

CHAPTER 5

Early *kalām*

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Kalām, or *‘ilm al-kalām* (the science of *kalām*), is a title of that branch of knowledge in Islam that is usually translated as “speculative theology”. Literally, *kalām* means “speech”, “talk” or “words”; *yatakallam fī* means to talk about or discuss a matter or topic. In an early usage of the word *kalām* in this sense, the Prophet is reported to have come out and found a group of Muslims *yatakallamūna*¹ *fī l-qadar* i.e. talking about, or discussing, predestination.² The opposite of *takallama fī* is *sakata ‘an* – to keep silent about – such a matter or topic. The word occurred in other traditions and continued to be used in the same sense even when discussions on theological matters had become more extensive and specialized. A statement by Mālik (d. 179/795) explains the connection between such discussions and the word *kalām* in its lexical meaning. He said: “Beware of innovations . . .; those who talk about [*yatakallamūn fī*] the names and attributes of God, His Word, His Knowledge and Power, and do not keep silent [*yaskutūn*] about things about which the Companions of the Prophet and their followers have kept silence.”³ As a jurist, he also stated: “I do not like *kalām* except in what involves *‘amal* (action), but as for *kalām* about God, silence is better than it.”⁴

Kalām here means discussion on theological matters. As M. ‘Abd al-Rāziq has rightly observed, such discussions were called *kalām* before the science of *kalām* became independent and recorded in writing, and people who engaged in such discussions were also called *mutakallimūn*. When books were written about these issues, the science which was written down was given the title that had been applied earlier to such discussions.⁵ In Islamic sources a number of reasons were offered for giving such a title to the science of *kalām*. Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390)⁶ put together such reasons as follows:

- 1 Traditionally the title that was given to the discussions of any separate issue, was *al-kalām fī kathā wa kathā* (an exposition of/a chapter or section on).
- 2 The question of *kalām Allāh* (the speech of God) was the most famous question and the one that gave rise to the most disputes.
- 3 The science of *kalām* generates in one the power to talk about or discuss religious matters and impress one's arguments on one's rivals as logic does in the field of philosophy.

As regards the first reason, it is true that chapters in such early books as *al-Ibānah* of al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) and *al-Mughnī* of 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) bear such titles but these works appeared much later than the name of *kalām* as a science. The same can be said of the second reason, since the title was well known before the discussions on *kalām Allāh* (the createdness or otherwise of the Qur'ān). Similarly, the third suggestion refers to the stage when logic and Greek philosophy became well known and influential in the Islamic cultural milieu in the third/ninth century, after the title of *kalām* had become well established. Other suggestions were put forward⁷ which can be explained away as post-dating the appearance of *'ilm al-kalām* as an established science in the second/eighth century. Western scholars, on the other hand, argue for a non-Islamic origin of the term *kalām* as being derived from the Greek *dialexis* used by the Church Fathers, or *logos*, directly or via Syriac,⁸ but none of the arguments for such views appears to be conclusive. The term in Islamic culture predates any presumed contact with Christian, Greek or Syriac sources and in any case *kalām*, as will be explained below, is not the only term used by Muslims for this science: six other terms were used. The most plausible explanation for the appearance of this term remains the original lexical meaning as used in the above-mentioned prophetic traditions.

J. van Ess considers that not every discussion on any religious question can be considered part of *kalām*; rather *kalām* requires a specific way of treating religious issues: it is a treatment where it is necessary to have an adversary in the discussion. *Kalām* "means a procedure" where you have a discussion about a topic that usually occurs according to a certain structure by question and response, frequently built up in the form of dilemmas.⁹ Van Ess cites a *risālah*, ascribed to al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, an anti-Qadarite *risālah*, which he dates at 73/692, to exemplify *kalām* in this sense as a dialectic formula which begins by posing a question, in the form of a disjunction: whichever choice the adversary makes, he loses, and is trapped in a position which is either manifestly untenable or identical with that of the questioner.

As to the question of dates, Michael Cook has convincingly argued that the ascription rests on the sole authority of the Zaydī Imām al-Ḥādī

(d. 298/910), that many of the arguments advanced by van Ess are questionable and the result could not be said to constitute proof, suggesting that it would be difficult to sustain a date later than the first half of the second/eighth century.¹⁰ The persistence in using the dialectical formula for such a lengthy *risālah* and the fact that the style of the text is so clearly different from the style of al-Ḥasan in his other *Risālat al-irjāʿ* make it more difficult to accept the ascription to al-Ḥasan on the sole authority of al-Hādī.

On the basis of this *risālah*, van Ess argues that the form was borrowed from Greek sources, while Cook, on the basis of a Syriac text, similar in form to that of the *risālah*, argues that the origin for the *risālah* was Syriac.

Without going here into the question of any relationship of Islamic culture to either Greek or Syriac, it is difficult to agree that Muslim writers had necessarily to resort to either source to become acquainted with such a formula, or that it did not exist in their culture. In fact we have a piece of argument dated much earlier than the dates suggested by either van Ess or Cook: that is the dialogue between Ibn ʿAbbās and some Khārijites who rebelled against ʿAlī.

On being sent by the Caliph ʿAlī to argue with them, Ibn ʿAbbās asked: “What do you have against ʿAlī?” They answered “Three things: one, he set men as judges *fī amr Allāh*, while judgment is only for Allāh; two, he fought but did not take captives or booty. If his enemies were believers it would not have been lawful for him to fight them, and if they had been unbelievers, he had the right to kill and take them captive. Three, he abdicated his position as *Amīr al-muʾminīn*. If he was not *Amīr al-muʾminīn* he must be *Amīr al-kāfirīn*.”

Ibn ʿAbbās asked: “If I cite from the Qurʾān and *Sunnah* what refutes your argument, would you come back to him?” They replied “Why not?” To the first question he cited Qurʾān 6: 95 and 4: 35 in which it is enjoined that arbiters be set up to decide on the price of a hare killed in the *ḥaram* and in marital disputes, and put to them: “Do you consider giving men authority to decide in matters of the blood of Muslims and reconciliation better, or to decide on the price of a hare or a matter involving whether it is lawful for a man to have intercourse with his wife?” They conceded the point. As to the second point that ʿAlī fought without taking captives or booty, Ibn ʿAbbās asked the Khārijites “Would you take your mother¹¹ ʿĀʾishah captive? If you say she is not our ‘mother’ you would be unbelievers, so you see that you are cornered between two unlawful things. Have I answered your arguments over this?”

They said yes. "As to your objection that he abdicated the position of *Amīr al-mu'minīn*, I can cite what the Prophet did at Ḥudaybiyah when the representative of the Quraysh did not accept 'Alī writing 'This is what has been agreed between the Messenger of Allāh and . . .' to which Abū Ṣufyān and Suhayl objected 'If we had known you were a messenger of Allāh we would not have fought you', at which the Prophet said to 'Alī, 'Wipe that out and write "This is what has been agreed between Muḥammad, son of 'Abdallāh and Abū Ṣufyān and Suhayl.'"'" At this point, two thousand of the Khārījites changed their position and did not fight 'Alī.¹²

In this dialogue both the Khārījites and Ibn 'Abbās use the disjunction formula, at a time much earlier than that of the *risālah* van Ess and Cook cite to suggest a non-Muslim origin for the formula.

Van Ess' view that *kalām* must involve such dialectical structure does not agree with the Islamic view of *kalām*. The dialectical situation and disjunction formula are of course part of *kalām* but are not the only form it takes. Throughout the history of *kalām* theological writings with different characteristics have also been accepted as part of *kalām*.

As mentioned, *kalām* has not been the only title given to this science as an independent subject. As many as seven names in Arabic have been used for it, which is perhaps unknown in any other science, and may suggest that the reservation regarding *kalām* shown by such scholars as Mālik continued afterwards.

- 1 One of the oldest titles was given by Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), in the second/eighth century, who named it *'ilm al-fiqh al-akbar*. *Fiqh* is a Qur'ānic word (9: 122) and this shows the relationship between *kalām* and *fiqh*. The adjective *al-akbar* shows the superiority of matters related to the principles of the faith over practical aspects of the *Shari'ah*.
- 2 *'ilm al-kalām*: this is also one of the oldest names. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), Mālik (d. 179/795) and Shāfi'ī (d. 204/819) are said to have given their opinions on *kalām* and the *mutakallimūn*.¹³ This title seems to have been the most common and enduring.
- 3 *'ilm uṣūl al-dīn*: another early title which is based on the division of religious knowledge into *uṣūl* and *furū'* (roots and branches). This title was used by Ash'arī (d. 324/935) in his *al-Idānah 'an uṣūl al-diyānah* and by al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) in his *Uṣūl al-dīn*. The faculties of theology in Al-Azhar University, for instance, are called *kulliyāt uṣūl al-dīn*.
- 4 *'ilm al-aqā'id*: a later title, dating perhaps from the fourth/tenth century. This name appears in the works of such writers as al-Ṭaḥāwī

- (d. 331/942), al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), al-Ṭūsī (d. 671/1272) and al-Ījī (d. 756/1355).
- 5 *‘ilm al-naẓar wa’l-istidlāl*: this was mentioned by Taftāzānī in his introduction to *Sharḥ al-‘aqā’id al-nasafiyyah*. The title used to be given in early *kalām* books to the first introductory chapter, which discusses proofs and the methodology of *‘ilm al-kalām*. This can be seen in the *Uṣūl al-dīn* of al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) and *al-Mughnī* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024). Perhaps because of the importance of the methodology of *kalām*, the title was applied to the whole science.
 - 6 *‘ilm al-tawḥīd wa’l-ṣifāt*: so called probably because of the importance of the Unity and other Attributes of God. This appears in the introduction to *Sharḥ al-‘aqā’id al-nasafiyyah* by Taftāzānī.
 - 7 *‘ilm al-tawḥīd*: this being the most important article of faith in Islam. This title was used by Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323/1905) in his *Risālat al-tawḥīd*, and became more common amongst modern theologians.

As *‘ilm al-kalām* became an independent science, various definitions of this term were introduced; the following definitions, given at different times in the history of *kalām*, are often quoted. Amongst the earliest is that by Abū Ḥanīfah (d. 150/767), who gave it the name *al-fiqh al-akbar* and stated: “*fiqh* in *uṣūl al-dīn* is better than *fiqh* in *furū‘ al-aḥkām*. *Fiqh* is knowledge of the beliefs and practices which are permitted and which are obligatory in both. What relates to beliefs is called *al-fiqh al-akbar* and what relates to practices is simply *al-fiqh*.”¹⁴ Such distinctions influenced later Ḥanafī theologians such as al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142),¹⁵ and the knowledge involved in both types of *fiqh* is that which is based on traditional (*naqlī*) or rational (*‘aqlī*) proofs.

Al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) makes the distinction between *kalām* and *fiqh* and defines *kalām* in his *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm* as: “a science which enables a person to support specific beliefs and actions laid down by the Legislators of the religion and to refute all opinions contradicting them”.¹⁶ Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 680/1281) and al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) give the definition of *kalām* as: “a science which enables one to establish religious beliefs, by adducing arguments/proofs and banishing doubts”. Ibn Khaldūn (d. 807/1404) defines *kalām* as: “the science that involves arguing with rational proofs in defence of the articles of faith and refuting innovators who deviate from the beliefs of early Muslims and Muslim orthodoxy”.¹⁷ In the modern era, Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1323/1905) gives the following definition:

The science that studies the Being and Attributes of God, the essential and the possible affirmations about Him, as well as the negations that are necessary to make relating to Him. It deals also with the apostles and the authenticity of their message and

treats of their essential and appropriate qualities and what is incompatibly associated with them.¹⁸

The earliest stage of *kalām* in Islam is surely to be found in the Qur'ān itself. *Kalām* in its technical sense involves providing rational proofs to establish the articles of faith. This is, in fact, an essential feature of the way the Qur'ān treats theological subjects. In the first verses that were revealed, we read: "Recite, in the name of your Lord, who created, Created man from clots of blood . . ." (96: 1–5). This shows the power that takes creation from one stage to another; later on the various stages of embryonic development are shown, from the germinal fluids, through the embryo, to the foetus and the infant, adult, degeneration by old age and death, to show that He who can do this can also take a person through the further stage of resurrection after death (22: 5–7, 23: 12–16).

Resurrection is dealt with on many occasions in the Qur'ān. The following example has been discussed by the two Muslim philosophers, al-Kindī and Ibn Rushd who analysed the rational basis of the Qur'ānic arguments for resurrection in these verses:

Is man not aware that We created him from a little germ? Yet he is flagrantly contentious. He answers back with arguments, and forgets his own creation. He asks: "Who will give life to rotten bones?"

Say: "He who first brought them into being will give them life again: He has knowledge of every creation; He who gives you from the green tree a fire when you light your own fires with it."

Has He who created the heavens and the earth no power to create their like? That He surely has. He is the all-knowing Creator. When He decrees a thing, He has only to say: "Be," and it is. (36: 77–82)¹⁹

Without being a book of theology that provides a systematic analysis, the Qur'ān dealt with all the issues that were discussed in *kalām* as fully developed later. Thus al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) says, "One is surprised by those who say there is no *'ilm al-kalām* in the Qur'ān when the verses dealing with *al-aḥkām al-shar'īyyah* are limited, while those that draw attention to principles of the faith far exceed them."²⁰ Similarly, al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), a pre-eminent commentator on the Qur'ān and *mutakallim*, points out that discussion is widespread in the Qur'ān on *tawḥīd*, prophethood and the hereafter. This is because the Prophet had to contend

with all manners of unbelievers, atheists, or those who deny the power and predetermination of God, and those who attributed a partner to God, be it from the celestial spheres, like the stars, or the lower spheres, like the Christians and the pagans, and those who denied prophethood altogether or those who disputed

the prophethood of Muḥammad, like the Jews and the Christians, together with those who denied resurrection and so on. The Qur'ān discussed the views of such groups, refuted and answered their claims.²¹

Accordingly he states:

Qur'ānic verses dealing with *al-ahkām al-shar'iyyah* are fewer than six hundred, while the rest explain questions of the unity of God, prophethood and refutation of idol-worshippers and various other types of polytheists. . . . If you examine *ilm al-kalām* you will find nothing in it other than discussions of these questions and refutations of doubts and counter-arguments.²²

Likewise, Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1327) states that: "The Qur'ān has established the principles of the faith, and also their arguments and proofs."²³ Ibn Rushd, a philosopher who wrote on the Qur'ānic methods of proving the beliefs of the Islamic faith, states: "The whole Qur'ān is an invitation to reflect and draw lessons and directs attention to the methods of reflection."²⁴

Discussion on religious matters began very early in Islam. We have seen earlier reference to the Prophet coming out and finding a group of Muslims discussing *qadar*. In fact the polytheists themselves relied on *qadar* to justify their stand and the Qur'ān directed the Prophet to answer them (6: 148; 16: 35), and although the Prophet did not encourage disputation over such matters as predestination, he answered all questions that were directed to him, unless they went beyond human knowledge, like the time of the Hour of Judgment.²⁵ On such matters he would direct the questioner to what is more useful. When he was asked by a Companion, "When is the hour of judgment?" he replied, "What have you prepared for it?"

He himself conducted theological discussions with non-Muslims. An example of this is the one he had with the delegation from Najrān, headed by their chiefs, al-Āqib and al-Sayyid. When he requested them to become Muslims and they refused, he commented:

"What prevents you from becoming Muslims is your claim that God had a son and your worship of the cross and eating the flesh of swine." They asked, "If Jesus was not the son of God, whose son is he then?" and they all argued with him about Jesus. He said, "Don't you know that there is no son who does not resemble his father?" They agreed. He asked them, "Don't you know that our Lord is living and does not die, while Jesus' life has come to an end?" They said, "Yes." He said, "Don't you know that our Lord is guardian over everything and protects and sustains living things?" They said, "Yes." "Does Jesus have power

over any of this?" They said, "No." He said, "Our Lord has formed Jesus in the womb as He wished, and our Lord does not eat, drink, or excrete." They said "Yes." He said, "Don't you know that Jesus was borne by his mother as a woman bears a child, and she gave birth to him as any woman gives birth to a child. He was fed like a child and he used to feed, drink and excrete?" They said "Yes." So he said, "How could he then be as you claim?" to which they could not give an answer.²⁶

Discussions on such matters as *qadar*, the Attributes of God, the nature of belief and unbelief, eschatology and the fate of sinners, continued during the times of the *ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet) and the *tābi'ūn* (those who followed them), laying the foundations for the later issues of *ilm al-kalām*. What they refrained from was not the discussion of such issues but from going deep into them or forcing the issues.²⁷

In order to have a clear picture of the nature of theological discussions in the era of early *kalām* it would be useful to show it in relation to subsequent eras. We find it suitable to adopt the following scheme in five stages.²⁸

- 1 the beginning, which covers the first and the very early years of the second/eighth century;
- 2 recording and the emergence of various schools and sects of *kalām*. This occupies four centuries, approximately from the early years of the second to the end of the fifth/eleventh century;
- 3 evolution and mingling with philosophy, which lasts from the sixth/twelfth to the ninth/fifteenth century;
- 4 decadence and imitation, from the tenth/sixteenth to the end of the twelfth/eighteenth century,
- 5 the modern period, covering the last two centuries.

In the first stage, discussions dealt only with separate issues of *kalām* where differences of opinion showed themselves as tendencies that did not develop into "schools" until later. It was during the second stage that the various *kalām* schools emerged with their distinctive features, where all aspects of the science of *kalām* were discussed and written down.

During the early years of Islam, theological discussions revolved around a number of separate issues. We have seen that discussion of the question of *qadar* appeared at the time of the Prophet. When the Prophet died, the problem of *khilāfah* (succession) arose and the *fitnah* (dissent) at the time of 'Uthmān and 'Alī witnessed the beginning of *firaq* (sects) with the appearance of the Shī'ah, Khārijites and Murjīites. The discussions of the last two arose primarily as a result of their understanding of the texts. Some chose to adhere to the literal meaning of texts while others were inclined to *ta'wīl* (interpretation) or taking a middle course.

The influence of the Qur'ān on *kalām* discussions was due to a number of factors. Firstly, it had discussed all the issues relating to belief in God, prophethood and eschatology, which were to become the main issues of *kalām*, supporting its statements with rational arguments. Secondly, it discussed the beliefs and thoughts of other religions such as first paganism, and then Judaism and Christianity. Thirdly, it also called for *nazar* and *tafkīr* (reflection and thought), making these an obligation in Islam.²⁹ Fourthly, the Qur'ān contains verses known as *muḥkamāt* (in precise language), and these the Qur'ān calls "the essence of the Book", and others known as *mutashābihāt* (ambiguous). The *ta'wīl* (interpretation) of this latter category – taken in isolation or understood in the light of the former – was one of the distinguishing factors between sects and schools. *Kalām* thus originated completely in the Islamic environment and foreign elements came only later as a result of mixing with other nations and also as a result of the translation of Greek texts into Arabic.

The emergence of the Khārijites gave rise to an early major issue of *kalām*, namely the status and fate of *murtakib al-kabīrah*: whether committing a grave sin makes a person a *kāfir* (infidel, to be condemned to Hell fire for ever) or not. Here we find that the Khārijites take the extreme view of considering such a person as an infidel, interpreting in their own way Qur'ānic verses that do not agree with this stand. At the opposite extreme, there were the Murji'ites who considered that sinners are still believers and that action is not part of the faith, to the extent that no sins would harm anyone who is a believer and no good deed would benefit an infidel. Again they based their view on Qur'ānic verses that promise a good future for the believers and interpreted other verses that contain warnings and threats to suit this stand. Scholars of the *ṣaḥābah* and *tābi'ūn* stood up to both the sects basing their views on combining the two sets of Qur'ānic verses, showing that a sinning believer remains a Muslim, and that his or her destiny is left with God, who may pardon him or her or give the deserved punishment, but not eternally in Hell.³⁰

As mentioned earlier, during the Prophet's time the question of *qadar* gave rise to much discussion as to whether people have free will or are under compulsion. This gave rise to two groups. The Qadarites held that people had *qudrāh* (power) over their actions: some went to the extent of denying the pre-existent knowledge of God in order to remove any compulsion, saying that people perform all their actions without divine assistance. These are the early Qadarites, who should not be confused with the Mu'tazilites who recognized the pre-existent divine knowledge, even though they affirmed people's freedom and responsibility for their actions. The former group includes Ma'bad al-Juhani (d. 80/699) and Ghaylān of Damascus (d. 150/767). At the opposite extreme of this argument there were the Jabriyyah, who affirmed the divine power and held that one is under compulsion to the extent that God creates

one's actions, good or bad, and one is like a feather in the breeze without any power of one's own. Amongst this group al-Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/745) is the most important representative. Some argued that the Umayyads encouraged the Jabriyyah for their own political reasons, but such conjecture is not borne out by the fact that Jahm, as well as Ma'bad, the leader of the Qadarites, rebelled against the Umayyads and were killed by them.

Both the upholders of *jabr* (compulsion) and *tafwīd* (delegation of action and responsibility to man) relied on certain verses in the Qur'ān explaining away others. Scholars of the *ṣaḥābah* and the *tābi'ūn* argued against both groups, confirming the pre-existent knowledge of God and negating compulsion at the same time, attributing to man power, will and actions with an attitude which takes the middle course between absolute *jabr* and absolute *tafwīd*. Such an explanation was given by Imām 'Alī, Ibn 'Umar and al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī.³¹

Another issue which has resulted from the beginning in much discussion is the question of the Imāmate which gave rise in particular to Shi'ism. In the early stage Shi'ism in general meant affection for, and loyalty to, the *ahl al-bayt*. This was enhanced by the catastrophe they met at the hands of the Umayyad authorities and particularly at the battle of Karbala, in which al-Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet, was killed, along with other members of the family (61/680). As a result of such events, we find armed rebellions by some and the beginning of such doctrines as the *ʿiṣmah* (infallibility) of the Imāms, *ghaybah* (occultation), *raʿāh* (return), the *mahdiyyah* (belief in the coming of the Mahdī as saviour of humanity), and the knowledge of the unseen and esoteric interpretation. Some members of the family of the Prophet preferred engaging in the pursuit of knowledge and the education of followers rather than in politics, such as 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn (d. 114/732), Muḥammad ibn 'Alī (Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah) (d. 81/700), al-Bāqir (d. 114/732) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765). These figures held a position of spiritual and intellectual *imāmah*, combining the function of spiritual guide and *faqīh mujtahid*. The only exception was Zayd who rebelled against the Umayyads and was killed in 125/742. Extreme views grew at the beginning of the second/eighth century, and were opposed by members of *ahl al-bayt* themselves such as al-Bāqir and al-Ṣādiq.

In addition to the previously mentioned theological questions, by the time of the early 'Abbāsids, other questions came to the fore such as the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'ān, the Divine Attributes of the Word and other Attributes in general as regards their existence and connection with the Divine Essence and its Unity. In fact, by this time, all essential themes which were to constitute *ʿilm al-kalām* had arisen.

As *ʿilm al-kalām* grew and the different sects and schools appeared, and some *mutakallimūn* began to adopt methods of argument that are

different in style from those of the Qur'ān, some began to question whether it was lawful to engage in *kalām* discussions. When Abū Ḥanīfah forbade his son to engage in debates on *kalām*, he said to him, "Why do you forbid for me what you engaged in yourself?" To which he replied, "When we engaged in that, we all fell silent, fearing that a speaker might err, whereas you engaged in these discussions, each one of you wishing his companion to slip and fall into disbelief. Whoever wishes this falls into the same trap."³²

Some considered it unlawful in view of some *ḥadīth* that disapproved of it or because of such negative characteristics as the neglect of traditional proofs or the fact that some *mutakallimūn* questioned the faith of opponents or because of the employment of Greek logic. This is seen in the reported disapproval of *kalām* by the leaders of Sunni schools of law as well as traditionists, such as Ibn Qutaybah and some reservations even by scholars of *kalām* such as al-Ghazzālī in his *al-Jām' al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*, and then Suyūṭī in his *Ṣawn al-manṭiq wa'l-kalām 'an fannay al-manṭiq wa'l-kalām*.

On the other hand, there were supporters of *kalām*, some of whom went to the extent of making it an obligation on Muslims, relying on the fact that it supports the creed and stands against doubters and opponents. Al-Ash'arī wrote his treatise entitled *Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fi 'ilm al-kalām*, in which he refuted the opposite views and defended his own. Support came also from many other scholars, including al-Āmirī, al-Ghazzālī, al-Subkī, Ibn 'Asākir and al-Bayāḍī,³³ who argued that the Prophet's objection was to discussions on the Essence of God and those that involve debating with the wrong motives or without knowledge or which would lead to acrimony, since the Qur'ān itself is full of verses that deal with theological issues and produce rational arguments for them. The debate was finally resolved by the fact that numerous scholars, throughout the Islamic era, of various schools, came to engage in theological discussion and created this very important science in Islam for which theological colleges are now well established in the main Sunni and Shi'i centres of learning.

In discussing the various stages and schools of *kalām* it is important to consider the type of arguments employed and the attitude of the *mutakallimūn* to such arguments. In early *kalām* both traditional and rational arguments were given due weight. We find at first people like al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, Abū Ḥanīfah and al-Thawrī relying on both, even though the traditional proof comes first for them. When the Mu'tazilites came, they raised the status of *'aql* (reason) almost making it equal to *naql* (tradition), as can be seen from statements of Wāṣil, who said: "Truth can be known from four sources: the Qur'ān, agreed *Ḥadīth*, rational argument, and *ijmā'*." The rational tendency grew gradually until it gave *'aql* a status which is above *naql*, even if they continued to use

them both, limiting the field in which *naql* can be used. This tendency reached its peak with Nazzām, but some moderation followed, at least theoretically, especially as witnessed in the works of ‘Abd al-Jabbār and his followers who tried to go back to accepting the four sources as did Wāṣil. However, this equilibrium was practically neutralized by the concept of *dawr* (circularity in argument): since ‘*aql*’ is our first means of establishing the truthfulness of the Prophet and the Qur’ān, if one later puts *naql* above ‘*aql*’, one is undermining the very means which led to the acceptance of *naql*.

But this argument would have made better sense if the Qur’ān had consisted only of a sacred text to be followed without questioning. However, the verses of the Qur’ān are not merely sacred texts but can also be viewed as propositions which come with their rational proofs. Why should we not rely on the rational proofs that occur in the Qur’ān, even when they are seen to be more convincing, closer to the hearts of men, and less inclined to convolution and polemics, than the traditional arguments of *kalām*? Ibn Rushd, for instance, who was above all a philosopher, examined the Qur’ānic methods, compared them to those of the *mutakallimūn* and found them to be better, for both scholars and the general masses at the same time.³⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah also observed that religion consists of issues and proofs, as did Ghazzālī and al-Juwaynī.³⁵

The Ash‘arites began by taking a balanced view between *naql* and ‘*aql*’ in the days of Ash‘arī and Bāqillānī, when they stated that there were five ways to knowledge: ‘*aql*’, Qur’ān, *Sunnah*, *ijmā‘* and *qiyās*. Al-Māturidī again recognized two sources, *ṣam‘* (Qur’ān and *Sunnah*) and ‘*aql*’, but the scale tended to favour ‘*aql*’, when the concept of *dawr* infiltrated into Ash‘arī *kalām*, from al-Juwaynī onwards until it reached its peak with Rāzī. Al-Āmidī tried to return to some balance, as did ‘Abd al-Jabbār, but the concept of *dawr* had been too deeply rooted.³⁶ It was such developments that led Ibn Taymiyyah to write his book, *al-Muwāfaqah* (“harmony”) or *Dar ta‘ārud al-‘aql wa’l-naql* (“Rejection of the conflict between ‘*aql*’ and *naql*”) in which he criticized the methods of al-Rāzī, al-Āmidī and others who put ‘*aql*’ before *naql*.

As already mentioned, the earliest *kalām* is to be found in the Qur’ān itself which treated theological issues supported by rational proofs. It was chiefly their ways of understanding the Qur’ān and the way their views related to the Qur’ānic position that differentiated theological sects and schools. The early *kalām* was closest to the Qur’ānic position which was generally adopted in the discussions of the ‘*ulamā‘*’ of the *ṣaḥābah* (Companions of the Prophet); the *tābi‘ūn* (those who followed them), and their followers in the first three centuries, the Sunni schools as well as the Imāms of *ahl al-bayt*, and whoever followed their lead without neglect or excess.

Table 1 was devised by H. M. al-Shāfi‘ī,³⁷ who is a leading authority of our time on *kalām* in the Arab world. It shows at a glance how the

Table 1

<i>al-naql</i>	The Qur'ānic position	<i>al-naql</i>
<i>al-tanzīh</i>		<i>al-ithbāt</i>
Ismā'ilīs	<i>Ṣaḥābah</i>	Ḥashwīyyah
Mu'tazilites	<i>Tābi'ūn</i>	
Ithnā'asharites	Imāms of <i>madhāhib</i>	Ḥanbalīs
Khārijites	Imāms of <i>ahl al-bayt</i>	Zāhirites
Zaydīs		Māturīdīs
		Ash'arites

Qur'ānic middle position compares to other positions. Shāfi'ī selected ten schools which have their own distinctive features and together expressed various types of thoughts and methods within *kalām*, which still survive for the most part to influence the intellectual and religious life of the Muslims up to the present.

The Qur'ānic viewpoint, which could be called *salafī*, is placed in the middle, since it is the origin of all the schools of thought and is taken as the criterion against which each is measured. The basis of this horizontal arrangement is twofold: (1) the predominance of *ithbāt* (taking the text at face value) or *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism) on the right hand, and the predominance of tendency to *ta'wīl* (interpretation) and *tanzīh* (transcendence) on the left hand; (2) tendency to adhere to *naql* (proof from tradition) on the right hand and that of adhering to '*aql* (rational proof) on the left hand. The diagram thus shows horizontally the extent of nearness or distance from the Qur'ānic viewpoint which combines '*aql* and *naql* and also *ithbāt* and *tanzīh*. The length of the vertical lines shows the variations between these vertical groups in their adherence to each of *naql*, *ithbāt* or '*aql* and *tanzīh*. For instance the Zaydīs are the nearest to *salaf* amongst the groups that tend towards '*aql* and *tanzīh*, and the least in going deep in that direction, whereas the Ismā'īlīs are the most committed to '*aql* and most deeply devoted to philosophy to the extent of *ta'īl* (stripping of all attributes) even though they give this the form of *bāṭin* (esotericism) and *ta'wīl*.

On the right hand side, the Māturīdīs are nearest to this Qur'ānic middle position, followed by others up to the Ḥashwiyyah, who are at the same time the most committed to *naql* and *ithbāt*.

The Qur'ānic median position is characterized by the following features:

- 1 It takes the middle course between '*aql* and *naql*, giving the highest authority to revelation, but this does not mean neglect of '*aql* since the text of the revelation itself includes rational arguments which conform with it.
- 2 Lack of excessive *ta'wīl*, which is done only in accordance with the rules of the language and the usage of *Sharī'ah*, negating, at the same time, meanings that involve anthropomorphism, thus achieving *ithbāt* without *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* without *ta'īl*.
- 3 Accepting sound traditional *dalīl* (proofs), beginning with those from the Qur'ān, followed by those from *ijmā'* then the *mutawātir ḥadīth*, then accepting *aḥād ḥadīth* whether *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* and rejecting the weak and forged *ḥadīth*.
- 4 Adherence to the *Sharī'ah* in its totality without raising practical *furū'* to the status of the principles of the faith.

The development of theological terms also reflects the various stages

of development of *ʿilm al-kalām*. Again, early *kalām* was closest in Qurʾānic terms. In a study on early Islamic theological and juristic terminology³⁸ I discussed *Kitāb al-ḥudūd fiʾl-uṣūl* by Abūʾl-Ḥasan ibn Fūrak (d. 404/1015),³⁹ and a number of other works including *al-Mubīn fi sharḥ maʿni alfāz al-ḥukamāʾ waʾl-mutakallimūn* by Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), which give some indication of the development of *kalām* terminology in their period. By *uṣūl* Ibn Fūrak clearly means *uṣūl al-dīn* (theology) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (jurisprudence). The relationship between the two types of *uṣūl* was strong from the beginning. Abū Ḥanīfah's book *al-Fiqh al-akbar* is on *kalām*. The term *uṣūliyyūn* was, moreover, used for scholars of both subjects. A continued tradition of combining the terminology of both subjects was observed even after *kalām* became strongly connected to philosophy,⁴⁰ and Ibn Fūrak's book is significant for combining the terms of *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. This was an early phase of *kalām* (*al-kalām al-qadīm*) before it became connected with philosophy (*al-kalām al-jadīd*). Early scholars such as Ibn Fūrak and other authors who followed his approach, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, seem to have wished to relate *uṣūl al-dīn* to *uṣūl al-fiqh*, keeping away from the approach of Greek logic (Ibn Taymiyyah writing a refutation of the latter), unlike other authors such as al-Ghazzālī, al-Rāzī and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

The fact that *al-Ḥudūd* is an example of the early *kalām* is confirmed by the introductory terms which deal with *al-ʿilm* and *al-naẓar* etc. These are also to be seen in the works of such early authors on *kalām* as al-Bāqillānī and ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, whereas later works usually begin with more philosophical terms like *al-wujūd waʾl-ʿadam* or *al-ashkāl al-arbaʿah*, as we see in Ṭūsī's *al-Tajrīd*, or mix the earlier terms of *ʿilm*, *naẓar*, etc. with philosophical ones, as did al-Rāzī in his *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn waʾl-mutaʾakkhkhirīn*. It is, moreover, noticeable that most of the terms Ibn Fūrak defined are of Qurʾānic origin, e.g. *ʿilm* (1), *naẓar* (6), *kasb* (19), *ibtidāʾ* and *irādah* (35, 36), rather than from Greek philosophy. From number 58 to number 100, for instance, (i.e. forty-three terms) there are only four terms that can be said to be non-Qurʾānic words (70, 73, 77, 90). Thus Qurʾānic words are not less than ninety per cent of the whole. This contrasts sharply with *al-Mubīn* by al-Āmidī where the percentage is clearly much lower. A comparison between *al-Ḥudūd* of Ibn Fūrak and *al-Mubīn* of al-Āmidī (which is on philosophical and *kalām* terms) is interesting: the former has 133 definitions, 98 of which are *kalām*; the latter has 223 definitions. Out of the 98 on *kalām* in *al-Ḥudūd* only 26 (twenty per cent) can be found in *al-Mubīn*. Al-Āmidī died 230 years after Ibn Fūrak, and both men were Sunni authors. Our comparison here may serve as an indication of how far "the new *kalām*" moved towards adopting philosophical terminology.

❧ NOTES ❧

- 1 In another version *yakhtaṣīmūn fī* – disputing over *qadar*.
- 2 He also said, “*Man takallama fī al-dīn bi ra’yihī fa qad ittahamah*”, meaning, “Whoever discusses religion, relying [solely] on his own opinion, has doubted it.”
- 3 Y. H. Farghal, *Nash’at al-ārā’ wa’l-madhāhib wa’l-firaq al-kalāmiyyah*, 1 (Cairo, 1972): 36, 65; M. ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *Tambīd li tārikh al-falsafah al-islāmiyyah* (Cairo, 1966): 266.
- 4 ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *op. cit.*: 266–7; Shāfi’ī, *al-Madkhal ilā dirāsāt ‘ilm al-kalām*, (Cairo, 1991): 28–9.
- 5 *Op. cit.*: 265.
- 6 *Sharḥ al-‘aqā’id al-nasafiyyah*, ed. Nūr Muḥammad (Karachi, n.d.): 5.
- 7 See Shāfi’ī, *op. cit.*: 28.
- 8 M. Cook has summed up these positions in “The Origins of *Kalām*”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 43 (1980): 42–3.
- 9 See *Anfänge Muslimischer Theologie* (Beirut, 1977): 55–6 (Arabic summary); *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. M. Murdoch and E. Dudley Sylla (Boston, 1975): 89, 105.
- 10 *Op. cit.*: 32.
- 11 As a wife of the Prophet, she is a “Mother of the Faithful”.
- 12 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barī, *Jāmi’ bayān al-‘ilm wa faḍlūh* (Cairo, n.d.): 376–7.
- 13 See Shāfi’ī: 26.
- 14 K. A. al-Bayādī, *Ishārāt al-marām min ‘ibārāt al-imām* (Cairo, 1949): 28–9.
- 15 See Taftāzānī, *op. cit.*: 4ff; Shāfi’ī, *op. cit.*: 15.
- 16 *Fī Ihṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, ed. ‘Uthman Amīn (Cairo, 1968): 69–70.
- 17 *Op. cit.*: 458.
- 18 *The Theology of Unity*, trans. I. Musa‘ad and K. Cragg (London, 1960): 29.
- 19 See A. Mahmoud, *The Creed of Islam*, “V. The Resurrection” (London, 1976): 71–2 quoting *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-falsafiyyah*, ed. M. A. Abū Rīdah; *Manābij al-adillah fī ‘aqā’id al-millah*, ed. M. Qāsim (Cairo, 1969): 244–5.
- 20 Al-Bayādī, *op. cit.*: 36.
- 21 *Al-Taḥf al-kabīr*, 15 vols, 2.1 (Beirut, 3rd ed., n.d.): 90.
- 22 *Op. cit.*: 88ff.
- 23 Muṣṭafā ‘Abd al-Rāziq, *op. cit.*: 280–1.
- 24 *Op. cit.*: 149.
- 25 See Farghal, *op. cit.*: 37–43.
- 26 Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-qur’ān al-‘azīm*, 1 (Cairo, n.d.): 368; Farghal, *op. cit.*: 33.
- 27 Al-Bayādī, *op. cit.*: 33.
- 28 Shāfi’ī, *op. cit.*: 53–4.
- 29 A. M. al-Aqqād dedicated a volume to this theme, entitled *al-Taḥkīm farīdah islāmiyyah* (Cairo, many editions).
- 30 A. S. Nashshār, *Nash’at al-fikr al-falsafī fī’l-islām*, 1 (Cairo, 1965): 243–6.
- 31 Shāfi’ī, *op. cit.*: 65.
- 32 See Farghal, *op. cit.*: 79–87.
- 33 Shāfi’ī, *op. cit.*: 38.
- 34 See M. Qāsim in his introduction to *Manābij al-adillah fī ‘aqā’id al-millah*.
- 35 *Op. cit.*: 148.

- 36 Shāfi'ī, *op. cit.*: 137–61.
- 37 *Op. cit.*: 72–5.
- 38 M. Abdel Haleem, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 65(1) (1991): 5–41.
- 39 The first book on *uṣūl* terminology to be written by a Sunni author. The first known work on *kalām* terminology was by Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdān al-Rāzī, an Ismā'īlī Shī'ī author who died in 322/933, but it is different in that it is not on *ḥudūd per se*, like Ibn Fūrak's work, which is still the first of its kind in this respect (*op. cit.*: 6).
- 40 Ibn Fūrak, *op. cit.*: 9.

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