THE PROBLEM OF LOGICALITY OF AGNOSTICISM[1]

Agnostisizmin Mantıksallığı Sorunu

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ABSTRACT

The term agnosticism was introduced by Thomas Henry Huxley. With this term, Huxley tried to signify a neutral approach to believing in God. In other words, the agnosticism was used by him to designate the state between theism and atheism.

Theism is a special kind of life which includes believing in God. There is in this kind of life a special kind of epistemology. This epistemology is valid only if we consider such a special kind of life. And there is in this kind of epistemology a special kind of logic. If we look at the theistic expressions from this point, we can see that they are valid and consistent. Whereas atheism is not a special kind of life. It is just an attitude against theism. Therefore there is not a special kind of epistemology and a special kind of logic in a certain atheistic life.

An agnostic cannot be inclined towards any of these two ways because he will leave agnosticism if he chooses one of them. It means we cannot say that agnosticism has any epistemological or non-epistemological, logical or non-logical structure.

Keywords: *Logic, Epistemology, Agnosticism, Theism, Atheism*

ÖZET

Agnostisizm terimi, Thomas Henry Huxley tarafından türetilmiştir. Bu terimle Huxley, Tanrıya inanmaya yönelik yansız bir yaklaşımı dile getirmiştir. Başka bir ifade ile agnostisizm, Huxley tarafından teizm ve ateizm arasındaki bir tavrı belirtmek için kullanılmıştır.

Teizm, Tanrıya inanmaya yönelik özel bir yaşam biçimine katılmayı belirtir. Söz konusu özel yaşam biçiminin -ancak dikkate aldığımızda geçerli olan- kendine özgü bir epistemolojisi ve mantığı vardır. Buna karşın ateizm, özel bir yaşam biçimine katılmayı belirtmez. O, sadece teizme karşı bir tavrı dile getirir. Dolayısıyla da ateizmin kendine

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özgü özel bir epistemolojisi ve mantığı yoktur.

Bir agnostik bu iki taraftan herhangi birine meyletmez. Çünkü herhangi birine meylederse yansız tavrından vazgeçmiş olur. Demek ki agnostisizmin epistemolojik ve mantıksal olan ya da olmayan bir yapısı olduğu söylenemez. Kısaca söylersek agnostisizm mantıksallık sorunu içeren bir terimdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Mantık, Epistemoloji, Agnostisizm, Teizm, Ateizm*

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to address if there is any certain point of logicality or non-logicality in an agnostic attitude. For doing this, firstly we will start by analyzing this term. And then we will try to determine the main properties of the items of the term agnosticism. In this way, we will have the possibility to see the functions –if any– of the items of this term in the factual or in the institutional sphere.

The term agnosticism consists of the word "agnosis" and suffix "ism". Agnosis is the opposite of the word gnosis (consists of the prefix "a" and the word "gnosis"). The "gnosis" comes from the Greek language and it means knowledge (Baylis, C. A., 1942:7; Shanahan, 1907). The suffix "ism" expresses a certain perspective regarding any system, theory or doctrine. Thus agnosticism is a system, theory or doctrine about obscurity.

As is known, in ancient Greece, there was a state of obscurity about knowledge in general among some philosophers such as Gorgias and Protagoras. But the term agnosticism was not used in this sense. It was used –in 1869 by Thomas Henry Huxley- to signify a neutral approach to believing in God (Bunnin, N. and Yu, J., 2004:20; Shanahan, 1907). A neutral approach to believing in God, however, designates a state between theism and atheism. This implies that an agnostic has to stay exactly in the middle space between believing in and denying the existence of a God. He cannot be inclined to one of these two sides. Can we speak about the logicality of such an attitude as this? Or not? If we can, what will be the kind of this logic? If we want to reply these questions, we have to discuss the two sides between which agnosticism is standing: theism and atheism. And as a result of these discussions, if we ascertain that these two sides are both logical or both non-logical, we can say that there is not any problem of logicality of agnosticism. For, in such a case, it will be at a point between two logical situations or between two non-logical situations. But if one of these two sides has any logical structure and the other one has not, then we can say that there is a serious problem of logicality and the

agnosticism is a paradoxical term. And this paradox will be about accepting two contrary situations at the same time. Therefore, in the following statements, we will try to determine the logical status of theism and atheism in order to see the logical status of agnosticism.

1. The Logical Status of Theism

The term theism, consists of the word "theos" and suffix "ism". The word "theos" comes from Greek language and it means God (Ferm, V., 1942:316). Thus theism is an attitude of believing in God. In this attitude there is a special kind of life which refers to the belief "that there is one and only one God who is eternal, is creator of the universe, is omnipotent, omniscient, benevolent and loving, and who is personal and interacts with the universe, as in the religious experience and prayerful activities of humans." (Smart, 2003:8). "The three great monotheistic traditions -Judaism, Christianity, and Islam- all worship a God with these properties." (Stephen, 1997:1) And a special kind of life which puts in order the way of living of a certain person according to these properties differs from ordinary factual life. The most important feature of this special kind of life is that it determines and impresses all of the ordinary life of the person who prefers this kind of life. Can we speak about a certain logicality of such a kind of life? Or not? If we can, what kind of logic is it? The best way to answer this question is to look at the structure of the theistic life and try to reply the following question: When a theist utters a certain theistic speech, does this speech has any epistemological value? Or not? If it has, what kind of epistemology is it?

Theistic speeches are discourses which are based on factual expressions and whose contents are changed and sensed again in the context of a certain belief. According to this, we can say that a theistic speech is a metalanguage which is formed in a special kind of life. And an epistemological valuing of this speech must be free from expressions which refer to factuality; but as a parallel expression, it must also use all of the properties of factual expressions. In such a case, the syntax on which factual expressions are predicated, is also valid for theistic expressions. In other words, if we can speak about such a syntactic structure of theistic expressions, then we can also speak about their logical structure. And this logical structure must be a parallel logic which considers all of properties of the general logic which is used for symbolizing and checking factual expressions.

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The general logic of factual expressions is to symbolize the cases and the facts in the world of things. For example, the proposition "if Michael works hard, he can succeed" can be symbolized as "p → q", or propositions like "the weather is rainy and so cold" and "the weather is rainy or snowy" can be symbolized as "p ∧ q" and "p ∨ q". The first of these propositions is consistent and the last two propositions are consistent with each other. Also an inference such as "George is in Egypt or in Canada. He is not in Egypt. In that case he is in Canada." can be symbolized as "p ∨ q, ~p ∴ q". And when we check this inference we can see that it is valid. (Restall, 2006: 26-56).

Thus we can symbolize and check the validity and consistency of theistic inferences and utterances according to logical methods. For instance, a theist abiding by a certain belief that forms his special theistic life can symbolize the expression "the God is omnipotent and omniscient" as "p ∧ q" in propositional logic, or an expression like "the God is merciful" as ∀x (Gx→Mx) in predicate logic. And when we check these expressions we can see that they are consistent expressions (Osman, 2011b:35-104). We can also symbolize the theistic inferences such as "if an object is a God, it must be the most perfect thing. If an object is the most perfect thing, it must also exist in the reality. Hence God must be existing in the reality.", "if God is the most perfect thing, it must be also perfect. If it is perfect, it must be existing in the reality. God is the most perfect thing. Hence God exists in the reality." as "p → q, q → r ∴ p → r" and "Mg → Pg, Pg → E!g, Mg ∴E!g". And when we check these inferences, we can see that they are valid. (Osman, 2011a:14-62).

2. The Logical Status of Atheism

The term atheism consists of the word "atheos" and the suffix "ism". The word atheos consists of the negative prefix "a" and the word "theos". In other words, atheos is the opposite of the word theos. Thus the atheism is an attitude aimed at negation of theism. This attitude does not refer to a special kind of life. The atheistic expressions and inferences, at first sight, appear as consistent and valid expressions and inferences. For instance, an expression like "the God is not omnipotent and omniscient" can be symbolized in propositional logic as "~(p ∧ q)", or an expression like "the God is not merciful" can be symbolized in predicate logic as "∀x (Gx → ~Mx)." These symbolic expressions are consistent expressions in terms of propositional and predicate logic. Also an inference like "if there is evil in the world, there is not a God. There is evil in

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the world. Hence there is not a God." can be symbolized in propositional logic as "p → ~q, p ∴ ~q". This inference is a valid inference in terms of propositional logic.

The fact that such expressions and inferences are consistent and valid does not mean that they have a definite logicality. Because these atheistic expressions and inferences cannot come up as a factual or as a parallel logic. For this reason, they do not have any factual or institutional epistemological reference. In other words, "an *atheist* is one who denies the existence of a personal, transcendent creator of the universe, rather than one who simply lives a life without reference to such a being. A *theist* is one who asserts the existence of such a creator. Any discussion of atheism, then, is necessarily a discussion of theism." (Le Poidevin, 1996:xvii).

CONCLUSION

An agnostic stays between an attitude which refers to a special logic which is coming from a special epistemology of a special kind of life and an attitude which does not refer to any logic. It means that he stays between a logical and a non-logical attitude. However, this is a serious problem of logicality of agnosticism. In this case, we cannot say that agnostic expressions are logical or non-logical expressions. Because they have to be both logical and non-logical expressions. For this reason, this situation puts forward the paradoxicality of agnosticism.

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