in the very reality of existence rather than its notion, and its accuracy in the distinction between the notion and the reality of existence have vaccinated this argument against most of the criticisms that have created troubles for the ontological arguments.

1. Mulla Sadra *Al-Masha'ir*, p.12.

². We use the words 'boundaries with non-existence' in this argument, but this is not intended to mean a real thing in such wise that non-existence is a thing and the boundaries is a line between the two things, i.e. existence and non-existence. This meaning is quite rejected, because there is nothing but existence. Non-existence is bereft of reality because it is non-existence. We use boundaries of existence and non-existence figuratively, whereas there is only existence with some limitations that can be grasped by comparing one existent being with another.

³. Some of these philosophical problems that had a new solution by Mulla Sadra are as follow:

- a: The unity of the intellet and intellectual and what what is intellected, that is important in the subject of "knowledge".
- b: The contingency and necessity
- c: The substantial movement
- d: The causality that is in the existence of beings and the relation between cause and caused
- e: The matter and the form and their unity
- f: The individuality
- g: The mental existence
- h: The grades of existence
- i: The copulative existence
- j: Duality of mind and body

⁴ - See note No. 1.

⁵ - Mehdi Ashtiani, *"Ta'liqah Ala Sharh al-Manzumah fi al-Hikmat"*, pp. 488-497.

⁶ - See footnotes of pages 16 and 17 of *Asfar VI*, written by Sabzavari.

⁷ - See footnotes of pages 14 and 15 of *Asfar VI*, written by Tabatabaai