



This lecture will deal with the topic of knowing God through reason, intellect and intuition and discuss how the various Muslim philosophers/scholars and movements went about understanding this particular aspect of theology. The topic deals with Kalām and the way that early Kalām scholars viewed this field and how those who opposed this field objected to it. Firstly, definitions: Kalām is a science difficult to define/distinguish from philosophy, that is why modern academics conflate the two, and this is a valid *madhhab*. In fact the two are different, Kalām is dialectical theology, in other words you are having a rational, cosmological basis of reality upon which you base your theology, i.e. basing theology not from texts/scripture but on rationality. How is this not philosophy, because in fact philosophy is to base ethics and morality on the intellect? Kalām is almost in the middle of philosophy and pure religious scriptural theology and thus the difficulty to demarcate between the two.

Kalām first began at the turn of the 2nd Islamic century. Ja’d b. Dirham (d. 110 A.H.) is accredited with starting this type of dialectic theology; he passed it on to his main student Jahm b. Ṣafwān; the two were the earliest to begin talking of the concept of the attributes of God. This controversy did not exist prior to them, they were the first to discuss matters the like of ‘how do we understand the attributes of God in the Qur’an’, prior to this controversies prevailed regarding ‘what the reality of faith (Imān) is; who should have been the Caliph: Abu Bakr (رضي الله عنه) or ‘Alī (رضي الله عنه); what is the role of the Caliph; what is predestination; what/how much does God know; how much does God control etc.’ thus, groups the like of the Khārijītes, the early Shī‘ītes, the Murji‘ītes etc. were forming before this. Ja’d b. Dirham and Jahm b. Ṣafwān] were the pioneers of this thought, however, it is very difficult to reconstruct their primary theology and what they believed as no books authored by them remain even though we do know that Jahm did author a number of books/treatises, in fact, all of the material that we have is attributed to them by their enemies either the Sunnītes or Mu’tazilītes.

Contemporaneous to this, other movements existed, of these are those discussing the theological position regarding ‘what are we to do we do with the believer who is not a good believer, i.e. the sinful Muslim, what is his status? Is he Muslim or not?’, the theological issue of ‘how do we define “faith” and ‘what constitutes minimal “faith” is going on simultaneously. A lot of people are discussing this issue but of the earliest among them is someone named Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (approx. d. 120), he was one of the first to begin a movement that is clearly distinct from both ‘proto-Sunnīsm’ and Khārijism; Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ comes forward and puts forward a position suggesting that the ‘sinning Muslim’ is neither a Muslim nor a disbeliever, he is between the two, in a quandary per se i.e. *manzila bayna manzilatayn* [a station between the two stations] being neither Muslim nor *kāfir*, until this point and to this day the ‘proto-Sunnītes’ profess this ‘sinner’ to be a Muslim and the Khawārij consider him/her to be a non-Muslim.

Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ is accredited with the founding of the actual Mu’tazilīte movement, he did not talk about God’s attributes, it was not a controversy for him –it is too early for that controversy- however, he did influence his brother-in-law and his student ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 148 A.H.), ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd was the first person to meld these two trends together and he brought forth a theology that included elements which denied the attributes of God, elements of the sinner’s status as being between the ‘two stations’ and also the concept of pre-destination and denying it [which was discussed by the Qadarītes], he took

from Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’, Jahm b. Ṣafwān and the Qadarītes; thereby taking Mu‘tazilism to an entirely different level i.e. stage two [of its development], in the Shaykh’s opinion he [‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd] is the real founder of Mu‘tazilīte thought, because Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā did not discuss God’s attributes nor did he discuss *Qadr*, it was ‘Amr who brought together a number of different strands, taking them to a different level.

At this stage we do not come across sophisticated proofs or intellectual theorems theorising any of these things, rather they are currently just simplistic notions, indeed, Greek thought is yet to penetrate the Muslim *ummah* [and Aristotle and Plato are yet to be translated]. So the question arises, where does ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd get these ideas from? Realistically we may never find out how in 140 A.H he is discussing issues that are clearly neo-platonic/Aristotelian [despite not being expressed in the neo-platonic/Aristotelian language]. The ideas are all there, we are talking about issues that are found in other religions and cultures, in Greek and Roman ideologies, but he has not been exposed to them directly. ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd took his general thought from Jahm b. Ṣafwān who took it from Ja’d ibn Dirham (this much is established), in his Masters paper Shaykh Yasir Qadhi proposed that John of Damascus (a very interesting figure who has not been the focus of much study) played a significant role in the transfer of ideas and thoughts, and it has been corroborated that Ja’d b. Dirham and John of Damascus were contemporaries in Damascus; indeed, they lived in the same time, in the same quarters, but no one ever said that Ja’d studied with John, shaykh Yasir was the first to propose this and he did this on the basis that if one studies his writings they will find striking similarities to Jahm b. Ṣafwān’s thoughts.

John of Damascus was a type of minister to the Umayyad Caliph of the time, he spoke Arabic – lived at a time when the Romans were given high positions as they were educated, literate and bureaucrats, the Umayyads came along and offered the Jews and the Christians high secretarial/ministerial positions etc. because they knew how to run a country. The Umayyad’s incorporated a lot of such people into their administration and John of Damascus was one such person. In fact he was not just a regular ‘minister’, he was a learned scholar, a priest and an iconoclast (many books of his survive to this day), he was the first Christian theologian to refute Islam [his book printed to this day is ‘The Heresy of the Ishmaelites’]. His teachings were similar to Ja’d’s with regards to God’s attributes, issues of *qadr* and even in how to prove the existence of God, because John of Damascus (Yuḥannā al-Dimashqī) was one of the first to propose a rudimentary form of what is later termed ‘the Kalām Cosmological Argument for Proof of the Existence of God’, he has a very rudimentary argument regarding motion, an object being ‘motionary’ versus stationary and that there must be a cause for this etc. this is exactly what Ja’d ibn Dirham, Jahm b. Ṣafwān and ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd said, this connection is a theory however, we do not know for sure if these two met. All that shaykh Yasir could prove was that they were in the same city, moreover that he, Ja’d b. Dirham, lived in the Christian quarters of Damascus, and this was unusual at this time.

So, ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd took Mu‘tazilism to a different level and this is real stage one of formalisation and crystallisation of the movement (Wāṣil b. Ata’ not having more to do then contribute to the name of the movement); in stage two the main people were alNazzām and Abū Hudhayl alAllāf (d. 235); in stage three the Jubbā’īs (the nephew and the uncle, Jubbā’ī was the step father of AlAsh‘arī).

It is AlAllāf whom we can credit for further development in Mu‘tazilism and he was the first person, as far as we know, to propagate the Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Creation and the Existence of

God, this argument changed the course for Kalām history, one of the fundamental differences between all the groups of Kalām and early orthodox Sunnīsm and *falsafa* is that all groups of Kalām agree to the basic premise of the Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Creation and the Existence of God [there are three Kalām movements that are well known: Ash'arism, Maturidism and Mu'tazilism, but they are not the only ones as it penetrated and infiltrated Ithnā 'Ashari Shi'ism, the Ibādīs too have strong Kalām arguments and Imām Zayd (ibn Husayn) was in fact a pure Mu'tazilī (which is why it is the closest *madhhab* to Mu'tazilīte thought, to this day) this is except for concept of Imāma], so Kalām became the largest theological school for some time, the one thing that separates the *mutakillimun* from the *falasifa* is the Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Creation and the Existence of God, in other ways they are similar but they differ on this.

So what is the Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Proofs of the Existence of God? It has a number of premises and was first formulated by alAllāf, and then taken up by all of the people of Kalām from the Mu'tazila, thus AlAllāf is the real founder of all Kalām thought and this 'Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Creation and the Existence of God' evidence was taken to be the standard evidence by the *mutakillimun*, to simplify, number of premises:¹

1. **Accidents subside in bodies²** (bodies are that which exist by themselves, accidents are that which do not exist by themselves, they need bodies to exist in, such as motion and colour, you can not have them on their own they subside in bodies).
2. **Accidents are created**, no accident is eternal, motion is created, being at rest is created as is colour and temperature etc., this is pure Aristotelian thought (found explicitly in Aristotle's Metaphysics book 10, where he gives the examples of motion he talked of the impossibility of 'an infinite regression of causes') you cannot have causes that go back to eternity, this is a fundamental Aristotelian point that was adopted by the *mutakillimun*.
3. **Bodies are created** (we are simplifying these points and missing the third one, this deals with no. four directly) he said if accidents are created and are inherent to the body, there must be a creator, a prime mover. Of course, this proof that was Aristotelian in origin was ironically meant to refute Aristotle himself and the *falasifa*, as of the fundamental points of the philosophers was that matter is eternal, they refuted the theology of philosophers by incorporating some Aristotelian cosmology, i.e. they refuted those who said that matter is eternal.

What did this do, how did this impact the Kalām movements? First and foremost, the belief that knowledge of God is not inherent – i.e. it is not obvious that God exists rather one needs to prove that God exists; this is the whole point of the Kalām argument. It is a philosophical premise, that you approach everything with a blank mind, that you do not know if god exists or not and are required to prove it with rational proofs (Descartes proved his own existence); and this is something that alQādī 'Abd alJabbār mentions, 'the very first obligation on the rational individual is the intention to rationally contemplate the existence of God'. AlJuwaynī and alBāqillānī also say the exact same thing, that the very first obligation upon the one who comes of age is 'to rationally prove that God exists because there is no way they can know this inherently', alBāqillānī explicitly states that 'one cannot know that God exists rather must prove it rationally, belief in God is not inherently known'. The second issue, related to this, is that sound/acceptable 'īmān must be built upon rational proofs for the existence of God, in other words, in order to be a good Muslim according to the Mu'tazila and many Ash'arītes and

Mātūrīdīs you need to prove God in this manner and if you do not do so your ʿīmān is problematic according to many of them, this is the position of alJuwayni, alBāqillāni, alRāzī and the Muʿtazila.

This led to the third issue of controversy, what is the status of the faith/ʿīmān of the blind follower (*muqallid*), suppose you are Muslim because your parents are/society is?, you never thought on whether it was true or not, you never compared it with anything, in fact you just assumed that it was correct as you are a ‘blind-follower’ in this regard, so what is the status of your ʿīmān? The majority of the scholars from the Muʿtazila said that such a person according to them is not a Muslim. Abū Hishām alJubbāʿī said that ‘whoever does not know the existence of God through rational proofs is a *kafir*’ which is the most extreme position, others amongst them, AlJuwayni, in his *alShāmil* says that ‘if a person had enough time to think of the rational proofs of the Existence of God and did not do so then such a person is considered from amongst the *kuffar* (*yulhaqu bi'l-kuffar*).’

AlGhazālī in his *Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, early alGhazālī was very different to late alGhazālī, in his *Munqidh* he presents the Ghazālian paradox, and states, ‘children who are born to Muslim parents are Muslim; and children who are born to Jewish parents are Jewish; and children who are born to Christian parents are Christian, and so I realise that I need to rediscover the truth of my religion,’ i.e. we need to step outside the ‘box of Islam’ and consider all the religions neutrally and then logically and rationally decide that we should be Muslim – and this, he states, is why he studied the various sects/religions that he did. This is a very philosophical premise, that one is required to start from scratch, from nil, in fact his paradox is actually quite profound, for as a Muslim if someone were to question them ‘why do you say that Islam is true?, you have not studied anything, what gives you the right to have this assumption?’ then from within the framework of Kalām we do not have a good answer as we have not ‘legitimised the belief in the existence of God’.

Taqīyy alDīn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd alSalām ibn alKhadar Ibn Taymiyyah alHarrāni, Shaykh alIslām b. Taymiyyah took neo-Sunnīsm/Ḥanbalīte orthodoxy and communicated it in a vernacular for the people and place of his time. Prior to this, no theologian that ascribed to simple Sunnīte Islam was able to communicate with the theologians in a language that they deemed acceptable, before Ibn Taymiyyah they would quote Qurʾan and Ḥadīth only, and because of this, they were called ‘those who fling texts’ *alHāshawiyya*, i.e. they were not rational or logical rather they were considered to be shallow etc. Ibn Taymiyyah came along and raised the discourse to another level thereby allowing orthodoxy/neo-Sunnīsm a foot in the door of political discourse, all the previous scholars had apprehended their students from engaging with the issue³– however that discourse could only get them so far; it was no longer successful in the time of Ibn Taymiyyah.

It was with the ‘advent of Ibn Taymiyyah that for the first time an intellectual theologian studied Kalām and *falsafa* and Ṣūfī/Ismaʿīli thought and disagreed using not only orthodox sources but Kalām itself as well. It is not that Ibn Taymiyyah was exactly the first, even though some ideas did not exist before him, however he proved the belief of neo-Sunnīsm/Orthodoxy using textual and intellectual evidences, and of the things that he addressed was their statement that knowledge in God is not inherent. He proposed rather that belief in God was inherent, the Qurʾan tells us of the existence of the *Fitrah* and he said that God has already put knowledge of His existence in us:⁴

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا ۚ فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا ۚ لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الدِّينُ
الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

so set Thou Thy face steadily and truly to the faith: (establish) Allah's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) In the work (wrought) by Allah. that is the standard religion: but Most among Mankind understand not.

The above tells us that there is an 'intuition' that God has placed in every single creation (*fiṭraṭ allāhi llatī fatar'l-nāsa 'alayha*) which is further expounded in a tradition of the Prophet, narrated by Bukhārī and Muslim , ... 'Every single new born is born upon the *Fiṭrah* and then his parents make him into a Jew/Christian or Zoroastrian'. Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, his main student, comment on this extensively, and say that 'and then his parents make him a Jew, Christian and Muslim' means there is something about Islam that is related to the *fiṭrah*, the *fiṭrah* is amenable to Islam and similar to Islam and is if you like Islam with a small 'i' i.e. submission.

Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim related this to the concept of the *mithāq*, 'the covenant', which is mentioned in:⁵

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِنْ بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۗ
شَهِدْنَا ۗ أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَٰذَا غَافِلِينَ ﴿١٧٢﴾

when Thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (Saying): "Am I not your Lord (Who cherishes and sustains you)?"- They said: "Yea! we do testify!" (This), Lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: "Of This we were never mindful":

where Allah (ﷻ) says 'and remember when your Lord took a covenant with the children of Adam' and the covenant was 'Am I not your Lord?' and they said 'Yes [you are]' so he says that the covenant deals with the existence of God, this, says Ibn Taymiyyah proves that the existence of God is ingrained in us and is intuitive, i.e. it does not need to be proven. Challenging the Kalām Cosmological Argument for the Creation and the Existence of God, he said this [that god needs to be rationally proven] basically means that the majority of Muslims are not Muslim, because you are saying that a person who does not have rational proof for the existence of God does not have sound faith and yet we know that the *ṣaḥābah*, our predecessors and our earlier scholars did not rationally/logically prove the existence of God, they simply accepted the faith as is and in this sense they were *muqallids*, he solved it by saying that we have an inner compass that allows us the luxury of saying that we do not have to leave our faith, check it and then 're-'embrace it and he quotes the paradox that arises when you believe in this stating that the net result of believing in this is that you have to become a *kāfir* before becoming a Muslim and what type of religion would ask its people to leave it before re-embracing it!

The only way to get out of it is to say that there is something within us, in the way that God created us, that gives us this knowledge, our intuition tells us this already/automatically; so we do not need to prove the existence of God, we do not need to prove it in this complicated way that no one knew before

alAllāf and which many do not understand to this day. However, the biggest problem that he had with this proof was not the fact that it was invented in the third century, that it was Aristotelian, that it was very difficult to understand, that its conclusion was common sense etc.; rather, his major problem with this evidence was that the ramifications of believing in the Kalām Cosmological Argument when you believe in it and apply it (as all of the groups of Kalām did, and they continue to do so to this day) ... you cannot ascribe something that you call an accident to God, because if you [*mutakallimun*] in your definition say that motion is an e.g. of an accident *par excellence*, if you say this, and then you say that God moves (and motion is an accident, and accidents must subsist in a body, and bodies are created) then god can never move according to all the scholars of Kalām, because if God moves the very premise on which Kalām is built would be destroyed,⁶ so if you belief in this proof you must take this proof as dictating your understanding of God, so God cannot move, He cannot rise over His throne, He cannot come down in the last third of the night as the Qur'an informs us, so God cannot have accidents and direction too is an accident so God cannot have direction, and He cannot have x, y and z (anything that has been defined by 'you' as an accident' and to deal with this they needed to resort to *ta'wīl*).

The primary problem that Ibn Taymiyyah had was that this proof was the corner stone that led the groups of Kalām, according to Ibn Taymiyyah's perspective, to deny or misinterpret the attributes of God. The Mu'tazila and the Ashā'ira differed on the definition of an accident and based on their difference they differed in their theology, the Ashā'ira affirmed 7 eternal attributes and the Mu'tazila did not affirm any; the Ash'arītes were able to affirm the seven attributes that they affirmed because they defined accidents as being 'that which does not subsist for two consecutive points in time i.e. change' (*ma la yabqa zamanayn*); as for the Mu'tazila they defined it as 'anything that is above and beyond the essence of the body', so for them even an eternal attribute such as life which had nothing to do with change nor time would have been an accident. This led to their famous statement, 'God does not have life, nor is He dead, God does not see nor is He blind, God does not hear nor is He deaf' they defined god in negations as they could not affirm attributes – to them affirming an attribute would mean that He had a body and His having a body would mean that He was created as all bodies are created. As for the Ash'arītes they could not affirm change nor could they affirm body parts '*ajzā'* – all of this terminology was rejected by Sunnīte Orthodoxy who stated that the problem comes when they take this 'evidence' –and it is not true in the first place – and apply it to God in contra-distinction to the Qur'an and the Sunnah which does not have this evidence and describes God in a way that is truly incompatible with this system.

¹ see: William Lane Craig. *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (1979).

² this is all from AlAllāf and was taken on by all Kalām groups, the best exposition is found in *Sharh 'uṣūl al-Khamsa* attributed to alQāḍī 'Abd alJabbār;

³ Abu Hanifa stated 'whoever studies Kalām will never be successful'; alShāfi'ī has a famous quote that 'whoever studies Kalām will become a *zindīq*'; Imām Malik said that he 'hated Kalām and everything to do with Kalām', so all of them desisted their students from engaging with kalām.

⁴ alRum: 30

⁵ alA'rāf: 172

⁶ 'The Role of Atomism in the Groups of Kalām,' in which the shaykh discusses how this defined all their subsequent beliefs.