**Existence of God**

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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.[[1]](#footnote-1)

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’*.[[2]](#footnote-2)

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 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-dalāil 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 (*ḥudūth)* 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 ad 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.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

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.

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 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.’”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**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’tazīlis 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"* (Ikhlās 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.

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 Hanbalītes 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‘tazīlīte 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‘arītes 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-Jubbāī[[5]](#footnote-5), 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‘arītes 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” (*iḥyā’*), “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 (*ẓāhir*) 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.

1. al-Juwayni, Irshād, p.210. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Yörükan, *İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1952, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. İsra 17.42. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. He was born in Jubba, Khuzistan in 235/849 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)