

An Analysis of Intellectual Virtues and Vices in the Debates with Imam Reza(A.S.)

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Abstract

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The aim of this study is to analyze the intellectual virtues and vices exhibited by the interlocutors in the debates of Imam Reza (A.S.) based on the approach of virtue epistemology. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and drawing upon library-based data, this study analyzes the historical accounts of Imam Reza's (A.S.) debates with the leaders of various religions and sects (including the Christian Catholicos (Jāthaliq), the Jewish Exilarch (Ra's al-Jālūt), 'Imrān al-Šābi'ī, and Sulaymān al-Marwazī). The findings indicate that, with the exception of 'Imrān al-Šābi'ī, the other interlocutors were unable to attain the truth due to the predominance of intellectual vices such as dogmatism, intellectual arrogance, dismissiveness, intellectual dependence, and conformity, and only exhibited an inevitable surrender before decisive proof. In contrast, supported by virtues such as curiosity, open-mindedness, intellectual humility, and intellectual courage, 'Imrān al-Šābi'ī found his way to the truth. The conclusion is that a fruitful debate depends on both parties being adorned with intellectual virtues (particularly truth-seeking and fairness) and avoiding the vices that obstruct the perception of truth. Accordingly, the promotion of the principles of ethical dialogue based on the Razavi Sīrah and the cultivation of intellectual virtues within the country's educational system are essential.

Keywords: Imam Reza (A.S.), Virtue Epistemology, Intellectual Virtues, Intellectual Vices, Debate.



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1.Introduction

Debate, as an ancient method for discovering and imparting truths, held a special place in the *Sīrah* of the Infallible Imams (A.S.), and the era of Imam Reza (A.S.), owing to the formation of the translation movement and al-Ma'mūn al-'Abbāsī's patronage of scholarly assemblies, is considered a turning point in this regard. Nevertheless, the mere existence of a dialogue-based structure does not guarantee fruitfulness or the attainment of truth. The fundamental problem of this research is why, in similar debates of Imam Reza (A.S.) with the leaders of various religions and sects, divergent results were obtained-why some, like 'Imrān al-Ṣābi'ī, attained the truth while others remained trapped in obstinacy and intellectual stagnation. The necessity of this investigation arises from the gap in domestic research, which, despite the importance of moral and religious education, has not yet analyzed the Razavi debates through the lens of "virtue epistemology" as a novel approach in analytic philosophy. By filling this gap, this article seeks to extract an ethical model for dialogue and debate based on the Razavi *Sīrah*, demonstrating that success in an intellectual encounter depends not merely on the power of logic and reasoning but on the adornment of both parties with intellectual virtues and their purification from intellectual vices.

2.Research Objectives

This research is structured around the central question: "What is the role of intellectual virtues and vices in the interlocutors of the debates with Imam Reza(A.S.)?" In pursuit of answering this question, the study follows three fundamental objectives: first, identifying and explicating the instances of intellectual virtues (such as truth-seeking, open-mindedness, and intellectual courage) and intellectual vices (such as dogmatism, intellectual arrogance, and intellectual dependence) in the behavior and speech of the participants in the Imam's debates. Second, analyzing the role of these virtues and vices in the process of attaining or failing to attain true knowledge and understanding the reasons for the individuals' failure or success in the face of the Imam's (A.S.) proofs. And finally, inferring and presenting an ethical and practical model for correct and fruitful debate, grounded in the teachings derived from the practical *Sīrah* and discursive logic of Imam Reza(A.S.), so as to extract the principles of ethics-centered dialogue for application in contemporary educational and social systems.

3. Methodology

This study is a fundamental research project with a qualitative approach, employing the “descriptive-analytical” method. The theoretical framework governing the analysis is the “responsibilist” approach in virtue epistemology—an approach that, instead of focusing solely on the formal properties of beliefs, emphasizes the character, motivation, and personality traits of the “epistemic agent” (the believing individual) and considers justified true belief not as the product of a merely reliable cognitive process, but as the result of the voluntary and conscious exercise of intellectual virtues by the knowing subject. Within this framework, an intellectual virtue is a stable character trait with motivational, affective, competence-based, and judgmental dimensions that directs the agent toward epistemic goods (truth, understanding, and wisdom).

The research data were collected through documentary and library study, with direct reference to authentic narrative and historical sources, particularly Shaykh al-Ṣadūq’s ‘Uyūn Akhbār al-Reza (A.S.). Data analysis was conducted at two consecutive levels: at the first level, the historical accounts of the Imam’s (A.S.) debates with figures such as the Christian Catholicos (Jāthalīq), the Jewish Exilarch (Ra’s al-Jālūt), Sulaymān al-Marwazī, and ‘Imrān al-Ṣābi’ī were meticulously described and compared; at the second level, the positions, questions, answers, and resistances of each interlocutor were assessed against the criteria of the components of virtue epistemology, so that by identifying the binary oppositions of virtue and vice, the ethical model of debate could be extracted.

4. Findings

The research findings reveal a stark contrast between two groups of interlocutors. On one hand, ‘Imrān al-Ṣābi’ī, as an exemplar of a virtuous epistemic agent, exhibited nearly all the central intellectual virtues. He spoke with exemplary “curiosity” and perseverance about his long journeys to find answers to fundamental monotheistic questions. His “open-mindedness” in sincerely accepting Imam Reza (A.S.) view and lack of prejudice toward his prior beliefs, along with his “intellectual independence” that distanced him from stubborn dogmatism, was evident. The pinnacle of his virtue was crystallized in his “intellectual humility and courage,” where, in an assembly filled with defeated religious leaders, he dared to pose questions and, after hearing decisive arguments, courageously acknowledged the invalidity of his previous

viewpoint and embraced Islam. In contrast, the other interlocutors—namely the Christian Catholicos, the Jewish Exilarch, and Sulaymān al-Marwazī—were immersed in intellectual vices. “Dogmatism” and prejudice were apparent in the Catholicos’ admission that, despite his inner inclination, he would submit to the Biblical reasoning, and in the Exilarch’s feigned ignorance in disregarding the miracles of Jesus (A.S.). The “intellectual arrogance” of the Exilarch in his repeated fallacies and avoidance of accepting the truth, and the “intellectual dismissiveness” of Sulaymān al-Marwazī in persistently repeating a false proposition, demonstrated their lack of motivation for truth-seeking. Moreover, “intellectual dependence” and “intellectual conformity,” as two macro-level vices, were manifested in their compliance with al-Ma’ mūn’s command to debate—not with the motive of discovering truth, but with the aim of defeating the Imam (A.S.) and gaining the Caliph’s approval. Consequently, due to the absence of intellectual virtues, this group perceived the debate not as a process for seeking truth but as an arena for wrangling and overcoming an adversary, and their ultimate surrender was not out of awareness and inner transformation but out of helplessness before the Imam’s (A.S.) decisive proof.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study arrives at the fundamental conclusion that the fruitfulness of a debate is contingent not merely upon the power of logical argumentation but, more significantly, upon the adornment of both parties with intellectual virtues, particularly “truth-seeking” and “fairness.” The Razavi Sīrah demonstrates that an ethics-centered debate is a bidirectional process for critical understanding, enhancing self-awareness, and assisting the interlocutor in gaining a clearer view of the truth, wherein the aim is not to silence the opponent but to affirm the truthful word from whichever speaker it may come. These results bear important practical implications for today’s society, which faces serious challenges in the sphere of dialogue.

Since intellectual virtues, contrary to common perception, are acquirable and teachable, the article presents three categories of strategic recommendations:

1. In the formal education system: indirectly incorporating the components of virtue epistemology through dialogue skills workshops, ethics-oriented free-thinking forums, in-service teacher training courses, and the revision of courses such as “The Ethics of Life” to cultivate virtues like intellectual humility and intellectual courage in students.

2. In the informal educational system: encouraging professors and teachers to serve as intellectual role models through active listening, acknowledging scholarly error, and promoting a questioning approach instead of one-way transmission of information.

3. In the social and media sphere: producing artistic, dramatic, and media content aimed at simply and comprehensibly explicating intellectual virtues and vices to the general public, with the aim of transforming public attitudes and promoting a culture of dialogue based on fairness, which is itself a necessary prelude to the realization of a more ethical and wiser society.

Keywords: Imam Reza(A.S.), Virtue Epistemology, Intellectual Virtues, Intellectual Vices, Debate, Moral Education, Truth-Seeking.