**THE PROBLEMATIC of KALĀM**

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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 he 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 preocupation of Muslim theologians.

Initially the majority of theologians divide human knowledge into two parts: necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*[[1]](#footnote-1)) 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[[2]](#footnote-2), according to whom man is forced to accept necessary knowledge in such a way that he cannot doubt its existence.[[3]](#footnote-3)Likewise, the Mu’tazilite Mutakallim Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār[[4]](#footnote-4) defines ‘*ilm ḍarūrī* as knowledge which a man cannot repudiate through doubt, or as knowledge which occurs in man but not from himself.[[5]](#footnote-5) ‘Abd al-Jabbār adds to his definition the notion that necessary knowledge is produced by God.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, according to the theologians mentioned above, there are five features of 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 ḥissī*). 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 (*khabar mutawātir*)[[7]](#footnote-7) is also considered as a kind of necessary knowledge, for like the other two kinds there occurs no doubt in its existing.

Some mutakallimun define knowledge as the conviction that something is according to its real state (*i'tiqad 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:

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

*(i'tiqad al-shay' 'alā mā huwa bihī ma‘a sukūni’n-nefsi ilayhi) (Abū Hāşim)*

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

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

A hatidh/tradition based on the authority of one person (*khabar 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**

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 undedstood 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.’[[8]](#footnote-8)*

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 *fitra* is preferable to knowledge obtained through speculative arguments.[[9]](#footnote-9)

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).

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-īman) consists in assent (al-taṣdīq), 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 ‘İmrān 3.3) and God proves the truth by His words (Shūrā 42.24) require believers to base their belief on a rational ground.

1. Hourani, who, referring to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, prefers to translate 'ilm ḍarūra 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. al-Bāqillānī famous Ash‘arite theologian died in 1013 C.E. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. al-Bāqillāni, Kitāb al-tamhīd, ed. R.J. McCarthy, Beirut, 1957, p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The most important figure in Mu’tazilīte theological tradition. He died in 1025 C.E. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 'Abd al-Jabbār, Mughnī, vol. XII, p.65. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthmān, Nazariyyāt, pp.60, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Khabar 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. al-Razī, *Matālib*, vol.III, p.164, the fourth argument. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)