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THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE : EPISTEMOLOGICAL  
TYPOLOGIES OF SOME MAJOR *MUTAKALLIMŪN*

BY

Qazi Zulkader Siddiqui

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**STUDIES IN HISTORY**



THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE:  
EPISTEMOLOGICAL TYPOLOGIES OF  
SOME MAJOR *MUTAKALLIMŪN*

QAZI ZULKADER SIDDIQUI\*

1. Read: In the name of the Lord who created. اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ۝١
2. Created man from a clot. خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ ۝٢
3. Read: And thy Lord is the Most Bounteous. اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ ۝٣
4. Who taught by the pen. الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ ۝٤
5. Taught man that which he knew not.<sup>1</sup> عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَم ۝٥

It was the revelation of these words and subsequent verses of the *Qur'ān* that changed the course of history. And it was these and other words of the *Qur'ān* which provided the intellectual impetus and an epistemological orientation to the people who accepted them as Divine revelation. It centred around a unique cognitive perception of Allāh as the One and Only Supreme Lord of the universe. The *Qur'ān* (meaning "the Reading" or "the Recitation") is itself the fountainhead of knowledge; and the One Who revealed it as described in the *Qur'ān* as the All-Knowing, the Aware, etc.<sup>2</sup>

But Allah is not only All-Knowing and Aware; He also participates in the affairs of man by teaching him the Truth through a process of revelation. Thus we are told:

31. As for that which We inspire in thee of the Scripture it is the Truth confirming that which was (revealed) before it. Lo! Allah is indeed Observer, Seer of His slaves.<sup>3</sup> وَالَّذِي نَزَّلْنَا فِي الْقُرْآنِ مُعْتَدٍ ۝٣١  
لَمَّا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِعِبَادِهِ لَخَبِيرٌ بَصِيرٌ ۝٣٢

In other words, the All-Knowing Lord has manifested the Truth in the *Qur'ān*, which becomes the fountainhead for the search of the same. Thus, very aptly, man, the created being, turns to his Lord and Creator humbly, and seeks the knowledge which would advance his steps towards the Ultimate Reality, and cries out.

My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.<sup>4</sup> رَبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا ۝١٧

Was this in fact the basis of the quest of the Muslim for knowledge that drove him to the farthest corners of the earth? Or was it some other factor that inspired the Arab of the *Jāhiliyah* to lay the foundation of such a brilliant civilisation? Although the

\*Member, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi.

expansion of the Muslim lands and the exposure to the different cultures and peoples had a vast contribution in itself, yet the basic impetus and the constant driving force can be attributed to nothing but the *Qur'ān*. The *Qur'ān* provided ample guidance and encouragement, and the *ḥadīth* of the Prophet (P.B.H.) gave the command:

Search for knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim male and female.<sup>5</sup> طلب العلم فريضة على كل مسلم  
و مسالمة

During the years following the Prophet (P.B.H.), we see centres of learning springing up across the length and breadth of the Muslim lands. As early as the rule of the Umayyads, Kūfah, Baṣrah, and Damascus rivalled Makkah and Madīnah in learning. We find major figures among the *ṣaḥābah* (the Companions) and the *tābi'ūn* (those who followed the Companions) in all these places and in others.<sup>6</sup> It was a response to the *Qur'ānic* guidelines and the *ḥadīth* injunctions.

### *Definitions of 'Ilm in the Early Period*

One question that arises, and in fact did arise in the early centuries of Islamic history, is the true definition of the term '*ilm*' that the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* refer to. '*Ilm*' in its earliest definition was knowledge of the *Qur'ān* and the *ḥadīth*, while all speculative thought was lumped under *fiqh* or *rā'y*.<sup>7</sup> *Fiqh* (i.e. the science of jurisprudence as we understand it today) did not exist as a separate science. During the first century of the *hijrah*, with the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'ūn* still on the scene, the need for a systematised science of jurisprudence was not felt. In fact none of the sciences existed as such. In the absence of the latter, the factual side of all intellectual activity was considered to be '*ilm*', while the speculative side was grouped under *fiqh*. The science that was referred to in later years as *kalām* and the speculative side of jurisprudence came to be known as *fiqh*.

Towards the end of the first one hundred and fifty years after *hijrah*, we find '*ilm*' acquiring a much broader meaning. Rather than limiting itself to merely the factual or empirical side of intellectual activity, it now incorporated all branches of knowledge. At the same time we also observe the emergence of boundaries between the various sciences.

On the heels of these developments, during the second and third centuries, numerous works from Greek and Persian languages were translated into Arabic that had a profound influence on the direction of intellectual activity. On the one hand we have the *fuqahā'* (jurists) *muḥaddithūn*, (traditionists) and *mufassirūn*, (commentators) whose sphere of activity remained purely within the legacy of the Prophet (P.B.H.); but on the other hand we find groups within the *mutakallimūn* like the Mu'tazilah and later the Ash'arites and the Māturīdites, who were deeply affected by the introduction of the Greek and Persian philosophies. The secondary effect of these translations was the emergence of a philosophical school among the Muslims themselves, which provided the bridge

between the ancient Greek and modern Western philosophy.

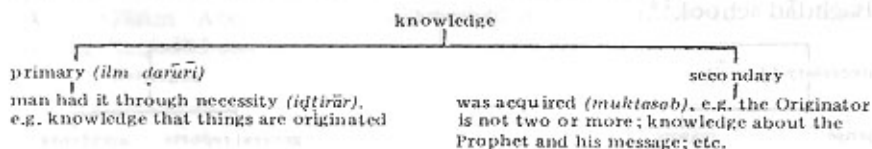
A major question of prime concern to us is the effect of these historical developments on the theory of knowledge as understood by the Muslims. The *muḥaddithūn*, the *mufasssīrūn*, the *fuqahā'*, the philosophers, and the *mutakallimūn* all grappled with the question partially or in its totality. The concerns of the first three were very limited though. While the *mufasssīrūn* were interested only in those sources of knowledge that assisted them in their exegetical exercises, the *muḥaddithūn* developed their principles for the sake of determining the veracity of the *hadīth*, its collation and its gradation. The *fuqahā'* in their broader concerns, utilised the efforts of the previous two to determine the rules governing the daily life of a Muslim. The science of *fiqh* (jurisprudence) recognised the primacy of the *Qur'ān* and *hadīth* and as the basis of knowledge of the law and day to day affairs of man. Divine revelation was the source; but *fiqh* recognised two other channels — *ijmā'* and *qiyās* — as sources of jurisprudence on issues where the *Qur'ān* and *hadīth* remained silent, and as long as the former were in harmony with the latter. Thus, the *mufasssīrūn*, *muḥaddithūn* and the *fuqahā'* were limited in their concerns about the sources or concepts of universal knowledge.

At the other end of the spectrum were the Muslim philosophers who maintained the superiority of reason over revelation in all epistemological concerns.<sup>8</sup> For them all knowledge remained subservient to reason.

Turning to the *mutakallimūn*, we find that we do not have a consensus of opinion on the types or causes of knowledge. It is this variety of thought that we wish to examine in the light of the perspective discussed so far. In the eighth century of *hijrah* (fourteenth century C.E.), we have a man like al-Taftāzānī presenting an elaborate theory of knowledge.<sup>9</sup> But where did it start, and when did it get accepted in that form? We have seen that the basic impulse derives from the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (P.B.H.) At the same time, the form it assumed was a far cry from the foreign philosophies which had lasting effect on Muslim thought;<sup>10</sup> but neither is it quite enumerated in the *Qur'ān* or the *Sunnah*. So let us then turn to the developments and observe them through history.

### *The Early Mutakallimūn:*

The issues that seem to have dominated early *kalām* were *īmān* and *kufr*, *qadr* and *jabr*, sin, etc.; but the "theory of knowledge" held the least interest, if any. The earliest mention we find, though not as such, is in relation to Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 125/743).<sup>11</sup> Ghaylān seems to have taught that human knowledge is of two types as shown in the chart below:



Whether this two-fold breakdown of knowledge was Ghaylān's own theory or was passed down to him cannot be known. But this division was to form the foundation of the development of the theory of *asbāb al-ilm* (causes of knowledge) and "types of knowledge".<sup>12</sup>

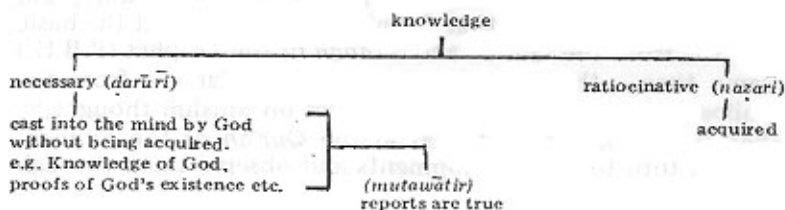
Tritton is of the opinion that the term *darūrī* (necessary) as applied to knowledge starts with Ja'd ibn Dirham (d. 125/743).<sup>13</sup> The reference he provides for this statement reads:

"From Ja'd ibn Dirham ... they have adopted the thesis that when deductive proof (*al-naẓar*) leads to knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*), that knowledge (*al-ma'rifah*) becomes an act (*al-fi'l*) without an agent (*fā'il*)"<sup>14</sup>

This has no reference to *darūrah*. Neither does Ja'd present a typology or a theory of knowledge. Unless Tritton had some other reference, or unless he has mixed Ja'd and Ghaylān due to the close proximity of their deaths, we must discount his statement.

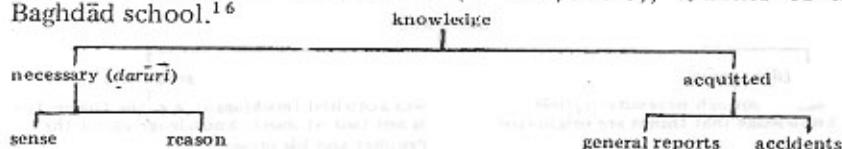
After Ghaylān, we find a gradual growing interest in the theory of knowledge, though mostly in Mu'tazilite circles. This could very well be due to the increased speculative activity in the field of *kalām*. The knowledge acquired through revelation and through the Prophet (P.B.H.) could not be questioned; but the place of reason per se had to be determined.

During the second century, the only other *mutakallim* who is on record to have put forward a theory is Hishām ibn Ḥakam (d.c. 188/803). His teachings seem to have been based on Ghaylān's theory, and are summarised in the chart below.<sup>15</sup>

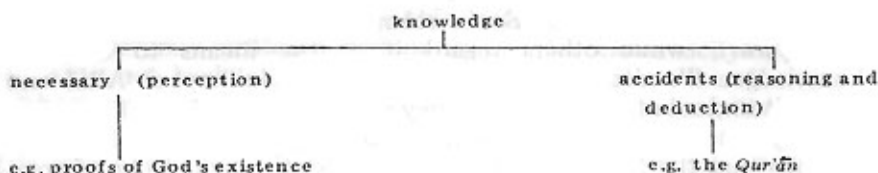


The Mu'tazilah, who flourished mainly during the third and the beginning of the fourth centuries, seem to have taken considerable interest. However, neither does there seem to have been a consensus among them on this matter, nor was there a systematic development of this theory. The division of knowledge remained two-fold, though some of them seem to have elaborated further on this base. The following charts show the views of some of these people.

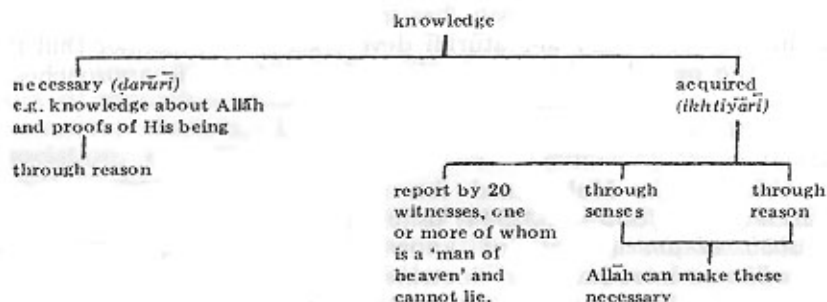
Abū Sahl Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir (d. 210/825-6), founder of the Baghdād school.<sup>16</sup>



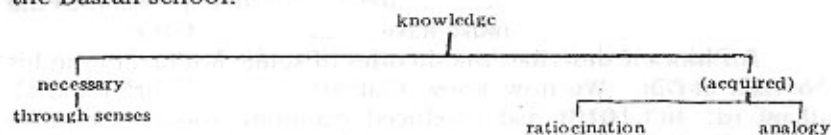
Hishām al-Fuwaṭī (d.c. 218/833), of the school of Baṣrah.<sup>17</sup>



Abū'l-Hudhayl al-'Allāf (b. between 130/748 and 135/753, d. between 226/841 and 235/850), of the Baṣrah school.<sup>18</sup>



Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), of the Baṣrah school.<sup>19</sup>

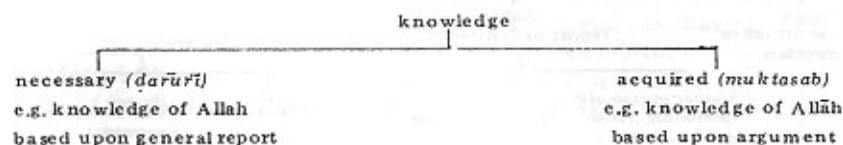


He rejected *tawātur* completely.

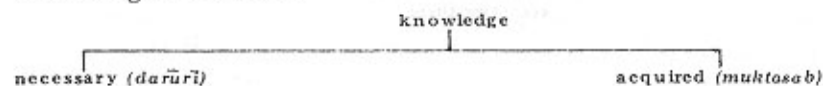
Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ (160/776 - 255/869), of the Baṣrah school.<sup>20</sup>

He taught that all knowledge is necessary (*darūrī*).

Abū 'Alī Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jubbā'ī (235/850 - 303/915), of the Baṣrah school.<sup>21</sup>



Abū'l-Qāsim 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Balkhī al-Ka'bī (d. 319/931), of the Baghdad school.<sup>22</sup>



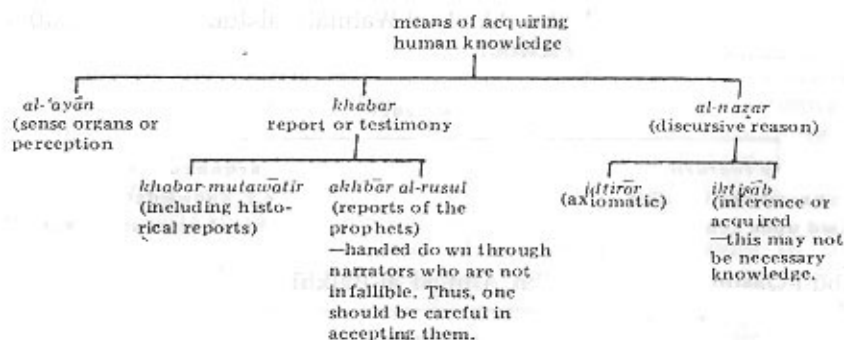
With the exception of al-Jāhīz, we see that all of the above mentioned Mu'tazilites recognised the two-fold division. The surprising factor is reason. Some seem to consider it as leading to 'ilm *ḡarūrī*, while others regard it as the means to acquired knowledge. We also have a person like Abū'l-Hudhayl al-'Allaf who places it under both categories. They do not seem to have a coherent explanation even within one school, i.e. Baghdād or Baṣrah. It is obvious that the Mu'tazilah did not consider this issue to be of great import or were too engrossed in other issues to adopt a unified or a systematic approach to this question.

The post-Mu'tazilah period seems to have taken this theory to its proper conclusion. Al-Ash'arī (260/873 - 324/935), probably in his reaction to the Mu'tazilah, has ignored this theory altogether; but his contemporary al-Māturīdī developed it in a manner that it became the model and base for all further systematic approaches.

### *al-Māturīdī*

Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī (c. 238/853 - 333/944) ushers in a new era with his theory of *asbāb al-'ilm* (causes of knowledge), by being "the first *mutakallim* to introduce the doctrine of sources of knowledge in a book on theology such as *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and thereby made a thorough attempt to build up his system on a sound philosophical basis".<sup>23</sup> Earlier, Wensinck had claimed that 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037-38) was the first to give an exposition to the *asbāb al-'ilm*.<sup>24</sup> Wensinck must have been aware of the fact that al-Baghdādī himself describes the theories of some Mu'tazilites in his *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*. We now know that at least al-Māturīdī and al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) had produced elaborate theories prior to al-Baghdādī. With the absence of early Mu'tazilite works and those of other early *mutakallimūn* it is difficult to say whether the *asbāb al-'ilm* were a matter of mere discussion or were expounded as such prior to al-Māturīdī as well.

The following chart describes al-Māturīdī's theory.<sup>25</sup>



Al-Māturīdī does not regard *ilhām* (inspiration) to be a source of knowledge.<sup>26</sup> This denial was carried through even by later Māturīdīte *mutakallimūn* like Abū Ḥafṣ ‘Umar al-Nasafī.<sup>27</sup> Al-Māturīdī severely criticises various groups for either denying that senses do not lead to knowledge or that reason alone is sufficient; but he regards reason as the most important of all sources, “because without its assistance sense and report can give no real knowledge.... It is reason which distinguishes men from animals. Al-Māturīdī has pointed out many cases where nothing but reason can reveal the truth. This is why the *Qur’ān* repeatedly enjoins man to think, to ponder and to judge by reason in order to find out the truth. Refuting the idea of those who think that reason cannot give true knowledge, he says that they cannot prove their doctrine without employing reason.”<sup>28</sup>

On the other hand, al-Māturīdī places reason within the framework of revelation. Reason has its limits, and can be obscured due to various factors, like desire, motive, habit, environment, association, etc. Therefore, reason must be guided by Divine revelation through a prophet.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in al-Māturīdī’s scheme of things, although the senses and reports seem to be bound by reason, the latter must operate within the framework of Divine revelation. Therefore, we do not have a place for revelation as such in the chart shown above.

One last comment with regard to al-Māturīdī is that we note the absence of the two-fold division of knowledge into *ḍarūrī* and *iktisābī* (or *ikhtiyārī*, *naẓarī*, etc.); however, this division occurs as a part of reason. Although it is not stated as such by al-Māturīdī, this development also marks the beginning of the theory of *asbab al-‘ilm* (causes of knowledge) as distinct from the theory of the “types of knowledge”. The prior two-fold division considered merely the “types” and not the “causes of knowledge”. In his three-fold division, al-Māturīdī talks of the means for acquiring (or causes of) knowledge. By incorporating the types of knowledge under one of the branches of the “causes”, he seems to be assuming that the theory of “types” is already known.

#### *A Creedal Statement of al-Māturīdī*

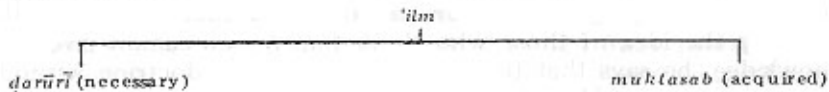
J.A. Williams has translated a creedal statement<sup>30</sup> which is “derived from al-Māturīdī’s teaching, and probably set down a generation later”.<sup>31</sup> Williams dates this creed as having been produced around the middle of the fourth/tenth century. Compared to al-Māturīdī’s statement in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, this creed whittles the theory of knowledge down to a bare minimal skeleton. It remains satisfied by merely mentioning the three means of acquiring knowledge.

This leads us to speculate that earlier *mutakallimūn* could also have produced elaborate theories which got reported later only in a minimal fashion. It is possible that systematic theories were postulated prior to al-Māturīdī, and were indeed incorporated into treatises on *kalām* which are no longer extant. With the absence of evidence

either way, one cannot be positive; but the existence of this creed suggests such a possibility.

### *Fiqh Akbar III*

We may also mention here the so-called *Fiqh Akbar* of al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), which Wensinck designates as *Fiqh Akbar III* and dates as possibly a beginning of eleventh century C.E. document.<sup>32</sup> Article 2 of this creed gives us a classification of types of knowledge.



According to the creed, *'ilm ḍarūrī* "is independent of the special faculty of the knowing subject", while *'ilm muḥtasab* "is dependent upon his judgements, opinion, and so forth".<sup>33</sup>

We see the same two-fold division that existed prior to al-Māturīdī. Wensinck seems to have used two factors in dating this creed, the theory of knowledge and the question of *istithnā'*. According to his sources, al-Baghdādī was the first to present the three "roots" of knowledge. Therefore, he concludes that this creed must have been prior to al-Baghdādī, being more primitive in form. Considering the second factor, in Article 24, *Fiqh Akbar* states "There is no objection to saying: We are faithful, if Allāh will". This mention of the problem of *istithnā'* leads Wensinck to state that this "proves the author is an Ash'arite", since "the Māturīdītes rejected the clause".<sup>34</sup> Hence, he concludes that the creed must have been written at least a generation or two after al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) and al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), but before al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037).

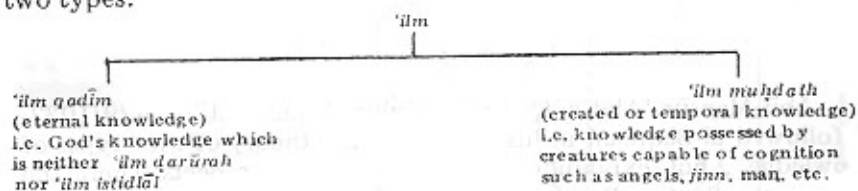
Our present study shows that al-Māturīdī and not al-Baghdādī was responsible for the postulation of the three causes of knowledge. Then does *Fiqh Akbar III* in fact pre-date al-Māturīdī? The possibility increases when we consider the fact that as far as the second factor is concerned, Wensinck (while analysing the *Waṣīyat Abī Hanīfah*) himself says that the question of *istithnā'* "is really much older than al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī".<sup>35</sup> On the other hand it may very well be argued that al-Māturīdī was not known to the West; but al-Bāqillānī and al-Baghdādī's theories (as described below) most definitely bear the stamp of al-Māturīdī's theory, which must have been known.

Therefore, we conclude that *Fiqh Akbar III* is in fact a much earlier document than what Wensinck anticipates it to be, written during the third/ninth century or earlier. In this light, a re-examination of the dating of *Fiqh Akbar III* and also possibly *Fiqh Akbar II* might prove illuminating.

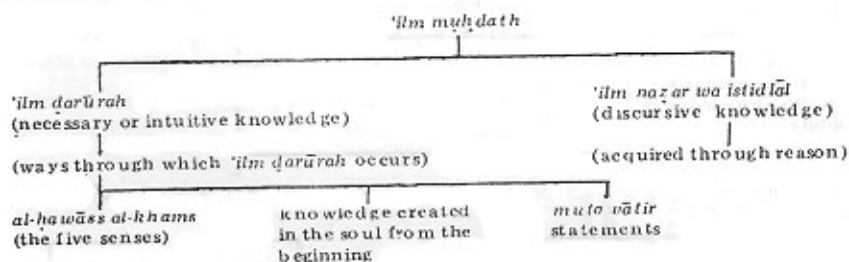
### *al-Bāqillānī*

Among the Ash'arites, Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Tayyib ibn

al-Bāqillānī was not only the "first major figure in the history of the Ash'arīte school",<sup>36</sup> but also seems to have been the first Ash'arīte to incorporate an epistemology in his book on *kalām*.<sup>37</sup> Al-Bāqillānī goes a step beyond al-Māturīdī in not only viewing the process of acquiring human knowledge, but looks at knowledge as a whole, that is including Divine knowledge. He divides knowledge initially into two types:



Complementing al-Māturīdī, al-Bāqillānī expounds the theory of the "types of knowledge" rather than the *asbāb al-'ilm*, which he incorporates in his theory as we shall see. He divides *'ilm muḥdath* further as follows:



A closer look at the scheme shows how the Ash'arīte legacy is reflected here as against the Māturīdīte. Although the three categories defined by al-Māturīdī exist in this scheme, yet the place allocated to each is significant. Going against al-Māturīdī's emphasis on reason, al-Bāqillānī defines *'ilm naẓar wa istidlāl* as knowledge which entails inference (*istidlāl*) and prolonged reflection (*tafakkur*) or in other words, it is knowledge which is based on *'ilm al-ḥiss wa ḍarūrah* (empirical and necessary knowledge).<sup>38</sup> Thus, reason is given a secondary position as against *'ilm ḍarūrah*, which he defines as knowledge inseparably attached to the creature, which can never be separated from its possessor, and the possessor is not liable to any kind of doubt or confusion in respect to it.<sup>39</sup>

In explanation of the extra category inserted by him regarding "knowledge created in the soul from the beginning", he gives as examples man's knowledge of his own existence and his inner states or affections such as feeling of health and illness, pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, capability and incapability, knowledge and ignorance, etc. It also includes the knowledge which occurs by the volitions of the speaker, the truth and falsity of statements, etc., and knowledge of what makes shame shameful, fear fearful, etc.<sup>40</sup>

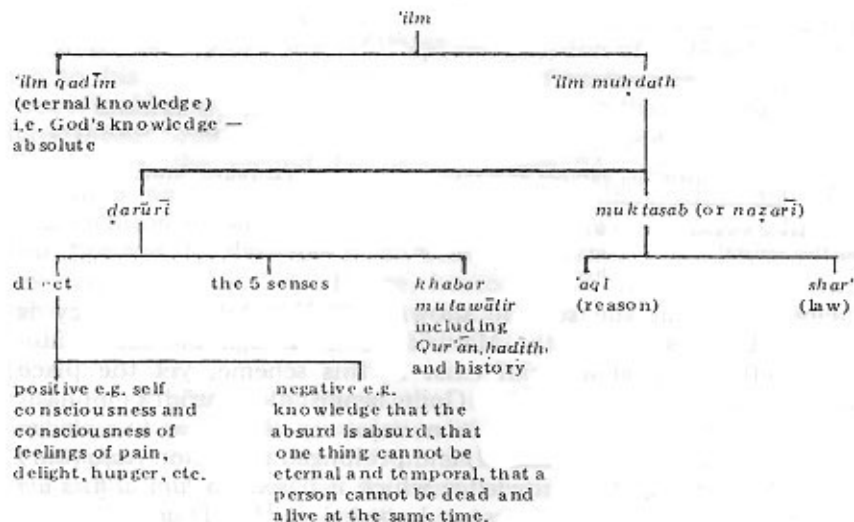
Mufaṭṭir statements include the knowledge about geographical locations, history, etc., and also the appearance of prophets of Allāh. This category also includes a "supernatural or extraordinary

variety of knowledge, which God infuses directly into the Soul, without the help of intermediaries or sense organs".<sup>41</sup>

Al-Bāqillānī, by elevating *'ilm al-qadīm* above *'ilm al-ḍarūrah* and *'ilm istidlāl* has avoided classifying Divine revelation. In other words, Divine revelation encompasses *'ilm muḥdath* in this scheme, and thus al-Bāqillānī remains very much within al-Ash'arī's following.

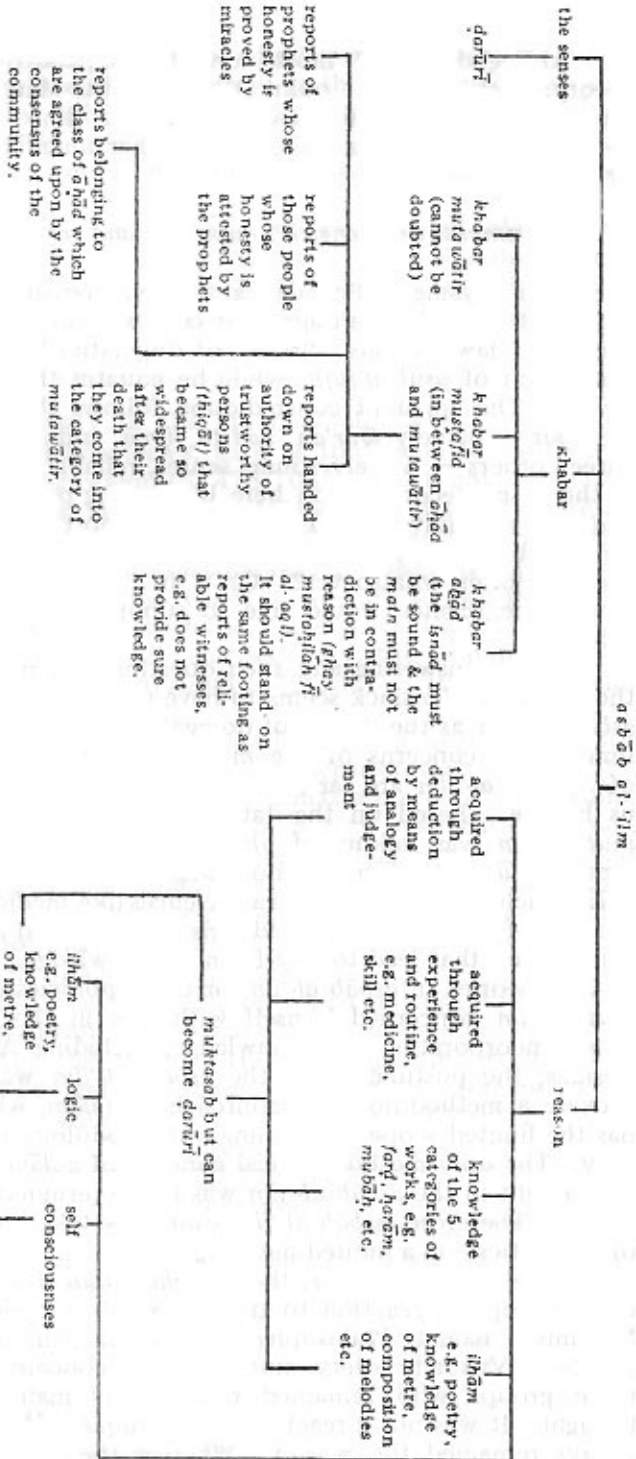
### al-Baghdādī

Abū Manṣūr 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037-8) followed al-Bāqillānī in his outline of the theory of the "types of knowledge", but expounded further on various aspects where the latter was silent. Besides, he follows al-Māturīdī in outlining a separate theory on the "causes of knowledge". His typology is as follows:<sup>42</sup>



Although al-Bāghdādī very clearly retains al-Bāqillānī's typology of *'ilm*, yet he also clearly states that the *asbāb al-'ilm* are three, namely the senses, *ḥabār*, and reason. What is indeed remarkable about al-Baghdādī is that he is able to clearly distinguish between "types of knowledge" and "causes of knowledge". Thus he removes all confusion between the two, and following al-Bāqillānī, he states that there are two types of originated knowledge, i.e. *ḍarūrī* and *muktasab*, while at the same time he follows al-Maturīdī in stating that there are three causes of knowledge as mentioned earlier. In this manner, he is able to reconcile the apparent contradiction between al-Bāqillānī and al-Maturīdī.

If we are to regroup al-Baghdādī's categories shown in the previous chart under *asbāb al-'ilm*, we come up with the chart as follow:<sup>43</sup>



Al-Baghdādī has most certainly expanded on al-Māturīdī's theory, but on one point the Ash'arīte-Māturīdīte differences remained, which continued down the line to al-Nasafī and al-Taftāzānī as we shall see, i.e. whether *ilhām* is a cause for 'ilm or not.<sup>44</sup>

*Some comments on Wensinck's approach and terminology*

In analysing al-Baghdādī's theory, Wensinck's thrust of the argument is to show an apparent contradiction in what he calls the "roots of law" versus "roots of dogmatics". The former is the translation of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, while he equates the latter to *asbāb al-'ilm*.<sup>45</sup> The apparent contradiction follows that while the former are four — namely *Qur'ān*, *ḥadīth*, *ijmā'* and *qiyās* — the latter are three others — namely sound senses, reliable reports, and reason. Is there any reconciliation here like saying perhaps the *Qur'ān* and *ḥadīth* are equivalent to the reliable reports, *ijmā'* to the sound senses, and *qiyās* to reason? Is there any correspondence between the categories whatsoever? Or is it a well-founded contradiction where one science would like to subordinate the position of the other?

Before answering any such question we must take issue with the fact that Wensinck seems to have gone too far in understanding *asbāb al-'ilm* as the "roots of dogmatics". In our reading, the epistemological concerns of the *mutakallimūn* in deriving the theory of *asbāb al-'ilm* are far broader than what Wensinck would have us believe. Based on the data we have, we know that when the *mutakallim* was talking of 'ilm, he did not take it in the limited sense of 'ilm *al-kalām*; for no *mutakallim* could make a claim that *kalām* included all the physical sciences like medicine, mathematics, etc., all of history, the law and jurisprudence, and in fact all sciences, skills, etc. that lead to any form of knowledge. Yet we know that in the theories of *asbāb al-'ilm* or the typologies of knowledge, the *mutakallim* concerned himself with 'ilm in the broadest possible sense, incorporating all knowledge, including Allāh's knowledge. Besides, the postulation of the *asbab al-'ilm* was NOT meant to provide a methodology for approaching *kalām*, whereas *uṣūl al-fiqh* has the limited scope of defining a methodology for juristic matters only. The only methodological concern of *kalām* for which a place was sought in the *asbāb al-'ilm* was the determination of the role of reason. Therefore, *asbāb al-'ilm* cannot be taken to mean the "roots of dogmatics" in a limited meaning.

To elaborate further, the *mutakallimūn* developed theories of epistemology in reaction to the philosophising element among the Muslims — namely Philosophers, the Mu'tazilah, and other heretical groups. Virtually every *mutakallim* is concerned about refuting these groups who remained outside the mainstream of Islamic thought. It was not a reaction to the *fuqahā'*.<sup>46</sup> The pivotal point always remained the reason. Whereas the *mutakallim* could not deny reason since he himself used it extensively, he had to place it within a scheme where it got its due respect but not at the expense

of the other *asbāb*. A settlement of whether reason was subordinate to revelation or not was also necessary. In this development we also see the difference in opinion of the Māturīdītes and the Ash'arītes, where the Māturīdītes remained within the Ḥanafī *fiqhī* (juristic) position by giving far more importance to reason within the framework of revelation.

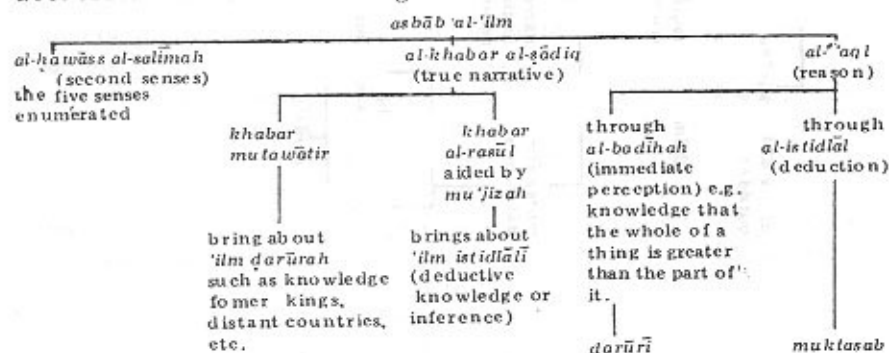
Therefore, Wensinck's contrast between *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *asbāb al-'ilm* and the translation of the latter as "roots of dogmatics" is not only erroneous but also fallacious. The two categories cannot be compared. Hence, the questions raised earlier are also irrelevant.

### *al-Nasafī and al-Taftāzānī*

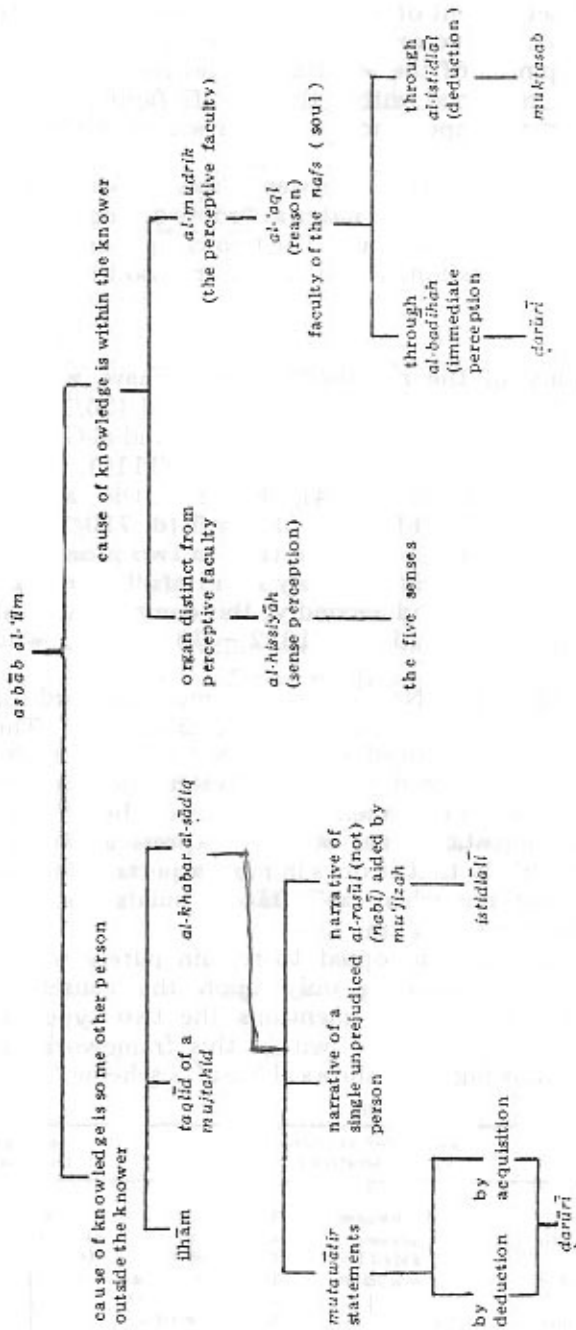
Skipping over many of the *mutakallimūn* who have written about epistemological typologies, such as Ibn Hazm (d.456/1064), Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Tabarī (d. 504/1110), Abū'l-Mu'īn Maymūn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Ḥāfiz al-Dīn Abū'l-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310), and 'Aqūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355),<sup>47</sup> we turn to two prominent personalities. The first is a Māturīdīte, namely Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142); and secondly, the commentator of his *'Aqīdah*, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (722/1322 – 791/1389), who was an Ash'arīte.

The *'Aqīdah* of Abū Ḥafṣ al-Nasafī became almost standard for Māturīdīte *kalām*, and has appeared in numerous translations.<sup>49</sup> The *Commentary of al-Taftāzānī* is indeed a masterpiece of scholarship. He has explained al-Nasafī's creed in a very systematic manner. Since the *'Aqīdah* is a very short document itself, it would be difficult to say whether the commentary does actually express al-Nasafī's point of view. It is very likely that it does in most aspects. We shall elaborate upon both and see where al-Taftāzānī builds upon al-Nasafī, and where he disagrees with him.

Al-Nasafī, unlike al-Baghdādī, opted to remain purely within the Māturīdīte tradition, elaborating only upon the causes of knowledge and not the types. He mentions the two types of knowledge — *ḍarūrī* and *muktasab* — within this framework, as does al-Māturīdī. The following chart shows al-Nasafī's scheme.<sup>47</sup>



## CHART - A



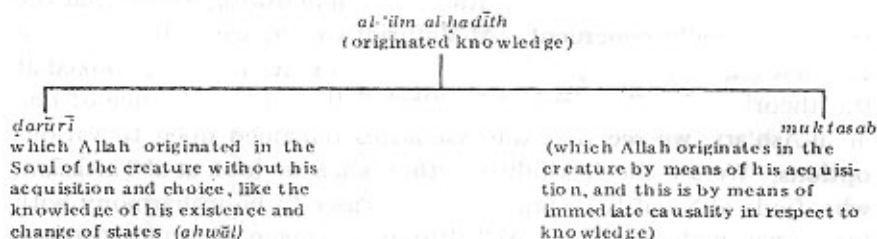
Comparing this scheme with that of al-Māturīdī, we see that the two are virtually congruent. Al-Māturīdī's word seems to have been the first and the last in this regard with his school. Having looked at the theories of al-Bāqillānī and al-Baghdādī, and the absence of one in al-Ash'arī, we see that the Ash'arītes remained open to various options. We see the flexibility further when we look at al-Taftāzānī, who finds al-Nasafī's position in most cases to be in harmony with his own understanding. Al-Taftāzānī's scheme is summarised as follows.<sup>50</sup> (See Chart A).

Al-Taftāzānī goes in great depth in defining each term, explaining each phrase, and answering objections raised by various groups. His approach is very systematic and scholarly, and one hardly finds any polemics in it. We see that he basically follows al-Nasafī — rather al-Māturīdī's scheme — instead of al-Bāqillānī or al-Baghdādī. It may be pointed out though, that all of them have a basic similarity in essence. Thus, it is very easy for al-Taftāzānī to adapt to the Māturīdīte scheme. But true to the tradition of *kalām*, in its fluidity with regard to epistemological concerns, he says in the end:

"... there is no reason for confining the causes of knowledge to the three (causes mentioned)".<sup>51</sup>

Comparing the charts we note that al-Taftāzānī, apart from elaborating upon certain stages, adds two further causes — namely *taqlīd* of *mujtahid* and the narrative of a single unprejudiced person. Besides, he disagrees with the Māturīdīte position that *ilhām* does not lead to knowledge. The *taqlīd* of a *mujtahid* is also an addition by al-Taftāzānī over all previous theories; but we do find a precursor for the narrative of the single unprejudiced person in al-Baghdādī who lists *khabar aḥād* but denies that it leads to sure knowledge.

With regards to *ilhām*, al-Taftāzānī circumvents criticising al-Nasafī by saying that the latter says "*ilhām* is not one of the causes of cognition (*al-ma'rifah*) of the soundness of a thing", rather than saying "*ilhām* is not one of the causes of knowledge (*'ilm*) of a thing".<sup>52</sup> He points out that a technical distinction confines *'ilm* to compounds (*al-murakkabāt*) or the universals (*al-kulliyāt*), and *ma'rifah* to simple things (*al-basā'it*) or to particulars (*al-juz'iyāt*). Before elaborating on the *asbāb al-'ilm*, al-Taftāzānī also mentions the types of knowledge. As a commentator and scholar, he does not produce a new theory; but since al-Nasafī does not expound on the types of knowledge, he produces it from *al-Bidāyah* of Nūr al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Abū Bakr al-Ṣabūnī al-Bukhārī (d. 580/1184). He puts forward al-Ṣabūnī's theory as follows:<sup>53</sup>



It is the same two-fold division. By recognising this typology, al-Taffāzānī basically falls within al-Baghdādī's tradition although he has opted for al-Ṣabūnī's simplistic division rather than al-Baghdādī's elaborate theory, possibility to retain greater flexibility.

### Concluding Remarks

Starting at least with Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 125/743), the *mutakallimūn* classified knowledge into two basic types, namely *ḍarūrī* (necessary) and *iktisābī* (acquired). The second category was sometimes referred to as *istidlālī* (deductive) or *nazarī* (discursive), etc. This classification seems to have originated out of a desire to determine the role of reason. In some early instances, we see reason being classified as a type of knowledge, and there does not seem to be a clear distinction between the types of knowledge and its causes. Although al-Baghdādī was the first to make this distinction clear, al-Matūrīdī, a century earlier, was interested mainly in the causes of knowledge (*asbāb al-'ilm*), and was the first to include such a theory in a treatise on *kalām*.

Starting with al-Matūrīdī, most *mutakallimūn* considered the *asbāb al-'ilm* to be three — senses, report and reason. The elaborate details that supplant the trees of the types of knowede and the *asbāb al-'ilm* differ with almost all the *mutakallimūn*. Interestingly enough, the school within which there is the least movement towards further developments is the Mātūrīdīte, which advocates reason next only to revelation.

One important conclusion that must be drawn is that the phenomenon of the epistemological theories was an on-going process among the *mutakallimūn*. Limiting reason to the realms of revelation, it became more of an intellectual exercise to determine the place of the human faculties and the external factors in the process of gaining knowledge. The broad outlines developed by the early *mutakallimūn* remained the backbone of all further speculations in this regard.

## REFERENCES

1. Cf. *al-Qur'ān*, 96:1-5.
2. Cf. *al-Qur'ān*, 2:29, 2:115, 6:103, 13:9, 31:34, 35:38, and scores of similar *āyāt*.
3. *Ibid.*, 35:31
4. *Ibid.*, 20:114.
5. From Ibn Mājah's *Sunan*, reported by Fazlul Karim in *al-Hadis*, (Washington n.d.), vol. I, p. 351. See also the numerous *ahādīth* in *ibid.*, pp. 347-361 which show the benefits of acquiring knowledge.
6. A number of works can be consulted in this regard. For example see Ansari, Zafar Ishaq. *The Early Development of Fiqh in Kufah*, Ph.D. thesis unpublished (McGill 1966), vol. I, and Watt, W.M., *Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Edinburgh, 1973), and the bibliographies therein.
7. Cf. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Brill, 1953). *SEI* articles on "Fikh" (pp. 102-103) and "Ilm" (p. 163); Wensinek, *Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, (London, 1932), pp. 29-30, 110-111; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 119; Macdonald, *SEI*, p. 212, col. 1.
8. Fakhr, Majid, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, (Columbia, 1970), p. 10.
9. Cf. *Infra*, pp. 18-21.
10. Tritton, "Theory of Knowledge in early Muslim theology", p. 256.
11. Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, p. 136. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq bayn al-Firāq*, p. 194. (Halkin's trans., p. 7), and Watt, W.M. p. 87.
12. The difference between the theories of *asbāb al-'ilm* and "types of knowledge will become evident when we get to al-Māturīdī, *infra*, pp. 7-9.
13. Tritton, *Muslim Theology*, (London, 1947), p. 59; and *idem.*, "Theory of Knowledge", p. 253.
14. Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firāq wa bayan al-firāq al-nājiyah minhum*, (Cairo, 1910), p. 262.
15. Tritton, *Theology*, p. 76; and *idem.*, "Theory of Knowledge", p. 253. Tritton takes this information from Ibn Qutaybah, *Mukhtalif, al-hadīth*, 1326, p. 60.
16. Tritton, *Theology*, p. 97, based probably on al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, (Istanbul, 1928), p. 260.
17. Tritton, *Theology*, p. 114; and *idem.*, "Theory of knowledge", p. 253. He does not give any references in this case.
18. *Idem.*, *Theology*, pp. 85-6; and *idem.*, "Theory of knowledge", p. 254; based on al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, pp. 258-32.
19. Tritton, *Theology*, pp. 91-92; and *idem.*, "Theory of Knowledge", p. 254; based on al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, pp. 256, 16.
20. Tritton, *Theology*, pp. 131-2; and *idem.*, "Theory of Knowledge", p. 254; based on al-Jahiz, *Rasā'il* (ed. Sandubi), 1933, p. 125.
21. Tritton, *Theology*, p. 143; based on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, In "Theory of Knowledge", Tritton, contradicts himself and says that knowledge of God comes through reason and is necessary (p. 254).
22. Tritton, *Theology*, p. 158; no references given . . . . .
23. 'Alī, A.K.M. Ayyūb, "Māturīdism" in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. Sharīf, (Weisbaden, 1963), vol. I, p. 261.
24. Wensinek, *Muslim Creed*, p. 251.
25. Based on the summary of al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* by Fathalla kholeif (appended to the *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, Beyrouth, 1970, pp. xviii-xx), and 'Alī, A.K.M. Ayyūb, *op.cit.*, pp. 262-4.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
27. Cf. *infra*, p. 18.
28. 'Alī, A.K.M. Ayyūb, p. 263; based on al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 9-11, 135-137.
29. 'Alī, A.K.M. Ayyūb, p. 263; based on al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 179-185, and *Kitāb Tā'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, (or *Tā'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*), Sūrah 7:54.

30. J.A. Williams. *Islam*, (New York, 1962). pp. 180—187. He obtained the Arabic text from Y.Z. Yorukan. *Islam Akaidine Eski Metinler*, Istanbul, 1953.
31. Williams, p. 180.
32. Wensinck, pp. 264-65.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
36. Fakhry, p. 236.
37. Cf. al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, (Cairo, 1947). pp. 35-39. for his theory. Cf. also Fakhry, pp. 236—7, for a summary.
38. al-Bāqillānī, p. 36.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
41. Fakhry, p. 237; Cf. also Bāqillānī, p. 37.
42. Wensinck, pp. 252—3, 256—7.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 253—260.
44. Cf. *infra*, pp. 18, 21—1.
45. Wensinck, pp. 248—249.
46. Cf. *passim* the appropriate chapters in the books of the *mutakallimūn* discussed in this paper. In fact in every chapter of these books, we can see a very clear mention of the groups and persons who concerned the *mutakallim*.
47. Cf. the following works in this regard:
- i) Ibn Ḥazm. *Kitāb al-fisal fi'l-milal*, 1317.
  - ii) al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-irshād*, 1938.
  - iii) al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-iqtisād*, 1327.
  - iv) 'Alī al-Ṭabarī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, Cairo, MS.
  - v) Abū l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, Cairo, MS.
  - vi) Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-arba'ūn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 1934.
  - vii) Abū'l-Barakāt al-Nasafī, *Umda*, ed. Cureton, 1843.
  - viii) al-Ījī, *Kitāb al-Mawāqif*, ed. Sorensen, Leipzig, 1848.
48. Some of the translation will be found in the following:
- i) Macdonald, D.B. *The Development of Muslim Theology*, 1903. pp. 313—322.
  - ii) al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, tr. Elder.
  - iii) Wensinck, *op.cit.*, pp. 263—264.
  - iv) D'Ohsson, Ignatius, *Oriental Antiquities and the General View of the Othoman Customs, Laws and Ceremonies*, Philadelphia 1788. pp. 54—57.
49. Cf. for example al-Taftāzānī, p. 15.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 15—27.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 26—27.