

## KALĀM / MUSLIM THEOLOGY

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### **The Emergence of Kalām (Muslim Theology) in the Classical Period**

The term *Kalām* literally means ‘speech’ and ‘word’, and is the counterpart of the term ‘logos’ in Greece, which means ‘reason’ and ‘argument’. It establishes the basics of faith and deed in accordance with the Qur’an, justifies these basics rationally and defends them against challenging ideas. From this definition follows that the subject matters of Kalām are faith and deeds/actions. The three branches of faith are belief in God, His prophets and the day to come. Deeds are ethical and so practical side of Kalām.

Kalām was applied to a particular system of thought which arose in Islam prior to the rise of philosophy and its exponents simply called *Mutakallimūn*. In its reference by the *mutakallimūn*, ‘*ilm al-kalām*’ is used interchangeably with ‘*ilm uşūl al-dīn*’ (the science of the basic doctrines of Islam). One of the primary tasks of theology, under this title, is to determine the items that make up the creed and to clarify their cognitive meaning. The titles ‘*ilm al-tawhīd*’, ‘*ilm al-jadal*’ and ‘*ilm al-naẓar*’ are also used to refer to ‘*ilm al-kalām*’ to denote the essentials of Muslim belief as a whole. *Al-Jadal*, the activity of dialectical disputation, is in particular used for instruction and the refutation of false theses. *Al-naẓar*, also, in the sense of disputation is quite common and is used to denote that every single sign and symbol in the outside world is seen as a constituent part of rational thinking.

*Uşūl al-dīn* generally follows the basic scheme which can rationally be demonstrated. Some topics like status of the Prophet and related questions such as prophetic revelation are not considered by some *mutakallimūn* to be *uşūl* but rather *furū*’ since they cannot be rationally demonstrated. This is the general scheme of *uşūl al-dīn*:

- Justified knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and speculative reasoning (*al-jadal* or *al-naẓar*).
- Proof of the existence of the Creator and His attributes.
- God’s governance of the world and the ontological status of human agency (*al-qadā’ wal-qadar* or *halq al-af‘al*)
- Prophets and questions related to Prophetic revelation.
- The world to come or resurrection.
- The status of individuals and the order of society (*al asmā’u wal-ahkām*, *al-ta’dīl ve tajwīr*, *al-imāma*, etc.).

Kalām or Muslim Theology is the forerunner to, and foundation for, Islamic thought. When compared with other Islamic sciences, Kalām by far the earliest one to arise because it relates to the very core of religion, i.e., faith and deed. As it was put forward by Ibn Khaldūn, contrary to Fiqh that is related to bodily commitments of the faithful, Kalām is related to the commitments of heart such as the articles of faith which deal with the essence and the attributes of God, resurrection, paradise, punishment and predestination. And Kalām entails discussion and defense of these

subjects with the help of intellectual arguments.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Ibn Khaldūn considers Kalām the first Islamic science to arise and attributes a primacy to it over other Islamic sciences.

### **Method in Kalām**

Islam in fact knew two theologies. The first was the Greeks' science about God, often called metaphysics. The second was what was called Kalām or dialectical theology. Unlike metaphysics which began with the premises of pure reason, Kalām takes the premises of revelation as its starting point and attempt to demonstrate dialectically and reasonably the conclusions that followed from them. So in describing Kalām, we see the Holy Qur'an as its subject matter and intellectual arguments as its method. It bases itself on rational and Qur'anic principles. It deduces creedal principles from the Holy Qur'an and bases them on reason so that they could be conceived by all. In other words, Kalām explains these principles, argues about them and defends them.

Considering both its subject matter and method, *Kalām* is called 'the speculative science,' 'dialectical science,' or 'the rational science.' If directly refers to a priori premises or rational arguments, kalām's method is considered 'rational,' and 'demonstrative truth' (*burhanī*). If it refers to the Holy Qur'an in its argumentations, then it is considered as 'speculative,' 'rhetorical' or 'dialectical' truth (*hitābī*). Although they differs in their reference to reason and scripture, from this it comes out that *Mutakallimūn* make use of both reason and scripture in their argumentation. Understandably, besides their commitment to the Scripture, *mutakallimūn* were very much celebrated for their free reasoning. This was both because they had to convince non-Muslims in their discussions on the one hand and they had to develop huge amount of evidence from the Holy Qur'an through reasoning on the other. That would finally render any evidence, be it 'demonstrative truth' (*burhanī*) or 'dialectical' truth (*khitābī*) one and the same. As a result they concentrated on the meaning of the Scripture rather than its literal structure. So they were called as *ahl al-ra'y*, those who are reasoning. As the *Mutakallimūn* considered the source of reason and revelation identical, they tried to make these two compatible with each other rather than clashing one another. Indeed the idea of *tawhīd* (literally *unifying*) requires this kind of compatibility and unification.

### **Motivations behind Theological Discussions**

In the beginning there were various motivations behind theological discussions. Initially some inner-Islamic debates, which were mainly political created some questions to be answered. Fore and foremost of these were about the destiny of those who waged war against one another after the death of the Prophet. Although there was a warning in the Qur'an for the Muslims saying that "if Muḥammad died or were killed, will you then return back to your habits and practices prior to Islam" (Āl-i 'Imrān 3.144), civil wars started among people as it were before Islam, and naturally many religious issues accompanied this course. So politically motivated problems at that time triggered many theological issues like the destiny of those who killed one another in these civil wars and the position of those people who committed a grave sin by delving into a mutual killing in this course. Although these problems were not religious but political in nature, religious terms were used by all parts to justify their positions. The practice of discussing political issues in religious context unfortunately triggered a false tradition which many times confused the religious issues

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Kaldun, *Muqaddima*, 1967, 2, 438.

with political ones and thus mistakenly turned the temporal political issues of the time into permanent ones.

And secondly at the end of the second century after Hegira, Muslims had a territorial expansion, when they encountered various religions and cultures. And simultaneously discussions started concerning religious doctrines. Understandably it was no point reciting passages from the Holy Qur'an to those people who did not acknowledge it as a holy scripture. So Muslim scholars felt obliged to find a common ground, i.e. reason which would serve as an arbiter to judge between right and wrong. So they developed theological method which uses reason as a common ground to make the religious doctrine understandable and conceivable for all. So it can easily be concluded from these facts that Kalām gained some of its character in its debates with non-Muslim groups and their refutation like Manicheans, Christians, Jews who were the key neighboring religious doctrines at that time. This was carried out especially through Mu'tazilite theologians as a missionary activity. There is no doubt that from the time of the first century of the hegira, the relationship between different religious groups exercised an influence on Muslim Theology by way of polemics. This led to a similarity of problems and method rather than a similarity of solutions. So Kalām started not only as an inner-Islamic discussion when, mainly through political development, the self-confident naiveté of the early days, but also as an encounter with alien religions and cultures.

### **The First Prominent Figures and Schools**

The above mentioned inner discussions in Muslim territory caused a hot debate between the rulers and scholars. Although many doctrinal problems were spoken out under the four caliphs, not until the Umayyad took over the caliphate that these problems were discussed in a systematic and argumentative way. The first man who talked publicly about the doctrine of the Qadarites was Ma'bad al-Juhanī. He lived in the early days of the Umayyads, the brutal times when persistent persecutions for opponents were operated in the country for the Umayyad hegemony. But the rulers claimed that they were not responsible for what they did. It is God who does everything. Soon after the misinterpretation of some doctrinal verses by the Umayyad rulers, some leading adversary figures came up with challenging ideas. Historians report that Ma'bad al-Juhanī was among these figures. They came one day to the reverend Muslim scholar Ḥasan al-Basrī and said: 'O Abu Sa'īd, these rulers shed the blood of the Muslims and do grievous things and say that their works are by the decree of Allah.'

To this Ḥasan replied: 'The enemies of God, they are liars.' Thus the first doctrine laid down by the early *mutakallimūn* was: 'Man is accountable for his own evil doings; these acts should not be ascribed to God.' This was known as the doctrine of *qadar*; hence the designation Qadarites given to the early *Ahl al-'Adl*, that is, the holders of the justice of God, for justice of God can be vouchsafed only by holding man responsible for his actions. Ma'bad preached these doctrines publicly and was therefore put to death (A.H 80/699 C.E.) by Hajjaj by order of caliph 'Abdalmalik.

After Ma'bad, Ghaylān al-Dimashqī promulgated similar views. He further added that it was incumbent on every Muslim to urge people to perform right actions and to check them from doing wrong. This addition by Ghaylan overtly interfered with and threatened the maintenance of the Umayyad rule. As a consequence, he met his death at the hands of Ḥishām ibn Mālik the Caliph.

In this regard, the significant figure in Kalām who spoke out the issues in an argumentative manner was Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and his letter to ‘Abd al-Malik needs scrutinizing. How much al-Ḥasan was appreciated by his contemporaries and how strong was the moral authority he had over them can be seen by the amount of concern the Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik had for Ḥasan's views. When he heard that Ḥasan had "discussed predestination (*qadar*)" in unusual manner, he thought it necessary to address a personal letter to him. The Caliph demanded that Ḥasan explain his views to him. Ḥasan answered in a long letter which deals systematically with the question of man's moral responsibility in the face of God's fore-knowledge and predestination as mentioned in the holy Qur'an. Ḥasan justifies as follows:

*God has said, "I have created jinn and men only in order that they worship Me. I do not require any sustenance from them; neither will I that they feed Me" (Zāriyāt 51.56-57). Thus He commanded them to worship Him, for which purpose He had created them, and God is not one to create them for a purpose and then intervene between them and it (to prevent them from fulfilling it), because He does not wrong (His) servants (laysa bi-zallām li'l-'abād) (Āl-i 'Imrān 3.182) (p. 68, 1. 6-9).<sup>2</sup>*

The argument that according to the Qur'an (Zāriyāt 51.56), God's purpose in creating man was to make him serve Him and that therefore He will not prevent him from this service (by pre-ordaining his disobedience), was used afterward as one of the arguments against predestination.

We have seen that Ḥasan is confident that God will not prevent man from serving Him "because He does not wrong man". Thus we arrive at the central questions of theodicy: Are man's evil acts pre-ordained by God? If so, God could be said to wrong man (in denying him his chance to do good and deserve his reward. This is the meaning implied by al-Ḥasan and stated explicitly by later authors). Is it at all possible that evil proceed from God? Ḥasan's answer is clear:

*Therefore, o Commander of the Faithful, understand what the Book (teaches) you and give up the erroneous opinions (al-ahwā') of those who do not know about God's decree (qadā') and His judgement (ḥukm). Because God says this (i.e. Āl-i 'Imrān 3.182) meaning that God did not change (i.e. withdraw and replace by its opposite) a favour He had bestowed on people (lam yakun mughayyiran ni'matan an'amahā 'alā qawmin), until they changed what is in their souls. Thus at first favour came from God but the change (taghyīr) came from men (al-'ibād), because they disobeyed His commandment as He said (Ibrāhīm 14.28-29): "Have you not considered those who have bartered (baddalū) God's favour for infidelity and caused their people to descend into the house of perdition, into Hell". Thus favour was from God, and the barter (tabdīl) from men, because they failed to do (tarakū) what He had commanded and they did ('amilū) that which He had forbidden them (En 'ām 6.151).<sup>3</sup>*

After these forerunners, in the early second century of Hegira Mu'tazila came forth as a doctrinal school to discuss many other problems in a systematic way. Wāsil b. Atā (131/748) and Amr b. 'Ubayd (144/761) are two important figures to set the backbone of Mu'tazilite doctrine. These two

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<sup>2</sup> For Ḥasan's letter see *al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Risāla: Studien zur Islamischen Frömmigkeit I*, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ed. H. Ritter, *Der Islam* 21 (1933), pp.67-83. Also see, Schwarz, "The Letter of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, *Oriens*, 20 (1972), pp.15-30.

<sup>3</sup> Op.cit., p.68.

were Ma'mun's own teachers and he held them in high esteem. Dirār bin 'Amr (200/815) Abu'l-Huzayl al-'Allāf (227/841) and Ibrāhīm an-Nazzām (221/815), Bisr bin Mu'tamir (210/825) Sumāma bin Ashras (213/828) following them contributed much in establishing and determining the basics of this school and they deserve to be mentioned as the predecessor metaphysicians of Mu'tazila. The last names to be mentioned are Jubba'īs who presented a splendid epilogue to the movement of rationalism in Medieval Islam.

Thanks to these intellectuals, in the eighth century, at Basra and Baghdad, the so-called Mu'tazila were engaged in debates on religion, politics and cosmology, as well as the defense of Islamic creed against non-Muslim dogmas. That began to happen during the Umayyad rule based in Damascus (40-132/661-750). And it happened before the Greco-Arabic translation movement in Baghdad was getting well under way during the reigns of the 'Abbasid Caliphs al-Mansūr and al-Rashīd. The seventh caliph, al-Ma'mun, during whose reign (198-218) the translations from Syriac and Greek in science, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy reached a culminating point, was also a patron of the rationalizing Mu'tazila. The two Abbasids following Ma'mūn were Wāthiq and Mu'tasim, who supported Mu'tazila wholeheartedly. This line continued until it was abandoned by al-Mutawakkil. Mu'tazila served as a unique school to establish and defends these basics as many as two hundred years until new ones, like Ash'arī and Māturīdī emerged.

These figures were mostly criticized by mainstream Islam not just because they referred to reasoning in understanding the Scripture but because the segregation they gave rise to in Muslim community. The community was a too young and immature yet to tolerate this segregation, so by labeling them as heterodox the community tried to get rid of them. And this was done in the hands of orthodox (Sunnite) theology.

### **Sunnite Theology**

As a reaction to the Mu'tazilī kalām two kalām schools developed: One is called Salafiyya, a school consisted of mostly of Muhaddiths like Ahmad b. Hanbal, Bukharī and others and they rejected rational interpretations of Qur'anic text. They supported a limited rationality which was confined totally to the rationality of the text not to human beings on the topics like divinity of God, His attributes, nature, etc.

Hāris al-Muhāsibī and Ibn Kullāb are the forerunners of the second school of kalām. However, this school has competently been represented by Māturīdī and As'harī. In the beginning of fourth century after Hegira, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d.935 C.E) and simultaneously Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d.944 C.E.) founded the first Sunnite theological school. However, if we speak a Sunnite theology after Mu'tazila, this could be Maturīdī before Ash'ari. Because Ash'ari is reported to have spent his 40 years as Mu'tazila, as the disciple of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, which means while he was promulgating Mu'tazilite tendencies, Māturīdī was paving way for Sunnite theology. If we leave aside the discussion on who was the first to be called as the leader of Sunnite theology, it can be said with these two schools' efforts the two major centers of Mu'tazila, Basra and Baghdad, became centers of Ash'arite school of theology, and Samarqand became the biggest Sunni school at that time.

Abu Mansūr al-Māturīdī<sup>4</sup> (333/944) credits his school with Abu Ḥanīfa<sup>5</sup> calling him as Imām (leader in the sect). His popular book *al-Fiqh al-akbar*<sup>6</sup> is among the most influential creedal text of his time afterwards and it indirectly created the Sunnite theology to be followed by Māturīdī. Although Abū Hanīfa himself did not intend to found a theological school, he was later on considered by Maturīdīs as the founder of Sunnite theology.

Disturbingly very little is known about the life of Māturīdī (333/944). He was born, in Māturīt, a place near Samarqand. He followed the opinion of Abū Hanīfa in legal matters. His *Kitāb al-tawhīd* and *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* are milestones in Kalām. While the former is pure speculative theology book, the latter is hermeneutical interpretation of the Holy Qur'an.

While Basra, where Ash'arī maintained his doctrine, had issues saturated with philosophical problems, Samarqand has its *sui generis* ones. Besides the problems discussed in Baghdāt and Baṣrā, Māturīdī, focused on rejecting the regional widespread doctrine of manichaeism with its dualistic approach in addition to rejecting Mu'tazilī doctrine.

As to the place of Ash'ari and Māturīdī in the history of Islamic thought, the testimony of Tashkuprizāda may be considered typical:

*“Know, then, that two men may be considered leaders of orthodox Islam in the science of speculative theology, one a Hanafīte, the other a Shafī'ite. The Hanafīte is Abū Mansūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmud al-Māturīdī, the rightly guided Imam... The other, the Shafī'ite is Abu'l- Ḥasan al-Ash'ārī al-Baṣrī.”*<sup>7</sup> ...

With these two schools' dominion over Muslim world, Mu'tazila was pushed more narrow space to operate. Thanks to the Shi'ite scholars who followed the mainstream line of Mu'tazilīte doctrine, it survived intellectually.

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<sup>4</sup> For a systematic work handling overall views of al- al-Māturīdī see; *al-Māturīdī's World of Thought* (Māturīdī'nin Düşünce Dünyası), ed. Prof.Dr.Şaban Ali Düzgün, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, (Ankara 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Abu Hanīfa, Numan bin Thabit (80-150) lived in the reign of Umayyads. He was gifted with a keen sense of reasoning and exceptional intelligence and acquired great fame as the interpreter of religious doctrines. He joined the circle of the most famous Imam of the time Hammād in Kūfa, after whose death he became the Imam of this circle. He founded a body of intellectuals from his distinguished students in order to create a new legal doctrine in Iraq. Under the period of Caliph al-Manṣūr he was offered the position of Chief Judge but he refused it. Finally he was imprisoned and died while still there in 150 A.H. (767 C.E.).

<sup>6</sup> These creedal treatises (*ar-Risāla*, pl. *ar-Resāil*) are popular expositions of the creed (*aqīda*) and written for the instruction of the people, which were meant to be learned by heart and recited by people. They have popular character, and put practical problems in the forefront, eschatological features, edifying dogmas such as those concerning miracles, details of little theological importance but which would strike the popular imagination, such as the number of the prophets, apostles and sacred books revealed before Islam. The oldest document of this series which has come to hand is the authentic *al-Fiqh al-akbar* by Abu Hanīfa; *'Aqāid al-Nasafīyya* by Naṣmaddīn al-Nasafī; *al-'aqīda at-Tahāwīyya* by Tahāwī (d.321/933); *Bayānu aqīdati 'l-usūl* by Abu'l-lays al-Samarqandī; *As-Sawād al-a'zam* by Hakīm al-Samarqandī; *'Amālī* by Sirājaddīn al-Ūshī; *al-Qasīda an-nūniyya* by Hızır Bey are examples of Māturīdīte creedal treatises. *Jawharatu 't-tawhīd* by Lakānī is an As'harīte treatise.

<sup>7</sup> Tashkuprizādah, *Miftāh al-sa'āda wa miṣbāh al-siyāda* (Hyderabad, 1329), II, 21-22.

Ash'ari first followed the doctrine of the Mu'tazila, then he became converted to traditionalism, but continued to use the speculative method of the Mu'tazila to defend traditionalist doctrine; in this way he arrived at an intermediate position, and this position was maintained by his school. In his *Istih̄sān al-khavḍ fī 'ilm al-kalām*, a treatise in defense of kalām and an answer to objections raised by the censors of kalām, Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī outlines quite a rationalist outlook. On the contrary, in his *ibāna* he is rather traditionalist. This is because he undertook a mental transformation from a rationalist point of view into a traditionalist one. When he is compared with Mu'tazila and Māturīdīya, Ash'arī could be seen as a traditionalist, yet he deserves to be called a traditionalist using reason in defense of orthodoxy. Two claims have been echoed about his stance: a Mu'tazilite with traditionalist tendencies, and Ash'arī with a rationalist tendency. In his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, he just outlines the doctrines of the various groups of theologians concerning theological issues.

The differences between these two theological schools have always been under discussion, some of which are accounted as follow:

For al-Maturīdī, the concept of God's wisdom is an active principle governing and determining the structure and operation of the universe. Contrary to Māturīdī, Ash'ari considers it perverse to search for a wisdom in God's acts. In his opinion, He is unquestionable for whatever He does. Mu'tazila, on the contrary, think that the actions without wisdom are not but nonsense and are nothing to do with God. The doctrine of *tanzīh* is a middle way between these two and asserts not a necessary but a wise and intelligent cause.

They differ in their role of human reason in the development of religious faith. Unlike Ash'arī who claimed that knowledge of God derives from revelation through the prophets, Māturīdī argues that knowledge of God's existence can be derived through reason alone. So according to Ash'arī a person who grows up in an isolated place is not responsible for finding out God, because human reason does not have the capability of discovering Him. On the contrary in Māturīdīte thought such a man is taken responsible for discovering the existence of God, as human reason does have this capability.

On the one hand both Ash'arī and Maturidī are presented as partisans of metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wīl*); and on the other, as partisans of the way of the Ancestors (*Salaf*), namely, the acknowledgment of all the scriptural and traditional data concerning God's attributes without attempting to interpret them for fear of falling into anthropomorphism, or of explaining them completely away and thus removing God of His attributes, or of using *tanzīh* which is an reduction of the doctrine of denudation. These two views are diametrically opposed.

These two schools in Kalām made use of reason in order to understand what they considered as the legitimate sources of theology: scripture and tradition. What they could not understand they left as it stood in the sources; they did not make use of reason to interpret the sources metaphorically. On the other hand, the rationalists advocated the use of reason on scripture and tradition; and all that they deemed to contradict the dictates of reason they interpreted metaphorically in order to bring it into harmony with reason.

Until al-Ghazālī (d.505), the first period of Sunni theology is called the period of *mutakaddimūn*. And its main characteristic was to rely on mostly the Qur'anic arguments in their discussions. In this period such names as Baqillānī (d.403), Ibn Fūrak, Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqī, Juwainī (d. 478),

Abu'l-Mu'īn an-Nasafī, etc. After al-Ghazalī, which was known as the period of *mutaahhirūn*, classical logic was included to the Islamic sciences and philosophical topics gained much more ground than ever. Nūraddīn as-Sābūnī, Shamsaddīn al-Samarqandī, Shahrīstanī (d. 548), Fakhraddīn al-Razī (d.606), Sayfuddīn al-'Amidī, Qādī Baydāwī, Adududdīn al-Īcī, Taftazānī, Curcānī, Ibnu'l-Humām, Calāladdīn ad-Dawwanī were among these *mutaahhirūn*.

Together with the changes in theological and philosophical considerations and with the new tendencies, novel topics were added to the subject matter of kalām and accordingly new method was developed to resist against the scientific evidences put forward by newly born sociology, biology, psychology, etc. Among those who opted for a new theology with a new method and subject matters are İzmirli İsmail Hakkı *Yeni İlm-i Kelām*, Istanbul 1339; İsmail Fenni Ertugrul, *Maddiyyūn Mezhebinin İzmihlali*, Istanbul 1928; Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *Uss-i Islām: Yeni Akāid*, Istanbul 1923, *Allah'ı İnkār Mümkün müdür?*, Istanbul 1327; Farīd Vajdī, *al-Islām fī 'asr al-'ilm*, Cairo 19529; Jamāladdīn Afghānī, *ar-Radd 'alā al-dahriyyīn*, Cairo 1955; Muḥammad Abduh, *Risāla al-Tawhīd* (Cairo, 1353); Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Shibli Nu'manī, *İlm al-Kalām*, Karachi, 1929; Muḥammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, Lahor 1989).

## THE PROBLEMATIC of KALĀM

To get to know how kalām deals its systematic subject matters two topics will be given as examples: One is theory of knowledge and the second is existence of God and the problems of attributes of God.

### Theory of Knowledge

The theory of knowledge concerns itself primarily with the possibility, nature and sources of knowledge. Taking the possibility of knowledge for granted, *mutakallimūn* focused their epistemological effort on the study of the nature and sources of knowledge. Mainly finding its inception in al-Māturīdī, the themes of the nature of knowledge and how it comes about have mainly been the preoccupation of Muslim theologians.

Initially the majority of theologians divide human knowledge into two parts: necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*<sup>8</sup>) and acquired knowledge (*'ilm muktasab*). Necessary knowledge occurs without man's having power to produce and prove it. The absence of power implies man's inability to prevent this knowledge from taking place in his mind. This conclusion is stated by al-Bāqillānī<sup>9</sup>, according to whom man is forced to accept necessary knowledge in such a way that he cannot doubt its existence.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the Mu'tazilite Mutakallim Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār<sup>11</sup> defines *'ilm ḍarūrī* as knowledge which a man cannot repudiate through doubt, or as knowledge which occurs in man but not from himself.<sup>12</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār adds to his definition the notion that necessary knowledge is produced by God.<sup>13</sup> Thus, according to the theologians mentioned above, there are five features of

<sup>8</sup> Hourani, who, referring to 'Abd al-Jabbār, prefers to translate 'ilm ḍarūrī by the English 'immediate knowledge', for in philosophical English 'necessary' means 'logically implied' which is characteristic only of knowledge deriving from discursive reasoning ('ilm muktasab). *Islamic Rationalism*, p.20.

<sup>9</sup> al-Bāqillānī famous Ash'arite theologian died in 1013 C.E.

<sup>10</sup> al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, ed. R.J. McCarthy, Beirut, 1957, p.7.

<sup>11</sup> The most important figure in Mu'tazilite theological tradition. He died in 1025 C.E.

<sup>12</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. XII, p.65.

<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān, *Nazariyyāt*, pp.60, 62.



necessary knowledge: **a.** occurrence without one's power; **b.** necessity; **c.** production by God; **d.** absence of doubts; and **e.** absence of speculation.

### **Kinds of Necessary Knowledge**

Necessary knowledge is divided into two main kinds: direct or a priori knowledge (*'ilm badīhī*), and sense perception (*'ilm hissī*). The former is again divided into two parts: positive direct knowledge, such as man's self-consciousness and his feeling of pain, delight, hunger, thirst and the like; and negative direct knowledge, such as the knowledge that something is inconceivable, that a thing cannot be eternal and come into being, that a person cannot be dead and alive at the same time. Reliable report (*khābar mutawātir*)<sup>14</sup> is also considered as a kind of necessary knowledge, for like the other two kinds there occurs no doubt in its existing.

Some mutakallimūn define knowledge as the conviction that something is according to its real state (*i'tiqād al-shay' 'alā mā huwa bihī/alayhi*). This conviction means certainty and absence of doubt; hence it is well rooted in one's mind so that one cannot repudiate it. In order to indicate this knowledge does not imply any doubt, some theologians add new elements into this definition as in these designations:

Knowledge is the conviction that something is according to its real state *with a tranquility of mind*.

(*i'tiqād al-shay' 'alā mā huwa bihī ma'a sukūni'n-nefsi ilayhi*) (Abū Hāshim)

Knowledge is the conviction that something is according to its real state *necessarily or with proof*.

(*i'tiqād al-shay' 'alā mā huwa bihī ḍarūratan aw dalīlan*) (Al-Jubbāī)

A *ḥatīdh*/tradition based on the authority of one person (*khābar al-wāḥid*) is not considered a reliable source of knowledge in Kalām in establishing creedal articles, but is thought to have only a moral value.

### **Theological implications of Necessary Knowledge**

Besides its being a proof on its own merit, necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*) is used as a basis of theological arguments. Knowledge in the capacity of proof occurs in basic issues of Kalām. The examples below are representative of the wide use of necessary knowledge as proof in Kalām. These examples deal with God, the world, man, and with the relationships between God and man and between God and the world.

### **Man's knowledge of God as an evidence for the existence of God**

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<sup>14</sup> *Khābar mutawātir* is a report or tradition repeatedly transmitted by so many persons whose number and righteousness exclude any possibility of their prior agreement on a lie, e.g., Muḥammad's claim for prophecy. Māturīdī differs from preceding scholars in the description of *mutawātir*. He does not consider the number and righteousness of so many persons as a guarantee of not agreeing on lying. Only the prophet is immune to lying not anyone else.

Man's knowledge of God is based on *fiṭra* or a priori knowledge. So many issues such as anthropomorphism or God's knowledge of the particulars can clearly be understood through this a priori knowledge. As for the second issue Fakhraddīn al-Razī is reasoning as follows:

*'We observe that if the people of this world, the righteous and the wicked (zindīq), the Muslim and the unbeliever (mulḥid), are afflicted by suffering they demand God for mercy and ask Him to save them from this suffering even if they are the most extreme deniers of His knowing of the particulars. If this happens to someone, he will necessarily set about praying, beseeching mercy from God and submitting to Him. This proves that the basic disposition (al-fiṭra al-asliyya) attests that the Lord of the world has power over the things and knows the secret and the hidden things. It is known that the testimony of the fiṭra is more acceptable than these hidden disjunctions (taqsīmāt khafiyya) and obscure proofs, which are to be sought for, and therefore one must definitely assert that the Lord of the world knows the particulars and is capable of supplying [man's] needs.'*<sup>15</sup>

Three important points are stated here by Rāzī: **a.** an act of all the people serves as proof of its truthfulness; **b.** the fact that many people behave in the same way shows that their behavior goes back to their primordial nature which can be identified as producing necessary knowledge; **c.** knowledge obtained through *fiṭra* is preferable to knowledge obtained through speculative arguments.<sup>16</sup>

Concerning the world and its structure, necessary knowledge is again used as a proof. The knowledge that things are created and directed (*muḥdatha, mudabbara*) is necessary knowledge. It is claimed that one's perception - one sees that all things are made and directed- is by *fiṭra*. Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 912 C.E.) holds that the modes of being, immobility, movement, combination, separation and composition, are perceived by seeing, i.e. necessarily. According to al-Razi, the knowledge of the existence of time is direct (*badīhī*), that is, does not require proof (Matālib, vol. V, p.21 f).

The notion of God's imposing unattainable duties (*taklīf mā lā yutāqu*) is also known through necessary knowledge derived from man's experience; every intelligent man knows through his completeness of intuition that it is evil to impose on the paralyzed, for example, the duty to walk.

### **Knowledge and Faith**

Muslim theologians claim that all axioms and assumptions employed are validated on rational grounds, insisting that premises authenticated in religious belief have been formally and systematically excluded from any prior acceptance as epistemic axioms. With these axioms the theory of knowledge ensures the cognitive value of religious belief. It can easily be claimed that kalām rests on no axiom or presupposition that is accepted as true on the sole basis of religious belief; so it deserves to be called as "the rational science". This is because a key verse from the Holy Qur'an signifies the belief in God as something cognitive: "**know** that there is no god but Allah" (Muḥammad 47.19).

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<sup>15</sup> al-Razī, *Matālib*, vol.III, p.164, the fourth argument.

<sup>16</sup> This reminds one of Aristotle's notion that 'in the human soul lies an intuition or immediate knowledge of those highest principles which are the source and premise of all scientific and mediate knowledge and which a student must possess before he can be taught. These axioms possess an even higher certainty than the knowledge deduced from them'. Heschel, p.278f.

For most of the *mutakallimūn*, reasoning (*al-naẓar wal-istidlāl*) precedes being a believer as its foundation and condition. That means there is direct relationship between knowledge and belief. So *kalām* asserts that religious belief (*al-īmān*) consists in assent (*al-taṣḍīq*), and this assent, in order to be valid, should to be based on sound rational inference. All primary doctrines are held to be rationally demonstrable on the basis of universally acceptable assumptions. The Qur’anic verses which underline that the Holy Qur’an is revealed on truth ( Āl-i ‘Īmrān 3.3) and God proves the truth by His words (Shūrā 42.24) require believers to base their belief on a rational ground.

### **Existence of God**

Some theologians agree that the inference of a creator from creation is self-evident and requires no proof, while others defend this inference by analogy or induction. Al-Juwaynī (d. 1085), for example, states that one can necessarily learn about God through the perfection of the world, which testifies to Him who did it perfectly.<sup>17</sup>

The question of whether someone with the aid of reason (*bi ‘aqlihī*) can recognize God was answered in a variety of ways. The Mu‘tazila taught the priority of reason over ‘hearing’ (the doctrine of active intellect in Muslim philosophy) and also therefore, the anteriority of knowledge of God deriving from reason over the event of revelation. That means man is able and even obliged to acquire knowledge about the existence of God by reasoning independent of prophetic revelation.

For Ash‘arī, the reason (*‘aql*) only possesses the ability to confirm the truth of what is true, the impossibility of what is impossible and the fact that the world has come into existence and will pass away and as well as the unity of God. The necessity of knowing God, and the related obligation of faith and fulfilling the works which are prescribed by the law, first becomes incumbent upon a being endowed with a reason when God has proclaimed His will through the sending of His prophet. Until then he earns neither reward nor punishment even for his deeds.

Māturīdī makes no significant distinction between *sam*’ and *‘aql*. When commenting Surah 6.145 he speaks of three different types of knowledge, *‘ilm al-‘aql*, *‘ilm al-hiss* and *‘ilm al-sam*’; however, he does attribute much importance to knowledge based on reason, in so far as he ascribes to reason the capability of distinguishing between good and evil. With his doctrine of the necessity of rational knowledge of God (*ma’rifat Allah ‘aqlan*), he stands, however, in contradiction to the Ash‘arī conception of *‘aql* and *sam*’.<sup>18</sup>

Māturīdīs consider the knowledge about the existence of God an obligatory conclusion on the basis of reasoning (*‘aql*), while the Ash‘arīs necessitate prophetic revelation (*sam*’) for the same conclusion. Both groups introduce the Qur’anic testimonies to support their arguments. The Ash‘arīs, for instance, maintain that since the Qur’an reads, “Messengers of good news and warning in order that mankind might have no argument against God after the messengers.” 4: 165) and “We do not punish until We have sent forth a messenger.” (17: 15), knowledge of God and other religious prescriptions are dependent on prophetic revelation rather than on reason.

### **Proofs for the Existence and Unity of God**

The traditional famous categories for proving the existence of God are cosmological (*hudūth*), the teleological (*ināyah*) and the ontological (*fiṭrah*) arguments; it is, however, the cosmological

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<sup>17</sup> al-Juwayni, *Irshād*, p.210.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Yörükan, *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1952, 106.

argument which mutakallimūn, in general, have emphasized most and of which they have given many more variant forms than those of the others. In a number of passages the Qur'an appeals to the evidence of natural phenomena in order to argue its point about the universal dominion of the One God. These are generally taken to be calls for a natural and rational proofs contained in the scripture (*al-dalā'il al-sam'iyya*). As al-Ash'arī claimed the scriptural proofs for the existence of God are in fact better than the philosophical demonstrations based on the ontology of accidents. So it may easily be stated that kalām is the rational exposition of the cognitive content of the religious vision articulated in the Qur'an. Let's take a look at a quotation on cosmological cosmological (*hudūth*) from R.Frank:

*“It embraces a discussion of the modes of being and the basic ontological classes of beings in general, the eternal and necessary and the temporal and contingent, and comprises a lengthy exposition concerning the being of the things that make up the universe and their division into those that exist in se and those that exist in alio, and of the various classes of the latter and the conditions of their existence, and of what it is to be the same and other and to be alike and different and of the ontological origin of the possibility and of what is possible and of the coming to be of what comes to be. It consists fundamentally of theoretical treatment of what counts as reality and of the basic classes of contingent beings and their properties. With these topics ‘ilm uṣūl al-dīn’ looks like metaphysics, but somewhat differently structured and more elaborately conceived.”<sup>19</sup>*

The argument asserts that the world came into being, that the world is contingent in that it could have been other than it is, or that certain beings or events in the world are causally dependent or contingent. From these facts mutakallimūn infer a necessary being or God exists. From the same premises the Muslim philosophers infer a first cause. This argument is part of classical natural theology, whose goal has been to provide some evidence for the claim that God exists.

Ontological (*fiṭra*) argument asserts that human mind does not need the external world or any empirical evidence in order to get the idea of all-perfect God. Thus it sees human mind potentially and intrinsically capable of arriving at this idea without agency of the created realm.

Teleological argument (*ināyah/nizām/ghāyah*) gets not only at the idea of God but also how wonderfully He creates the world. This second aspect renders it as an empirical argument for the existence of God. This amazing world we live in constitute evidence of intelligent design and inferring God's existence as the best explanation for it features, which serve as the persuasive evidence of intelligent purpose (*telos*, in Greek). The best explanation for this intelligible material world is that there exists an intelligent designer who intentionally brought about this fine-tuning world. According to Ibn Rushd, this bilateral aspect of the argument makes it much more religious and Qur'anic.

Indeed these three arguments are not but the moments of the same argument. So there is no need to hold one and leave aside the other two. In a personal level, sometimes ontological argument suffices man, and so does teleological one some other time.

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<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Frank, “The Science of Kalām”, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites: Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, Vol.III, ed.Dimitri Gutas, Burlington 2008, p.14.

As Mutakallimūn take the uniqueness and existence of God for granted and more easily known, they more focused on His unity. Unity of God (*tawḥīd*) in this sense is “the assertion that God is one” in the sense that He is unique: there is only one God (*lā ilāha illa llāh*). Uniqueness of being and of power seems to be the primary connotations of the word *al-tawḥīd*. The Ash‘arites extend this to say that there is no agent other than God (*lā sharīka lahū fī fi‘lihī*). The general argument used to prove the existence of God is called *dalīl al-tamānū‘*, which bases itself on this Qur’anic verse: “were there in them both (heaven and earth) other gods than Allah, they would surely have been ruined” (Anbiyā 21.22). “Say: ‘If there were other gods with Him, as they say, then surely they would have sought access to the Lord of the Throne.’”<sup>20</sup>

### **Attributes of God and the Problem of Anthropomorphism/Tajsīm**

One important topic tackled in Kalām is the existence of God and exposition of the nature of God and of His essential attributes.

Mutakallimūn divide the attributes of God into two large groups: those which exist since the eternity in and through God’s essence (*al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyya*), which are the attributes of being, and those which refer to an activity (*al-ṣifāt al-fi‘liyya*). Ash‘aris and Mu‘tazilis suggested that these attributes (*ṣifat al-af‘āl*) refer to activities of God which are closely connected with the things of the world which have come into existence in time, in contrast with the eternal attributes of being (*ṣifat al-dhat*) which have nothing to do with time.

According to Māturīdī, there is as little difference between the two sentences “God is the creator since eternity” (*lam yazal al-khāliq*) and “He is creating since eternity” (*lam yazal khāliqan*) as there is in the case of the attributes of being. In Māturīdīte thought every attribute of God, whether dhātiyya or fi‘liyya is eternal contrary to other two schools. They namely Ash‘arīs and Mu‘tazilis see a causal relation between God’s attributes and objects. And as the objects are temporal they see the relation and the attributes as temporal. In contrast with these schools Māturīdī does not see any causal relation between God’s activity and its object. What follows from this is that to say that God became creator by creating the world and nourisher (rāziq) by providing nourishment would contradict the unique perfection of divine essence. Rather God is the creator, the nourisher according to His essence and since eternity with these eternal attributes.

As for the metaphoric and anthropomorphic interpretation of God’s attributes which are called *as-ṣifat al-khabariyya*, we can see on the one hand, there is no likeness between God and other beings, which is expressed in such verses in the Qur’an as “*There is nothing like Him*” (Shūrā 42: 9), and “*There is none equal with Him*” (Ikhḷās 112:4). On the other hand, there are some others in the Qur’an suggesting anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*), with reference to either the essence or the attributes of God.

The early Muslims knew that anthropomorphism is absurd, but they decided that these verses were the word of God and therefore believed them without trying to interpret their meaning. Since there is no likeness between God and other beings, such attributes as seeing, hearing, descending, etc. predicated on God in the Qur’an need to be interpreted. As these attributes are also predicated on human beings, a due way is to be developed in order not to delve into anthropomorphism.

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<sup>20</sup> Īsra 17.42.

With regard to God's attributes there are different understandings. Hanbalites hold that the meaning of the original sentences concerning God's being is utterly trans-conceptual. There is no any validity of rational theology in interpreting these attributes. Their "*bi-lā kayf* – without asking how" expresses a rejection of all rational analysis: one can't offer any conceptual clarification of the descriptions of God contained in the Qur'an. However, the Hanbalites are not literalists in the usual sense of the term. Although the expression "*yadayya*" of Qur'an (Ṣād 38.75) means "my hands" in the usual sense of the word, the case must be different in God's case but we are not in a due position to conceptually interpret it.

By contrast, the leading Mu'tazilite theologians hold that in its basic teachings the religious language of the revelation disclosed no reality and no dimension of reality that is not accessible to rationalization or conceptual theory. Later on the Mu'tazila extended the subject (of God's freedom from human physical attributes) to the negative verses and decided to deny God's possession of the additional attributes of knowledge, power, volition, etc. They also rejected God's hearing and vision, because both hearing and vision are corporeal accidents. In addition, they refused God's speech and decided that the Qur'an was created. This claim created a turmoil in the community and was turned into inquisition, an event known as *mihna* in the history of Islam. Ash'arites held that the expressions most properly used to describe God are those which occur in the Scripture (the attributes by which God has described Himself in the Qur'an) and, therefore, that in order to achieve a rational knowledge of God one has to begin from the Scripture. On the contrary, Mu'tazila, following Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī<sup>21</sup>, held that the terms most valid and properly descriptive of God are those determined to be so on the basis of autonomously rational speculation.

So, Ash'arites seek to follow a middle ground, asserting the reality of God's essential attributes without rationalizing them and without conceiving them as having the same characteristics as the analogous attributes of creatures: *bi-lā ta'tīlin wa-lā tashbīh*. And in the varying formulations suggested for simultaneously negating both 'they are He' and 'they are not He'. To use 'how?' of something is to imply that it shares some properties with created beings and is distinguished from them by belonging to one class of beings and to another. In this solution, God having no *kayfiyya*, is a transcendent being but, nevertheless, is not utterly beyond the reach of conceptual knowing.

According to the Māturīdīs, God's attributes of action such as "creating" (*takhlīq*), "providing" (*tarzīq*), "giving life" (*ihyā'*), "giving death" (*imāta*), and "bringing into existence" (*takwīn*) are all eternal attributes of God. They are neither identical to God, but nor other than His essence. The Māturīdīs do not make a distinction between the attributes of action and attributes of essence with respect to their eternity or temporality. On the other hand, the Ash'arīs assert that the attributes of action are not eternal. They maintain that before the real act of creating (*khalq*), providing (*rizq*) and the like, such attributes are not found in God, and thus they are not called eternal.

Māturīdī interprets (*ta'wīl*) the anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an, which is the loosening of the text from its outer (*zāhir*) literal sense through pleonasm (*ziyāda*) or sparseness of expression (*nuqsān*), through tropical (*majāz*) or metaphorical (*isti'āra*) expression. Māturīdī understands the throne of God ('*arsh*) as a pictorial expression of God's power and majesty. Naturally such a conception excludes any similarity between the Creator and creatures as we observe in Sūrahs 7.54, 20.5, and the like.

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<sup>21</sup> He was born in Jubba, Khuzistan in 235/849

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