THE THEOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE: A STUDY ON THE DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE EARLY *MUTAKALLIMŪN*

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Khulasah

Tujuan artikel ini ialah untuk meneliti pandangan para *Mutakallimūn* berkenaan definisi ilmu dan hubungannya dengan doktrin akidah mereka. Dalam artikel ini saya melihat bahawa definisi ilmu yang dibina oleh para *Mutakallimūn* dipengaruhi oleh doktrin akidah mereka. Disamping itu juga perbezaan pandangan mereka terhadap apa yang dimaksudkan dengan definisi dan apakah kandungannya turut memberi kesan dalam perbincangan ini. Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, saya akan meneliti beberapa definisi ilmu yang dikemukakan oleh para *Mutakallimūn* dari generasi awal ilmu *kalam* daripada mazhab Ashaʿirah dan juga Muʿtazilah.

Kata Kunci: Konsep Ilmu, Definisi Ilmu, Akidah, *Mutakallimūn*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine the definition of knowledge among the *Mutakallimūn* and its relation to their theological doctrines. In this article I argued that the definitions of knowledge developed by the *mutakallimūn* are influenced by their theological background. In addition, I will indicate that the theologians' different views regarding "what a definition actually is and consists of" also play a key role in their definition of knowledge. To achieve this aim, I will investigate several definitions of knowledge from the *Mutakallimūn* of Early *Kalām* from the early Ashʿarites and the Muʿtazilites.

Keywords: The Concept of Knowledge, the Definition of knowledge, Theology, *Mutakallimūn*

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Introduction

In classical Islam, the discussion of the definition of knowledge is one of the main concerns of Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*). The definition of knowledge is important for them as it is a foundation for their theological doctrines. They try to explain what knowledge really meant in order to find an acceptable definition that could be applied to God and man, to revelation and to reason.[2]

Al-Tahānawī has divided the views of Muslim theologians regarding the definition of knowledge into three major divisions: The first sees that the nature of knowledge is known immediately (*ḍarūrī*),[3] therefore there is no need for definition or it is impossible to define knowledge. This view was introduced by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). He argued in two ways; firstly, one knows his own existence by immediate knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*), which does not need proof or reflection (*naẓar*). Since one's knowledge of oneself is immediate, and it is specific knowledge (*ʿilm al-khāṣṣ*), hence knowledge in general terms (*maʿnā al-ʿāmm*) must have been also immediately known. So, if a general meaning of knowledge is *ḍarūrī*, it does not need a proof or a definition; secondly, if knowledge is acquired and needs definition; either it is defined by itself or by others. Al-Rāzī argues that, in both cases, they are false. For other than knowledge is defined (*yiʿraf*) by knowledge and if knowledge is defined by another it will imply a circle (*dawr*), since each of them depends on one another. This implication, he insists is implausible.[4]

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[2]   Rosenthal, F. M., *Knowledge Triumphant*, Leiden, 1970, 46-7.

[3]   For the views of the *mutakallimūn* on *ʿilm ḍarūrī* see, B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology" in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 20(1), 1993, 20-32.

[4]   Cf. al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 32 vols., Cairo, 1938, 2: 186-187.

The second view considers that the definition of knowledge is discursive (*naẓarī*) but difficult to define. This view was supported by al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). They argue that the way to identify knowledge is through division (*al-qisma*). However, this division could only differentiate between assent (ᶜ*ilm taṣdīqī*) and belief (*iᶜtiqādāt*) but it could not identify knowledge per se (*muṭlaq al-ᶜilm*).[5]

Meanwhile the third view believes that the definition of knowledge is discursive and not difficult to define. The majority of Muslim scholars including philosophers, and theologians from the Muᶜtazilites and the Ashᶜarites, incline towards the third view. Hence, our concern here is the third view, since it is the view of the majority of the *mutakallimūn*.[6]

Every school of thought offers different definition of knowledge. More interestingly, disputes on the definition of knowledge also occurred between scholars within the same school, as we will indicate. The dispute on the definition of knowledge is closely related to two aspects of knowledge; first, is the way they understand the concept of definition; and second, it is based on the theological background. Thus, before we proceed, it is important to discuss their concept of definition and the theological foundation. In this regard I will start with the theological foundation of the disputes in order to reveal significant disagreement between the Muᶜtazilites and the Ashᶜarites in defining knowledge.

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[5]   Cf. al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, 3 vols. Beirut, 1998, 2: 1056.
[6]   Cf. al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf*, 2: 1057.

The Theological Foundation

The root of the dispute probably can be traced back in the second/eighth century when Wāṣil b. ʿAṭāʾ (d. 176/786), the founder of the Muʿtazilites discusses the attributes of God. He says that "one who confirms the qualities (*maʿānī*) or attributes that are eternal to God's essence (*dhāt*), has already believed in two gods, the first is God's essence and the second is His attributes".[7]

According to H. Wolfson, Wāṣil's rejection of qualities and attributes is closely related to the idea of Trinity in Christianity. Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī describes the three members of the Trinity by the Arabic word *aqānīm* (hypostases), *ashyāʾ* and *maʿānī*, that is "things". Meanwhile, Ibn Ḥazm refers to all three members as three things (*ashyāʾ*). According to al-Ashʿarī, Ibn Kullāb called the *maʿānī* that exist in our bodies accidents, things (*ashyāʾ*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*). In fact, it would seem that the words *maʿnā*, *shayʾ* and *ṣifa* all became interchangeable terms, used as a description of anything existing in a subject.[8]

Therefore, Wāṣil considers that the belief in the divine attributes will indirectly lead one to a similar belief to the Christian Trinity. He argues that God's eternity is the most specific description of His essence. Hence, if the attributes share with God in eternity, they also have a share in divinity (*al-ilāhiyya*). Therefore, in order to safeguard that unity (*tawḥīd*), the Muʿtazilites denied all God's attributes,

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[7] Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal wa al-Niḥal,* ed. ʿA. al-Wakīl, Cairo, 1387/1967, 1: 46; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn,* ed. M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, 1369/1950, 1: 224. On early Muʿtazilites' discussion of the theory of knowledge, see Bernand, Marie, "La Notion De ʿIlm Chez Les Premiers Muʿtazilites", in *Studia Islamica,* 36, 1972, 23-45.
[8] Wolfson, Harry. A., *Philosophy of the Kalām,* London, 1976, 117.

including knowledge (*ᶜilm*).[9] For them the existence of the eternal attributes will imply polytheism (*shirk*) since the only eternal being is God's essence. Thus, they believe that God has no attributes of power, life and knowledge.[10] Hence, due to this theological background, their discussion on the definition of knowledge will exclude God's knowledge.[11]

The Ashᶜarites, by contrast, believe in a different view regarding the relationship between God's attributes and His essence. They maintain that God has an additional attribute. Therefore, when we say "God knows", that means that God has the attribute of knowledge. This attribute of knowledge is something additional to His essence (*zā'id ᶜalā al-dhāt*).[12]

They base their arguments on the Qur'anic verses that confirm the existence of God's attributes such as: "He has

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[9] Ibid., 133.

[10] The Muᶜtazilites in general agree to deny the existence of any additional attributes to God. However, they are divided on the interpretation of the relation between God's essence and His attributes into three main views: (i) The theory of unity (*al-wiḥdah*) of Abū al-Hudhayl al-ᶜAllāf; (ii) the theory of representation (*al-niyābah*), of Abū ᶜAlī al-Jubbā'ī; and (iii) the theory of states (*al-aḥwāl*) of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī. However, after the discovery of the late Muᶜtazilite works, the fourth theory, the rules (*al-aḥkām*), developed by the late Muᶜtazilite, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, was introduced. Cf. Mānkdīm, Shashdiw, Aḥmad b. Abī Hāshim al-Qazwīnī (ᶜAbd al-Jabbār). *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ed. ᶜA. K. ᶜUthmān, Cairo, 1965, 18; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, 134.

[11] Ibn al-Murtaḍā, Aḥmad b. Yaḥyā. *Ṭabaqāt al-Muᶜtazilah* (*Munyah*), ed. S. Diwald-Wilzer, Wiesbaden, 1961, 13; al-Zamakhsharī, Jār Allāh Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ᶜUmar al-. *al-Kashshāf ᶜAn Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa ᶜUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, 3 vols., Cairo, 1900, ii: 329.

[12] Al-Ashᶜarī, Abū al-Ḥasan ᶜAlī b. Ismāᶜīl. *Kitāb al-Lumaᶜ fī al-Radd ᶜalā Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Bidaᶜ*, ed. H. Ghuraba, Cairo, 1955, 26; al-Baghdādī, Abū Manṣūr ᶜAbd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir. *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Istanbul, 1928, 90; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, i: 92.

sent from His (own) knowledge (*bi ᶜilmihi*)".[13] Al-Ashᶜarī argues that the meaning of the verse clearly indicates that God has knowledge. The Ashᶜarites in turn apply analogical reasoning that is based on this Qur'anic verse. This type of reasoning in *kalām* is known as the proof of the seen [world] on the unobservable [world] (*istidlāl bi al-shāhid alā al-ghā'ib*).[14] Al-Bāqillānī argues that, in the seen world (*al-shāhid*), a knower (*al-ᶜālim*) is referred to as someone who has knowledge. Then he applies this principle to the unseen world (*al-ghā'ib*). Therefore, when we say "God knows", that means that God has knowledge. Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) even goes further to say that the attributes of *ᶜilm* is the cause for God to know, which, without it, God will not know. Hence, the attributes of God according to him are eternal as well as His essence (*dhāt*).[15]

The Concept of Definition

The *Mutakallimūn* in general have their own way of how to define thing. Their disagreement on the concept of definition also contribute to difference on the definition of knowledge. Explaining the nature of definition, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933) states:

> There are a lot of things that we would like to define, yet, we are unable to find a suitable and concise terminology for that meaning. Therefore, we need to mention the rules or guidelines (*aḥkām*)

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[13] Al-Qur'an. 4: 166. Al-Qur'an. 35: 11; al-Qur'an. 54: 58.

[14] Al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib. *Al-Tamhīd al-Awā'il fī Talkhīs al-Dalā'il* or *Kitāb al-Tamhīd fī al-Radd ᶜalā al-Mulḥidah al-Muᶜaṭṭilah wa al-Rāfiḍah wa al-Khawārij wa al-Muᶜtazilah,* ed. Richard J. McCarthy, Beirut, n.d., 152; Ess, Josef, van. "Logical Structure of Islamic Theology", in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture; Giorgio Levi Della Vida Conference,* ed. G. Grunebaum, Los Angeles, 1967, 34.

[15] Cf. al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 152.

that are related to it and the states that refer to it...for the aim of a definition is to clarify its aims (*aghrāḍ*). As it is permissible for an interpreter (*mufassir*) to deal conclusively with his interpretation based on what he thinks suitable either to add or to reduce, to prolong or to summarize, similarly it is also permissible in the context of definition.[16]

From this passage, one might observe that the concept of definition by Abū Hāshim is less sophisticated. He only outlines general rules about it. The rule is that the definition interprets the meaning of the thing defined and will not lead one to become ignorant (*jahl*) of it. The definition must also omit anything that is outside the thing defined. The other significant rule is the freedom for a definer to interpret what he thinks suitable in his definition. When these rules are fulfilled, the definition of a thing is acceptable.[17]

This phenomenon is observed by Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141), when he reports that the majority of the Muʿtazilites consider that 'definition' is the interpretation (*tafsīr*) of the word defined (*al-lafẓ al-maḥdūd*). What is important in their definition is that the words used in the definition must be clearer from the word defined. Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d.436/1044), however, disagrees with this method of definition. He believes that the definition must explain the reality of the thing defined. Therefore, definition for him is a revealer (*kāshif*) of the meaning and the reality of the thing defined. Preferring the view of Abū al-Ḥusayn over the majority of the Muʿtazilites, Ibn al-Malāḥimī argues

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[16] ʿAbd al-Jabbār, Abū al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad. *Al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-ʿAdl*, 16 Vols. edited by a group of scholars led by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Cairo, 1960-1969, xii: 14-15.

[17] For information regarding ʿAbd al-Jabbār's arguments on the differences of the definition of knowledge among the Muʿtazilites see *Mughnī*, xii: 14-6.

that if there is no definition of knowledge and we were asked about its reality, it is appropriate for us to use some words that reveal its reality and become a definition of knowledge.[18]

There is also a debate among them regarding defining something by changing (*ibdāl*) it with another word. ʿAbd al-Jabbār(415/1025), one of the prominent Muʿtazilite scholars, clearly accepts this form of definition when he defines reflection (*naẓar*) with thinking (*fikr*).[19] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, however, disagrees with ʿAbd al-Jabbār. He argues that changing the word will not explain the attribute that distinguishes the thing defined from others. For instance, if you define knowledge as clarification (*tabayyun*), then one will ask you what clarification is.[20] He argues further that the aim of defining something is to explain the characteristic and judgments (*aḥkām*) that reveal its reality and distinguish it from others. Therefore, defining something by changing it for another word will not suffice, since it does not reveal the reality of the thing defined. Therefore, it is an inappropriate method of definition. Ibn al-Malāḥimī also reports a similar view from Abū al-Ḥusayn in the latter's *Sharḥ al-ʿumad*; therefore, both of them reject ʿAbd al-Jabbār's definition of reflection as thinking.[21]

Definition of Knowledge by the Muʿtazilites

Early Muʿtazilites mostly agreed that knowledge is from the genus of belief or conviction (*iʿtiqād*).[22] Therefore, they use

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[18] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. M. McDermott and W. Madelung, London, 1991, 12.

[19] *Mughnī*, xii: 4.

[20] According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Abū al-Ḥusayn accepts this form of definition in his *Tasaffuḥ* and *Ghurar* but rejects it in *Sharḥ al-ʿumad*. Cf. Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Muʿtamad*, 17-8.

[21] Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Muʿtamad*, 13.

[22] *Mughnī*, xii: 16 & 60.

the word *i'tiqād* to define knowledge. Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 317/931), a Baghdādī Muʿtazilite, for instance, defines knowledge as "believing the thing (to be) as it is".[23] His definition, however, has been criticized by many theologians including from the Muʿtazilites.[24]

Abū al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, (d. 429/1037), an Ashʿarite theologian, for instance rejects this definition with the argument that defining knowledge as "believing the thing (to be) as it is", implies a similarity between knowledge and belief. This similarity is implausible since it will include belief by uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*) and mere chance (*ṣudfah*) in knowledge, for a merely lucky person (*mubkhit*) and uncritical imitator (*muqallid*) could believe the thing as it is, without knowing it. Also, it will include one who has presumption (*ẓann*) and doubt (*shakk*). This implication clearly contradicts what has been agreed among grammarians (*ahl al-lugha*) that a knowing person (*ʿālim*) is certain of what he knew without any doubt or disbelief.[25]

Consequently, Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915), a Baṣrian Muʿtazilite, comes up with another definition of knowledge. He bases it on a similar foundation with al-Balkhī's definition but with some adjustments. Abū ʿAlī defines knowledge as "believing a thing (to be) as it is, when it happens immediately

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[23] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5. Marie Bernand, based on Vajda's report, mistakenly attributes this definition to ʿAbd al-Jabbār cf. Bernand Marie. *Le Problème De La Connaissance D'Après Le Mugni Du Cadi ʿAbd al-Gabbar*, Alger, 1982, 265.

[24] Abū Yaʿlā, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. al-Farrāʾ. *al-Muʿtamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn,* ed. W. Z. Ḥaddād, Beirut, 1974, 32; *Mughnī*, xii: 17. This definition was also rejected by Plato, see his *Theaetetus*, trans. M.J. Levett, Cambridge, 1990, 338; Conrford, F. M. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, London, 1935, 142.

[25] Cf. Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5; *Mughnī*, xii: 17-18; cf. ʿUthmān, ʿAbd al-Karīm. *Naẓariyyat al-Taklīf, Ārāʾ al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Kalāmiyyah*, Beirut, 1971, 46.

or by proof".[26] With this definition, he was able to avoid some of the criticism of Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī's definition of knowledge, especially regarding the inclusion of uncritical imitation and mere chance in the definition; for the second part of his definition will exclude both uncritical imitation and mere chance from knowledge.

One might observe that Abū ʿAlī's definition has a considerable similarity with the definition of knowledge attributed to Plato as "justified true belief".[27] For justified true belief is based on proof. Therefore, I will investigate the link between Abū ʿAlī's definition of knowledge with Greek philosophy. While the relation between Abū al-Hudhayl with Greek philosophy is proven,[28] Abū ʿAlī's direct connection with philosophy is unclear. However, there are various reports indicate that philosophy is not unfamiliar during his time. J. van Ess reports that Abū ʿAlī's son, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī, wrote a book rejecting the logic of Aristotle, called *Kitāb al-taṣaffuh*.[29]

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[26] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn,* 5; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant,* 64. Interestingly, al-Tahānawī reports that al-Rāzī defines knowledge with a definition that almost identical with that of Abū ʿAlī's. Cf. al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf,* ii: 1058

[27] Plato seems to be considering some such definition in Theaetetus, 201, and perhaps accepting one in Meno, 98. cf. Gettier L. Edmund. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" in *Analysis,* vol. 23, 1963, 121.

[28] According to Ibn al-Murtaḍā, Abū al-Hudhayl investigated Aristotle's works, Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt,* 44. H. S. Nyberg also reports that Abū al-Hudhayl enjoyed the favour of al-Maʾmūn, who often invited him to the court for theological disputes, cf. Nyberg, "Abū al-Hudhayl l-ʿAllāf", 127; Hourani, Hourani, F. George. "Islamic and non-Islamic Origins of Muʿtazilite Ethical Rationalism" in *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 1976, 81.

[29] Van Ess, J. "Logical Structure, 21.

The translations of the *Sophist* of Plato and the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle were completed during Abū ʿAlī's lifetime.[30] Also during his lifetime, the small remnants of the school of Alexandria have emigrated to Baghdād from Ḥarrān.[31] Therefore, based on these reports, it is probable that Abū ʿAlī was also familiar with philosophical debates of his time, although whether he adopts Plato's definition of knowledge is uncertain; for unlike the *Sophist* and *Metaphysics*, the specific dates of the translation of the *Theaetetus* and *Meno* into Arabic are lost.[32]

Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933) in this regard modifies his father's definition of knowledge by relating it to man's psychological reaction. He defines knowledge as "believing a thing (to be) as it is to one's own satisfaction (*maʿa sukūn al-nafs ilayh*)".[33] It is likely that Abū Hāshim is the first Muʿtazilite to define knowledge based on the tranquillity of the soul. This definition, later, becomes a foundation for ʿAbd al-Jabbār's definition of knowledge.[34]

From these last two definitions, one might observe that they manage to exclude *taqlīd* and mere chance from knowledge, yet they do not satisfy all of the critics. The problem arises from the first part of their definitions,

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[30] Wolfson, Muʿammar's Theory of *Maʿna* in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H. A. R. Gibb*, Leiden, 1965, 673-4.

[31] According to Hourani, those philosophers emigrated from Alexandria to Antioch in the reign of ʿUmar II (r. 717-20), from Antioch to Harran under al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61), and finally to Baghdad under al-Muʿtadid (r. 892-902), see, Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origin", 81.

[32] See Ibn al-Nadīm, Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad b. Isḥāq. *Al-Fihrist,* ed. I. Ramaḍān, Beirut, 1415/1994, 230-45.

[33] *Mughnī*, xii: 14; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 63.

[34] According to Bernand, Abū Hāshim's formulation of the definition of knowledge was adopted not only by his followers but also by some Ashʿarites, See, Bernand, *Le Problème*, 291-300.

"believing a thing" (*i'tiqād al-shay'*). This part of the definition is problematic because of the words *i'tiqād* and *shay'*. Criticizing these definitions, Abū al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī writes:

> These three definitions invalidate the knowledge of impossibilities (*al-muḥālāt*). Indeed the knowledge of them is not the knowledge of something (*shay'*) because impossibility is not something. However, it is agreeable that the knowledge of impossibility as impossible is acceptable although they are not something (*lā shay'*); and tell them [the Muʿtazilites] if knowledge is belief, the consequence is that every knower (*ʿālim*) is a believer (*muʿtaqid*). Indeed, God is a knower but He is not a believer. Therefore, defining knowledge with belief (*i'tiqād*) is implausible.[35]

Al-Baghdādī's criticism of the definitions of knowledge by three Muʿtazilites scholars are based on their use of the words (*a*) *i'tiqād*; and (*b*) *shay'*. The consequence of defining knowledge with the word *i'tiqād*, he argues, is that God will become a believer (*muʿtaqid*). For, when knowledge is belief, then a knower (*ʿālim*) will be a believer. The employment of such a term for God is inappropriate, since there is no evidence supporting that view. Neither the Qur'ān nor the Sunna indicates that "*muʿtaqid*" is one of God's names.[36]

In defending his predecessors' consideration that knowledge is from the genus of belief (*i'tiqād*), ʿAbd al-Jabbār argues that there is no problem with using the word *i'tiqād* in defining knowledge. He explains that one is called a believer (*muʿtaqid*) when the knowledge one obtains becomes a belief. So, whenever one accepts the validity of certain knowledge, it becomes his belief and he will become a believer. However, ʿAbd al-Jabbār explains that the nature

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[35] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5-6.
[36] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 6.

of knowing is different in the case of God, because God knows with His essence (*bi dhātihi*) rather than with his knowledge (*al-ʿilm*). Therefore, God cannot be called a believer (*muʿtaqid*). In addition, he says that the believer ties his belief in his heart, but God is not similar to human nature because He has neither bodily existence nor a heart like human beings.[37]

This argument is also mentioned by Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī[38] when he presents a similar argument to ʿAbd al-Jabbār in defending the use of *iʿtiqād* in defining knowledge.[39] Abū al-Ḥusayn argues that "*muʿtaqid* is the one who has *iʿtiqād*. God has no *iʿtiqād* because He has no knowledge therefore, it is inconceivable to call Him *al-muʿtaqid*". The word *muʿtaqid*, he argues, "if it is applied to a knower, indicates that he ties his heart to something [belief] (*ʿaqada qalbah ʿalā shayʾ*); this indication cannot be applied to God. Therefore, the use of *iʿtiqād* will not imply that God should become a *muʿtaqid*." However, later, Ibn al-Malāḥimī rejects this argument and comes up with another definition of knowledge.[40]

Thus, when the Muʿtazilites use the word belief (*iʿtiqād*) in defining knowledge, God's knowledge is not included in their consideration. Therefore, it should not be a problem to say that knowledge is belief and a knower (*ʿālim*) is a believer (*muʿtaqid*), since that only applies to human beings or other creations but not to God.[41] However, Ibn al-Malāḥimī

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[37] *Mughnī*, xii: 27-8.

[38] Abū al-Ḥusayn as reported by Ibn al-Malāḥimī, inclines toward Abū Hāshim's definition of knowledge. Therefore, he agrees with ʿAbd al-Jabbār in defending the use of belief to define knowledge. cf. Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Muʿtamad*, 14.

[39] Cf. Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Muʿtamad*, 15.

[40] Cf. Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Muʿtamad,* 23.

[41] One might observe that in this argument they are not using a single standard in applying the theory of knowledge in God and human beings.

considers that this argument is implausible since it is inconsistent with the common usage in the Arabic language.

Definition of Knowledge by The Ashᶜarites

The Ashᶜarites, by contrast, as we explained earlier believe in a different view regarding the relationship between God's attributes and His essence. Therefore, when we say "God knows", that means that God has the attribute of knowledge.[42] Based on this theological background, the Ashᶜarites, in their discussion on the definition of knowledge, will always consider that their definitions need to include God's knowledge. Thus, it is no surprise when al-Baghdādī reveals two definitions of knowledge offered by his fellow school-members (*aṣḥābunā*) based on the word attribute (*ṣifat*): The first definition is "knowledge is an attribute through which he who is alive becomes knowing", and the second is "knowledge is an attribute through which one who is alive and capable can produce an act and good at it".[43]

From these definitions, we can observe that the Ashᶜarites' definitions of knowledge establish no relationship between belief and knowledge. Instead, they introduce the word *ṣifat* rather than *iʿtiqād*. Thus, the use of the word attribute (*ṣifat*) to define knowledge according to the Ashcarites will comply with both humans and God's knowledge.

According to al-Āmidī,[44] Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashᶜarī defines knowledge as "the perception (*idrāk*) of the object known".[45]

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[42] Al-Ashᶜarī, *Lumaᶜ*, 26; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 90; al-Shahrastānī, *Milal*, i: 92.

[43] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5; cf. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 53.

[44] See al-Āmidī, Sayf al-Dīn, ᶜAlī b. Abū ᶜAlī, al-. *Abkār al-Afkār fī Uṣūl al-Dīn,* 4 vols., ed. I. al-Ajūz, Beirut, n.d., 74.

[45] *Idrāk al-Maᶜlūm, Mughnī*, 18. According to Rosenthal this definition is primarily credited to al-Ashᶜarī. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 56.

ʿAbd al-Jabbār criticizes this definition of knowledge when he argues that the use of the word *idrāk* in relation to knowledge is possible only in certain circumstances, such as *adraktu maʿnā kalāmika* (I know the meaning of your speech), but it could not be used in defining knowledge in general, for both words cover different aspects which are not covered by the other.[46]

ʿAbd al-Jabbār explains that there are certain cases where *idrāk* can be used but not the word *ʿilm* and vice versa. The examples of the first situation are that we know God but we do not perceive (*adraka*) Him, or we know non-existences (*maʿdūmāt*) but we cannot perceive them. Meanwhile, for the second situation, the example is that a sleeping person perceives or feels the bite of a bug or flea but he does not know it.[47]

According to the Ashʿarites, the use of the word *shay'* in defining knowledge, is problematic since it will exclude the non-existent (*maʿdūm*) from the object of knowledge.[48] Al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) argues that "if we use the word *shay'* in the definition of knowledge, the object which is not a thing (*laysa bi shay'*) will be excluded from known objects (*maʿlūmāt*)".[49] Therefore, he maintains that the use of the word "known" (*maʿlūm*) is more plausible in defining knowledge than the word "thing" (*shay'*), since the former will not exclude the non-existent (*al-maʿdūm*). As a result, al-

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[46] To see more on ʿAbd al-Jabbār's arguments against other definitions of knowledge see, *Mughnī*, xii: 16-22.

[47] Mānkdīm, *Sharḥ*, 169.

[48] For ʿAbd al-Jabbār's arguments on *Shay'iyyah al-Maʿdūm*, see Bernand, *Le Problème*, 266-71.

[49] Al-Bāqillānī considers non-existent (*maʿdūm*) is nothing (*lā shay'*). Cf. al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 35.

Bāqillānī defines knowledge as "cognition (*maʿrifa*) of the object known as it is".[50]

ʿAbd al-Jabbār however, disagrees with al-Bāqillāni's definition of knowledge. He argues that the use of the word *maʿrifa* in defining knowledge will not clarify anything. Instead, it will only add to the confusion, for ʿAbd al-Jabbār believes that there is no difference between knowledge ('*ilm*) and cognition (*maʿrifa*).[51] On this, he argues that "to define something one must mention the clear rules to the addressee (*mukhāṭab*)".[52]

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[50] Cf. *Tamhīd al-Awā'il*, 25. cf. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 53. Abū Yaʿlā al-Ḥanbalī (d. 458/1066) offers similar definition with al-Bāqillānī. See Abū Yaʿlā, *al-Muʿtamad*, 32.

[51] The discussion on "whether knowledge is similar with cognition or not", is not an issue among major theologians in the fourth/tenth century. Al-Baghdādī for instance in his *Uṣūl al-Dīn* did not differentiates between knowledge and cognition. Similar expressions can be seen in the writing of Abū Yaʿlā al-Ḥanbalī. In addition, al-Ashʿarī himself and his early followers considered and used ʿ*ilm* and *maʿrifah* as synonyms.

[52] *Mughnī*, xii: 19. Al-Bāqillānī's definition also has been rejected by his fellow Ashʿarite, al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). Al-Āmidī's argument is based on two reasons: Firstly, it was a consensus among the Ashʿarites that God has knowledge and His knowledge cannot be called *maʿrifah*. Therefore, the use of *maʿrifah* in defining knowledge will exclude God's knowledge in this definition. Secondly, al-Bāqillānī defines ʿ*ilm* with the word *maʿlūm* which is taken from the root ʿ*ilm*, al-Āmidī argues that the word taken from a root must have been less obvious from the root itself. To define something more clearer (*aẓhar*) with something that is less obvious (*akhfā*) is forbidden (*mumtaniʿ*). Therefore, the definition of knowledge by al-Bāqillānī according to al-Āmidī is invalid since it is inappropriate to define knowledge with the words *maʿrifah* and *maʿlūm*. Cf. al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-Afkār,* 74-5.

The idea of *shay'iyya al-maʿdūm* in Muʿtazilite can be traced back to ʿAbbād b. Sulaymān (d. 250/864) a Baṣrian Muʿtazilite.[53] On this, he argues that "the known objects (*maʿlumāt*) are known to God before they exist, the produced things (*maqdūrāt*) are under the power of God before they exist, thing (*shay'/ashyā'*) is [called] a thing before its existence, an atom (*jawhar*) is [called] atom before its existence, similarly an accident (*ʿaraḍ*) is [called] accident before its existence".[54]

His main argument is that the non-existence is considered a thing *shay'iyya* because it is similar to other objects, such as known [object] (*maʿlūmāt*), substance (*jawhar*), and accidents (*ʿaraḍ*) in the case that they were described with their respective names even before their existence. For instance, a person tells his friend that he wants to draw a picture tomorrow. Although the picture does not exist yet, one already calls it a "picture". Therefore, based on this formula, the Muʿtazilites conclude that non-existence (*maʿdūm*) is something (*shay'*), since there is no difference in naming something that either potentially exists (*wujūd bi al-quwwa*) or actually exists (*wujūd bi al-fiʿl*). Therefore, they believe that it will not be a problem to use the word *shay'* in defining knowledge.[55]

Yet, Abū al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī was able to detect the vagueness of this formula. He observes that the Muʿtazilites probably can apply this method for a possible thing (*mumkināt*), which has a potential and an actual existence, but this formula could not be applied to an impossible thing

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[53] For biographical note on him see Watt, "ʿAbbād b. Sulaymān al-Saymarī (or al-Daymarī)" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*The*), New Edition, 12 vols., Leiden, 1960-2004, i: 4.

[54] Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, i: 159.

[55] Cf. Frank, M. Richard. "*Al-Maʿdum wa al-Mawjud*: The Non-Existent, the Existent and the Possible in the Teaching of Abu Hashim and His Followers", in *Melanges de I'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire*, 14, 1980, 198.

(*mustaḥīlāt*), which does not have an actual existence, such as the associate (*sharīk*) of God.[56]

The associate of God, he argues, does not exist now and will not exist in the future. Therefore, based on ʿAbbād b. Sulayman's formula, which required both the actual and potential existence, God's associate could not be considered *shay'* since it is lacking the potential existence, and is, thus, incompatible with the formula. Furthermore, al-Baghdādī argues that to deny any relationship between the impossible things (*mustaḥīlāt*) and knowledge is inconceivable, since we know that the *mustaḥīlāt* is something that is not presently existing and will not also in the future. This proposition, according to al-Baghdādī, is enough to include the *mustaḥīlāt* as an object of knowledge, and, hence, proved that the Muʿtazilites' view of the *shay'iyya al-maʿdūm* is false.[57] Furthermore, the Ashʿarites argue that the implication of saying that *maʿdūm* is something will imply that there are beings that are eternal alongside and independently of God. This is problematic since it implies the existence of more than one God.[58]

Based on this argument we could observe that, the Muʿtazilites are trapped in their own argument when they accused the Ashʿarites of accepting multiply eternal beings since the latter consider that the attributes of God are eternal. Therefore, when the Muʿtazilites consider that *maʿdūm* is something, one should ask them this 'something' either it is temporal or eternal. The same question they have asked the Ashʿarites regarding the attribute of God. [59]

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[56] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5.
[57] Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5.
[58] Cf. Frank "al-Maʿdūm wa al-Mawjūd", 186.
[59] Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal,* i: 46; al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, i: 224; Bernand, "La Notion de 'Ilm", 23-45

Conclusion

From these arguments one might observe that the Muᶜtazilites and the Ashᶜarites have their own theological background that influences their definition of knowledge. Based on their theological doctrine that God has no attribute, the Muᶜtazilites exclude God from the discussion on the definition of knowledge. While the Ashᶜarites, based on their theological doctrines that the attribute of God is additional to God's essence consider that it is alright to relate God to knowledge. This dispute however, is not only illustrate the disagreement among the *Mutakallimūn* on knowledge but also indicate the richness of Islamic intellectual heritage on the epistemological issues.

One might also observe that through this article we could understand why both parties uphold their views. This approach is important in order for us to understand the dispute among the scholars in a respectful manner. Therefore, it is important for the student of Islamic studies to understand not only who says what but also the why he says it.