

Al-Ash^ʿarī's Discussion of God's Knowledge

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The questions relating to God's attributes and His unity are regarded as controversial areas in Islamic theology. Indeed, these problems became one of the main issues in early development of Islamic theology and philosophy.

These problems become more complicated when we consider the references in al-Quran related to the attributes and the oneness of God. The following are some translations of the great many verses regarding these two questions. Firstly, verses which describe the attributes of God:

Send not away those
who call on their Lord
Morning and evening.
Seeking His face. (6: 52)¹

Say: 'Who is it in Whose
Hands is the governance
of all Things, - who protects
(All), but is not protected
(of any)? (Say) if ye know. (23: 88)²

Throw (the child)
Into the chest, and throw
(the chest) into the river:
the river will cast him
Up on the bank, and he
Will be taken up by one
Who is an enemy to him:
But I cast (the garment of)
Love over thee from me:
And (this) in order that
Thou mayest be reared
Under Mine eye. (20: 39)³

The first verse in speaking of God's face, the second is of God's hand and the third verse refers to the eye of God. These are among a number of verses which are regarded as illustrating a pure anthropomorphic concept of God. These anthropomorphic attributes can be described as 'physical', and are not of interest in this present dis-

cussion. What we are much more concerned with is the attribute which is regarded as that of 'quality'. To illustrate, we may quote several translations of al-Qur'ān mentioning these attributes:

Say: 'Whether ye hide
what is in your hearts
or reveal it,
He knows what is all:
He knows what is
In the heavens,
and what is on earth,
And God has power
Over all things. (3: 29)⁴

God! There is no god
But He – the living,
The self-subsisting, Eternal.
No slumber can seize Him
Nor sleep. (2: 255)⁵

No soul can believe, except
By the will of God,
And He will place Doubt
(Or obscurity) on those
Who will not understand. (10: 100)⁶

Offspring, one of the other:
And God heareth
And knoweth all things. (3: 34)⁷

If they do, they are in right guidance,
But if they turn back,
The duty is to convey the message:
And in God's sight
Are (all) His servants. (3: 20)⁸

Based on these verses, early theologians interpreted the attributes of God and divided into different sects and schools. We shall not be concerned with the problem of the attributes of God in General, or the interpretation of these verses, because this would lead into a broad field of study which would be outside the area of our discussion. For the purpose of our present discussion we shall concentrate on the problem of God's knowledge.

Despite the fact that al-Qur'ān proclaims that God has many attributes, there are several verses which firmly proclaim the concept of the unity of God and the oneness of God, as in the translation below:

Say: He is God,
The One and Only;
God the Eternal, Absolute;
He begetheth not,
Nor is He begotten;
And there is none
Like unto Him. (122: 1-4)⁹

And your God
Is One God:
There is no god
But He,
Most Gracious,
Most Merciful. (2: 163)¹⁰

The unity of God has been the earliest and most fundamental issue in Islamic thought. The concern has been to maintain the monotheistic conception of God which displaced polytheistic and henotheistic conceptions of Arab paganism, often referred to as the age of *Jāliyyah* (Ignorance). From this arose several problems. For instance, if these attributes or qualities are regarded as parts of God, does that not involve a return to a polytheistic conception or is it inconsistent with the concept of the Unity of God? For such reason some of the Mu'tazilites and other sects of theologians denied the divine attributes in order to maintain the Unity of God. The Mu'tazilites are those who were regarded as divesting God of all essential attributes and proclaimed themselves as *ahl-al-Tawhīd* (People of Unity).

Al-Ash'arī agreed with all Muslim Scholars that, according to al-Qur'ān, 'God knows'. However, the question of how this should be interpreted remains. In al-Ash'arī's philosophical discussions of God's knowledge and its relation to God's essence, the following questions were dealt with. If God really knows is His knowledge eternal or created? If it is eternal, does He know through His essence which is He? The first question is the question about the nature of God's knowledge, whether it is eternal or created. Whereas, the second question is the most significant question, for it describes the nature of that knowledge as well as its relation to the essence of God Himself. From these questions, lead a great many inquiries. Al-Ash'arī dealt with these questions with orthodox middle path attitudes which will be clearly seen at the end of this discussion.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE

Al-Ash'arī believed in the eternity of God's knowledge. It is not created as the compulsionist Jahm b. Ṣafwān (died 746 A.D) and his followers (the Jahmites) claim. Jahm b. Ṣafwān died in 746 A.D., but the Jahmites were very active in the time of al-Ash'arī. For this reason, in his discussion of the uncreatedness of the words of God (al-Qur'ān) entitle 'Kalām on the doctrine That the Qur'ān – is the Uncreated Word of God' in his work *Al-Ībānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīyānah*, there are two sections containing his reply to the Jahmiyyah (Jahmites).¹¹ This was in addition to his criticism of the Mu'tazilites, but in this section we shall deal with Jahm's arguments of the createdness of

God's knowledge and al-Ash'arī's reply to them.

Firstly, Jahm described the relationship between God, His knowledge and all things known to Him. It is reported as follows:

God cannot know of things before He has actually created them. In other words, He knows them after He has created them.¹²

The reason he put forward is that, if God knew things before He created them, it would entail the supposition that His knowledge of the things would either, (a) remain as it was before the creation of the things, or (b) it would not remain the same. If (a) is the case, it is impossible, because the knowledge of the things before their existence is distinct from the knowledge of the things after their existence. If (b) is the case, then God's knowledge must be variable, in the sense that His knowledge of the things before they exist is different from the knowledge of these same things after they exist. This is certainly true because whatever is variable must be changeable. And if it is changeable, it cannot be eternal. Both supposition (a) and (b) lead to the conclusion that God's knowledge is not eternal, but is created.

The second argument of Jahm is concerned with the relationship between God's knowledge and His essence. It is an elaboration of supposition (a) from the first argument. He said.

God's Knowledge does not precede phenomena because that would imply change in Him, because knowing that a thing will be is different from knowing that it is. There is one knowledge for every knowable.¹³

Al-Shahrastānī's account of Jahm b. Ṣafwān and Hishām b. Ḥakam is that:

They agreed that God knows eternally what will be, and knowledge about the future is not the same as knowledge about the present.¹⁴

From these two statements, it can be concluded that since God is regarded as the creator of things as they are, and since these things are changeable, according to Jahm, God knows things after they have been created. This is to establish the absoluteness and the uniqueness of God. This would follow the same conclusion as for the first argument that is, God's knowledge is created.

Now, we proceed to analyse al-Ash'arī's reply to Jahm's positions or rather the Jahmites' positions. Al-Ash'arī maintained that God's knowledge is eternal and he set out to prove that both of Jahm's arguments are false. To begin with, al-Ash'arī makes clear that the eternity of God's knowledge was affirmed by all Muslims and to deny this would be regarded as a departure from this general agreement. This is not a philosophical argument, but rather an accusation against the Jahmites. Al-Ash'arī said:

The Muslim unanimously agreed, before the origin of the Jahmiyyah and the Mu^ctazilah and the Haruriyyah, that God has knowledge eternally, and said: God's knowledge is eternal, for God's knowledge precedes created things and they do not refuse to say of every new thing that arises and everything that come down from God. All this exist antecedently in God's knowledge; and therefore he who denies that God has knowledge dissents from the Muslims and is guilty of a departure from their agreement.¹⁵

This statement of al-Ash^cari^r is in agreement with the position of the Early Orthodox. In *Fiqh Akhbar* II by Abū Ḥanīfah (died 767 A.D) a contemporary of Jahm b. Ṣafwān, it is stated that:

He has been from eternity and will be to eternity with His qualities and His names. None of His qualities or names has come into being; from eternity He knows by virtue of His knowledge, knowledge being in eternal quality.¹⁶

This is also an accusation rather than an argument. It is obvious that here al-Ash^cari^r is expressing his orthodox attitude to the problems.

Moreover, al-Ash^cari^r accused the Jahmites of borrowing their position from non-Islamic sources, namely 'the zindiq'. He made this accusation because, according to al-Ash^cari^r, their position in maintaining the createdness of God's knowledge would entail that God has no knowledge before is created. And, since God is eternal and knowledge is created, therefore the proposition that 'God is knowing' is impossible.

They have simply borrowed this from the 'zindiqs' and the advocates of *ta^ctil*; because many of the 'zindiqs' believe that God is not a knower, or a wielder of power, or a living one, or hearing one, or seeing one.¹⁷

Concerning the proposition of the first argument of Jahm, that is, God knows things after He creates them, follows another proposition that is 'God originates knowledge for Himself'. This, according to al-Shāhristānī's account of the orthodox argument, in replying to Jahm's theory is totally unthinkable. If God originates knowledge for Himself, then either: (1) it must be in His essence, or (2) in a substrate, or (3) not in either. Moreover, he clarified that:

Origination essentially demands alteration; and origination in a substrate would demand that the substrate should be of time; while origination not in a substrate would be of time; while origination not in a substrate would demand the denial of God's specifying.¹⁸

From this reply, it is reasonable to assume that the idea 'God originates knowledge for Himself' is unthinkable.

Another proposition derived from Jahm's theory is that, if God knows thing after He creates them, that is, 'God's knowledge is like human knowledge', then God knows things after they exist. Al-Ash^cari^r's general argument that 'God is unlike a creature' throws light on his

reply to Jahm's position. It is to presume that if God were like a creature, it would follow that His relation to temporal production would be that of a creature. If God were like a creature, it would lead to the following alternatives: God would be like a creature either: (1) in all respects, or (2) in some respects. If (1) is the case, it would entail that He would be temporally produced, as a creature is, in all respects. If (2) is the case, God would be temporally produced, in the sense that there are some respects in which He is like creature and some in which He is not. Both alternatives are equally impossible to presume of God, since God is eternal but creatures are temporal either in all respects or in some respects.

But it is impossible for the temporally produced to have preexisted eternally.¹⁹

Referring to this argument, there is a good ground for maintaining that God's knowledge is eternal, and it pre-exists eternally. And to hold that God knows things after He creates them is unreasonable.

The second argument of Jahm is closely related to the first one: If God's knowledge is eternal, it must follow that God Knows in the past, present and future, since things before they exist are different from themselves after they exist. So, the different forms of the knowable in a different state of time or situation of the knowable would entail that God's knowledge will change as the knowable changes. If it is eternal, it is impossible to change. Therefore, according to Jahm, God's knowledge is created.

Since this was the object of Jahm's position al-Ash[°]arī produced the counter argument to this claim. Al-Ash[°]arī's reply was reported by al-Shahrastānī, as follows:

They way in which they differ is nothing to do with knowledge about them, but is peculiar to themselves. They are known because knowledge comes into contact with them but that does not alter.²⁰

Since it has been agreed that God is eternal which is a state regarded as timeless, the changing of the thing knowable, that is, the thing in eternity and afterwards created, does not affect His essence.

Furthermore, considering the new cognition precedes from the things as it exists he claimed:

Are these new cognitions knowable before they come into existence, or are they not an object of knowledge? If they were knowable was it by eternal knowledge and cognitive power, or by other cognitions which preceded their existence? ²¹

These two alternatives are produced in order to clarify their claim regarding the new cognition of a knowable. This is a conclusion which can be drawn from Jahm's argument of the changeableness of the knowable. The first alternative would mean that everything is known

by eternal knowledge and this would also follow from Jahm's answer about the new cognition. The second alternative is certain to be impossible, because it would entail that those cognitions need further cognitions and result endless chain (*tasasul*).

From these discussion it is concluded that, according to al-Ash'arī. God's knowledge is eternal, for God knows the things before he creates them. Since God's knowledge is eternal and is not affected by the changing of time and of things that exist, therefore it is false to believe that God's knowledge is created. It is eternal. Since it is eternal, it is to be believed that God knows the past, the present and the future.

THE ETERNITY OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE AND ITS RELATION WITH HIS ESSENCE

It has already been argued, in the previous section, that God's knowledge is eternal. And it has been said before, that God Himself is eternal. The problem is, how are these two eternities to be related, that is, how is the eternity of His knowledge to be related to God Himself? The following questions serve to show how this problem has been dealt with by the Mu'tazilites and al-Ash'arī's comments on their views.

Firstly, if God's knowledge is eternal, does He know through Himself, is this knowledge part of Himself? Secondly, if God's knowledge is eternal, is it predicated of God simply to assert His being and to deny His ignorance? These two questions were central to the thought of two leading scholars of the Mu'tazilites. The first question is identified with the position of Abū al-Hudhail al-ʿAllāf (died 841 A.D) one of the famous scholars of Basrite school of Mu'tazilites. Whereas the second question is identified with the position of Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (died 840 A.D) who during his youth associated with philosophers, dualists and materialists as well as sceptics. Both of them influenced the contemporaries of al-Ash'arī, that is, al-Jubbāʾī (died 915 A.D) and his son, Abū Hāshim (died 933 A.D).

Regarding Abū al-Hudhail's position, al-Shahrastānī reported that he was following the philosophers' conception of God's knowledge. He stated:

Abū al-Hudhail al-ʿAllāf followed the philosophers in holding that God knows by knowledge which is Himself (*nafsuhu*).²²

Regarding al-Nazzām's position, al-Ash'arī mentioned that:

He denies knowledge, power, living, hearing, seeing and other essential attributes of God and says that God is continuously knowing, living, powerful, hearing and eternal in virtue of Himself (*bi-nafsihi*), but not in virtue of knowledge, power, living, hearing, seeing and eternity, and so his view with regard to other essential attributes.²³

Referring to Abū Hudhail's position, it is obvious that he is in favour of maintaining the simplicity as well as the absoluteness of God. God's qualities must be regarded as either negations or logical references or relations. Because of His absolute simplicity, nothing positive could be said about God since then there would be an added subject and a predicated quality and being to Him. However God is not to be regarded as composite.

According to the report of al-Shahrastānī quoted before, it is obvious that Abū Hudhail was influenced by the philosophers in his conception of divine attributes. If we investigate in detail al-Nazzām's position, then we can conclude that his position is also influenced by the philosophers. This claim is substantiated by H. A. Wolfson who established that both al-Nazzām and Abū Hudhail were influenced by Aristotle.²⁴

The phrase which indicates the relationship between the Mu'tazilites' (al-Nazzām and Abū Hudhail) position and Aristotle's is 'which is Himself', which both al-Nazzām and Abū Hudhail used although they differed in their positions – Abū Hudhail saying that 'God knows by Himself' (in virtue of Himself), where as al-Nazzām denied it, saying that God knows not in virtue of knowledge. Thus H. A. Wolfson pointed out that:

The Arabic phrase *li nafsihi* or *bi nafsihi*, which we have translated as 'in virtue of Himself' is a direct translation of the Greek expression which means 'according to himself, by himself, or 'in virtue of himself'²⁵

To make clear Aristotle's position on this subject, H. A. Wolfson summarised Aristotle's meaning of the phrase quoted above in three alternatives:

(1) that which is the definition of the subject, thus signifying its essence, or (2) that which is its genus and differentiae, or (3) that which is its property.²⁶

Although Abū Hudhail and al-Nazzām differ in this matter, they still used the characteristic phrase, 'in virtue of'. In this regard, H. A. Wolfson states that:

Accordingly, when both al-Nazzām and Abū Hudhail describe divine attributes as terms predicated of God 'in virtue of Himself', they mean thereby that each of these terms signifies a property of God.²⁷

However, with regard to the question of any predicate of God, for example the predicate 'knowing', signifying a property of God, they have different interpretations.

If we are to assume that both of these scholars were influenced by the *Metaphysica* of Aristotle, we have to examine the translation movement in the history of Islamic thought. Ishāq b. Hunain (died 911 A.D), a famous translator of Greek works, is said to have translated into Arabic the following texts:

The *Categories*, the *Hermeneutics*, *De Generatione et Corruptione*, the *Ethica* in Porphyry's Commentary, parts of the *Metaphysica*, Plato's *Sophist*, parts of *Timaeus*, and finally the spurious *De Plantis*.²⁸

The *Metaphysica* of Aristotle had not been translated during the debates between al-Nazzām and Abū Hudhail which took place before 850 A. D. The translation would have been made between the middle of the ninth century and the early part of the tenth century. However, al-Ash'arī stated that Abū Hudhail was influenced by Aristotle.

The view of his is taken by Abū Hudhail from Aristotle, for in one of his books, Aristotle says that the Creator in His entirety is knowledge, in His entirety is power, in His entirety is hearing, in His entirety is seeing.²⁹

Though the translation of the *Metaphysica* had not yet been done in the time of these two scholars, it is quite reasonable to say that they were familiar with the concept due to the popularity of Aristotelian teaching throughout the new Islamic states especially Persia (Iran).

This is a good example of the way the Mu'tazilites, in rationalizing their conception of God, especially the unity of God, employed Greek philosophy, which is also regarded as external element in Islamic thought. This was the main target of the orthodox theologians seeking to attack and abolish it. Al-Ash'arī strongly opposed such elements and he is regarded as a hammer of the Mu'tazilites.

With regard to the problem of the attributes of God in general, al-Ash'arī is reported to have produced or reproduced the principle of *Mukhālafah* that is, 'God's difference from all created beings'. The principle of *Mukhālafah* is derived from the concept of *tanzīh*, the excluding God from all human likeness, in contrast to the concept of *tashbīh* (Comparison) and *ta'tīl* (divesting).

These two extreme positions of *tashbīh* (comparison) as held by the Anthropomorphists and *ta'tīl* (divesting) as held by the Mu'tazilites were the main targets of al-Ash'arī in his interpretation of the divine attributes. The principle of *Mukhālafah* is used to trace a middle path position between these two extremes. Al-Ash'arī admitted the existence of the divine attributes with the qualification of *tanzīh*. Thus, he admitted the existence of God's knowledge but this knowledge cannot be compared to human knowledge neither can God's other attributes be compared to those of men.

With the qualification of *Mukhālafah*, he maintained that the attributes of God, including the attributes of knowledge are unique and fundamentally different from those of creatures. This is of course, to avoid the confusion raised by the Mu'tazilites and the Anthropomorphists, both of whom are regarded as heretical by the orthodox section of the Muslims.

In relation to the Qur'ānic teaching regarding the problem of

the divine attributes, he stated that with the qualification of the principle of *Mukhālafah*, no attributes should be ascribed to God unless they are specifically expressed in al-Qur'ān. In this, he is in agreement with the majority of the Muslim theologians.

As against the position of the Mu'tazilites, al-Ash'arī held that God's knowledge is not identical with His essence and as against the Anthropomorphists he maintained that God's knowledge is not distinct from Him. These two quotations below will serve to show his doctrine clearly.

the essential divine attributes of knowledge, power and living are eternal and subsist in God's essence.³⁰

God has attributes which inhere eternally in Him and are in addition to His essence.³¹

As far as these two quotations are concerned, al-Ash'arī has clearly departed from the Mu'tazilites conception of God's knowledge as well as from the Anthropomorphists. This is a very difficult balance to be preserved. The following paragraphs are his philosophical arguments in favour of his doctrine.

GOD'S KNOWLEDGE IS NOT IDENTICAL WITH HIS ESSENCE

If God's knowledge is identical with His essence, it would be followed by the conclusion that 'God's knowledge is God'. Then if this is true, one could address his petitions to God's knowledge rather than to God Himself, which is unthinkable. We found this argument in his reply to the argument of Abū Hudhail. He said:

Since you say that God's knowledge is God, say 'O knowledge of God, forgive me and have mercy on me'. And then he will decline to do this and will be involved in contradictions.³²

From this argument, al-Ash'arī proceeded to maintain that God has knowledge by which He knows rather than knowledge which is Himself. He set up a number of arguments by firstly clarifying that the works of God are the works of wisdom; then he proves that God is knowing by knowledge.

In the section discussing the orthodox position of maintaining that everything in the universe is attributed to God's creative power, al-Shahrastānī proves that the works of God are of wisdom. He says that this world and universe are well ordered and arranged, manifesting that there is a perfect and a wise architect who designed it. It is impossible to assume that this well ordered universe is the work of man, since man's knowledge is of generalities not details. Moreover, man's knowledge is not in line with what man does. Therefore, there will be one other than man who is wise and perfect, who is able to ar-

range these phenomena. And finally, al-Shahrastānī states that this is a position hold by al-Ash^carī. He says:

Such was al-Ash^carī system as expounded in his books, and applied to the actions of the ignorant.³³

Having these as the proofs that the work of God is the work of wisdom, then al-Ash^carī used this phrase at the very beginning of his argument in maintaining that God is knowing, not ignorant. He argued:

Besides, if works of wisdom could be produced by one who is not knowing, we could not know but that perhaps all the determinations, dispositions and works which proceed from living beings proceed from them while they are unknowing. The impossibility of that proves that well-made works can be produced only by one who is knowing.³⁴

On the basis of this argument, he goes on to prove the real question at issue. It has been proved before that works of wisdom prove that God is knowing. This means that God has knowledge. The reason is that:

If the works did not prove the knowledge of the man from whom they proceed, then they would not prove that the man from whom they proceed is knowing.³⁵

From this statement, al-Ash^carī argued that: (1) If the proposition that works of wisdom prove that God is knowing but do not prove that God has knowledge, is valid, then it entails the further proposition, (2) that works of wisdom prove our knowledge but do not prove that we are knowing. In other words, if proposition (1) is valid, it is impossible also to accept proposition (2). But, it is unthinkable to imagine proposition (2) that is, man has knowledge, but does not know and likewise man is knowing but has no knowledge. Therefore, both propositions (1) and (2) are invalid. and it is reasonable to hold that God has knowledge, since He is Knowing. He has knowledge, in the sense that He is not only knowing but knowing by knowledge.

The Mu^ctazilites are reported to have claimed that the works of wisdom do not prove the knowledge of the man who is knowing. The reason they put forward is derived from their understanding of the meaning of 'his being knowing'. According to al-Ash^carī, they said:

the knowing man may be known to be knowing by one who does not know that he has knowledge.³⁶

From this understanding, they concluded that the meaning of 'his being knowing' is not that he has knowledge.

Al-Ash^carī replied to this question in two ways. First, if the understanding of 'his being knowing' as held by the Mu^ctazilites is true, it would entail another proposition that 'works of wisdom prove that one has knowledge of them, but do not prove that he is knowing'. This

has been proved before to be false. Secondly, al-Ash^carī disagreed with the meaning of ‘his being knowing’ given by the Mu^ctazilites. He produced his understanding of the phrase as follows:

I hold that one’s being knowing means that he has knowledge. Thus one who does not know that Zaid has knowledge does not know that Zaid is knowing.³⁷

Consequently, if we do not know God has knowledge, we do not know that He is knowing. So also, if we know God has knowledge, we know that He is knowing; it is impossible to maintain that we know God has knowledge, but do not know He is knowing. And it is impossible to hold that we do not know that God has knowledge, but know that He is knowing. Since this is impossible, it is to be believed that God is knowing by knowledge rather than God is knowing by His essence.

This, al-Ash^carī is trying to prove in his previous argument is that God’s knowledge is not identical with His essence. However, al-Ash^carī does not finish his argument here, but he goes on to prove that God’s knowledge is not distinct from Him. He set up several arguments to support this claim, which is perhaps his argument in reply to the Anthropomorphist conception of attributes.

GOD’S KNOWLEDGE IS NOT DISTINCT FROM HIM

Just as he denied the claim that God’s knowledge is identical with His essence, al-Ash^carī is also reported to have denied that God’s knowledge is distinct from Him. In other words, according to al-Ash^carī, God’s knowledge is not distinct from Him, whether it is said to be as a quality apart from God’s essence or as an attribute distinct from God. In his second set of arguments on the doctrine of God’s knowledge and other divine attributes are not to be regarded as distinct from God Himself.

R. J. McCarthy suggested that the use of the word ‘distinct’ here as: “Distinct from everything i.e. a separate entity in himself.”³⁸ Al-Ash^carī himself defined the word ‘otherness’ in his own understanding as: “that one of two things can be somehow separate from the other.”³⁹ Despite these two definitions of the term involved, we have already learned that God is eternal, His knowledge is eternal and it is easier to suppose that these two eternities are not separate from one another. In other words, the definitions of ‘distinct’ and ‘otherness’ as understood by al-Ash^carī are used to maintain and clarify the whole argument of this section, that is God’s knowledge which is eternal is not distinct from God Himself who is eternal.

In this section of the argument, al-Ash^carī used the same method as was used in the first section: thus he argued:

If one could claim that the work of wisdom proves that the knower is knowing and his knowledge is known subsequently, another could claim that the work of wisdom proves that the knowledge is knowledge and it is known to belong to a knower subsequently.⁴⁰

These propositions are invalid and since the assertions are the same, therefore the proof that the knower is knowing is also to be regarded as a proof of knowledge.

After citing several passages of the Qur'ānic verses in favour of his doctrine, al-Ash'arī concluded his doctrine by producing two propositions: (1) God is knowing by Himself. (2) God is knowing by a knowledge which cannot be Himself. If (1) is the case, it would entail that God Himself would be knowledge. It has been proved to be false. If (2) is the case, then it is also would entail another proposition, that is, God is knowing by a quality distinct from Him. If this is true, then we should have to say that quality is knowledge. Moreover, he said:

But knowledge cannot be knowing, nor can the knower be knowledge, nor can God be identified with His attributes. Do you not see that the way in which one knows that knowledge is knowledge is that by it the knower knows? For the power of man, by which he does not know, cannot be knowledge. Hence, since the Creator cannot be knowledge, he cannot be knowing by Himself. And if that be impossible, it is certain that He is knowing by a knowledge which cannot be Himself.⁴¹

Finally, he stated that if God is knowing by Himself or by a quality which can be Himself is possible, it would mean that 'knowing' does not refer to God Himself or not to a quality. This certainly would be impossible because there would be no affirmation either of God or of quality which cannot be Himself.

This has been an account of al-Ash'arī's treatment of the central problem of the divine attributes, especially the problem of God's knowledge. He rejected Jahm's solution by saying that to hold that God's knowledge is created is unreasonable. Al-Ash'arī proves that it is eternal, and since it is eternal, it is reasonable to hold that God knows the past, the present and the future. He opposed the Mu'tazilites' solutions claiming that God is knowing by His essence. He claimed that God is knowing by knowledge. The knowledge of God is not to be thought of apart from His essence, as held by Anthropomorphists. These two elements, firstly, knowledge is not God, and secondly, knowledge is not other than God are described as an effort of al-Ash'arī to go and form his doctrine between the two extremists, the rationalist Mu'tazilites and the Anthropomorphists as well as the compulsionists positions.

NOTES

1. All quotations are taken from the translation by A. Yusuf Ali, *The Glorious Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*, (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, 1978), p. 302.
2. *Ibid.* p. 889.
3. *Ibid.* p. 796.
4. *Ibid.* p. 130.
5. *Ibid.* p. 102.
6. *Ibid.* p. 510.
7. *Ibid.* p. 131.
8. *Ibid.* p. 127.
9. *Ibid.* p. 1906.
10. *Ibid.* pp. 63-64.
11. Al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Diyānah*, Translated by W. C. Klein, American Oriental Series, (New Haven: Connecticut, 1940), pp. 73-75.
12. Abdul Subhan, 'Al-Jahm b. Ṣafwān and His Philosophy', *Islamic Culture*, Vol. 11, (1937), p. 224.
13. A. S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology*, (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1949), pp. 63-64.
14. Al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb Nihāyat al-Aqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, edited and translated by Alfred Guillaume, (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 78.
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