

'Abd al-Jabbār's Apologetical Arguments Opposing Christian Christology: A Critical Analysis from the Viewpoint of Epistemological Argumentation Theory

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Abstract: This paper advocates the use of modern argumentation theories in Islamic theological discourse. While the Islamic tradition has its own argumentation theories, modern terminology and theory can aid in interpretive understanding and critical analysis. The article focuses on 'Abd al-Jabbār's (d. 415/1025) *Tathbit*, which utilizes the rational methods of *kalām* and *radd* to counter Christianity. The author exemplarily analyzes 'Abd al-Jabbār's argument against the Christian claim of the divine nature of Jesus and argues for historical theological texts to be examined for their argumentativeness, as well as for the value of analytical and argumentation theories in understanding the history and development of argumentative theology.

Keywords: 'Abd al-Jabbār, Kalām, Radd, Argumentation Theory, Christian-Muslim Relations

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1. The Different Ways of Interpreting Islamic Theological Arguments

The Islamic tradition has developed its own argumentation theories on the basis of Aristotelian logic, especially on the theory of syllogism, such as in the writings on *'ilm ādāb al-baḥṭh wa-l-munāzara*. In fact, describing the theological arguments in terms of these theories can be informative. Likewise, the explanation of historical facts and theological ideas can contribute much to clarifying the arguments; however, one who wants to achieve a profound understanding and assessment of these arguments must reconstruct and evaluate them with help of modern argumentation theories. Any analysis that remains within the historical Arabic logic terminology could easily end as a mere description of the arguments, whereas an analysis by means of modern terminology and argumentation theory enables an interpretative understanding of the historical texts, as well as a critical analysis that meets modern standards.

Among the many things this critical analysis allows, one can clearly work out all the explicit premises and implicit assumptions upon which each argument is based, reconstruct the exact logical construction of the argument and assess it with the tools of modern formal logic, determine the epistemological and theological principles used in the argument, judge the validity and adequacy of the argument, both in relation to its originally intended audience and to one's own standards, and in particular establish the epistemological claims of the arguments (i.e., whether the argument really wants to lead readers to rationally recognize the truth of the Islamic doctrine or just to persuade them).

Argumentative theoretical approaches are being increasingly applied in Islamic theology, but this modern effort is still in its early stages. The argumentative theoretical approach is especially appropriate for the *kalām* [speculative theology] and *radd* [apologetic] literature: Both *kalām* and *radd* texts are strongly argumentative, whether in intra-Islamic theological discourse or in inter-religious discourse, with 'Abd al-Jabbār's (d. 415/1025) work *Tathbīt* providing a particularly good example of this. The current paper aims to clarify 'Abd al-Jabbār's method of argumentation, which he applies in his critique of Christianity.¹ For this purpose, 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Tathbīt* provides a very suitable basis, as he confronts Christianity in it using the methods of *kalām* and *radd*.

1 For general insight into the encounters between Muslims and Christians in theological debates with special reference to 'Abd al-Jabbār, see Lejla Demiri (2006), "İslâm Kelâmcılarına Göre Hıristiyanlık: Kadı Abdülcebâr Örneği", *Köprü Dergisi* 93, pp. 77–89.

The study considers *radd* to methodologically be a sub-discipline of *kalām*, (i.e., a subdiscipline of systematic-argumentative Islamic theology). Both *radd* and *kalām* use the same disputation techniques and pursue the same goal of convincing the addressee of a theological thesis using rational arguments.

The argumentation structures in the *radd* of the Christians use different types of arguments that either try to undermine the validity of Christian doctrines or try to prove the validity of Islamic theses. This is done primarily by applying logic and reason and by using epistemological principles such as deduction, induction, and interpretation.

Analyzing the epistemology of an author, a movement, or a particular discourse can be done in two ways, either as a theoretical or as a practical analysis. Understanding the theological theses depends on a practical analysis if one wants to understand the argument the author actually applied rather than just the argumentation theory to which the author refers. Why does this make a difference? The author of a work often does not remain true to their self-presented epistemology or argumentation theory. In this sense, a practical analysis that reconstructs and builds on the principles of knowledge and on the argumentative means an author has actually applied in their arguments is more significant for both theology and applied epistemology compared to a theoretical analysis of the theories the author may hold regarding argumentation.

According to the epistemological argumentation theory developed by Lumer,² one can reconstruct an author's epistemological principles based on their arguments. The epistemological argumentation analysis is especially applicable to the study of Islamic theological arguments, as it claims and explains how knowledge can be generated by arguments. This is very similar to the traditional theory of *kalām*, which claims that theological knowledge or judgment can be derived through argumentation. However, the generated knowledge and judgments are often relative in theological discourse and depend on reasoning (*ijtihādī*). Indeed, many classical texts on Islamic theology are heavily argumentative, and much of Islamic theology attempts to base faith on valid and sound arguments. Moreover, *kalām* is characterized not only by its content on the Islamic doctrine of faith, but above

2 For an example, see Christoph Lumer (2005), "The Epistemological Theory of Argument – How and Why?", *Informal Logic* 25, 3, pp. 213–243.

all by its argumentative method, which draws on principles such as *ilzām* [charge/allegation], *mu'āraḍa* [opposition], *istidlāl* [proof by deduction, argument, or inference], and *taqṣīm* [partition] in order to construct valid theological arguments.

This paper gives an example of a critical analysis and reconstruction of the arguments in classical *radd* texts from the viewpoint of epistemological argumentation theory and analyzes these texts with the help of epistemological criteria in order to establish whether they can be handled this way, in particular whether all of them are broadly intended to be or can be reconstructed as one of the universal types of argument the epistemological approach has identified so far (e.g., deductive, probabilistic, or practical arguments or combinations thereof), whether the present list of epistemologically valuable argument types should be extended (e.g., specifically Islamic types of argument), or whether Islamic theology has frequently used argument types that should be abandoned from an epistemological point of view.

Furthermore, the article assesses the chosen example with the help of the criteria developed in the epistemological argumentation theory to gain an impression of the state of the art in classical Islamic theological argumentation.

2. About 'Abd al-Jabbār

This article takes as an example an argument from Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār,³ an influential Mu'tazilite theologian (*mutakallim* [somebody who argues dialectically])⁴ and apologetic author who lived in the 10th century.

Even Islamic theologians of that period used very sophisticated deductive arguments. As the erudite among them were also familiar with Aristotelian logic in particular, they even had a theory on this argument type at their disposal. Quality examples of rather sophisticated and sound deductive theological arguments can

3 His full name is Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad ibn al-Khalil ibn 'Abdallāh, al-Qāḍī al-Hamadhāni al-Asadābādī. For a short introduction to his biography, works, and doctrine, see Margaretha Heemskerk (2007), "'Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad al-Hamadhāni", in Kate Fleet & others (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vol. 3*, Leiden & Boston, Brill Online, https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/abd-al-jabbar-b-ahmad-al-hamadhani-COM_0102 (last access 2021-05-13).

4 Cf. Josef van Ess (2002), "Mutakallimūn", in H. D. Betz, D. S. Browning, B. Janowski, & E. Jüngel (Eds.), *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 4th ed., Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, vol. 5, col. 1625.

be found exemplified in 'Abd al-Jabbār's book titled *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*. In this book 'Abd al-Jabbār argues against Christian Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity, among other things.

Undoubtedly, the Mu'tazila were among the first theological schools to employ the rational method in inner-Islamic theological discourses for solving theological questions with logical and rational arguments; they also attempted to rationally refute the theses of other theological schools within the framework of their *radd*. 'Abd al-Jabbār applied the same method here within the framework of his *radd* against Christian doctrines. Therefore, this paper also contributes to answering how the Mu'tazilite encounter with Christianity in the 10th century had taken place argumentatively.

'Abd al-Jabbār's time saw great interest in rational thinking, and Christians who knew philosophy were held in high esteem. As a result, many of them received high posts in the state apparatus.⁵ The disputations with Christians on theology was certainly instructive with regard to Muslims practicing their own thinking in this new rational theology, and this atmosphere of discussion is the one under which the four works⁶ where 'Abd al-Jabbār treats Christianity⁷ also came into being, albeit in varying degrees of detail. 'Abd al-Jabbār's work *al-Mughnī*, in which he systematically reproduces his mu'tazili theology and fundamentally refers to mu'tazili scholars,⁸ is the one in which he set down interesting arguments on Christianity. His *Tathbīt* also contains relevant argumentative discussions of Christian doctrines.⁹ But *Tathbīt* (written c. 385/995) was written after *al-Mughnī* (written c. 360-380/970-990),¹⁰ which is why *al-Mughnī* will be used as an example below.

5 Heribert Busse (1969), *Chalif und Grosskönig. Die Buyiden im Iraq (945–1055)*, Beirut, Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, Orient-Institut & Wiesbaden, Steiner (Beiruter Texte und Studien 6), pp. 451–479.

6 The complete titles of these works are: (i) *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl*, (ii) *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, (iii) *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* and (iv) *Al-muḥīṭ bi-l-taklīf* – cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), "'Abd al-Jabbār", in D. Thomas & A. Mallett (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 2, pp. 597–610.

7 Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), "'Abd al-Jabbār", pp. 594–597.

8 Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), "al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa-l-'adl", in D. Thomas & A. Mallett (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 2, pp. 597–600.

9 Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2004), *A Muslim Theologian in the Sectarian Milieu. 'Abd al-Jabbār and the Critique of Christian Origins*, Leiden, Brill (Islamic history and civilization 56), pp. 80–83.

10 Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), "Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa", in D. Thomas & A. Mallett (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 2, pp. 604–608, and Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), "al-Mughnī", pp. 597–600.

‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *al-Mughnī* is his larger work on the *kalām* and is distinguished by how it presents the arguments adopted from his authorities. ‘Abd al-Jabbār regularly refers to the conclusions and proofs of the Mu‘tazilite authorities Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915–16) and Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī (d. 321/933). Thus, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s refutation of Christianity in the *al-Mughnī* gives the impression of a scholar who seeks above all to preserve the teachings of his theological school, which quite contrasts with *Tathbit*. ‘Abd al-Jabbār attempts in his *al-Mughnī* to deconstruct Christian statements in order to argue that, contrary to Christian claims, Christian theology is neither rational nor monotheistic. In contrast, ‘Abd al-Jabbār provides only a brief general reference to the Bible in *al-Mughnī*. He comments on the Bible in much greater detail in *Tathbit*. ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s main concern here is to subject the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation to a rational examination.¹¹

The vast majority of earlier Muslim anti-Christian polemics, including ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s own *al-Mughnī*, were based on a logical deconstruction of Christian theology. In his *Tathbit*, however, ‘Abd al-Jabbār himself explains that he did not “intend to demonstrate the error of Christianity”, but rather to “demonstrate how [the Christians] had deviated from the religion of Christ.”¹² Although ‘Abd al-Jabbār asserts this himself and justifies it in comparison to his *al-Mughnī*, the next section of this paper will show that ‘Abd al-Jabbār did not consistently follow this approach, for he had also constructed logical and rational arguments against Christian doctrine in his *Tathbit*.

Another peculiarity of *Tathbit* is that while ‘Abd al-Jabbār had consistently attributed the statements in *al-Mughnī* to his Mu‘tazilite authorities, he insists in *Tathbit* that his descriptions of Christians “can hardly be found in any other book.”¹³ These particularities in *Tathbit* ultimately justify this paper’s focus on a closer examination of *Tathbit* and presentation of its findings.

‘Abd al-Jabbār was chosen as an example here because he was an important representative of Islamic systematic theology as well as of the *radd* literature and Islamic epistemology. In addition, his example will be used to illustrate the methodological approach of a practical analysis as described above. To this end, the

11 Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), “Tathbit dalā’il al-nubuwwa”, and *Idem* (2010), “al-Mughnī”.

12 ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbit*, quoted by Gabriel Said Reynolds (2010), “Tathbit dalā’il al-nubuwwa”.

13 *Ibid.*

following introduction should be made for the argumentative text: 'Abd al-Jabbār presents arguments of a special genre in his *Tathbīt*, in which he tends to not construct an argument against Christian doctrine, but rather an argument to ward off an argument by the Christians; he thus proceeds apologetically. But what is actually special is that the Christian thesis does not form a direct attack on Islamic doctrine but rather represents a self-defense of its own doctrine with reference to Muslim sources, in this case to the Qur'ān. The fact that the Christian argument had drawn on Islamic sources and interpreted them in Christian terms moved Muslim polemicists and apologists such as 'Abd al-Jabbār to defend the Qur'ān and Islamic doctrine. Thus, their response involved an argumentative defense of their own interpretation of the Qur'ān against the Christian interpretation. This already shows the high degree of complexity that was possible in the argumentative discourse of the time.

'Abd al-Jabbār structured and justified his *kalām* with reasoning entirely in the spirit of the rational Mu'tazilite theology. Therefore, his critique of Christianity is not surprisingly also rationally constructed. The next section will use an example to examine how 'Abd al-Jabbār had applied this rationality to this Muslim-Christian encounter.

3. An Exemplary Argument by 'Abd al-Jabbār

One such argument that 'Abd al-Jabbār incorporated into his *Tathbīt* was directed against the well-known Christian accusation regarding the divine nature of Jesus being mentioned and confirmed in the Qur'ān.¹⁴ 'Abd al-Jabbār constructed an argument against this claim by drawing on an exegetical form of argumentation in which a discussion takes place about the metaphorical interpretation of the phrases Word of God, Spirit of God, and Son of God. This strategy was unavoidable for him, because the question involved how the Qur'ānic phrases "Word of God" and "Spirit of God" are to be understood and what exegetical conclusions may be drawn from them. The Christian thesis that Jesus is the Son of God invokes the verse from the Qur'ān (4:171), in which Jesus is presented as the Word of God:

14 Christian attempts to prove the divinity of Jesus or the truth of Christian doctrine based on the Qur'ān have always been perceived by Muslim authors as an invitation to an argumentative response. As another example apart from 'Abd al-Jabbār, al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285) also understood the writing of a Christian who'd tried to find evidence for the Christian doctrine in the Qur'ān as a stimulus for his polemical writing *al-Ajwiba al-fākhira*; cf. Hermann Stieglecker (1962), *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*, Paderborn, Schöningh, p. 266.

“... Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word (*kalima*), which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit (*rūḥ minhu*) proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers...”¹⁵

Christian polemicists often saw the Qur’ānic term *Kalimatuhu* (His [God’s] Word) to be evidence for the Trinity. For example, John of Damascus (d. first half of the 8th century)¹⁶ argued the Qur’ān to confirm the Trinity by this verse, as well as others.¹⁷ ‘Abd al-Jabbār constructs the following argument against this general assertion, which had also been formulated by later Christian theologians such as Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464):¹⁸

“[S1.1] If it is said, ‘Since it is right in your view that God almighty says that Christ is his word and spirit, [S1.2] then why will you not allow him to say that he is his Son in the Gospel?’, [S2.1] say to him, [S2.2] Our master Abū ‘Alī¹⁹ said, ‘The intention in his describing Jesus as word of God is that people would be guided by him as they are guided by a word. [S3] And the meaning of our saying that he is the spirit of God is that people will be given life by him in their faith as they are given life by their spirits which are in their bodies.’ [S4] This is comprehensive, and it compares him with a word which is a sign, and the spirit upon which a living being among us depends. [S5.1] It is like a word through which is guidance being called light and healing, [S5.2] because truth is known through it just as the way is known through light, [S5.3] and because deliverance in religion is provided through it just like healing through a remedy. [S6] And if a word can be used metaphorically out of its context, it does not follow that another can be used

15 Qur’ān 4:171, after the translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

16 Cf. Johannes Pahlitzsch (2009), “Peter of Damascus”, in D. Thomas & A. Mallett (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 1, pp. 290–292.

17 Cf. John of Damascus, *Liber de haeresibus*, cap. 100, translated in John of Damascus (c. 750) & Theodor Abū Qurra (c. 800), *Schriften zum Islam*, ed. by Reinhold Gleis & Adel Theodor Khoury 1995, Würzburg, Echter & Altenberge, Oros (Corpus Islamo-Christianum. Series Graeca 3), p. 79.

18 Cf. John Tolan (2013), “Nicholas of Cusa, Nicholas of Kues, Nicolaus Cusanus”, in D. Thomas & A. Mallett (Eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 5, pp. 421–428. Nicholas of Cusa argues similarly in his work *Cribratio Alchorani*; he claims that Muḥammad wrote the Qur’ān as a Nestorian Christian and that Islam is merely a heresy influenced by the Nestorian creed; cf. Nicholas of Cusa (1460/61), *Sichtung des Korans [Cribratio Alchorani]*, ed. by Ludwig Hagemann & Reinhold Gleis 1989–1993, 3 vols., Hamburg, Meiner (Philosophische Bibliothek 420), ch. II, p. 15, no. 11f.

19 This refers to Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915–16), another apologetic author of the early 10th century who died in Baṣra. Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī wrote a *Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā* which has not been preserved, and even the original title of that work is not known exactly. We just learn from ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Tathbit* that Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī wrote a *radd* about the Christian doctrine; cf. David Thomas (2010), “Radd ‘alā al-Naṣārā”, in David Thomas & others (eds.), *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History*, Leiden & Boston, Brill, vol. 2, p. 138–140. But ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s own argumentative text makes clear that Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī’s works were available to ‘Abd al-Jabbār and have influenced him.

metaphorically without evidence. [S7] And thus we do not say that Jesus was Son of God by analogy with our saying that he was a spirit and word of God. [S8.1] In a similar way it is said that Gabriel is a spirit, though it is not said that he is the son, [S8.2] and there is no difference between one of us who seeks to use the term 'son' for him because we describe him as spirit, [S8.3] and our claim that he should be called God's father or brother by analogy with this. [S9] For general meanings are not literally appropriate to God, [S10] and neither are those instances in which a man is metaphorically called someone else's son, as we have mentioned above, appropriate to God almighty. [S11] So the claim that this is so collapses."²⁰

The text consists of a Christian thesis implicit arguments for this thesis, and a plethora of partial arguments. 'Abd al-Jabbār's arguments have the function of showing how the Christian's thesis is false because their interpretation I_c ²¹ of the Qur'ānic quotation Q ²² is wrong.

The text begins with a hypothetical sentence structure formulated as a conditional clause. "If it is said" (*fa-in qīla*) is the protasis (the antecedent clause) with the conditional particle *in* ("when"), while "[then] say to him" (*qīla lahu*) is the apodosis (*jawāb al-shart*, consequent clause). The phrase "say to him" (which means here: "respond to that Christian assertion as follows") is one of the indicators that mark the beginning of argumentation in classical Islamic theological texts and often represent a form of hypothetical sentence structure.²³ In this hypothetical sentence structure, the Christian thesis is presented in indirect speech.

On the one hand, this indicates that the thesis does not need to be held *de facto* by a Christian opponent at all, but (i) may initially be a hypothetical and staged play of the author's thoughts; on the other hand, it may (ii) indicate that this hypothetical thesis is part of a *taṣnīf* [disjunction, case distinction] and that the author is thus trying to grasp and refute all possible statements and objections to a thesis. The first possibility would be of little advantage, as the arguer would then hypothetically construct an argument and subsequently refute it, which might not even be held by his opponent. The second possibility would be advantageous

20 Quoted from the standard translation by David Thomas (2008), *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology*, Leiden, Brill (History of Christian-Muslim relations 10), pp. 297–299.

21 I_c designates the Christian interpretation of Q .

22 Q designates the Qur'ānic quotation used to substantiate the Christian thesis "Christ is his [God's] word and spirit" (cf. S1.1).

23 Cf. Josef van Ess (1976), "Disputationspraxis in der islamischen Theologie. Eine vorläufige Skizze", *Revue des études islamiques* 44, pp. 23–60, especially p. 25.

in terms of argumentation strategy: The arguer lists all *possible* objections and theses of the opponent and tries to refute them one by one; if no more objections are possible, he would thus have forced the opponent to drop his thesis and, if necessary, confirm his own thesis; at the very least, however, he would have shown that the opponent's thesis is doubtful. This is the ideal picture behind the *taṣnīf* argumentation strategy, and this hypothetical sentence structure is a common argumentation technique in Islamic argumentation theory.²⁴ This distinction between different possible cases, which can also be called *al-sabr wa-l-taqṣīm*, can have complex forms in argumentative application.

4. The Interpretation of the Christian Thesis

We can understand the Christian thesis T_c ²⁵ according to a stronger or to a weaker interpretation. According to the stronger interpretation, T_c states that Jesus is the Son of God; this is justified by the metaphorical interpretation of the Qur'ānic quotation Q. This stronger reading is presented in S1.1-S1.2: If Q is interpreted correctly, the Qur'ān acknowledges that Christ is the Son of God and has his own divine nature. Thesis T_c is substantiated by interpretation I_c , which explains the Qur'ānic term "Word" as a metaphor for Jesus being the Son of God. Therefore, 'Abd al-Jabbār's main task is to refute that metaphorical meaning.

Another interpretation of T_c can be phrased as follows: "It is legitimate²⁶ that Jesus is called the Son of God in the Gospel." This interpretation is based on the premise: "If Jesus is called the Word and Spirit of God in the Qur'ān (cf. Q), then it is legitimate for him to be called the Son of God in the Gospel (cf. S1.1–S1.2)". This reading of the thesis is based on the question raised from the Christian position in S1.1–S1.2 and is articulated in T_c in the form of an implication.²⁷ We can reconstruct the argument that justifies thesis T_c in the form of a *modus ponens* ([implication elimination] *qiyās al-istithnā'*,²⁸ formally $p \supset q, p \therefore q$):

24 Cf. Josef van Ess, *Revue des études islamiques* 44 (1976), p. 25.

25 T_c designates the Christian thesis: "He [Christ] is his [God's] Son in the Gospel" (cf. S1.2).

26 In the sense of being correct or well-founded.

27 Very often, arguments begin with a thesis of the opponent, which is presented in the form of a question. This is another variant of the so-called question-answer situation; cf. Josef van Ess, *Revue des études islamiques* 44 (1976), p. 25.

28 For the term *istithnā'* see Kwame Gyekye (1972), "The Term *istithnā'* in Arabic Logic", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92, 1, pp. 88–92.

P1: If Jesus is called the Word of God and Spirit of God in the Qur'ān, then for him to be called the Son of God in the Gospel is legitimate [p ⊃ q].

P2: (Quotation Q shows that) Jesus is called the Word of God and Spirit of God in the Qur'ān [p].

C1: For Jesus to be called the Son of God in the Gospel is legitimate [q].

Another Christian argument (which implicitly supports the argument given above) can be reconstructed from a weaker interpretation as follows:

P3: If the term "Word of God" in the Qur'ān means Son of God, then Word of God is identical with Son of God.

P4: (Quotation Q shows that) the term "Word of God" in the Qur'ān means the Son of God.

C2: The Word of God is identical with the Son of God.

The first premise (P1) of the first argument attributed to the Christian establishes a relationship between the Word of God and the Son of God: if Jesus can be called the Word of God, then he can also be called the Son of God. Now this premise sounds downright absurd. However, whether this is what 'Abd al-Jabbār means by S1 is doubtful. An alternative reconstruction may help here:

P1: According to the Qur'ān,²⁹ Christ is the Word of God and Spirit of God [from S1.1].

P2: I_c³⁰: In the Qur'ān, the terms "Word of God" and "Spirit of God" mean the Son of God (alternatively: the Word and Spirit of God are identical to the Son of God; "Word and Spirit of God" is a metaphor for the Son of God).

P3: Principle of extensionality: $(\forall \Phi, x, y)(\Phi x \ \& \ x = y \supset \Phi y)$.³¹

T_c³²: According to the Qur'ān, Christ is the Son of God.

29 To illustrate the relevance of this argument, one can add: "Because the Qur'ān was revealed by God and God always tells (reveals) the truth, this must be true."

30 I_c designates the Christian interpretation of Q.

31 For all predicates Φ and all individuals x, y , the following holds: if a predicate Φ applies to x and x is identical to y , then the predicate Φ applies to y as well.

32 T_c designates the Christian thesis.

However, P2 is quite implausible. S1.2 rather means a weaker premise: If the Qur'an already admits that Jesus is the Word and Spirit of God, then this is close to what Christians say: Jesus is divine. But this does not give the metaphorical argumentation which 'Abd al-Jabbār criticizes.

The question at this point is whether 'Abd al-Jabbār is intentionally imputing this premise to the Christian position in order to be able to refute it more easily, or whether, from the Christian position, something else is implied by this relationship between the terms "Word of God" and "Son of God." Certainly, it is only convenient for 'Abd al-Jabbār if the opponent represents a logically unrelated statement, but it seems as if the Christian position wants to say: "If Jesus can be called 'Word of God,' and if this designation is not absurd among you Muslims; then the designation of Jesus as 'Son of God' should also not seem absurd to you. Why should the designation 'Son of God' be more absurd than the designation 'Word of God'?"

This would be a plausible argument. The Christian's criticism is thus justified, and its absurdity vanishes. The Christian does not primarily want to show that Jesus is the Son of God because in the Qur'an Jesus is referred to as the "Word of God," rather, the Christian sets up a fictitious and hypothetical argument: "If you Muslims do not regard the designation "Word of God" for Jesus as absurd, then you must not regard the conception of Jesus as the Son of God as absurd either; thus you must not criticize us if you do not want to contradict yourselves." This reading appears legitimate if we take into account that the Christian thesis uses the phrase "then it is legitimate" (*jawwaztum*, S1.1), apparently wanting to express that Muslims must accept the designation "Son of God" for Jesus as legitimate when they consider the designation "Word of God" to be legitimate.³³ 'Abd al-Jabbār could be drawing here on a Christian thesis that he did not construct himself but actually received from Christian opponents, but which he partially misunderstood.

However, this weaker interpretation depends heavily on premises that are not explicit in the text but require being supplemented. Moreover, the stronger interpretation comes closer to the wording of the argumentative text because its

33 Less unproblematic is premise P2. The truth of the attribution of this premise to Muslims can be taken from the Qur'an, which refers to Jesus as the "Word of God" (cf. Qur'an 4:171). 'Abd al-Jabbār's tries to show that this Qur'anic passage may by no means be interpreted in the way Christians do, who want to deduce from this verse that the Qur'an confirms the divine nature of Jesus and thus the doctrine of Trinity. From this perspective, P2 is the premise which 'Abd al-Jabbār attempts to interpret hermeneutically in such a way that it does not support or prove the argument of the Christian opponent.

reconstruction requires fewer supplementary premises and because it emphasizes the essential principle of the metaphorical interpretation of Q. Any decision between a stronger and a weaker interpretation is to be made in terms of the author's intention, as Lumer suggests.³⁴ For the further analysis, therefore, the stronger reading of T_c will be used (i.e., the thesis "Jesus is the Son of God").³⁵

'Abd al-Jabbār's argumentation against T_c is structured into four sub-arguments, all of which are directed against the interpretation I_c of Q. They attempt to show the falsity of I_c (and thus the truth of I_m ³⁶) argumentatively by building on a metaphorical interpretation of Q. In the first sub-argument, 'Abd al-Jabbār defines that a metaphorical meaning is only present when a hint (*dalāla*) of this meaning is given (S6). However, this hint is missing in Q; therefore, I_c cannot be true.³⁷ In S7, 'Abd al-Jabbār states that I_c does not follow from Q by analogy (*qiyās*). The second sub-argument states that Gabriel is also said to be a spirit by analogy, although he is not said to also be a Son of God (at the same time; cf. S8.1). In this way, 'Abd al-Jabbār presents a counter-example against a general metaphorical interpretation of the term "Spirit of God" equals "Son of God." However, 'Abd al-Jabbār overlooks the fact that Gabriel is not called "Spirit of God," but only "spirit." Thus, no valid comparison exists, and the counter-example is invalid. The third sub-argument (S8.1–8.2) is a reversal of the first and states the metaphorical interpretation I_c to be arbitrary: The equality between the terms "Spirit" and "Son" is unfounded, as by the same method of equating another term such as "brother" could be added without the opponent (the Christian) being able to reject it, for equating "brother" is as unfounded and arbitrary as equating "spirit" with "son." The fourth sub-argument intends to show the absurdity of the statement "Christ is

34 For the analysis of weak interpretations of arguments, Lumer presents criteria that are essential to preserve the author's intention; cf. Christoph Lumer (2003), "Interpreting arguments", in Frans H. van Eemeren & others (eds.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation*, Amsterdam, SIC SAT, p. 715–719.

35 However, caution is required at this point. It is about 'Abd al-Jabbār's presentation of the Christian argumentation, and if one attributes too strong premises and theses to the Christians, the argumentation easily becomes a mere straw-man fallacy. In any case, it remains unclear what argumentation 'Abd al-Jabbār is imputing to the Christians. According to what he writes afterwards, it should be something like: "If the metaphor 'Jesus is the Word of God' is correct, then (by analogy, for instance) the metaphor 'Jesus is the Son of God' is also correct." But this interpretation fails because Christians do not understand "Jesus is the Son of God" as a metaphor at all. It is possible that 'Abd al-Jabbār has in fact constructed here a mere straw-man argument, perhaps without being aware of it.

36 I_m denotes the Muslim interpretation of Q.

37 At this point, of course, it is unclear whether the Christians support this statement at all. 'Abd al-Jabbār, however, apparently accepts this.

the Son of God.” ‘Abd al-Jabbār defines that general meanings can never be applied in the literal sense to God. Thus, the metaphorical meaning of “Son” does not apply in the literal sense to God (cf. S9–S10³⁸).

In this argumentation ‘Abd al-Jabbār presupposes a general premise about the metaphorical interpretation:

P_M (premise about metaphorical interpretation): I_m is an intended metaphorical meaning of a passage Q in a text if and only if (i) Q contains references to the content of I_m , or (ii) Q uses a well-established metaphor for I_m .

This premise should of course also apply to I_c and Q , which ‘Abd al-Jabbār checks against conditions (i) and (ii) from P_M . His first and third sub-argument attempt to show that I_c does not satisfy condition (i); his second sub-argument attempts to show that I_c does not satisfy condition (ii).

The following analyzes the first sub-argument, which is at the same time the main sub-argument, for its formal structure as an example.³⁹ Just like the other sub-arguments, it is respectively directed against T_c and I_c and can be reconstructed as:⁴⁰

T_c : The I_c of Q says that G_{Was} ⁴¹ intends G_{Son} ⁴².

$P_{M(i)}$: A metaphorical meaning is only intended if an indication exists for such an intention.

sP5: No evidence is found in Q that G_{Was} intends G_{Son} .

C3: G_{Was} does not intend G_{Son} , therefore $\sim T_c$.

This reconstruction of a formally valid argument is a first and simple representation showing on which premises the (sub-)argument is built. Central to the fulfilment of condition (i) of P_M is the premise sP5, which states that Q to contain no evidence that G_{Was} intends G_{Son} .⁴³ The truth of this premise is the central assumption upon which the conclusiveness of the entire first sub-argument

38 Here, S10 is the negation of T_c , and S9 gives a theoretical justification of that negation.

39 Especially due to the third sub-argument being simply a reversal of the first sub-argument.

40 The following reconstruction is only one possibility among others to show how ‘Abd al-Jabbār understands the argument.

41 i.e., Word and Spirit of God.

42 i.e., Son of God.

43 Although this premise is not explicitly stated in the text but must instead be added, this can be done with a fairly high degree of certainty, as ‘Abd al-Jabbār had also obviously presupposed it.

depends. Now, how can 'Abd al-Jabbār justify that the statement G_{Was} , which is justified by Q, does not intend the statement G_{Son} ? 'Abd al-Jabbār uses an interpretative approach by describing the relationship of Word of God and Spirit to God, rationalizing it, assuming its semantic absurdity, and stating that he cannot find such a relationship between God and Son. Accordingly, he argues that a term can be used metaphorically out of its actual context with a different meaning (cf. S6); however, a reference to the intended meaning must also then occur, which 'Abd al-Jabbār also finds in a semantic similarity for I_m : Jesus is the Word of God because he guides people like a word and conveys the truth, just as words do (S2.2, S5.1–5.3). Just as 'Abd al-Jabbār interprets the relationship between the term “Word of God” and Jesus as the leader of men metaphorically, he requires his opponent to show a corresponding reference to the relationship between the designations of Jesus as Word of God and as Son of God. 'Abd al-Jabbār assumes that no (semantic) evidence exists for such a relationship (sP5) and thus justifies $P_M(i)$ from his argument reconstructed above. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār claims to have shown that condition (i) of P_M is not fulfilled by I_c ; namely, T_c is false.

6. The Weaker Interpretation of the Christian Thesis and Its Refutation

Alternatively, a weaker interpretation of the argument can be made that is more hermeneutical in nature. According to this reading, 'Abd al-Jabbār attacks the thesis implicit in the Christian argument that to call Jesus the Son of God in the Gospel is legitimate if Jesus is called Word of God and Spirit of God in the Qur'ān (T_c above). This argument can be reconstructed as follows, is formally valid, and builds on a plausibility relation:

P1.1: Only if the designation of Jesus as Word of God and Spirit of God implies his designation as Son of God, the Bible legitimately designates Jesus as Son of God. (Because of the word “only” this is equivalent to saying: “If the Bible legitimately calls Jesus the Son of God, then calling Jesus the Word of God and the Spirit of God implies calling him the Son of God”).

Alternative P1.1*: Only if the proposition “Jesus is the Word of God” and the proposition “Jesus is the Spirit of God” make the proposition “Jesus is the Son of God” plausible, then it is plausible that the Bible uses the proposition “Jesus is the Son of God”.

P1.2: The designations Word of God and Spirit of God do not imply the designation Son of God.

Alternative P1.2*: The proposition “Jesus is the Word of God” and the proposition “Jesus is the Spirit of God” do not make the proposition “Jesus is the Son of God” plausible.

C1.1: The Bible does not legitimately call Jesus the Son of God (*modus tollens*: P1.1, P1.2).

Alternative C1.1*: That the Bible uses the proposition “Jesus is the Son of God” is implausible (*modus tollens*: P1.1*, P1.2*).

The first premise (P1.1) in the form of an implication (*shartīyya muttaşıla*) builds on the Christian thesis and thus opens up a negative line of argument. ‘Abd al-Jabbār takes on the complex hermeneutical challenge of proving P1.2 and introduces further sub-arguments to support this central premise of his argument. He formulates a premise for his sub-argument for thesis P1.2. This justifies the following semantic consideration: If a term is used only metaphorically for another concept, then it does not follow that the term can be applied to other concepts without evidence (cf. S6). With the help of this material premise with the function of a rule of inference, the sub-argument can be reconstructed as follows, with C1.2 justifying the premise P1.2 from the argumentation given above:

P1.3: If Jesus is only metaphorically called the Spirit of God, that he can also be called the Son of God does not follow without additional evidence (cf. S6–S7).

P1.4: Jesus is only metaphorically called the Spirit of God (cf. S2.2).

C1.2: Jesus also being able to be called the Son of God does not follow without additional evidence (*modus tollens*: P1.3, P1.4).

6. Results and Consequences

In order to evaluate an argumentation, one must always consider its function and intention. Is it rhetorical, consensualist, or epistemological? The hypothetical and logical structure of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s argumentation and the formally valid form of his argument and sub-arguments give a clue that they are not mere rhetoric, but are epistemologically oriented. Namely, they actually want to contribute to the cognition of truth.

The hypothetical sentence structure in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s argumentation discussed here (S1.1–S3) has the function of taking all possible objections into account. This approach is part of the strategy for driving an opponent to defeat. Miller counts silence due to the inability to construct a counter-argument (*sukūt li-*

al-‘ajz) to be among the characteristics of defeat.⁴⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār thus tries to use the hypothetical sentence structure to put the opponent in a position where they can no longer construct any counter-argument and thus has to admit defeat. This argumentation is not rhetorical, for its aim is not merely to persuade the opponent with bogus arguments.⁴⁵ Nor is it consensual: The arguer does not aim to reach a (mere) consensus with his opponent.⁴⁶ Rather, ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s intention is to demonstrate the truth of his thesis through rational argumentation and to lead the addressee to rational acceptance of his thesis (cf. argumentation text above). This method is a feature of the epistemic argumentation theory.⁴⁷ Thus, good reasons exist for classifying ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s argumentation as epistemic.

This paper would like to make a case for examining historical theological texts for their argumentativeness and, in the case of strongly argumentative texts, for bringing the argument into the focus of the investigation. This paper provides an analytical example of how this can be done when one bases the work on or analyzes it in terms of the epistemological argumentation theory. The analytical and argumentation theory approach can provide insights undiscernible without systematic analysis. In this way, more can be discovered about the argumentative performance of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, as well as other authors, and more can be learned in general about the history, development, and above all the application of argumentative theology.⁴⁸

44 Cf. Larry B. Miller (1986), *Islamic Disputation Theory. A Study of the Development of Dialectic in Islam from the 10th. through 14th Centuries*, Diss. Princeton University 1984, Ann Arbor MI, University Microfilms International, p. 41.

45 Cf. Christoph Lumer (2007), “Überreden ist gut, überzeugen ist besser! Argumentativer [sic] Ethos in der Rhetorik”, in Günther Kreuzbauer, Norbert Gatzl. & Ewald Hiebl (Eds.), *Persuasion und Wissenschaft. Aktuelle Fragestellungen von Rhetorik und Argumentationstheorie*, Wien, Lit (Salzburger Beiträge zu Rhetorik und Argumentationstheorie 2), pp. 7–33.

46 In the sense of an agreement between the participants in an argumentative act, who agree on the claimed validity of their utterances; cf. Jürgen Habermas (1981), *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, vol. 1, p. 406. This applies to the argumentativity of the *radd* in general: the function of *radd* argumentations is not to reach consensus. This would contradict the theological claim to truth of the *radd* and often entail a correction of one’s own theological thesis, which would possibly have an effect on the whole theological doctrine; thus argumentative systematic theologies are strongly networked argumentation structures that are strongly bound to common theses. If these theses change, this can influence many other arguments; on the structures of arguments cf. Gregor Betz (2010), *Theorie dialektischer Strukturen*, Frankfurt a. M., Klostermann (Philosophische Abhandlungen 101).

47 Cf. especially Christoph Lumer (2011), “Argument/Argumentation”, in Petra Kolmer & Armin G. Wildfeuer (eds.), *Neues Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe*, Freiburg i.Br & München, Alber, vol. 1, p. 227–240, and Christoph Lumer (2007), “Überreden ist gut, überzeugen ist besser”.

48 Additional information about ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *radd* and further examples for the analytical analysis of *radd* arguments are provided in Serkan Ince, *Argumentation und Apologetik*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2023.

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