

**IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

MASTER THESIS

**THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF IN
CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THEOLOGY**

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THESIS SUPERVISOR

ASSOC. PROF. BURHAN KÖROĞLU

ISTANBUL, 2021

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by

JAMIE B. TURNER

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Philosophy**

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ISTANBUL, 2021

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy.

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ÖZ

KLASİK İSLAM TEOLOJİSİNDE DİNİ EPİSTEMOLOJİ

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Bu çalışma, İslam'ın klasik teolojik gelenekleri içindeki dini epistemolojinin ana eğilimlerini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bunu yaparken klasik Orta çağ bakış açılarını, çağdaş dini epistemolojinin deyimlerine, diline ve kavramsal çerçevesine “çevirmeyi” amaçlar. Öncelikli endişe kaynağı, İslam içindeki geniş ölçüde teistik kanıtsalcı perspektiflerle yakından örtüşen gelenekler ve reforme edilmiş epistemolojik perspektiflerle geniş ölçüde örtüşen geleneklerdir. Bu tez, İslam kelam geleneğinin, yani Mu'tezile, Eş'arî, Mâtürîdî ve Hanbelî okullarının farklı epistemolojik eğilimlerini göz önünde bulundurarak, aynı zamanda bu perspektifleri çağdaş normatif epistemolojik teoriler bağlamına yerleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu okullar ve gelenekler arasındaki farklılıklar içinde gezinirken, tez, tüm bu bakış açılarını tek bir tutarlı görüşte bir araya getiren teolojik ve epistemolojik bir sentez inşa etmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dini Epistemoloji, Epistemoloji, İslam Teolojisi, Reformcu Teistik Kanıtsalcılık.

ABSTRACT

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This work aims to consider the major trends of religious epistemology within the classical theological traditions of Islam. In doing so, it aims to “translate” these classic medieval perspectives into the idioms, language and conceptual framework of contemporary religious epistemology. Of prime concern, are those traditions within Islam that closely overlap with broadly theistic evidentialist perspectives, and those which broadly overlap with reformed epistemological perspectives. In considering these different epistemological trends of the Islamic theological tradition i.e., the Mu’tazilite, Ash’arite, Maturidite and Hanbalite schools, the thesis also aims to attempt to fit these perspectives within the context of contemporary normative epistemological theories. In navigating through the differences between these schools and traditions, the thesis aims at constructing a theological and epistemological synthesis which brings all of these perspectives together into one coherent view.

Keywords: Islamic Theology, Religious Epistemology, Reformed Epistemology, Theistic Evidentialism.

DEDICATION

In memory of my dear Grandma Jean



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society is different in so many fundamental ways to societies of old; traditional societies were a collective social-unit that recognised its place in the, “Great Chain of Being”; that hierarchical order with God at its head, and all else below, given its being and held in place by God, who, out of His Wisdom, made manifest a system of creatures and a creaturely order that bear witness to He. Evidently then, although questions concerning the rationality of faith; its justification; or warrant, were questions entertained at least in some capacity by the theologians and philosophers of the day, they did not have the grip on societies of old quite like the extent that they do today among popular crowds. The lack of faith or the apparent irrationality of it, is a prevailing view particularly in Western society (and most certainly among philosophical circles), which makes the question(s) regarding the epistemic status of religious belief, all the more interesting and philosophically important, perhaps in some unique sense, more than ever before!

In this context, the epistemology of religious belief ought to be a sub-discipline of critical importance to reflective and intellectual religious folk. Fortunately, much progress has been made in this territory in the last several decades, coinciding with the rise of philosophy of religion itself in the academy. Philosophers like Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, C. Stephen Evans, Michael Bergmann, William Lane Craig, and others, have greatly contributed to questions concerning the rationality, justification and warrant of religious belief. Currently, some (if not many) philosophers of religion have also started to realise the need to diversify the discourse, or otherwise put: outsource academic projects in the discipline to involve a greater contribution from thinkers outside of merely Christian philosophical circles. The hope is that, philosophers from the Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist and other traditions, alongside Christian thinkers, will be at the forefront of issues like the epistemology of religious belief. It is certainly my hope that, in particular,

contemporary Muslim philosophers of religion draw on the great theological tradition of the classical medieval period (as well as in more modern times), in bringing forth the great themes, ideas, thinkers and theses developed by classical Islamic theologians (and philosophers) to contemporary discussion. Undoubtedly, those ideas given their uniqueness and novelty, would certainly enrich the discourse. However, in order that this may be achieved, that is, in order that the discourse *be* enriched by these pre-modern conceptualisations in theology and philosophy, it appears to me that some form of “translation” needs to take place.

In using the term “translation”, I simply mean to refer to the idea that the heart of the theological and philosophical ideas developed by medieval Islamic thinkers need be “translated” in some sense. That is, that the ideas developed in an altogether different time-frame, where the philosophical jargon, concepts, frameworks and ideological consensus were significantly different, need be placed within the terms, idiom and language, engaged by contemporary philosophers of religion, in order that they have significant influence in contemporary philosophical discourse. Thus, we may, whilst modifying a term employed by Jon Hoover in a different context, coin the primary activity of this thesis, as “philosophy in translation”.¹ That is, as the work of bringing forth medieval Islamic theological views, into contemporary light, by wrapping them in the philosophical concepts and terms that present day (analytic) philosophers of religion employ them.

This thesis then, seeks to investigate the differing philosophical views developed by the main theological schools in the Islamic tradition, from the medieval period to the present day. In doing so, it aims to compare, contrast and evaluate these views—specifically concerning the epistemology of religious belief, with particular focus on theistic belief—in the context of the contemporary normative epistemological theories developed by epistemologists, and the distinct views drawn out by philosophers of religion, with a particular eye on “theistic evidentialist” vis-à-vis “Reformed epistemological” views. In the proceeding section, before introducing the theological schools of interest in this thesis, I will attempt to say something more precisely about

¹ Jon Hoover. “Theology as Translation: Ibn Taymiyya's Fatwa permitting Theology and its Reception into his *Averting the Conflict between Reason and Revealed Tradition* (Dar' Ta'ārud al-'Aql wa l-Naql).” *The Muslim World* 108, (2018), 47.

the specific research questions that this thesis aims to address, as well as noting a few important points regarding my general methodological approach employed in the study as well.

1.1. Research Questions

- (1) What are the main trends within the Islamic theological tradition which could be viewed as adopting theistic evidential and/or Reformed epistemological positions, regarding the epistemology of religious (or primarily theistic) belief?
- (2) How could the theistic evidentialist trends within the tradition be wedded together with Reformed epistemological accounts of religious epistemology?
- (3) To what extent could some of these accounts fit within ‘internalist’ or ‘externalist’ theories of normative epistemological theories evident in the contemporary philosophy of religion?

Let me begin then, by saying something on each of the three primary research questions of this thesis. In the first instance, we are concerned with the different epistemological trends within the Islamic tradition, in light of what are broadly termed and often contrasted with one another, “theistic evidentialism” (TE) and “Reformed epistemology” (RE).² As will be made clear in the thesis, these two views are not mutually exclusive, but as far as trends go, they represent two different epistemological intuitions. Where for example, in the former position the idea is that some reason or argument is necessary for religious belief to have some positive epistemic status, in the latter case that isn’t a necessary condition. So, in looking at the primary theological traditions on classical Islamic theology, namely the Mu’tazilite, Ash’arite, Maturidite and Hanbalite (Atharite) schools, we are trying to extract what sort of religious epistemological trend they adopt, vis TE and/or RE.

The second research question will be a focus more toward the end of this thesis (after the general mapping out and bringing together of the different trends, theories and positions adopted by the differing theological schools in light of contemporary considerations has been done). It concerns the extent to which the different trends can

² For a solid introduction to these views cf., and chapter III of this thesis.

in some way or other, be merged or synthesised together such that there is a broadly consistent outlook that hones in on the different epistemological intuitions captured by these differing trends and traditions. In this case then, we will be interested in how a synthetisation of trends in the Islamic tradition which are close to RE, can be merged/synthesised with trends which run closer to TE and vice-versa.

The third question of consideration concerns the sorts of contemporary normative epistemological theories (or simply put theories of knowledge) which may undergird or find compatibility with the positions on religious epistemology coming from classical Islamic theology. These different theories of knowledge are broadly contrasted in terms of being either “externalist” or “internalist” and they are also often intertwined in the philosophy of religion, with the positions of TE or RE (as we shall see this isn’t however a necessary link). This is important for us especially when considering the plausibility of the positions developed from the Islamic theological tradition. In other words, if these positions are going to be viable contemporary options they should be able to align comfortably with well-defended epistemological theories or otherwise they will lose their philosophical pull, and hence be unable to adequately enrich the discourse in the field.

1.2. Methodology

Before proceeding, let me mention something by way of the methodology employed in the thesis. As it may be evident from the introduction, the sort of approach I am taking in this research thesis is a comparative approach of sorts. Where I am drawing parallels, making connections and finding areas of overlap. However, the approach is not of a standard comparative kind, given that I am also trying to create some sort of “translation” of medieval theology into the framework of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Nevertheless, the point I want to make here also, is that it is crucial that the method of analysis, comparison and “translation” activity, allows the different works particularly from the Islamic tradition to speak for themselves if you will. Thus, in my method of assessing the data, I intend to conduct the research through critically reading various sources of a primary and secondary nature, with the intent on being precautionary as to allow the connections to be made organically and thus not being forced.

Finally, I want to point out that my focus in the thesis is on the schools of classical Islamic theology as opposed to theology *and* philosophy, such that I am excluding the likes of al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. The reason this is, is because the classical theological schools are already philosophical in nature, and they are the mainstream traditions within Islam. Moreover, given the limits and restrictions placed on this research thesis, I am unable to fit in any section on the philosophical schools or thinkers within Islam. But, I do not see this to be overly problematic. Now, let us proceed into the thesis by first considering the nature of classical Islamic theology and its distinct schools or traditions.



CHAPTER II

MAJOR TRENDS WITHIN ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

The tradition or practice of Islamic theology in the classical period, came to be known as a discipline coined, *‘Ilm al-Kalām*. This distinct intellectual practice, first began and became associated with, a group which came out of the city of Basra, known as the Mu’tazilites. But before considering the nature of Mu’tazilism (and the other schools of *kalām*) I think it would be relevant at this point, to briefly comment on the term *kalām* itself, used to refer to theology within Islam. According to Harry Austryn Wolfson (1991, 62), “*kalām*, which literally means ‘speech’ or ‘word’, is used in Arabic translations of the works of Greek philosophers as a rendering of the term *logos* in its various senses of ‘word’, ‘reason,’ and ‘argument.’³ The term *kalām* is also used in those Arabic translations from the Greek in the sense of any special branch of learning and the plural participle, *mutakallimūn* (sing. *mutakallim*), is used as a designation of the masters or exponents of any special branch of learning.” Thus, in the case of a Muslim theologian, he would be referred to as “*al-mutakallim fī al-ilāhiyāt*”, or the *mutakallim* (expert) in matters pertaining to the divine. Crucially, as Holtzman notes, although *kalām* is ordinarily translated as theology, “this rendering does not express well its scholastic methods. The term ‘speculative theology’ conveys in a better way the nature of the theological discussions.”⁴

Although I agree that ‘speculative theology’ appears to do a better job, I think that keeping the terms such as; *kalām*, *‘ilm al- kalām* and *mutakallim* untranslated, makes more sense in order to do justice to its own distinct nature. The tradition of *kalām* however, shouldn’t in and of itself be thought to refer to Islamic theology in its totality.

³ Harry A. Wolfson. *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Harvard University Press, 1976), 9.

⁴ Livnat Holtzman. “Islamic Theology”. In *De Gruyter Handbook of Medieval Studies* eds. Albrecht Classen (De Gruyter, 2010), 62-63.

As we will come to see, the Hanbalite (or more generally *atharī*) tradition of theology in Islam, is also concerned with theological topics but is distinct from *kalām* in methodology and approach toward the issues; generally restricting the debate to textual rather than rational proofs. Thus, what is distinctive about *kalām* is its method of argumentation, generally taking a dialectical or discursive format. It is particularly this style of argumentation applied to theological issues, which seems to have taken influence from outside the Muslim community, although, certain thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun attribute *kalām*'s logical discursive methods to the transition from its placement in *fiqh* to theology.⁵ Nonetheless, *ilm al-kalām* began to flourish as a discipline with the outbreak of the Mu'tazilites, whom we ought now to introduce (along with the other schools).

2.1. The Four Primary Schools of Thought

In considering the outbreak of a systematic theologising enterprise within the Islamic tradition, we are coming to consider the four major schools of broadly Sunni theology within the Islamic tradition, and it will be to each of these four schools with a particular reference point (i.e., thinker or group of thinkers) that we will be exploring in the major sections of this thesis concerning an Islamic epistemology of religious belief. The first of these schools—as we have already alluded to—is known as Mu'tazilism.

2.1.1. Mu'tazilism

The Mu'tazilites derive their name from the term '*azil*, meaning to depart. Legend has it that the founder of this particular movement which initiated and 'departed' in Basra—and later becoming prominent in Baghdad, hence the Baghdad-Basra school distinction within some of its ideas—was Wasil ibn Ata', a student who attended gatherings held by a famous traditionalist Imam, Hasan al-Basri. In a discussion over the nature of faith; particularly sin, and whether one who engaged in major sinful acts is to be considered one of faith or not, al-Basri distinguished the 'orthodox' position from that of the Kharijites, and asserted that although such a person maybe a *fāsiq* (transgressor), that

⁵ Cf., Harry A. Wolfson. *The Philosophy of Kalam* (Harvard University Press, 1976), 14-17.

does not take him beyond the perils of Islam.⁶ Ibn Ata' however, vocally disagreed and conjectured that such a person would be in a state somewhere between belief and disbelief. It seems that the exchange became somewhat heated and Wasil ibn Ata' departed the gathering.⁷ Hasan al-Basri famously remarked that he had '*azil* or departed from us, and hence those who came to be associated with Wasil ibn Ata' were known as the Mu'tazilites. Crucially, despite important differences among the Mu'tazilite thinkers, there remained among them five central principles known as *uṣūl al-khamsa* (the five principles), which were: (1) God's Unity (*tawhid*), (2) God's Justice ('*adl*), (3) the eternity of heaven for the righteous and hell for sinners (*al-wa'd wa'l-wa'id*), (4) the intermediate state of the Muslim sinner, and (5) the command to enjoin good and forbid the bad (*al-amr bi'l-ma'ruf wa'l nahy 'an al-munkar*).⁸

Following the collapse of the Umayyad Dynasty and the emergence of 'Abbasid rule, Muslim theologians/intellectuals can be seen during this period to entered into a phase of 'Hellenistic Influence'.⁹ Indeed, this political shift which saw Baghdad as the new caliphal capital, sparked the age of what has come to be known as the "translation movement" i.e., a highly productive period of the translation of Greek, Indian, Syriac and Persian texts into Arabic within all of the major "secular" sciences. This movement was coupled by the inevitable continuation of Muslim interaction with the local people over whom now ruled, following those early Arab conquests. Such interactions laid the seeds of systematic theologising among Muslim circles. The Mu'tazilites were the first to fertilise those seeds into blossoming ideas of theology including doctrines of divine simplicity, creation of the Qur'an, and the necessity of a natural theology within the Islamic tradition.¹⁰

For the Mu'tazilites reason ('*aql*) was put at the cornerstone of theology. They sought to upload a theology of Islam that is entirely grounded and based upon rational pursuits.¹¹ Central to this outlook beyond and the five key principles which allowed the

⁶ Khalid Blankinship. "The early creed". In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47.

⁷ Ibid. 48.

⁸ Ibid. 47-48.

⁹ William Montgomery Watt. *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 84.

¹⁰ William Montgomery Watt. *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, (Oneworld, 1998), 102.

¹¹ Livnat Holtzman. "Islamic Theology". In *De Gruyter Handbook of Medieval Studies* eds. Albrecht Classen (De Gruyter, 2010), 67.

school to be unified in some sense, was their disdain for what they saw to be any kind of anthropomorphising of the divine, which they saw particularly in the thought of their theological adversaries like the Hanbalites. Thus, they taught that God was totally incorporeal and indivisible, unique and transcendent. As such, they support a theory of language which divided readings of scriptural into either literal (*haqiqi*) or metaphorical (*majazi*). Any Qur’anic verses such as, “the Most Merciful [Who is] established on the Throne”, depicting notions of spatiality, could be swept away as anthropomorphic metaphors, in preserving God’s radically otherness and transcendence (*tanzih*).¹² Although such a theological method was designed to preserve God’s *tanzih* beyond the perils of what they saw to be dangerous assimilation with creation (*tashbih*), traditional Hanbalites would see this as a betrayal of the Qur’anic text itself, and as a denial (*ta’īl*) of God’s attributes, for such theologians it wasn’t a preservation of God’s *tanzih* that the Mu’tazilites were engaged in, but rather a dramatic imbalance between God’s *tanzih* and *tashbih*, or according to some perhaps worse: mere disbelief (*kufr*).¹³

Nonetheless, the Mu’tazilites persisted with their doctrines unfazed, and, as alluded to earlier, developed an important doctrine of divine simplicity, which saw God’s essence and attributes as one and the same inseparable. That is, God’s power or wisdom for instance, merely describe God’s eternal subsisting essence, rather than speak of distinct attributes separate from His essence that He possess. This view epitomised the first principle of the Mu’tazilites, namely *Tawhid*, and put them to some extent, much closer to the theology of the philosophers (*falāsifa*), than it did traditional Sunni theology. With their emphasis on God’s radical otherness from creation, and God’s justice (*‘adl*) manifest within all creation, and of which He is bound to without exception, the Mu’tazilite view of God comes across as a mechanical deity, almost unknowable, or perhaps more precisely, a ‘cosmic justice machine, rather than a free and conscious being’.¹⁴

As is probably apparent, Mu’tazilite doctrine stressed the importance of reason (*‘aql*) in their theological discourse, in ways which has often seen them labelled as

¹² Khalid Blankinship. “The early creed”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 53.

¹³ *Ibid.* 54.

¹⁴ Sabine Schmidtke. “The Mu’tazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase”. In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 160.

“rationalists” as opposed to “traditionalists”, or more aptly put, “scripturalists”. The Mu’tazilites themselves nonetheless did attempt to ground their own theories with reference to Qur’anic verses, yet their adversaries would be seen to claim that not only had they compromised the apparent readings of Qur’anic text, rather than following the dictates of reason, they did in fact uphold positions which were a perversion of reason itself.

Finally, as we will come to see in more detail below, the general approach of the Mu’tazilites in emphasising the importance of reason, dialectical argumentation and evidence, is evident in their discourse on the epistemology of religious belief, where evidence is taken as reasons independent of scripture itself.

2.1.2. Ash’arism

Following the influx of the Mu’tazilite school of Islamic theology, which is properly considered to have initiated the formative structure of what later came to be coined *‘ilm al-kalām*, it was the departing of another individual which gave rise to the classical Sunni school of kalam, known as Ash’arism. The eponym of this theological school and he who departed from Mu’tazilite theology in a famous story of conversion, was Abu’l Hasan al-Ash’ari. The formation of the ‘orthodox’ schools of theology in Sunni Islam, arose, at least in part, as a response to movements like Mu’tazilism.¹⁵ Indeed, as we will come to see shortly, it is the famous controversy between the Mu’tazilites and traditionalist theologian Ahmad ibn Hanbal over the eternality of createdness of the Qur’an, which in essence outlined the boundaries and principles of Hanbalite theology. Yet, before we touch on the theological school of Ibn Hanbal, we will continue to consider the formation of the schools of kalam (i.e., Ash’arism and Maturidism), for which Hanbalite theology stands as somewhat contrasted to.

So, al-Ash’ari—born in Basra in 873—studied under the tutorage of Mu’tazilite theologians, where he developed a reputation as a young student, for his studious work-ethic and natural intelligence. In fact, given that he studied directly under what one may

¹⁵ Jan Thiele. “Between Cordoba and Nīsābur: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash’arism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century)”. In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 227.

regard as the head of the Mu'tazilites in Basra, namely al-Jubba'i, he was somewhat destined (or so they thought) to be a Mu'tazilite prodigy. Sparing the details, al-Ash'ari came to view Mu'tazilite theology as fundamentally flawed following his education and general maturity, and being influenced by the prevailing theological orthodoxy set down by Ibn Hanbal, al-Ash'ari came to accept traditional Sunni theology in its Hanbalite form, but coupled with the rational principles of *kalam* that he had learnt whilst studying at the feet of the great Basran Mu'tazilite theologians.¹⁶ It is through the use of such rational principles, that al-Ash'ari sought to defend the doctrines of traditional Sunni theology and the primacy of revelation as the superior source of knowledge (above the dictates of reason), as well as to critique his former theological associates, moving from Basra to Baghdad, where he was to remain for the duration thereafter until his death in 935.

The famous story of al-Ash'ari's conversion has it that Prophet Muhammad appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to defend the traditions that had come down from him to the Muslim community (i.e., *ahadith*), and questioned him as to whether or not he has truly been fulfilling this duty. Consequently, we are told that al-Ash'ari abandoned his rationalist theological enterprise (*kalam*) for traditional Hanbalism, (strict adherence to the apparent readings of the Qur'an and Sunna), only that later in another vision the Prophet appears to al-Ash'ari angrily, and insists that he had instructed him to related his Prophetic traditions, but *not* to give up on the rational methods that he had learnt in his theological studies, employed to defend the doctrines of the Islamic faith.¹⁷ Thus, al-Ash'ari is said to have conceived of his theological enterprise, now as one orthodox by any Hanbalite standard, but with greater harmony in the relationship between reason and revelation.

This newly formed Sunni school of *kalām* coined after al-Ash'ari himself, was thereafter referred to as Ash'arism, and differed from the Mu'tazilite school in important respects. Five cases in point should be sufficient to illustrate the level of difference: (1) the uncreated nature of the Qur'an, (2) the divine essence-attribute distinction, (3) the doctrine of *bi-lā kayf*, (4) a literal understanding of all 'revealed'

¹⁶ Ibid. 228-230.

¹⁷ William Montgomery Watt. *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 115.

eschatological phenomena, (5) the doctrine of acquisition (*kasb, iktisāb*).¹⁸ As for the first, al-Ash'ari insisted (following Ahmad ibn Hanbal and co.) that the Qur'an is to be regarded the eternal speech of God and hence uncreated as opposed to the doctrine of Qur'anic creation infamous with Mu'tazilism. This is of course is to some extent intertwined with the idea that God's speech is attributed to God distinct from His essence, and hence is illustrative of the second point, namely the Ash'arite rejection of the doctrine of divine simplicity upheld by the Mu'tazilites (and the *falāsifa* for that matter), and the acceptance of distinction between God's essence and attributes.¹⁹ As for the third point, this refers to the idea that, contrary to the *ta'wīl* or employment of metaphors used by the Mu'tazilites in interpreting apparent anthropomorphisms in scripture, their meaning ought to be accepted without enquiring into the modality or 'how-ness' of how God possess such attributes. This would be challenged by later Ash'arites, but would remain a general hallmark of Hanbali theology. Fourthly, al-Ash'ari and his followers held that eschatological descriptions such as the "Vision of God" in the next world, is not to be dismissed as a mere metaphor, but is to be taken in its apparent literal sense. Fifthly, the Ash'arites rejected Mu'tazilite doctrine of *jabr* or the total free-will of human creations which seemed to compromise God's omnipotence, and instead attempted to strike a balance between creaturely freedom (*jabr*) and divine decree (*qadr*). In doing so, they embraced a position referred to as the doctrine of *kasb*, which taught that God creates the power to act in His creatures, at the very moment of action, and through which the creature responds only by performing the action in question, not any other.²⁰

One of important connections beyond the rational method between the Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite schools of *kalām*, was the continuation of upholding an atomistic physical ontology. This is of particular interest for religious epistemology within the Islamic tradition, because it is often through this metaphysical theory that cosmological arguments for the existence of God were established, and as we will come to see, those

¹⁸ Khalid Blankinship. "The early creed". In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 62.

¹⁹ Ibid. 63-64.

²⁰ Ibid. 66-67.

sorts of arguments or evidences (*adilla*), were central in grounded true faith for the practioners of *kalām* (*mutakallimūn*).²¹

2.1.3. Māturīdism

In turning now to the other Sunni school of *Kalām* within the Islamic tradition, we come to see a tradition which developed in other parts of the Muslim world—most notably Samarqand following the spread of Ash’arism and *Kalām* more generally—and which was coined after its ‘founder’ Abu Mansur al-Māturīdī.²² Unlike the Ash’arite school, the Maturidite school of *Kalām* remained somewhat obscure for centuries after its formation, it later came to hold great prominence in the Islamic world particularly with the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The link here is to be found in the fact that the Maturidite School developed from Hanafī scholars, and hence Hanafite jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and Maturidite theology came to be tied closely together, that’s why Abu Hanfia himself (the eponym of the Hanafite school) is thought to be an ancestor of Māturīdism. Given that Hanafite jurisprudence was adopted by the Ottomans, so too was Maturidite theology.

The Maturidite School rose through a development of theological doctrines developed by Abu Hanifa and his followers. This development occurred probably in part in order to refute the doctrines of the Mu’tazilites, Hanbalites and other theological strands in the Islamic tradition, as well as Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians. The central work of al-Māturīdī is his *Kitab al-Tawhid* which establishes most of the Maturidite doctrines of theology, some of which differ from the Ash’arite school, while most of them in content and method are in essence the same. What is striking about that work as will be shown in more detail in later sections of this thesis, is the philosophical methodology employed by al-Māturīdī in trying to establish Islamic doctrines such as the existence of God, Divine attributes, and scriptural hermeneutics as opposed to mere reference to

²¹ Jan Thiele. “Between Cordoba and Nisābur: The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash’arism (Fourth-Fifth/Tenth-Eleventh Century)”. In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 242.

²² Cf., Oliver Leaman. “The developed *kalām* itradition”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 86-90, for a neat introduction to Māturīdism.

the teachings of scripture, which as we will soon see, was the primary method of Hanbalite theologians.²³

Maturidite theology has generally been seen to be closer to Mu'tazilite thought than Ash'arism, which is probably due at least in part to al-Ash'ari's historic rejection of Mu'tazilism. One way in which this seems to be the case is in terms of the emphasis that the Maturidites laid on the epistemic fruits of reason independent from revelation in contrast to the Ash'arites. One of the ways in which this seems to have been made manifest is in terms of the meta-ethical theories that have been associated with these schools of Islamic theology. Unlike the Ash'arites, who thought that moral ontological reality and epistemology was grounded in divine fiat, command and thenceforth revelation, the Maturidites followed the Mu'tazilites in thinking that moral truth isn't merely contingent on God's Will and nor was it the case the revelation alone could reveal objective moral truths to us, rather reason itself is able to grasp moral realities on its own so-to-speak.²⁴

One of the other chief differences between al-Maturidi and al-Ash'ari which also seems to set the former closer to the Mu'tazilites once more, concerns the debate of *Qadr* (pre-destination or rather, Divine Decree). Al-Maturidi seems to place greater emphasis on human choice (*ikhtiyār*) and his responsibility over his choices, much more than we see in al-Ash'ari who rather emphasizes God's omnipotence and His role in creating human acts, which cannot be viewed in any real sense independently from God's own acting. Perhaps another difference can be found in the context of the 'punishment of sins'. The two both hold that a major sin does not take one outside the fold of Islam and that even an ounce of *iman* in the heart of the Muslim is sufficient protection for him for the eternity of Hell. That being said, it seemed that al-Ash'ari in contrast to al-Maturidi, was not willing to concede that a *mu'min* (one who has *iman*) will evade Hell for eternity in an indefinite sense; ultimately leaving the judgement to God and God alone.²⁵

²³ Ulrich Rudolph. "Hanafi Theological Tradition and Māturīdism". In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 284.

²⁴ Ibid. 290

²⁵ Ibid. 292.

Finally, the two schools of theology seem to differ in their understanding of what has been coined, ‘God’s active attributes’ (*ṣifāt al-fi’liyya*). While the Ash’arites held that the active attributes of God are not eternal (since for instance God hasn’t been created since eternity past), the Maturidites hold that in fact God’s active attributes are eternal. The two schools despite their minor differences are in agreement with what we might frame the fundamental theological doctrines and positions of Islamic theology, and will become apparent also in our discussion of the Ash’arite and Maturidite positions on the epistemology of religious belief.²⁶

2.1.4. Hanbalite Traditionalism²⁷

In contrast to the three theological schools of the Islamic tradition that we have thus far introduced, the Hanbalite School of theology, coined after its eponym Ahmad ibn Hanbal, was a persistent force against the philo-theological enterprise of *kalām* that the other schools were engaged in. Rather than formulating its doctrines on the basis of philosophical argumentation or dialectical reasoning, the Hanbalites emphasised the primacy of the textual revelation, and defended its self-sufficiency against theological positions developed independent of it.²⁸

One of the distinctive features of this Hanbalite traditionalism which sought to defend the self-sufficiency of revelation in all theological domains, was the insistence that not only are the methods of *kalām* useless, they are actually blameworthy and dangerous innovations to the religion which have not been sanctioned by God and His Messenger. For the Hanbalites, the revelation ought to be obeyed as it was obeyed and understood by the first few generations of Islam who were closest to the Prophet. The questions of the *mutakallimūn* only serve to instil doubt into the hearts of the faithful and fail to guide us any closer to God. One important criticism that came from later Hanbalites like Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328)—who will become our prime focus concerning Hanbalite religious epistemology—was that the methods of *kalām*, such as the various proofs for the existence of God, at best, only move the believer to affirmation of God’s Being,

²⁶ Ibid. 293-294.

²⁷ Cf., Jon Hoover. “Hanbali Theology”. In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), for a brilliant overview of Hanbalite traditionalism

²⁸ Cf., Binyamin Abrahamov. “Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology”. In *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Theology* eds. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 264-268.

whereas the Qur’anic method was to combine affirmation with servitude—which is the essence of Islam.²⁹

Ahmad ibn Hanbal and his followers rose to historical prominence, following his famous challenging of the Mu’tazilites and ‘Abbasid rulership, who acted as their patrons, in refusing to accept their doctrine that the Qur’an was created. Ahmad ibn Hanbal rather insisted that it has to be affirmed as the eternal speech of God, to claim otherwise, is tantamount to a denial of the Qur’an itself. Interestingly, Ibn Hanbal’s response to the Mu’tazilites was perhaps the first occasion in which his traditionalist school of thought, had to engage in dialectical reasoning within theology, in order to refute the positions of his theological adversaries. So, although this didn’t necessarily vindicate the methods of *kalām* per se, it did implicitly validate the use of reason in theology. However, the Hanbalites would have probably claimed this was an exceptional circumstance and such counter-argumentation may well be employed by the scholarly elite only when that rare occasion permits.³⁰

Perhaps among the most important theological differences among the Hanbalites and *mutakallimūn*, which even in the contemporary period has generated great hostility between the theological schools at times, concerns the interpretation and understanding of God’s Attributes as they have been stated in scripture. In contrast to the *mutakallimūn*, the Hanbalites understood the meaning of the text at face value, and hence attributed to God attributes that look at least at first glance, as anthropomorphic, such as the Hands of God. However, the Hanbalites well aware of this criticism wielded their theological weapon of *bi’lā kayf*, which meant that they affirmed the attribute, denied its assimilation between God and creation, and did not inquire into the modality of this divine attribute.³¹

I suppose this once again provides evidence of the reasoning behind a defense of theological doctrines that the Hanbalites engaged in. That being said, the general lack of philosophical-theologising among Hanbalite thinkers means that it is often hard to

²⁹ Jon Hoover. *Ibn Taymiyya* (Oneworld Publications, 2020), 45-50.

³⁰ William Montgomery Watt. *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 126.

³¹ Binyamin Abrahamov. “The ‘Bi-Lā Kayfa’ Doctrine and Its Foundations in Islamic Theology”. *Arabica* 3, (1995), 365-366.

derive a strong philosophical position which is worthy of consideration in the midst of different views in the contemporary philosophy of religion. It is for this reason that our focus on the Hanbalite School will be with Ibn Taymiyya, who, unlike many of his predecessors, did engage with matters of *kalam*, even if it was simply to refute their methodology and doctrines.³² In summary then, we may tentatively conclude that the Hanbalite School of theology represents something like Traditionalism and the previous schools of *kalam* represent something like Rationalism in theology, but of course this is only a matter of simplification, it is indeed more complex than that, but it does at least give us a taste of what may be expected to come from these theological positions concerning religious epistemology.

So, with the primary schools or traditions of Islamic theology being introduced, I now want to move on to bringing to our attention, the important concepts and ideas from within the contemporary analytic philosophical tradition, which will be the focal point of the thesis, in that we are trying in some sense to situate these different schools of thought within classical Islamic theology, into this contemporary framework. Thus, in the next section, I aim to layout the distinctive positions and epistemological concepts that we will draw upon from the contemporary philosophy of religion, in an attempt to develop the classical Islamic positions which represent the above theological schools, in contemporary light.

³² Cf., Frank Griffel. "Ibn Taymiyya and His Ash'arite Opponents on Reason and Revelation: Similarities, Differences, and a Vicious Circle". *The Muslim World* 108, (2018), 11-39.

CHAPTER III

CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY

In order to formulate rigorous and contemporarily relevant accounts on the epistemology of religious belief in the Islamic tradition, it is imperative that we “translate” the classical perspectives into the contemporary conceptual framework (or otherwise put into the contemporary language or idioms) in contemporary epistemology and philosophy of religion. Hence, we need to begin by laying out the key epistemic concepts that we will draw on formulating the different Islamic positions relevant for contemporary debate. Roughly then, we need to introduce the following concepts: (1) belief, (2) positive epistemic status (i.e. rationality, justification and warrant), (3) internalism/externalism, (4) noetic structure and (5) evidence.

3.1. Beliefs and Positive Epistemic Status

A belief is roughly a propositional attitude which affirms that the content of the proposition is truth bearing. Beliefs are often divided into two types: basic beliefs (also referred to as non-inferential beliefs) and non-basic beliefs (also referred to as inferential beliefs).³³ This distinction is crucial for us in order to understand how different epistemic positions frame the nature of theistic or religious beliefs. A basic belief is a belief that we hold not on the basis of any others and is usually one that comes to the subject in immediate fashion. Primary examples of basic beliefs are beliefs about our own mental states or perceptual beliefs.³⁴ For instance, one may have the belief that they see a computer before them right now, this belief is basic in that it isn't based on some inference from other beliefs or propositions, rather it just comes to us immediately when we're in the sorts of circumstances which allow this belief to arise by way of our cognitive faculty designed for sensory beliefs. Non-basic beliefs are those which are

³³ Richard Feldman. *Epistemology* (Pearson, 2003), 16-17.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 19-21.

held on the basis of some other beliefs and are inferential in nature. For instance, one may have the basic belief that door-bell is ringing (upon hearing the chimes of the bell) and then from this basic belief by way of inference, infer another belief that there is someone at the door. A crucial question that we will look at when considering the different accounts on the epistemology of theistic belief in the Islamic tradition is whether and in what sense, belief in God may be basic or non-basic.

But, among our beliefs, we make a distinction between those that are mere opinions or conjectures, and those we think are sufficient for knowledge. Some beliefs we may think are reasonable for us to hold (given the evidence and so forth) and others we may think are unreasonable. In making these sorts of distinctions, we assign to some of our beliefs “positive epistemic status”.³⁵ That is, we give the belief held by a subject, some concept of (epistemic) appraisal that we don’t necessarily attach to some of our other beliefs. Traditional notions of positive epistemic status are: rationality, justification, warrant and knowledge. There are different ways in which epistemologists make use of these terms and they often differ over what they mean and their use in different epistemic contexts. We will be primarily interested in the notions justification, warrant and knowledge (and the connections between them), so we will leave rationality aside for the moment. But let us begin our consideration here by thinking about why these concepts may be important for the epistemologist.

Say you have a belief. You believe that China is in Europe (at least you have this opinion from some bizarre reason, primarily due to sheer ignorance). Could this belief be sufficient for knowledge? Obviously not. It lacks a vital ingredient for any account of knowledge, namely truth! It is simply not true that China is in Europe and you cannot *know* something that is false. So, suppose you have a different belief, but say that this time it turns out to be true. For instance, you believe that Derby County will beat Manchester United 6-0, in the FA Cup quarter-final, even though it’s at Man Utd’s home ground, and there is such a huge gulf in class between the two teams (in Man Utd’s favour). Yet, lo and behold, your belief turned out to be true. Few would say that you *knew* in this case, or that your belief was sufficient for knowledge. Rather, you fell

³⁵ Cf., Alvin Plantinga. “Positive Epistemic Status and Proper Function”. *Philosophical Perspectives* 2, (1988), 1-50, to understand the concept of ‘positive epistemic status’.

into a fortunate case of epistemic luck: you had a mere guess that luckily turned out to be true. Therefore, it seems that not even a mere true-belief could be sufficient for knowledge, so what's lacking? Traditionally what's been suggested is that you lack some "justification" for your belief: some reason or evidence that you have cognitive access to, which confers justification on the belief in question, it makes it reasonable and justified for you to hold. So, if you have another belief: you believe that it's raining outside (which happens to be true), and you base this belief on the fact that you can hear and see the rain clearly outside, you'd have a justified true-belief (JTB). Then, in having JTB, it seems you have knowledge right?

Now, to clarify, in order to have justification for one's belief, it has been depicted - at least for the most part in Western philosophy - in terms of the subject "fulfilling their *epistemic duties*". That is to say, one is justified in believing if they are within their rights: they have access to the relevant evidence, counter any defeaters that may crop up and otherwise do their level best to follow the evidence. Hence, justification has generally been viewed in *deontological* terms. Yet, it turns out that epistemologists now routinely reject the idea that justification coupled with true-belief is sufficient to account for knowledge (since Edmund Gettier's famous paper).³⁶ To see why, imagine the following situation: a subject forms the belief that it is twelve o'clock (and say it is indeed twelve), but they form this belief by looking at a clock in the city centre which yesterday had stopped working at twelve. This belief is true, and it appears the subject has some justification (in virtue of their sense perception), so they have JTB, and yet we'd be inclined to think that the subject didn't really *know* that it was twelve, but rather fell into the fortune of epistemic luck.

3.2. Internalism & Externalism

Consequently, epistemologists have shifted from taking justification as thus defined, coupled with true-belief as sufficient for knowledge and attempted to supply some additional condition, or otherwise quite radically change the nature of the approach entirely. In this regard, it has opened a debate of central importance for us in this paper, namely between *internalism* vis-à-vis *externalism* on the nature of justification (or

³⁶ Cf., Edmund Gettier. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge". *Analysis* 23, (1963), 121-123.

warrant – to be introduced shortly).³⁷ The problem with the clock case (and other “Gettier cases”) is the problem of getting a tight connection between justification and truth. Some have argued that the problem in these is not in the subject’s hands so-to-speak, but is rather due to something *external* (as opposed to *internal*) to the subject’s first-person purview that is creating the problems in these cases. As a result, epistemologists have turned away from *internalism*, which has it that the subject is justified solely in terms of the reasons, evidence or conditions accessible to them: justifiers that they are cognitively aware of. Instead, they have rejected this position and adopted *externalism*: literally the denial of *internalism*, holding that some conditions external to the subjects’ cognitive awareness are necessary for justification (or warrant). We will draw on this distinction and consider some contemporary accounts of both justification and warrant in the proceeding sections.

In marking out this distinction, this has further resulted in clearer distinctions between different terms of epistemic appraisal or “positive epistemic status”. Epistemologists now often differentiate between “justification”, perhaps conceding the definition discussed above, thus seeing it in the light of *internalism*. And “warrant”: that quantity enough of which turns mere true-belief into knowledge. Thus, one may be justified in holding a certain belief, but that isn’t to say that they *know* the belief in question. What is required for knowledge is not some account of justification, but rather some account of warrant (we shall look at some examples toward the end of this section).³⁸

3.3. Noetic Structures and Evidence

Now, at this point it is also imperative that we understand the idea of a noetic structure, or the structure of our beliefs in relation to justification or warrant. As noted above, there is distinction between basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs. As we saw in our ‘someone at the door example’ related beliefs can form chains. Hence, they form some sort of structure. Typically, epistemologists will adopt some version of *foundationalism*. That is to say, there are some basic beliefs at the foundations of our

³⁷ Cf., Richard Feldman. *Epistemology* (Pearson, 2003), 30-35, in this important distinction.

³⁸ The concept of warrant was brought to the table most importantly by Alvin Plantinga in his warrant trilogy of 1993-2000, cf., Plantinga’s *Warrant: The Current Debate, Warrant and Proper Function, Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press).

noetic structure which ultimately ground justification or warrant for our non-basic beliefs, otherwise we would have an infinite regress of beliefs and no justification/warrant, hence total scepticism.³⁹ The idea of *foundationalism* will also be central to our considerations of Muslim accounts on knowledge. And in exploring those ideas we will make a distinction between *classical* and *moderate* foundationalism, we shall leave these two distinctions to the side for now.

Finally, we ought to say something about the notion and nature of *evidence*.⁴⁰ Evidence is typically thought of as being a central component of justification or warrant. An important division within the general genus of evidence is important for us here. Namely, the distinction between “propositional” evidence and “non-propositional” evidence. Generally, the former refers to some sort of argument or inference from one’s propositional knowledge. The latter refers to things such as perceptions, intuitions, seemings and experiences. Some epistemologists may be strict in accepting only the former type as proper or adequate forms of evidence, others may be open to accepting both types as sufficiently adequate. This distinction will be very important for us when considering the sort’s evidences adequate to support the proposition of theism for instance.

With these epistemic concepts briefly introduced, before turning to the Islamic tradition in full, we ought to say a few things specifically concerning religious epistemology in the contemporary philosophy of religion. The ideas therein will guide our own examinations of religious epistemology in the Islamic theological and philosophical traditions.

3.4. Religious Epistemology in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

The current debate concerning religious epistemology in contemporary philosophy is neatly broken down by Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty into three primary (although not mutually exclusive) groupings: (1) fideism, (2) Reformed epistemology, and (3)

³⁹ Richard Feldman. *Epistemology* (Pearson, 2003), 60-64.

⁴⁰ Cf., Timothy McGrew. “Evidence”. In *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology* eds. Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (Routledge, 2011), 58-67.

evidentialism.⁴¹ The spectrum of views within fideism has it on the one end that religious belief is in some sense immune from the usual evidential epistemic standards to which we might subject beliefs about science or history (this is closely related to the view known as “presuppositionalism”). And at the other end of this rather tight family of views on the spectrum of fideism, it has it that a subject must have some trust or faith in God, in order for his or her theistic belief to be justified. In between these two views, is a form of fideism which holds that: given the ambiguity of evidence for theism, “one can choose to hold theistic beliefs because of their special morally-centred nature”.⁴² Reformed epistemology is simply the thesis that “religious belief can be rational in the absence of arguments”.⁴³ The central idea is that theistic (or religious) belief can be *properly basic* with respect to one or more property of positive epistemic status (i.e. rationality, justification, warrant). Evidentialism or theistic evidentialism (as Bergmann coins it), is roughly the idea that the positive epistemic status of one’s theistic belief is achieved in virtue of the belief being grounded on some supporting *evidence* (in the broadest sense).⁴⁴ Let’s briefly explore these ideas in a bit more depth, starting with the view of most importance to this paper: reformed epistemology.

3.5. Reformed Epistemology (RE)

Contemporary advocates of RE are famously Alvin Plantinga, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff, C. Stephen Evans and Michael Bergmann (to name just a few). These thinkers all hold that in some sense belief in God can be *properly basic*.⁴⁵ That is, a basic belief (not held on the basis of any other beliefs) and justified (or otherwise rational and/or warranted). Central to the thesis of RE is a generic rejection of what has come to be known as the “evidentialist objection to theism”. Let the objection run as follows: one can only hold proposition *p*, namely that God exists, justifiably if and only if one supplies evidence *E* in support of *p*. Assuming one does not have *E*, it follows that one would be unjustified in upholding *p*. Plantinga has astutely argued that for the

⁴¹ Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty. “Religious Epistemology”. *Philosophy Compass* 108, (2015), 547-559.

⁴² Ibid. 549.

⁴³ Andrew Moon. “Recent work in reformed Epistemology”. *Philosophy Compass* 11, (2016), 879.

⁴⁴ Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty. “Religious Epistemology”. *Philosophy Compass* 108, (2015), 550.

⁴⁵ Cf., Alvin Plantinga. *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000), for the most extensive and substantial defence of RE.

most part this objection to theism has rested on *classical foundationalism*. This view on the structure of knowledge and justification Plantinga has also arguably shown to be self-defeating, making way then for a more *moderate* form of foundationalism which pluralises the sorts of beliefs which a subject can hold in a properly basic way, including belief in God. Drawing on the ideas of reformed theologian John Calvin, Plantinga has argued for the possibility that God planted within human beings a *sensus divinitatis* or faculty by which basic belief in Him can be elicited in a variety of circumstances. Given the compatibility between this view and his account of warrant (proper functionalism), as long as one's theistic belief is elicited in according with those conditions of warrant, one's theistic belief can be warranted for the believer in a properly basic manner by way of one's *sensus divinitatis*.

C. Stephen Evans (remarkably finding himself in all three camps broken down by Tweedt and Dougherty, exemplifying the potential cross over between them), has argued that the traditional arguments for God's existence have at their root different "signs" which undergird them, pointing to God's existence. Evans argues that independent of the arguments themselves, these "signs" may function to elicit basic belief in God.⁴⁶ For example, undergirding the cosmological argument is what Evans refers to as the sign of "cosmic wonder", which may be brought forth by questions such as: 'why is there something rather than nothing?' Reflection on such questions and the "signs" of the cosmos more generally, can culminate in an immediate sense of God's presence. Such basic beliefs may be properly basic with respect to justification for instance, if they satisfy something like Swinburne's "principle of credulity" or perhaps a phenomenal conservativist (PC) position on justification which goes something like the following: if it seems to S that *p*, in the absence of some defeater, S has some justification for believing that *p*.

Notice however, that in either case (Plantinga's or Evans), it is not that evidence as such is thrown out of the window. It would be inaccurate to say that there is no evidence at play in these cases (such as profound experiences or strong seemings), but that crucially, arguments are absent and that these beliefs are not themselves held on the

⁴⁶ Cf., C. Stephen Evans. *Natural Signs and Knowledge of God: A New Look at Theistic Arguments* (Oxford University Press, 2010), for Evans' account on this issue.

basis of any other beliefs or propositions. The two accounts differ in that the former is *externalist* and the latter *internalist*. This goes to show the compatibility of RE with either of the two general strands within contemporary epistemology on the nature of justification or warrant. Let us turn to consider theistic evidentialism.

3.6. Evidentialism

Theistic evidentialists hold that belief in God is justified (or warranted) *iff* it is adequately grounded or properly based on some supporting evidence. At the heart of the traditional evidentialist setup has often been the enterprise of natural theology i.e., offering some arguments for God's existence based on some feature of the world or from *pure reason*, independent of scripture. However, the evidentialist in the broadest sense, may simply hold that the subject need base his or her belief in God on some evidence which extends beyond the restrictive "propositional" sort and may include religious experiences, intuitions or seemings, which are nonetheless accessible within subject's purview. Hence, not only is (PC) for instance, entirely compatible with RE, it is also entirely compatible with theistic evidentialism as well. However, some evidentialists may take a somewhat stronger view on things (although this is not so fashionable nowadays). For example, some may maintain that only "propositional evidence" is sufficient to confer justification (or warrant) on one's theistic belief. This is often considered the view of the "enlightenment" philosophers such as John Locke. Tweedt and Dougherty refer to this position as "hyperevidentialism".⁴⁷

3.7. Fideism

Strong fideists have it that, even contrary to what one's evidence suggests (or in the absence of any supporting evidence whatsoever) one can nonetheless be rational in holding their theistic or religious beliefs. Perhaps K. Scott Oliphint's *Covenantal Epistemology* ("Presuppositionalism") could be seen to fall into the camp of strong fideism. Oliphint embraces an epistemology of religious belief that explicitly places theology prior to epistemology and see's scripture as providing the principles for one's

⁴⁷ Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty. "Religious Epistemology". *Philosophy Compass* 108, (2015), 548.

epistemology, rather than seeing that one's religious beliefs ought to fulfil some epistemic conditions external to it.⁴⁸ John Bishop on the other hand adopts a more *moderate* form of fideism. He takes inspiration from William James' view on the ethics of belief, asserting that it can be *morally* acceptable for a subject to hold a proposition such as theism to be true, even if they see that their total evidence doesn't adequately support the proposition as such.⁴⁹ One condition under which Bishop suggests this may be permissible is when one's evidence is in some sense ambiguous. Weak fideists like C. Stephan Evans seem to hold something like the view that, given the human beings cognitive condition i.e., that they often err, particularly in Evans' view because of them being sinful creatures, such error requires *faith* for its correction. In this case, a subject may be rational in holding their theistic belief, even if it may appear irrational to those who lack *faith* as those who lack *faith* remain trapped by the cognitive defects of sin.

3.8. Convergence Between the Approaches

As already noted, the general intuitions and views encapsulated by these three groupings differ and that may be in some areas on the spectrum clear incompatibility, but there can also be some cross over of clear compatibility between these views (as evidenced by Evans). In the former case for example, strong fideism is obviously incompatible with theistic evidentialism because the latter holds explicitly that the positive epistemic status of one's theistic belief *must* be grounded on the subjects' adequately supporting evidence, whereas the strong fideist holds that the subject can be rational even when one's available evidence supports a view or proposition contrary to one that the subject accepts. The same may be said for *moderate* forms of fideism as well. In this case, given the ambiguity of evidence for instance, the theistic evidentialist would probably argue that the subject is required to simply suspend judgement.⁵⁰

We've already seen how RE and theistic evidentialism can align, and it appears (as may already be evident) that full alignment between the three groupings consists roughly in holding the traditional view on RE, theistic evidentialism in the broad sense, and a *weak*

⁴⁸ K. Scott Oliphint. "Covenantal Epistemology". In *Debating Christian Religious Epistemology* eds. John DePoe and Tyler McNabb (Bloomsbury, 2020),

⁴⁹ Cf., John Bishop. *Believing by Faith* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty. "Religious Epistemology". *Philosophy Compass* 108, (2015), 553.

fideist position. Given a broad vision on the nature of evidence including both “propositional” (like arguments) and “non-propositional” (like experiences or seemings) evidence, the reformed epistemologist can fit within that broadly theistic evidentialist camp. If in addition, they also hold that *faith* has a central role to play in acquiring reasonable evidence for one’s theistic belief, the absence of which results in one’s inability to “see” such evidence, it follows that this weak fideist view can also incorporate the preceding views as well. Thus, adopting RE, theistic evidentialism and fideism all at once (ala Evans).

3.9. Key Difference Between Theistic Evidentialism and RE

The general focus in this paper will be between views that fall within the spectrum of theistic evidentialism or RE (or both). Hence, we will exclude thinking about fideism for the most part and in that vein, it might be helpful to now consider some of the primary differences between the two main views of focus before grappling with the actual positions in the Islamic tradition.

The first consideration concerns the nature of evidence. The “enlightenment” view taken up John Locke and Rene Descartes hold a very strict criteria on the nature of evidence. They think that the supporting evidence for our theistic beliefs: (1) cannot be properly basic (because only beliefs of the strictly logical and incorrigible kind can be properly basic on their *classical foundationalist* view) and (2) it must be strictly indubitable; deducible from self-evident propositions. On this view the reformed epistemologist is directly at odds with the theistic (hyper) evidentialist, for she maintains both that theistic belief may be properly basic and that the nature of the evidence need not be indubitable, but may rather be *defeasible*.⁵¹ However, as we have already seen if the theistic evidentialist widens the scope of evidence beyond the indubitable propositional kind to include experiences and seemings, neither of which need be *indefeasible*, then the reformed epistemologist can embrace such a view, holding that our basic theistic beliefs are grounded in some sense in our seemings or

⁵¹ Cf., Michael Bergmann. “Defeaters and Higher-Level Requirements”. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 55, (2005), 419-436, for a helpful overview of the concept of defeaters and defeasibility.

experiences and in conjunction with the fulfilment of some epistemic conditions for warrant say, then these theistic beliefs are evidentially supported and yet properly basic.

Yet, what about the debate over *internalism* or *externalism* concerning the nature of justification/warrant. Isn't the central divide between these two camps over this epistemic view? Aren't theistic evidentialists committed to the view that the subject must be aware in some sense, of the justifiers which confer justification on their theistic belief? Whereas, reformed epistemologists simply have it that the fulfilment of some conditions external to the subject's first-person purview is sufficient for justification/warrant? In fact, as Michael Bergmann points out this need not be the case.⁵² For instance, theistic evidentialists may adopt an *externalist* of warrant, but hold that humans lack some "cognitive faculty enabling them to see non-inferentially that God exists".⁵³ Similarly, a reformed epistemologist can adopt an *internalist* account of justification or warrant and theistic evidentialism. To put it slightly differently than before, she may think that humans do have a cognitive faculty (or combination of faculties) geared toward producing non-inferential (properly basic) beliefs about God, but hold that we must in some sense be *aware* of the supporting grounds on which this beliefs are grounded, perhaps akin to our perceptual beliefs. They need not require that the subject has some "awareness that the grounds are adequate" but that merely requiring "awareness of adequate grounds".⁵⁴ Therefore, we can see how one maybe both a reformed epistemologist and theistic evidentialist, whilst at the same time either view can adopt *internalism* or *externalism*, so beyond the first point of potential clash between the two groups, where does the central conflict lay?

It appears that the *primary* arena of conflict between these two positions then, concerns the question of whether there is or isn't some cognitive faculty (or combination of faculties) primed to produce basic theistic beliefs. For the theistic evidentialist who also adheres to an externalist account of justification and/or warrant, fails to fall into the category of a reformed epistemologist not essentially on grounds of his evidentialism, nor his externalism, but rather because she fails to recognise a cognitive faculty which

⁵² Michael Bergmann. "Epistemology of religious belief – recent developments". In *A Companion to Epistemology* eds. Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, and Matthias Steup (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 697-699.

⁵³ Ibid. 698.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 698.

produces non-inferential beliefs about God. Similarly, one who adheres to internalism on the nature of justification and/or warrant, whilst at the same time adopting theistic evidentialism in the broad sense, would be a reformed epistemologist only when she adopts the view that there is a faculty primed for basic theistic beliefs, in spite of her adoption of internalism and theistic evidentialism, which are both compatible with her view on RE.

As we come now to explore the views in the Islamic tradition this *essential* difference between the two groups may well turn out to be crucial in separating some of the positions therein. We ought also to remember that we will be primarily concerned with warrant vis-à-vis justification, simply because the classical Muslim theologians and philosophers were much more concerned with outlining some theory of knowledge simpliciter, and as has already been made clear, it is warrant that is sufficient for knowledge not justification, although the latter may be necessary (at least this is an open question). Nevertheless, where and when it can be done, I will also see if there is a possibility that we can find in some of the classical views which hints at a distinction between warrant and justification, or otherwise where I think we can try to develop one.

Finally, although proponents of RE and theistic evidentialism may adopt either an *internalist* or *externalist* position on justification or warrant, most advocates of RE are *externalists* and most advocates of theistic evidentialism are *internalists*. Hence, we cannot overlook this distinction, it will be vital to understanding some of the epistemological differences between the views we will explore.

CHAPTER IV

‘ABD AL-JABBĀR & THE DUTY TO REASON

In turning to the Mu’tazila and the general epistemic positions taken up by this theological school concerning the epistemology of theistic belief, we are turning to the first major school of *kalām* in the Islamic tradition, often depicted by orientalist scholars of Islam as the true ‘free-thinking rationalists’ who emphasised reason over scripture in all matters. Indeed, there is an element of truth to fact that the Mu’tazila laid a great deal of emphasis on reason which sometimes appeared to make revelation superfluous in their overall systematic world-view, but at the same time it isn’t entirely accurate. Nevertheless, the Mu’tazila as ‘men of rational discourse’ primed themselves on account of rationalizing Islamic doctrine and defending their view of Islam from opposing theological and religious traditions. It is in part due to their concern for the claims made by other faith groups, that facilitated the Mu’tazila to uphold a central notion known as *wujūb al-naẓar* or the duty/obligation to reason,⁵⁵ which is hugely important in determining or appreciating their approach to the sorts of conditions a believer may have to fulfil for his faith (*īmān*) to be justified or warranted.

The central Mu’tazilite figure which we intend to draw on – who embodies and outlines the principles of this distinct theological school – is Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025). ‘Abd al-Jabbar was, according to contemporary scholars, “a systematic theologian devoted to *kalām* and to Mu’tazilite doctrine, whose greatest accomplishment was cataloguing the views of the more creative members of his school” (Reynolds 2005). Yet, at the same time, ‘Abd al-Jabbar was clearly very much an *intellectual* in his own right, as is particularly evident from his views on ethics.⁵⁶ In a small treatise which

⁵⁵ Cf., Ayman Shihadeh. “The existence of God”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 199, on the Mu’tazilite position on the duty to “theological reflection.

⁵⁶ Cf., George Hourani. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ‘Abd al-Jabbār* (Oxford University Press, 1971).

typifies the principles of the Mu'tazilite school, namely; *Kitāb al-uṣūl al-khamṣa*, 'Abd al-Jabbar begins the treatise on epistemic terms concerning the knowledge of God on the obligation to arrive at knowledge of Him through discursive reasoning. According to 'Abd al-Jabbar, the first duty that God has imposed upon his creatures is; “discursive reasoning (*al-naẓar*) which leads to knowledge of God, because He is not known necessarily (*darūratan*) nor by the senses (*bi'l-mushāhada*). Thus, He must be known by reflection and speculation”.⁵⁷ Let us try to unpack this statement.

4.1. Naẓar & Discursive Reasoning

Consider first what 'Abd al-Jabbar and the Mu'tazilites mean by speculative or discursive reason (*al-naẓar*) which they consider to be the source of our knowledge about God and the method by which this obligation or duty is to be fulfilled. By *al-naẓar* the Mu'tazila and *mutakallimūn* more generally mean speculative reasoning. But more precisely, the term *naẓar* in the context of *kalām* “receives the dialectical meaning of ‘reflection’, ‘rational discursive thinking’ [and] it is seen as an obligation of man”.⁵⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbār on *naẓar*: “there is nothing in acquired knowledge (*'ilm muktasab*) the basis of which is not attributable to *al-naẓar*.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, he states that the term-*naẓar* has different meanings, for instance; (i) turning the iris (*ḥadqa*) towards the sight in order to see it; (ii) mercy and kindness/benevolence (*al-raḥmān to al-iḥsān*), (iii) the view of the heart (*naẓar al-qalb*), and (iv) waiting (*intizār*). It is however the third meaning that takes the place of *naẓar* in the theological context for 'Abd al-Jabbār. More precisely he defines *naẓar* in this sense as *fikr* (thinking), and by this he means; “contemplating (*ta'ammul*) the condition of a thing and comparison between it and others, or comparison between occurrences (*ḥāditha*) with others that came into existence.”⁶⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbar divides *naẓar* into two types: (a) concerning worldly affairs (*umūr al-dunyā*) i.e., trade, medicine, crafts, and (b) concerning religious affairs (*umūr al-dīn*). On the latter he divides those affairs into: (b1) searching for true knowledge based on sound evidence (*dalīl*), and (b2) defending religious doctrine from

⁵⁷ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-'adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), XI, 310-11.

⁵⁸ Tj. De Boer and H. Daiber. “Naẓar”. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Brill, 2021), 634.

⁵⁹ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-'adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), II, 38.

⁶⁰ Ibid. II, 45.

its adversaries.⁶¹ The process of *nazar* is taken up by the *'aql* (discussed below), in the pursuit of obtaining knowledge (*'ilm*). For 'Abd al-Jabbar knowledge (*'ilm*) is defined in the following terms:

What our sheikhs (may God have mercy upon them) says about knowledge is that it is of the genus of belief. When the belief is related to the object as it is, and occurs in a way that necessitates repose of the mind (*sukūn al-nafs*), it is knowledge (*'ilm*). When it is related to the object *as it is not*, it is ignorance. When it is related to it in a way that confirms it, *but does not* necessitate repose of the mind, it is neither knowledge nor ignorance.⁶²

What is particularly interesting about this definition of the knowledge is the obvious phenomenological concomitant component: namely the idea that knowledge itself is recognised and obtained, *only* when the consequent *experience* of its obtainment is felt within the mind. Thus, 'Abd al-Jabbār has it that, knowledge contains both an objective and a subjective element, namely “(a) an intellectual content corresponding to reality in the manner of truth, and (b) an emotional state of satisfaction and tranquillity. Both characteristics are necessary to constitute knowledge”. According to George Hourani, 'Abd al-Jabbār in setting out knowledge in the following terms, recognises the distinction between what would be a ‘mere-true-belief’ and knowledge. He states that the latter part of the above definition demonstrates that, “(a) the content can exist without producing (b) the state of mind ... A person may happen to have a true belief in reality as it is, as a result of mere good luck or following sound authority; but in this case he will be no different from persons who have mere opinions or doubts. None of them has the tranquillity of mind that comes to the knower (XII. 17). For the latter ‘it is not possible to doubt what he knows. He is not affected by what affects those who have opinion or good luck’ (XII. 36).”⁶³ The idea is that, the knower has a *ma'nā*, namely “intrinsic causal determinant of the thing being-so”,⁶⁴ or simply the proper ‘ground’ or causal connection which is lacking in the case of the one who doesn’t know. Interestingly, Rosenthal recognises that the early definitions of *'ilm* among the *mutakallimūn* (including 'Abd al-Jabbār), are primarily “based on the assumption that the *explanation of a subjective mental (psychological) process in its relationship to the*

⁶¹ Ibid. II, 49.

⁶² Ibid. III, 112-113.

⁶³ George Hourani. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 52-54.

⁶⁴ Richard M. Frank. “*Al-ma'nā*: Some Reflections on the Technical Meanings of the Term in the Kalām and Its Use in the Physics of Mu'ammār”. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, (1967), 250.

objective, the mastery of concrete data, somehow suffices to grasp the nature of knowledge.”⁶⁵ Indeed, this as we have suggested, seems to be evident in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s own definition. Elsewhere, ‘Abd al-Jabbār does explicitly state that knowledge is the “*ma’nā* which produces tranquillity of the knower’s soul with respect to what he obtained”.⁶⁶ Kambiz Ghaneabassiri explains in a similar fashion to Richard Frank and Hourani that ‘Abd al-Jabbār is referring to what could be translated as “entitative ground.”⁶⁷ The entity in question would appear to refer to something *internal* to the subject. To a particular state (*hāl*) in the human soul which, when achieved, indicates that knowledge has been grasped.

4.2. Istidlāl & ‘Ilm Muktasab vs. ‘Ilm Ḍarūrī

Although it is not all that clear, given the general approach of the *kalām* tradition it appears that this ‘ground’ would be sought or obtained through the process of *nazar*, which is characteristically seen as the ‘*aql*’s process of discursive reasoning by making an inference from the *dalīl* (sign; indicant) to the correspondent *madlūl* (indicated; signified). To be clear the term *dalīl* can be defined simply as “evidence that is or can be used to draw [an inference to] a conclusion”.⁶⁸ However, in being more precise who must state that *dalīl* is an “ambiguous term” such that “it can mean sign or indication, every proof through the inference of a cause from its effect or the inference of the universal from the particular in opposition to the proof from a strictly deductive syllogism in which the particular is deduced from the universal; and finally it is used as synonymous with proof ... [i.e.,] *burhān* generally”.⁶⁹ (Encyclopaedia of Islam 2000). For the *mutakallimūn* however;

... *dalīl* is not a proof in the Aristotelian sense of the word, an ἀπόδειξις, *burhān*, as the *falāsifa* would have said; it is not a demonstration scheme, a methodical set of argumentation like a

⁶⁵ Franz Rosenthal. *Knowledge Triumphant: The concept of knowledge in medieval Islam* (Brill, 2007), 51.

⁶⁶ Qādī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), IV, 78.

⁶⁷ Kambiz Ghaneabassiri. “The Epistemological Foundation of Conceptions of Justice in Classical Kalam: A Study of Abd al-Jabbar’s al-Mughni and Ibn al-Baqillani’s al-Tamhid”. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 19 (2008), 81.

⁶⁸ Richard M. Frank, Mark R. Woodward and Dwi S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu’tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oneworld Publications, 1997), 110.

⁶⁹ S. van den Bergh “Dalīl”. In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (Brill, 2021), 313.

syllogism, for instance, or an induction; it is only a sign or an indication, in the literal sense of the word.⁷⁰

The process of constructing an evidence through an inference involving a *dalīl* to the *madlūl* e.g. inferring from an observation of smoke (the indicant; *dalīl*) that there is a fire (the indicated; *madlūl*) is referred as *istidlāl* and the inference is “only possible when there is some connection (*ta'alluq*) between *dalīl* and *madlūl*.”⁷¹ So does this mean that knowledge in all cases is only achieved through discursive reasoning in ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s Mu’tazilite epistemology? No. This is because ‘Abd al-Jabbār like other *kalām* theologians makes an important distinction between necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) and acquired knowledge (*‘ilm muktasab*), it is only the case of the latter where the discursive reasoning is essential, so we ought to consider this distinction to get a clearer picture on what ‘Abd al-Jabbar understands knowledge to be in the fullest sense of the term and then how this ties in to the question of knowledge of God and the duty to arrive at knowledge of Him through a process of reasoning (*naẓar*).

For ‘Abd al-Jabbar *‘ilm ḍarūrī* appears to mean that knowledge which “a man cannot repudiate through doubt, or as knowledge which occurs in man but not from himself” and he suggests that such knowledge is “produced [within man] by God”.⁷² ‘Abd al-Jabbār divides necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) into three distinct components: (1) knowledge which occurs to man before the occurrence of any other knowledge i.e., (1a) knowledge of one’s own states, like his ‘being willing’ or ‘thinking’, (1b) knowledge which is based on experience – “knowledge of the connection between the act and its agent and of the ethical judgement of acts”,⁷³ (1c) knowledge not grounded in experience and which holds that either of two alternatives is the case: “knowledge that an essence is either existent or non-existent and that an existent is either eternal or temporal”.⁷⁴ The second broad category of necessary knowledge for ‘Abd al-Jabbār is (2) knowledge which obtains in virtue of some means. For instance; (2a) knowledge perceptible particulars (*mudrakāt*) which is the result of (sense) perception (*idrāk*), and (2b) knowledge by mass transmission (*khabr mutawātur*).⁷⁵ The third category of *‘ilm*

⁷⁰ Josef van Ess. *Kleine Schriften* (Brill, 2018), 243.

⁷¹ Ibid. 245.

⁷² Binyamin Abrahamov. “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology”. *British Society* 20, (1993), 21.

⁷³ Ibid. 24.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 25.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 25.

ḍarūrī is; (3) knowledge which obtains through what resembles a means. By this ‘Abd al-Jabbār is referring to for example the knowledge that God is knowing which cannot be known without first knowing that He exists, and in knowledge of His existence is the means which necessitates knowledge that He is knowing.

In contrast to necessary knowledge, acquired knowledge (*‘ilm muktasab*) is understood by ‘Abd al-Jabbār to mean knowledge which comes as a consequence of an effort of reasoning to a conclusion, it obtains through a process of rational inquiry. Crucially then it requires some form of ‘proof’ as the ‘ground’ to access this sort of knowledge. As ‘Abd al-Jabbār puts it, “rational inquiry necessitates or leads to knowledge *only* when it depends on proof/evidence (*dalīl*).”⁷⁶ At the heart of his understanding of proper knowledge obtained through reasoning is the notion of ‘effort’ in the process, that is, if a man “made the right kind of effort he would attain knowledge, but he makes it in the wrong way. The cause of this deviation is a desire to support a previous erroneous belief, ‘either on account of tradition or convention or growing up in it, or for ambition, or to obtain benefit or repel harm’”.⁷⁷ The clear distinction between knowledge which is ‘necessary’ and knowledge which is ‘acquired’ is the *immediacy* of the knowledge obtained in the case of the former, and the excursion of effort by way of rational speculation in the latter. Evidently, the category of knowledge which is deemed to be acquired knowledge, is all those sorts of knowledge we may have that is not known ‘necessarily’, crucially to note is knowledge of theism, which isn’t classified as a case of *‘ilm ḍarūrī*. What is also important to bear in mind at this point is that in virtue of the ‘necessary’ – ‘acquired’ distinction, ‘Abd al-Jabbār thus grants the basic ‘foundationalist’ thesis that there can be *noninferentially* justified beliefs. But let us turn back to quote at the start of this expedition in understanding As ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s theory of knowledge, pertaining to theistic belief more specifically.

Recall that ‘Abd al-Jabbār considers knowledge of God as being outside of the category of necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*), in his words “He is not known intuitively (*ḍarūratān*) nor by the senses (*bi’l-mushāhada*). Thus, He must be known by reflection

⁷⁶ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), IV, 202.

⁷⁷ George Hourani. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of ‘Abd al-Jabbār* (Oxford University Press, 1971), 27.

and speculation (*al-naẓar*).⁷⁸ Now, this process of *al-naẓar* is defined or understood in this context to mean, “the way to knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) by virtue of that which is signified (*al-madlūl*) in the sense that [the signified] necessitates and generates [the knowledge]”.⁷⁹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār in outlining the types of evidence (*al-adilla*) upon which it is incumbent on man to speculate in reaching knowledge of theism, states that, “there are four [kinds of evidence]: purely reasoned evidence (*hujjat al-‘aql*), scripture (*al-kitāb*) ... and consensus (*ijma’*).”⁸⁰ Yet, crucially theistic knowledge “can *only* be gained by speculating with purely reasoned evidence, because if we do not [first] know that He is truth we will not know the authenticity of the Book [i.e., Qur’an], the Sunna and communal consensus.”⁸¹ He goes on to add that the evidence by which discursive reason leads to knowledge of God is knowledge of “my own being [or self; *nafs*] and what I observe about [physical] bodies.”⁸² ‘Abd al-Jabbār thus argues that his own being is a *dalīl* (indication) of God - the *madlūl* in this case (i.e., that which is being indicated) because, he says; “I find my own being in a state of perfection, and it is impossible for me to create something like myself or some parts of myself. Thus, *a fortiori*, as I am unable in my original state of being a drop of sperm to create myself, I know that I have a creator and designer who is good, and who is other than me, and He is God.”⁸³ He continues by explaining that, this constitutes evidence of God because one knows that “bodies must have motion, rest, contiguity and separation, and these things are caused [i.e. temporally originate] (*muḥdatha*). Thus, bodies must be caused since transitory things (*al-ḥawādith*) are not eternal” – therefore: given that I am a body I must have a cause (God).⁸⁴

4.3. Taqlīd & Wujūb al-Naẓar

Thus, for ‘Abd al-Jabbar knowledge of God pertains to matters which are acquired by the use of discursive reasoning, primarily from the indicants observed in the empirical world to a Creator of the world as a whole, starting from himself is the first fundamental

⁷⁸ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), IV, 248.

⁷⁹ Richard M. Frank, Mark R. Woodward and Dwi S. Atmaja. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu’tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oneworld Publications, 1997), 134.

⁸⁰ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), VI, 33.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* VI, 143.

⁸² *Ibid.* VI, 160.

⁸³ *Ibid.* VI, 162.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* VII, 14-15.

indicant. But what is also crucial to consider in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s epistemic scheme and the Mu’tazilites insistence on the duty to reason to knowledge of God, beyond the point that such knowledge is not within the realms of *‘ilm ḍarūrī* is also in virtue of the condemnation of *taqlīd*. *Taqlīd* is understood roughly as ‘blind imitation or following’, its primary use in the Islamic tradition is within jurisprudence (*fiqh*) which concerns whether the lay Muslim can extract Islamic rulings himself or whether he is permitted to do *taqlīd* of a jurist (and jurisprudential school) and hence become a *muqallid* or follower without having to extract the evidences for his religious practises himself. In the context of *īmān* or faith the *mutakallimūn* unanimously condemned *īmān al-muqallid* or the faith of the blind follower, arguing on both scriptural and theological grounds that such faith is invalid epistemically unjustified. ‘Abd al-Jabbār defined *taqlīd* as; “accepting the words of someone else without demanding from him a proof or evidence, so he uses it like a necklace (*qilāda*) around his neck.”⁸⁵ In a short treatise, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī uṣūl al-Dīn*, he reiterates that the first duty upon man is “speculation and reflection which leads to the knowledge of God.”⁸⁶ Here he defends this principle by arguing in the following way;

The learned man knows that there are people who are wrong in their speculation (*yukht’u*) and others who are right (*yuṣību*), however each of them claims that he is right. Why, then, is the *taqlīd* of one of them better than the *taqlīd* of the other? Why is the *taqlīd* of the believer in God’s unity (*tawḥīd*) better than the *taqlīd* of the unbeliever?⁸⁷

‘Abd al-Jabbar goes on to add that this demonstrates the “incorrectness of *taqlīd* and proves that the truth cannot be known through [blindly following] people.”⁸⁸ Crucially according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār then is the ‘problem of diversity’ as per religious and theological claims which he suggests cannot be differentiated without rational speculation. The *muqallid* would be in danger of blindly following what is false if *taqlīd* is his method to obtain religious truth. Indeed, ‘Abd al-Jabbār states that, if the religious believer recognises that “it is impossible that all these [differing] systems of thought should be right – for each contradicts the other – [he will then know that] there are systems which are right and others which are wrong.”⁸⁹ But then if he knows this, he must also recognise that if he adopts the method of *taqlīd* then he has just as much

⁸⁵ Ibid. VII, 78-79.

⁸⁶ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī uṣūl al-Dīn* (Cairo, 1968), 12.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 14.

⁸⁸ Ibid. 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 16-17

chance (if not even less so) in landing at the true system of thought as he does in landing or arriving at the false one.

Significantly, ‘Abd al-Jabbār makes the point that knowledge of the basic religious truth (i.e., God’s existence) is not a case of necessary knowledge (*‘ilm darūrī*) because if it were then “[all] the learned people would hold the same notions and would not differ concerning them.”⁹⁰ Here he seems to be suggesting that necessary knowledge is something which is held universally and is known to us in virtue of our humanity it is not something we obtain through reasoning. He explains this in another when he states that:

Knowing God is not immediately known but acquired (*iktisāb*) for two reasons: (i) knowing God occurs depending on our reflection (*naẓarinā*) in a constant way (*ṭarīqa wāḥida*). Therefore, it must be generated from our reflection. Since reflection is our action, knowing God is also from our action; for the agent of the cause is also the agent of the effect. Since knowing God is from our actions; therefore, it is not immediate knowledge, because immediate knowledge occurs in us not from our actions. (ii) Knowing God occurs based on our intentions and our motives, and it is denied based on our dislike and our aversion.⁹¹

Here ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues on the basis of the Mu’tazila theory of action – namely that human agents (*fā’il*) are the creators of their acts – that our knowledge of God is a human ‘product’ rather than the immediate knowledge that God instils within his creatures. Given that our theistic knowledge is entirely predicated on human acts, it is within the ‘hands’ of human agents themselves to *control* this knowledge, hence their ability to stifle it or reject it, this is not the case with immediate knowledge, it cannot be repelled. Similarly, he seems to be suggesting that if knowledge of God were immediate, which is to say is created within man by God, then it precludes human agents from any moral responsibility about that belief in Him. In that case the unbeliever’s lack of knowledge in God is not a fault of their own, but merely the result of God not instilling such knowledge within them, and hence they would be excused, this was not possible for a Mu’tazilite like ‘Abd al-Jabbār who emphasised the necessity of punishment for disbelief as being an intrinsic part of God’s justice (*‘adl*).

‘Abd al-Jabbār further argues that the *muqallid* can either know the truth of the *muqallad* (i.e., what or who he makes *taqlīd* of) through: (a) immediate knowledge;

⁹⁰ Ibid. 18.

⁹¹ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), IV, 240.

which cannot be the case because if it were so then all people would agree on such a matter, (b) through another act of *taqlīd*; which is either through following the most pious person, or following the majority of people. In the case of the latter, he claims that piety *per se* is not a demonstration or sign of truth (even other religious groups have pious people he suggests), likewise what the majority agree on is not necessarily what is true. Thus, it is left to (c) something other than *taqlīd* and immediate knowledge, the only candidate is for it to be knowledge that is acquired through proofs (*adilla*): a proof which moves from an analogy from the observable world to what is unseen (*istidlāl bi al-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib*).

4.4. Mu’tazilism and Contemporary Religious Epistemology

In reflecting on the above discussions, we now want to see where the classical Mu’tazilite position as occupied by ‘Abd al-Jabbār stands in the context of the different epistemological positions in the contemporary discourse concerning theistic/religious belief. Before attempting to look at general theory of knowledge, and some thesis on justification/warrant, it will be helpful to consider which of the three generic groupings the Mu’tazila position falls into (be that one or more than one of them). For starters it is plausible to rule out the classical Mu’tazilī position exemplified by ‘Abd al-Jabbār, as falling into the spectrum of fideism (strong-moderate-weak). This is because taken in its strongest sense, fideism holds that theistic belief may be rationally held even when one’s total evidence suggests that its contrary (atheism) is true. For ‘Abd al-Jabbār theistic belief appears to be rational only through the evidential support it gains from rational evidence (*dalīl ‘aqlī*) in relation to the proposition of theism. Even in its weaker form, where fideists may hold that a voluntaristic step into faith is sufficient for a subject to reasonably accept theistic belief (given the cognitive advantages faith gives in taking one out of the damages caused by sin), this wouldn’t seem to fit either. ‘Abd al-Jabbār clearly holds that knowledge in a universally objective sense, is the basis of theistic and Islamic belief, faith (or the putting of trust) in one’s religious views be akin to an inappropriate act of *taqlīd* for ‘Abd al-Jabbār and the ‘problem of religious diversity’ would remain. Moreover, as we have seen it is the notion of *evidence* which is so central to the Mu’tazili view ‘Abd al-Jabbār adopts, that it is quite obvious he falls into the theistic evidentialist camp. But we ought to make this more explicit, as well as

consider the epistemological framework in which he relates evidence, knowledge and theism together coherently.

As we saw earlier, according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār it is “discursive reasoning (*al-naẓar*) which leads to knowledge of God, because He is not known necessarily (*ḍarūratan*) nor by the senses (*bi’l-mushāhada*).”⁹² Crucially, theistic knowledge according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “can *only* be gained by speculating with purely reasoned evidence.”⁹³ Now, in saying as much, ‘Abd al-Jabbār has clearly adopted a theistic evidentialist position and importantly he has excluded theistic belief from being among the products of ‘*ilm ḍarūrī* and instead recognised knowledge of theism as being a category of our acquired knowledge (*‘ilm muktasab*). Before considering the nature of this evidentialism, we must consider more closely the *ḍarūrī/muktasab* distinction again. As we suggested previously, in holding certain forms of knowledge as being *ḍarūrī*, ‘Abd al-Jabbār is holding that some beliefs (sufficient for knowledge) are *properly basic*. That is, they can be justified (or warranted) for the subject in question, without being based on any other beliefs and they are something that the subject comes to know in the immediate way. In outlining the types of necessary knowledge (or properly basic beliefs) that he accepts into a proper noetic structure, ‘Abd al-Jabbār upholds a classical foundationalist position on the structure of justification pertaining to our beliefs. In fact more precisely, he upholds “ancient and medieval foundationalism.”⁹⁴

What is distinctive about these forms of foundationalism (as opposed to just foundationalism simpliciter), are the types of beliefs accepted to be among those that are foundational (properly basic; *ḍarūrī*). The ancient/medieval foundationalist (like ‘Abd al-Jabbār), holds that the “self-evident truths of reason” and “what is *evident* to the senses” (as well as generally “incorrigible” beliefs about one’s own mental states) are among the *properly basic* beliefs of a proper noetic structure.⁹⁵ This differs only slightly from the classical (modern) foundationalist who “rejects what is *evident* to the senses in favor of what *appears* to the senses.”⁹⁶ This shift is taken in light of modern

⁹² Ibid. VI, 65.

⁹³ Ibid. VI, 76.

⁹⁴ Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr. *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga* (State University of New York Press, 1991), 181.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 182

⁹⁶ Ibid. 182.

scepticism with the aim to make sure our basic beliefs are immune from doubt. Perhaps one may be wrong about what it is they see ‘out-there’ in front of them, but they cannot be wrong about what *appears* to them as they see it, thus the “incorrigibility” of these sorts of beliefs are supposed to add further support to the certitude of the beliefs foundational to any justified chain of beliefs. Nonetheless, it may be justified in coining both types as classical foundationalism, and this we shall do for convenience. Given that ‘Abd al-Jabbar accepts only those beliefs which are roughly (1) incorrigible beliefs about one’s mental states, (2) sensory experiences, and (3) logical truths, and (4) the addition of *khbr mutawātur*, he broadly fits into the classical foundationalist framework with some slight modification on the latter point. Nonetheless, he sharply restricts those propositions which could be justifiably held on the basic way. Crucially of course, theistic belief is one of those types that is being excluded.

Given this background with can turn back to the nature of the theistic evidentialism ‘Abd al-Jabbār upholds (as we are clear that his foundationalist picture requires this sort of evidentialism). Does ‘Abd al-Jabbār uphold a sort of “hyperevidentialist” view where only propositional evidence is sufficient in the context of theistic belief and that such evidence must be indubitable in some sense? Perhaps ‘Abd al-Jabbār upholds something like the following:

4.5. A Generalized Hyperevidentialist Argument⁹⁷

1. Epistemic evidentialism: Belief B is justified for S at t if and only if S’s evidence sufficiently supports B at t (where the general criteria for what counts as evidence for religious beliefs are the same as the criteria for what counts as evidence for non-religious beliefs).
2. Selective Account of Evidence: S’s evidence consists entirely of propositions that have feature F [i.e. a feature that only properly basic beliefs have].
3. Particular theological thesis: The proposition that God exists does not have F.
From thesis it follows that
4. The proposition that God exists is not part of S’s evidence. (from 2 & 3).

⁹⁷ Chris Tweedt and Trent Dougherty. “Religious Epistemology”. *Philosophy Compass* 108, (2015), 555.

5. Hyperevidentialism: If S's belief that God exists is justified, it is sufficiently supported by other propositions (i.e. it is supported inferentially). (from 1 & 4).

The idea here is that, an 'evidentialist-foundationalist' has it that only *properly basic beliefs* are immune from requiring some inference to ground their justification (or warrant). Now, S's properly basic beliefs ought to have some feature F (be that a classical foundationalist feature or otherwise), and theistic belief lacks such a feature. Therefore, theistic belief – if it is to be held justifiably – has to be based on some other propositions i.e. it must be a non-basic belief. In order to see if 'Abd al-Jabbār would surely uphold something like the above, it is important that we get clearer on whether evidence at the basic level may be extended in the case of theism to allow it *properly basic* status (although this does seem unlikely given what we have seen concerning his apparent classical foundationalist picture thus far).

According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, properly grounded theistic belief (and by extension Islamic faith) rests essentially on *adilla* (evidences) which support it. It appears that these sorts of evidences are of a propositional kind, although they need not be indubitable syllogisms, the sort of which the *falāsifa* took to be full-proof demonstrations. But then that opens an important question on the nature of evidence for 'Abd al-Jabbar's Mu'tazilite thesis here: what counts as sufficient evidence to justify theistic belief? To what extent could experience, seemings and intuition be at work here? Well, 'Abd al-Jabbar does define knowledge in a way that involves some sort of phenomenological seeming perhaps, he states that "when the belief is related to the object as it is, and occurs in a way that necessitates repose of the mind (*sukūn al-nafs*), it is knowledge ('*ilm*)." ⁹⁸ So perhaps theistic belief could be knowledge (in the sense of it being JTB) when coupled with a really strong seeming, and hence be among our properly basic beliefs after all? This is perhaps a little too hasty, because we have to ask: what exactly is necessary or required for the concomitant "repose of mind" coupled with true-belief to occur in the case of one's theistic/religious beliefs? As pointed out earlier, for 'Abd al-Jabbar this repose of mind is due to what he refers to as a *ma'nā*,

⁹⁸ Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa al-'adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), V, 23.

namely an “intrinsic causal determinant of the thing being-so”.⁹⁹ In the case of theistic belief, as we have seen, it seems that only some form of rational inference is sufficient to meet this standard (but it is not entirely clear why, and we shall attempt to address this issue in relation to a causal theory of knowledge in later sections). As we have seen, for ‘Abd al-Jabbār, “rational inquiry necessitates or leads to knowledge *only* when it depends on proof/evidence (*dalīl*)”¹⁰⁰ and given that he is quite clear concerning the acquired (as opposed to necessary) nature of theistic knowledge, and given the notion *dalīl* as consisting of inferences (internally accessible to a subject), theistic belief (and by extension Islamic belief) could not be among those that are *properly basic*. Hence, it seems that ‘Abd al-Jabbār would in fact uphold something like the following “generalized hyperevidentialist argument” cited above.

What is left to consider is more precisely however, is the nature of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s general theory stipulating the conditions for knowledge and the place for reformed epistemology in his account. For now we may speculate that ‘Abd al-Jabbār upholds something like the JTB account as describing the conditions for knowledge (i.e. warrant), but with perhaps some additional condition(s). Given the Mu’tazilite insistence on the notion of *wujub al-naẓar*, which ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues (given the Mu’tazilite theory of action), that it is up to the human agents themselves to *control* our beliefs and knowledge in some sense (although this is not supposedly the case with immediate knowledge, it cannot be repelled). Acquired knowledge depends on our own efforts to search for the proper evidence and to act in accordance with our *epistemic duties* and to fulfil the ethical requirements of reasonable belief. Of course this raises the crucial question as to whether or not beliefs (or knowledge) is in some sense under our control or not. That is, whether they are or are not voluntary (i.e. ‘doxastic voluntarism’). And the distinction that ‘Abd al-Jabbār makes between necessary and acquired knowledge on this front is something we will consider later, but it turns out that the idea seems to be (at least in relation to acquired knowledge like theistic knowledge) that justification consists in something very much like the *deontological* meaning taken up by the “enlightenment” philosophers of the Western tradition. Consequently, it looks as if ‘Abd al-Jabbār is holding something like the JTB position.

⁹⁹ Richard M. Frank. “*Al-ma’nà*: Some Reflections on the Technical Meanings of the Term in the Kalâm and Its Use in the Physics of Mu’ammār”. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87, (1967), 252.

¹⁰⁰ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawhīd wa al-‘adl: al-Taklīf* (Cairo: n.d.), V, 47.

Yet, given the fact that he makes a distinction in regards to epistemic responsibility depending on whether the belief in question is necessary or acquired, perhaps there is a bit more at play here. To this we return to the concept of *ma'na*.

4.6. Ma'na & Causal Accounts of Knowledge

As we have seen, the epistemic role of *ma'na* acts as the “intrinsic causal determinant of the thing being-so”, this leads to the potential to open up a sort of “causal theory of knowledge” in ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s epistemology. A general ‘causal theory’ might go something that the following:¹⁰¹

- (a) *p* is true
- (b) *S* believes that *p*;
- (c) *S*’s belief that *p* is caused by the fact that *p*.

The idea is that the *fact* of *p* being is in some sense causally connected to the belief that *p*. suppose you see a glass of water in front of you and form that corresponding belief that it is indeed in front of you. The fact that the water is in front of you, *causes* your belief that it is. If this causing or causal connection is *appropriate* in the epistemic sense you may be said to *know* and hence your belief would have warrant. The idea of the causal connection being appropriate adds another condition (d) to brief account noted above. Consider another example: suppose a volcano erupts which causes lava to cover the surrounding environment/land, this may cause a subject to *infer* that an eruption occurred without them actually witnessing it themselves. Here then, unlike the first example, we have a non-basic inferentially held belief.

Now, this account of knowledge may make sense of what *ma'na* in the epistemic scheme upheld by ‘Abd al-Jabbār. For one thing, it can make sense of the fact that according to ‘Abd al-Jabbār, if knowledge of God were immediate it precludes human agents from any moral responsibility in holding that belief. This is because such a belief is simply *caused* within the subject such that they know that belief in question and

¹⁰¹ Cf., Alvin Goldman. “A Causal Theory of Knowing”. *The Journal of Philosophy* 64, (1967), 357-372, for this normative epistemological theory.

hence do not require any further seeking of evidence. So certain beliefs can be sufficient for knowledge because they have the right or appropriate causal connection to the fact. However, in cases of acquired knowledge, perhaps what is appropriate may include some seeking of reasons or construction of inference and so there is epistemic responsibility involved. Yet, according to someone like Alvin Goldman (the original proponent of this thesis), it is not that the seeking of reasons (or traditional justification) here that confers warrant of the belief, but simply that a proper inference say, was the appropriate causal process by which such a belief arises. However, one may add this justification condition in order to get at the intuition of epistemic responsibility being important for rational believing when the belief in question is not a basic one, and this would seem to be important for ‘Abd al-Jabbār. Therefore, we may speculate that for ‘Abd al-Jabbār a belief is sufficient for knowledge when *darūrī* if it merely fulfils the conditions (a)-(d), but when the knowledge is *muktasab* it requires the fulfilment of condition (e) which is something like a traditional *deontological* justification requirement (perhaps to *know* that I have the appropriate causal connection?). What bearing then does this have for this classical Mu’tazilite position and reformed epistemology?

As suggested previously (in reference to Bergmann) it seems that the *primary* issue of conflict between theistic evidentialists (for which we see ‘Abd al-Jabbār to be one) and reformed epistemologists, is whether there is a particular faculty for forming theistic/religious beliefs such that believing the in theism can be warranted in the basic way. Now, in the case at hand, if there were such a faculty it might mean that an appropriate causal connection between belief and fact is ensured in a basic way, without the need for inference or argument. On ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s scheme however, it seems he is quite clear that no such faculty exists for an appropriate formation of theistic (and Islamic beliefs) in basic fashion. Therefore, for a subject to be warranted in holding their theistic and Islamic beliefs it must include inference or argument of sorts, because this is the only way that the belief and fact are causally connected in an appropriate manner, and so reformed epistemology would not as things stand be able to fit within this Mu’tazilite scheme. Yet, that being said, the potential for an externalist theory of warrant here will become hugely important when we consider the four differing theological positions in the latter sections and the return of the reformed epistemological issue. These matters do indeed require further research into the primary

source materials and so should be treated as tentative, as opposed to conclusive conclusions on the matter. Nevertheless, they are not without good reason and so present us with prima facie grounds for treating this religious epistemological position in the way that we have thus far done. For now, however, we shall move on to consider classical Ash'arism.



CHAPTER V

CLASSICAL ASH'ARISM: 'ILM VS. TAQLĪD

In this section the aim is to continue the discussion concerning the epistemology of theistic belief among the *mutakallimūn* by turning our attention to the more 'orthodox' strands within Islamic theology, and thus to the first Sunni school of *kalām*: Ash'arism. In doing so we aim to restrict ourselves to the 'classical' period (*mutaqiddimūn*) of the school i.e., from Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'arī to al-Juwaynī, hence excluding the post Juwaynīan period (*muta'akhhirūn*) of Imam al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, which would deserve a much more extensive study than we are able to develop given the limitations we are under. Nonetheless, a study of classical Ash'ari thought on the topic probably more or less draws out the positions later Ash'aris adopted as well.

Perhaps a good point to start this discussion would be to return to the original Mu'tazilite thesis of *wujūb al-naẓar* or the duty of reasoning to the existence of God in order to properly consolidate one's faith (*īmān*). Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'arī as a former Mu'tazilite himself, in his zeal to restrain the limits of faith within close proximity to 'Hanbalite orthodoxy' sought to defend the doctrines of the traditional understanding of faith and religion on rational grounds. Yet, nevertheless in the process of doing so, he carried with him certain remnants of Mu'tazilite thinking that were alien to Hanbalite scripturalism. Indeed, one of these 'remnants' was the presumption that faith must be grounded on reason and mere *taqlīd* was an unacceptable route properly ground assent (*taṣdīq*) to belief in the doctrines of Islam. However, given the broader meta-ethical distinctions between what came to be Ash'arism vis-à-vis Mu'tazilism meant that the way in which al-Ash'arī viewed the obligation or duty to reason was somewhat different. In the case of the latter they thought that this obligation came in virtue of reason itself in the sense that reason had reached an *objective* conclusion about ethical norms which are binding in the real world. In contrast, the 'ethical voluntarism' of the Ash'arites meant that they viewed this obligation as binding only in virtue of a *shar'ī*

divine command.¹⁰² Hence, the obligation itself is not a rational-moral necessity *qua* necessity for the Ash'arites, but nevertheless as we will come to see, is still central to their views on the epistemology of theistic-religious belief.

5.1. Īmān as Taṣdīq

According to al-Ash'arī, *īmān* or faith is fundamentally a question of *taṣdīq* (assent), that is, to assent to what another proposes which oneself then henceforth holds to be true. Roughly two interpretations of what al-Ash'arī is said to have meant by *taṣdīq* has been reported and come down to us. In the first case al-Ash'arī, it is simply said to refer to the aforementioned understanding of assent.¹⁰³ In the second al-Ash'arī, it is said to mean that one know (*'ilm*, *ma'rifa*) what he professes to be true, it is almost an assent with a higher order awareness that we not only assents *per se* to what he supposes is the case, but further, he *knows* that what has been proposed to which he has assented is *in fact* the case.¹⁰⁴ This *prima facie* inconsistency however, needn't been seen as such upon further consideration. As Ferit Uslu notes, “according to the reports of Ibn Fūraq (d. 1015), a leading follower of al-Ash'arī, he (al-Ash'arī) constantly stressed that faith was a kind of knowledge.”¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere we find in the anonymous, but important Ash'arite text *al-Kāmil fī ikhtiṣār al-shāmil* we read, “the Master [al-Ash'arī] said at one time that assent is to know (*al-ma'rifa*) and said at another time that it is, strictly speaking, the interior statement (*qawlu al-nafs*) and is necessarily concomitant with knowing; and this is what the Qāḍī [al-Bāqillānī] approves.”¹⁰⁶ The two positions are entailed as one by al-Ash'arī in that the assent of the believer in the heart (*bi'l qalb*) to which al-Ash'arī elsewhere refers is “necessarily concomitant with knowing”¹⁰⁷ itself, hence in *īmān* the concept of *taṣdīq* and *ma'rifa* are brought together in one.

¹⁰² Cf., Ayman Shihadeh. “The existence of God”. In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 199.

¹⁰³ Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. *Kitāb al-Lumā'* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 75.

¹⁰⁴ Abū Bakr Ibn Fūraq. *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ash'arī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashraq, 1987), 152.

¹⁰⁵ Ferit Uslu. “Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith”. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 168.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn al-Amīr. *Al-Kāmil fī ikhtiṣār al-shāmil* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 44-45.

¹⁰⁷ Abū Bakr Ibn Fūraq. *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ash'arī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashraq, 1987), 160.

5.2. True Īmān as JTB

Uslu (2007) in reference to Ash'arite theologian al-Baghdādī (d. 1037) demonstrates the crucial point that the link between *taṣḍīq* and *īmān*, when properly considering the nature of the former, shows that *īmān* in (at least classical) Ash'arite thought is *propositional* in that “the assent of faith is about ‘truths’, in other words, it has the character of propositional statements.”¹⁰⁸ This is also clear from the concept of *wujūb al-naẓar* highlighted previously, because the obligation or duty to reason in reaching knowledge of God, and henceforth faith itself, concerns propositional questions of the existence of God, His divinity and the truth claims of revelation/prophethood. Assent concerns the truths of such propositions which for the Ash'arites is subject to reason (*aql*; *naẓar*). Thus, Uslu suggests that there are two common features of assent for classical Ash'arites.¹⁰⁹

- i. the propositions.
- ii. to accept (or to approve) their truth.

With the addition for a third common component, namely:

- iii. The certainty of the assent.

The addition of the third component which appears central to Ash'arite discussions on the nature of faith, is important in understanding the broader contours of the Ash'arite approach to the epistemology of theistic belief/religious belief. According to Uslu “assent (*taṣḍīq*) in the Ash'ari definition of faith carries the meaning, ‘certain true belief’.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, as al-Iṣḥārā'īnī puts it: “the revelation [Qur'an 4:51], however, considers this assent to be knowledge (*ilm*); it is not sufficient that it be mere belief (*i'tiqād*) and not knowledge.”¹¹¹ In similar fashion, al-Juwaynī writes, “the true sense of faith is assent to God (*al-taṣḍīq bi'llāh*) ... the assent, strictly speaking, is interior speaking, but it exists only along with knowledge.”¹¹² In this sense, the early Ash'arites made a distinction between knowledge and mere (true) belief. This distinction appears

¹⁰⁸ Ferit Uslu. “Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith”. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 170.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 173.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 174.

¹¹¹ Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. *Al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 56.

¹¹² Al-Juwaynī. *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād* (Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1950), 88.

to primarily surround the concept of certainty (*yaqīn*), such that knowledge and certainty themselves are synonymous. What constitutes the certainty are evidential grounds that are available to the knower and to which he would be made aware. Mere belief even if true and firmly held, would not be classed as knowledge, because it lacked the absence of doubt that is required for certainty i.e., knowledge itself. Uslu highlights the *rationalistic-evidentialist* and *internalist* tendencies of the Ash'arites when he states; "even if a 'mere belief' happens to be true, the person who holds it cannot *know* its truth without possessing strong and conclusive evidence, i.e. scientific knowledge."¹¹³ They have to *see* it for themselves so to speak. He concludes then for this reason that according to the scheme of the early Ash'arites they considered "assent in faith (*īmān*) as 'justified true belief', which fulfils both subjective *and* objective conditions of certainty. And also for this reason, al-Ash'arī did not regard the assent of a blind follower of the creed (*muqallid*) as a proper assent in faith." Frank puts it in the following way, that for the early Ash'arites, "Belief [*īmān*] as a kind of knowing is the reflective, second level of knowledge *that it is true that* God is unique, the Creator etc."¹¹⁴ Uslu summarises the thesis of knowledge in the context of faith for the early Ash'arites in the following way:

Thus, from the point of view of early Ash'arīs, the expression 'I know that *p*' comprises three distinct elements (i) I believe firmly that *p*, (ii) *p* is true, (iii) I have sufficient and conclusive evidence for believing firmly that *p* is true.¹¹⁵

Therefore, faith itself (i.e. assent to the existence of God and by extension the fundamental doctrines of Islamic belief), rests on certain knowledge which is based on conclusive evidence, without which one's faith is brought into question. Before exploring the various implications of this view and important differences within it, particularly concerning how it relates to the lay community, we ought to pick up on another central epistemic distinction that we also saw on the Mu'tazilites as manifested by 'Abd al-Jabbār, namely the distinction between necessary and acquired knowledge which was also central to Ash'arite epistemic thought.

¹¹³ Ferit Uslu. "Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith". *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 171.

¹¹⁴ Richard M. Frank. "Knowledge and Taqlīd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash'arism". *Journal of American Oriental Society* 109, (1989), 39.

¹¹⁵ Ferit Uslu. "Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith". *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 172.

5.3. Ash'arite Noetic Structures

Ash'arite thinkers, in taking on the 'orthodox' torch of '*ilm al-kalām* from the Mu'tazila, for the most part followed their detractors in the classifications of what ought understood as '*ilm ḍarūrī* and '*ilm muktasab*. According to al-Baghdādī, necessary knowledge is defined as knowledge which occurs to the knower without him possessing the capacity to produce the knowledge himself or even prove it.¹¹⁶ Al-Bāqillānī adds that; man is compelled to accept such necessary knowledge beyond doubt.¹¹⁷ Hence, the definition closely follows 'Abd al-Jabbār's own understanding. Indeed, the Ash'arite thinkers largely agreed with their adversaries on what is to be understood as acquired knowledge as well, i.e. justified true beliefs derived from other such kinds of belief which rests in that knowledge which is necessary. Like the Mu'tazilites, the foundational or necessary knowledge for these early Ash'arites could be broken up into four essential components (Uslu 2007), namely knowledge obtained by virtue of: (1) immediate sensory experience, (2) self-evident logic truths, (3) incorrigible introspective, and (4) a mass transmission of reliable reports. Evidently then, all other forms of knowledge outside this scope would be classed as acquired (*iktisāsbī*) in nature, and unlike necessary knowledge would require evidential grounds in order for them to be appropriately admitted as knowledge as opposed to mere true belief. Consequently, knowledge of God is that which is acquired by the reasoned and calculated efforts of the human being who would have the obligation to do so, upon the reported miracles of a proclaimed prophet.

5.4. Ash'arite Theistic Evidence

Having made the important distinction between necessary and acquired knowledge, such that the knowledge of God and by extension religious truths is to be understood in terms of the latter, crucially rejecting the place of *taqlīd* in the principles of faith (*uṣūl al-dīn*), it necessarily follows for the Ash'arites as it did in the case of the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār, that knowledge (justified true-belief?) in the case of theistic and Islamic belief would have to depend on evidences (*adilla*) sought through a process of

¹¹⁶ Binyamin Abrahamov. "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology". *British Society* 20, (1993), 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 24.

reasoning and reflection (*naẓar*): evidence based on the analogy from the observable world to what is unseen (*istidlāl bi al-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib*) as we saw previously. Before assessing at least in brief what some of those evidences may be more specifically, we need to return to the question pertaining to the relationship of true faith i.e. that which is grounded in knowledge with its concomitant requirements or conditions, and the relationship it holds with the lay community of the faithful, and whether some of the conditions properly grounded theistic and Islamic belief may differ from those of the learned. A consideration of some of the points in this regard will shed important light on the wider implications for the epistemology of religious belief within the classical Ash’arite tradition. In this regard, the Ash’arite theologian Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 1118) gave a succinct account on some of the positions of the early Ash’arites on this issue, he writes:

Since it is a fact that rational inquiry is in principle obligatory, it is obligatory for *the community as a whole*. Whether it is, however, an obligation of *every individual* is something based on a principle that explains how one achieves adequate knowledge of God and of His attributes and His Apostles and the particular teaching of Islam. The followers of our school disagree on this: [1] Some of them hold that what is required is belief that is founded in a definitive, rational proof of what one is obliged to believe and accordingly his belief in what he believes is thus a true knowing ... [2] Some of them hold that belief must be based on proof (*dalīl*), but that the proof may be one given in revelation (*sam’ī*), either in the text of the Scripture and the Sunna or from the consensus of the community; and it may be purely rational (*‘aqlī*) ... [3] Some of them say that what is required is a belief that apperceives its object as it really is and as such; accordingly, belief in it, so characterized, is knowledge.¹¹⁸

Accordingly, al-Anṣārī explains that those who adopt the first position, divide the reasoning and speculation concerning the fundamental religious principles such as belief in God and the Prophet, into those aspects which are “an individual obligation” and those that consist in “things which are a communal obligation.”¹¹⁹ As for the former they hold that an individual obligation is upon each responsible sane person (*al-mukallaḥ*) to have proper knowledge of God, that is to say justified true belief in his existence, and by extension the veracity of the prophet’s claims. In the case of the latter, what is said to be a communal rather than individual duty, are those matters such that if the community of the faithful neglected them, then they would be thereby committing collective sin. Al-Anṣārī states that these pertain to matters such as, “the drawing out

¹¹⁸ Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. *Al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 75-77.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 80.

of multiple proofs”, “defending the core of Islam”, “refuting opponents” of the religion, and “to dispose of the false reasoning of those who teach error and of heretics.”¹²⁰

Thus, what can be gathered from the above discussion is that there are differing views among the Ash’arites concerning the nature of the obligation to knowledge of God. Frank commenting on this passage suspects that the first position, namely that the theistic belief has to be grounded in a formal demonstration seems somewhat of an extreme position, and notes that al-Anṣārī does not elsewhere give us an indication of an Ash’arite thinker who stipulates it in this way, instead the second-third positions seem closer to the truth concerning these early Ash’arites.¹²¹ Now, what is crucial is the status of the *muqallid* i.e. he who assents to faith based on imitation in the absence of knowing proofs or reasons which may confer justification/warrant upon his belief. According to al-Baghdādī, “in his [al-Ash’arī’s] opinion, the individual who believes in what is true by *taqlīd* is neither an idolater (*muskrik*) nor an unbeliever (*kāfir*), even though he is not unqualifiedly termed believer (*mu’min*).”¹²² The idea seems to be that, if an individual does not fulfil his obligation to reason to the knowledge of God, then his assent to belief in Him, is not sufficient for (real) knowledge, once again this makes it clear that in the absence of evidential grounds internally accessible to the subject in question, he or she cannot claim to know the object or proposition in question.

Now, what is also of importance here is the extent to which the lay community, which, even if obliged to see for themselves the reasons which confer justification upon their beliefs, ought to know the intricacies of the evidences used by the *mutakallimūn* and perhaps even potential objections as well. It seems that for al-Ash’arī, knowledge of the basic religious truths may be obtained “by those who follow the general outline of this [i.e. *al-dalīl*], even if they do not work out the detail. The knowledge of expert *mutakallimūn* is of the sort that comes from this kind of reasoning when it is carried out in full detail, while the knowledge of the other believers is obtained on the basis of the generalities which they deal with precisely and is not at variance with the former”.¹²³ In this regard, al-Iṣfarā’īnī is reported to have stated that that:

¹²⁰ Ibid. 81.

¹²¹ Richard M. Frank. “Knowledge and Taqlīd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash’arism”. *Journal of American Oriental Society* 109, (1989), 44.

¹²² ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī. *Uṣūl al-dīn* (Istanbul, 1928), 119.

¹²³ Abū Bakr Ibn Fūraq. *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ash’arī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashraq, 1987), 182.

As for the laymen and the lowest (intellectual) class of the Muslims (*al 'awāmmu wa qimā'ū*), they are of two sorts. One consists of people who are not wholly lacking in a kind of reasoning, even if it is imperfect in its expression and its grounding. Such people are truly Believers (*mu'min*) and, in the proper sense, know (*'arif*). The second consists of people who are completely uninformed in this regard and have no real knowledge; rather, since they believe through adherence to what is said by others, their belief lacks integrity and not one of them is absent of uncertainty and doubt.¹²⁴

So, according to al-Iṣfarā'īnī those who do not acquire their religious belief in virtue of at least a cursory understanding of the reasons which give him or her justification, he cannot be said to have *knowledge* of his religious beliefs, and hence their mere true beliefs about God and His revelation, are not immune from doubt, and hence exclude him or her from the full title of a believer in the proper sense; that is a true *knower* in the epistemic sense. Elsewhere al-Iṣfarā'īnī demonstrates the *internalist-evidentialist* epistemic approach of the classical Ash'arites where he explains that, “when he *inwardly* believes (*i'tiqād fī nafsihī*) that what he believes is as in fact it really is and has no reservations whatsoever about it, [his belief] is true knowledge”.¹²⁵ Yet, crucially al-Iṣfarā'īnī also notes that according to some of the Ash'arite thinkers, for the faithful Muslim who obtains his belief through *taqlīd* and is thus to a certain extent not immune from doubt, “if God graciously rids him from doubt, gives integrity to his belief, and frees it from the evil suggestions that [may] befall him, then this is knowledge on his part and sound faith (*īmānun ṣaḥīḥ*).”¹²⁶ What is significant about this positions is that it somehow manages to seemingly square an *internalist* epistemic approach with *externalism*, or at least incorporates it, and would in theory allow knowledge to be obtain in virtue of some external factor to the conscious awareness or grasp of the subject. To this we will return shortly.

According to another Ash'arite theologian al-Juwaynī, “to require of the laymen that they reason formally and draw out conclusions concerning these questions [of creed] inevitably entails the imposition of an obligation that cannot be fulfilled, and to hold this, in effect, is to consider the laymen unbelievers.”¹²⁷ However, he continues by stating that, what is required of the lay community of the faithful is that they acquire, “only correct belief, that is free from doubt (*shakk*) and uncertainty; they are not

¹²⁴ Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. *Al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 96-97.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 101.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 106.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 110.

required to *know*, for knowledge, when it is indisputable, is founded on rational investigation ... Sufficient for the laymen, thus, is belief which is true and uncontaminated by doubt and uncertainty.”¹²⁸ He then adds that, “if someone were to call this belief ‘knowing’ and ‘knowledge’ (*ilm wa ma’rifā*) in an extended sense, it would not be unreasonable.”¹²⁹ Nonetheless, even theistic belief built on an awareness of the ‘proofs’ of God in an elementary sense (in the absence of the finer details and responses to counter-arguments) according to al-Anṣārī was not understood by al-Juwaynī to mean the believer in this case has real knowledge in the proper sense.¹³⁰ Thus, although the interesting admission of an “extended” conception of knowledge to incorporate belief not built upon strong evidential grounds, it seems in reality al-Juwaynī’s position was that true knowledge in the proper sense, has to be grounded in certain proofs with additional knowledge pertaining to their details and addressing potential *defeaters*, another crucial point we will consider shortly.

Let us return to the issue of formulating evidence, given that we have thus far seen the constant weight that the Ash’arite theologians have given to evidential grounds in support of one’s religious belief for it to be classified as knowledge. Al-Ash’arī, as reported to us by Ibn Fūraq, explains the process of reasoning to such grounds in the following way;

The person ... can know the truth or falsehood of a judgement only by getting his necessary knowledge as a foundation or as a criterion or as a principle to [enable] the judgement that he is going to evaluate. He accepts the truth of the [judgements] that have evidence for and the falsehood of the [judgements] that have evidence against. When he cleanses his thoughts and his approaches from the things that prevent him from reasoning and from getting knowledge objectively, then indisputably ... the knowledge that he is looking for will appear in his mind.¹³¹

Thus, for Al-Ash’arī (and other early Ash’arites) acquired knowledge ought to be built from the foundational necessary knowledge that we have, this necessary knowledge pertains to the alleged four indubitable components noted above, a hallmark of classical foundationalist epistemology. The knower ought also to act sincerely in his or her pursuit of truth and follow only those judgements to which he or she assents which have

¹²⁸ Ibid. 111.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 112.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 114.

¹³¹ Abū Bakr Ibn Fūraq. *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ash’arī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashraq, 1987), 190.

sufficient or proper evidential grounds to support them. In doing so, he or she will come naturally at an acquiescence of the truth. But what are some of the evidences that these classical Ash'arites put forth in support of the proof of religious truths, in particular theism, that can be built up from our foundational necessary knowledge?

Ayman Shihadeh (2008) notes the helpful distinction of theistic arguments made by the later Ash'arite *mutakallim* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, dividing the arguments offered by theologians and philosophers into roughly four kinds: (1) design arguments, (2) arguments from temporal origination, (3) arguments from the contingency of a things' attributes, and (4) arguments from the contingency of existents per se.¹³² Generally, the Ash'arites followed the Mu'tazilites in primarily advancing arguments of the second kind, hence in contemporary philosophy of religion a modified version of their arguments has been coined the Kalam Cosmological Argument. The formulation of these arguments advanced by the Ash'arites followed the same sort of scheme as outlined above in the writings of 'Abd al-Jabbār. Majid Fakhry neatly summarises the method in the following way, "the general procedure of the Mutakallims in proving the temporality of the universe consisted in showing that the world, which they defined as everything other than God, was composed as atoms and accidents. Now the accidents (singular *'araḍ*), they argued, cannot endure for two instants of time, but are continually created by God who creates or annihilates them at will."¹³³

To summarise the thrust of the classical Ash'arite position consider the following: "according to al-Ash'arī, the knowledge in faith *was not a kind of necessary knowledge that came either innately or self-evidently, or as direct evidence to the senses*. For, if knowing that God exists belonged to the kind of necessary knowledge, all humankind would be intellectually compelled to know Him and it would be impossible to accept the opposite of this truth or even to doubt it".¹³⁴ At the heart of both the classical Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite positions is that theistic belief does not consist of necessary knowledge but is instead acquired. We will now attempt to consider some of the

¹³² Ayman Shihadeh. "The existence of God". In *The Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology* eds. Timothy Winter (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 203.

¹³³ Majid Fakhry. "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God". *The Muslim World* 47, (1957), 136.

¹³⁴ Ferit Uslu. "Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith". *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 179.

important nuances of this view for the Ash'arites in light of the relevant contemporary conceptual framework.

5.5. Ash'arism and the Contemporary Religious Epistemology

The discussion concerning the classical Ash'arite picture has allowed us to see close parallels with the Mu'tazilite view exemplified by 'Abd al-Jabbār, but at the same time we have also seen some important nuance especially concerning the lay community of Muslims. The first primary obvious parallel between these two traditions of *kalam* is in terms of their “theistic evidentialism”. Like the Mu'tazilite tradition, classical Ash'arism adopts a form of theistic evidentialism, holding it to be central to the warrant of one's theistic and Islamic belief that one in some sense possess evidence that confer warrant upon one's theistic belief(s). But does classical Ash'arism differ in the *nature* of its theistic evidentialism? In other words, what *sort* of evidence is required and can theistic/Islamic belief be *properly basic* for a believer or must it be based on some other beliefs/propositions? Addressing the latter question will allow us to respond adequately to the former, so that's where we ought to begin.

As we've seen the early Ash'arites made a distinction between necessary and acquired knowledge in much a similar way to the Mu'tazilites. They held that necessary knowledge was of four types: sensory experience, logical truths, introspection of one's states, and reliable testimony by multiple reports.¹³⁵ In doing so, they excluded theism to be among our necessary knowledge. Like the Mu'tazilites, they condemned acquisition of this theistic belief by *taqlīd* and they also restricted the evidence to rational proofs, as opposed to incorporating seemings, intuitions or experiences (*ilhām*) for theistic belief to be sufficient for knowledge. It appears then that the sort of “hyperevidentialism” adopted by the Mu'tazilites was taken up by the classical Ash'arites as well, hence also committing themselves to the same view of a proper noetic structure in the form of classical (ancient/medieval) foundationalism. But how did they view the relation between warrant and the rational proofs drawn out in support of theistic/Islamic belief?

¹³⁵ Ferit Uslu. “Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith”. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 180.

According to Ibn Fūraq, the classical position developed by al-Ash'arī was that to have sound faith or assent in matters of faith, is to have knowledge, as al-Iṣfarā'īnī puts it: “the revelation [Qur'an 4:51], however, considers this assent to be knowledge (*'ilm*); it is not sufficient that it be mere belief (*i'tiqād*) and not knowledge.”¹³⁶ So, what does it mean for one's faith in theism and by extension Islam to be sufficient for knowledge? According to Uslu, the classical Ash'arites adopt something akin to the JTB account of knowledge. To quote him again he states that:

From the point of view of early Ash'aris, the expression ‘I know that *p*’ comprises three distinct elements (i) I believe firmly that *p*, (ii) *p* is true, (iii) I have sufficient and conclusive evidence for believing firmly that *p* is true.¹³⁷

Crucially, as Frank put it, for the early Ash'arites, “belief [*īmān*] as a kind of knowing is the reflective, second level of knowledge *that it is true that* God is unique, the Creator etc.”¹³⁸ This seems to suggest quite clearly then, that the sort of justification involved in their account of knowledge is not simply that some evidences or reasons eminent from an appropriate causal connection between belief and fact, but rather seems to work in traditional *internalist* fashion, where the subject accesses the reasons or evidence himself. Moreover, there is also reason to think that the justification conceived here is of the *deontological* kind as well (at least as far as it relates to theistic and Islamic belief) because the central importance they give to the maxim of *wujūb al-naẓar*. That is to say, one would be acting contrary to the ethics of belief if they did not make effort to assess the relevant evidence pertaining to these religious beliefs. But is there a way in which we could improve this account of knowledge given the failure of the standard JTB account recognised by contemporary epistemologists? Perhaps there is a way to add a no-defeater clause and hence developed a “defeasibility” account of knowledge, adding a fourth condition to the traditional JTB conditions.

Now, the (later) Ash'arite theologians al-Jurjānī (d. 1413) and al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390) speak of the notion of a “rational counter argument (*mu'arid 'aqlī*)” or defeater in the

¹³⁶ Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. *Al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 115.

¹³⁷ Ferit Uslu. “Knowledge and Volition in Early Ash'arī Doctrine of Faith”. *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, (2007), 183.

¹³⁸ Richard M. Frank. “Knowledge and Taqlīd: The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ash'arism”. *Journal of American Oriental Society* 109, (1989), 41.

context of interpretation scripture.¹³⁹ That is to say, in the context of scripture in order for its content to yield certain knowledge (as opposed to apparent knowledge), it must satisfy a no-defeater conditional. If we have some rational counter argument to understanding the text in the literal sense for instance, we might need to understand it metaphorically in order to satisfy this no-defeater condition. Now, it may be somewhat of a leap to go beyond the classical Ash'arite era and take this notion from another context, but I think it can be made plausible in classical Ash'arism as well, because the same interpretative technique was already in place even if the language adopted differed. Consequently, we may speculate that on classical Ash'arism in order for one's theistic and Islamic belief be sufficient for knowledge it must meet the standard JTB conditions *and* there must be an absence of some defeater(s). This is crucial because it would potentially allow for a classical *kalam* position to be a defensible stance within the contemporary epistemology of religious belief, namely a “defeasibility” account of knowledge.

5.6. Ash'arite Sensible Evidentialism

However, this is not necessarily the entire story for the classical Ash'arite position. As we came to see earlier, some of the Ash'arites distinguished between a communal obligation (*farḍ 'ayn*) and a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) in satisfying the condition stipulated by the maxim of *wujūb al-naẓar*. This opens up interesting and important epistemic questions if we take the obligation being satisfied in some sense as a requirement for one's undefeated JTB or warrant in their theistic and Islamic beliefs. First, it allows us to think in terms of an epistemic body or unit as opposed to an individual and how the conditions for warrant may differ given those two different set of circumstances. And second, it might allow us to consider a different form of evidentialism that we have considered up until the present, namely what Stephen J. Wykstra has coined “sensible evidentialism”. Now, according to al-Iṣfarā'īnī (as previously quoted):

As for the laymen and the lowest (intellectual) class of the Muslims (*al-'awāmmu wa qimā'ū*), they are of two sorts. One consists of people who are not wholly lacking in a kind of reasoning,

¹³⁹ Nicholas Heer. “The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymīyah and the Mutakallimūn”. In *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy* ed. Mustansir Mir (Darwin Press, 1993), 182.

even if it is imperfect in its expression and its grounding. Such people are truly Believers (*mu'min*) and, in the proper sense, know (*'arif*). The second consists of people who are completely uninformed in this regard and have no real knowledge; rather, since they believe through adherence to what is said by others.¹⁴⁰

This passage is entirely consistent with what we have said thus far. On this position, it seems that there are only individual epistemic obligations which is to be settled entirely by the subject alone. Moreover, al-Iṣfarā'īnī insists that knowledge here is the second-order awareness whereby one “inwardly believes (*i'tiqād fī nafsihī*) that what he believes is as in fact it really is and has no reservations whatsoever about it.”¹⁴¹ Hence, he makes quite clear the *internalist* position on the nature of warrant consistent with what have said thus far on justification as one of the conditions for warrant. This is of course an important point to remember given our interest in considering these differing positions in light of reformed epistemology. That being said, al-Iṣfarā'īnī also gives us a potential way to construe things differently. Because, he admits that, in principle at least, God may inspire the faith of the *muqallid* such that his faith is free “from the evil suggestions that [may] befall him, then this is knowledge on his part and sound faith (*īmānun ṣaḥīḥ*).”¹⁴² Crucially, this opens us the potential for both *externalism* on the nature of warrant and reformed epistemology, so we shall return to it shortly.

Now, let us return to consider the place of a communal epistemic duty rather than an individual one at work here. What al-Anṣārī (1928) mentions regarding the epistemic duties involved here, are paradigmatic cases of justification construed along *deontological* lines. They concern to things such as, “the drawing out of multiple proofs” and “refuting opponents” of the religion i.e. the relevant truth claims and propositions believed. How do the nature of a subjects’ justification and evidence differ if we consider them to be part of an epistemic community? Wykstra draws a distinction between different notions of evidentialism and defends what he coins “sensible evidentialism”. This form of evidentialism has it that, evidence is necessary for the warrant of a subjects’ belief, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that he or she has to access the evidence. For example, when we take beliefs in electrons as requiring evidence for one to be rational in believing, Wykstra remarks that,

¹⁴⁰ Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī. *Al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Dār al-Salām, 2010), 96-97.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 186.

¹⁴² Ibid. 190.

We do *not* mean that it cannot be properly basic ... we allow that one can properly believe in electrons through spontaneous trust in the say-so of school teachers. But although person A might so believe by trusting the say-so of person B, and B by similarly trusting person C, we take it that this chain of testimony is, *somewhere in the community*, anchored in something other than testimony. And for electrons, we take this ‘something other’ to be an *evidential* case for electrons ... it is in some *communitarian* sense – not ‘individualistically’ – that we take evidence to be available for our electron belief.¹⁴³

What Wykstra is getting at is that, in order for a belief in electrons for instance (as opposed to perceptual belief) to be warranted, what is required is that some inferential evidence is in play. It would be epistemically inappropriate to find oneself with the basic belief in electrons and hold onto it taking it to be something you know, if you hadn’t heard of it before and it was just an idea that came to your mind. However, you can be justified (and warranted) in holding a belief in electrons through testimony for instance. In doing so, you may even have a basic belief in electrons in the sense that your believing in the testimony of your school teacher is basic. Yet, testimony based beliefs form chains of transmission and it seems right to think that inferential evidence is still necessary somewhere down that chain. Therefore, your belief has two sources of warrant: the first from the basic belief and the second is the evidence supporting the thesis that electrons exist. So, how could this “sensible evidentialist” position shed light on the Ash’arite position of a communal (epistemic) obligation to *know* God and His religion?

5.7. Ash’arite RE?

Well, perhaps it is possible for the *muqallid* to be warranted in holding his theistic and Islamic belief in virtue of the testimony from his senior religious peers: scholars (*‘ulemā*) and *mutakallimūn* who have access to evidence, reasons and arguments that support the beliefs in question. Thus, the subject may believe in a basic way and yet inferential evidence would be still relevant here. Only that the evidence would be possessed and processed “by others with the requisite skills, time, and resources” (Wykstra). So, given this potential option for the classical Ash’arites, what implications does this hold for a Reformed epistemology? Well first, we ought to return to consider what we have previously mentioned from al-İşfarā‘īnī, namely that it may be possible that one can arrive at knowledge of God (and thus be warranted in holding their theistic

¹⁴³ Stephen Wykstra. “Towards A Sensible Evidentialism”. In *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings* (Harcourt College Publishers, 1989), 420.

belief), through some external condition being fulfilled, that is, the lack of doubt and surety of the belief, instilled within them through divine inspiration. Now, does this mean that the justification here is externalist in nature? Perhaps it might be that the believer still needs to have adequate evidence that he or she “sees”, perhaps some strong seeming or experience, some feeling of surety as a result of the divine inspiration, and so the conditions for warrant do not change to some sort of *externalism* in this case, but remain *internalist*. As it is the seeming or experience which the subject has *some* cognitive access to which confers warrant on their beliefs (in conformity with other conditions for warrant). This is a question however, that we need not settle, what is more important is its implications for the place of RE.

If some form of divine inspiration is sufficient for a believer to *know* and hence be warranted in their theistic and Islamic beliefs, then it follows that the classical Ash’arite here upholds the central thesis of reformed epistemology that one can *know* theism (and Islam) is true, even in the absence of some arguments. The problem, however, is in considering how exactly this is supposed to make sense on the JTB type account of warrant that the classical Ash’arites appear to uphold. Perhaps, it might be in virtue of the firmness in which the seeming comes to the subject that it is sufficient for them to have justification, but even in the absence of some defeater, it is not clear how this gets a tight connection at truth and hence warrant, if it is just based on some strong seeming. Therefore, it looks somewhat like a *weak fideist* position, and that runs contrary to the evidentialist spirit of classical Ash’arism, so it appears that this is not the best way to construe an Ash’arite Reformed epistemology. In keeping this evidentialist spirit intact, it seems that a more genuine Quasi-Reformed epistemological thesis within classical Ash’arism would be the adoption of “sensible evidentialism”. That is to say, the believer may hold their basic belief in Islam in accepting the testimony of those who are aware of the evidence and reasons which support Islamic belief. In this sense, they can be justified and warranted accepting relevant testimony, which as we have seen in its *mutawātir* form, is sufficient for ‘*ilm ḍarūrī* according the Ash’arite scheme. In the absence of some defeater, the believer would be justified in accepting the testimony of the ‘*ulemā* and in virtue of the evidence that they possess which supports it, the epistemic community as a whole would be warranted: those who accept the belief on inferential evidence and those who take it in the basic way by testimony. Interestingly, this also shows how one can adopt a Quasi-Reformed epistemological thesis, without

requiring there to be a special cognitive faculty for basic religious beliefs, this demonstrates a unique way to bring the theistic evidentialist and intuitions of the Reformed epistemological theses together.

Consequently, we have seen that it is possible for a broadly classical Ash'arite position to make sense on a reformed epistemological thesis, whilst keeping the central theistic evidentialist spirit of their position, and not imposing obligations on the lay community of Muslims which they could not fulfil. That being said, we now turn to consider the Maturidite position.



CHAPTER VI

MĀTURĪDĪ: KITĀB AL-TAWHĪD

Turning our attention now to the theology and epistemic positions within Maturidite thought, we will focus on the eponym of the school itself: Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, and his magnum opus in speculative theology; *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. In this famous work, al-Māturīdī begins the first chapter with a thorough rejection of *taqlīd* in matters of faith, and sets out a general epistemology. Before the discovery of ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s *Mughnī*, relevant sections in al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* was seen as perhaps the first systematic account of epistemology among the *mutakallimūn*, nevertheless if not the first *mutakallim* who lays out such an account, it appears to be the earliest account by a Sunni *mutakallim* and seems to have led to a consequence of manuals in theology after him adopting a method similar to him directly or indirectly in starting their theological tomes with a discussion on the nature and sources of knowledge. Thus, we begin with the first passage of the book in the chapter against *taqlīd* (entitled: “the invalidity of *taqlīd* and the necessity to know religion by means of *dalīl*”):

Al-Shaykh Abū Manṣūr, may God grant him mercy, said: moreover, we find that all people, with all their different religious opinions and sects, agree on one statement, namely, that whatever one holds to be true, is valid, and, as a result, that whatever others than him hold, is invalid ... Therefore, it is taken for granted that *taqlīd* excuses its embracer from holding the opposite view on the same question. This, however, only accounts for the multiplicity of number. The only way out of this is if one of them has his ultimate argument based on intellect (*‘aql*) by way of which his truth can be known and if he has proof by way of which he can persuade fair-minded people to accept his truth. Therefore, the one whose source of religion compels the realisation of his view, is right, and thereupon, each one of them ought to learn the truth which the former finds in his religion. This is because of the fact that his genuine arguments and testimony to his truth will have overwhelmed them. For, the ultimate arguments, if one overcomes everyone else with them, compel each one of them to submit to him.¹⁴⁴

The first thing to note about this passage is that, al-Māturīdī, like the other *Kalām* schools we have touched upon, evidently embraces the position of *wujūb al-naẓar* and posits the intellect as being the source of religious knowledge. Second, as we saw in

¹⁴⁴ Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (Dar al-Yamiyat al-Misriyya), 24.

particular from the discussion of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (although it can be found in the writings of the Ash’arites as well), al-Māturīdī cites the problem of “religious diversity” as being at the heart of the necessity to arrive at knowledge of God by use of the intellect (beyond the point that for al-Māturīdī as with the other *mutakallimūn* such knowledge is not *ḍarūrī*). Thus, as J. Meric Pessagno explains commenting on the above passage, according to al-Māturīdī, “what is needed for a true knowledge of religion is, first, an intellectual argument (*al-ḥujja al-‘aqliyya*) that will convince the hearer of the personal trustworthiness (*ṣidq*) of the teacher, and, second, a proof (*burhān*) of the objective truth (*ḥaqq*) of what is taught. Only when both aspects are thus known is religion known.”¹⁴⁵ If the person does not settle the problem of “religious diversity” without recourse to some form of intellectual proof or argument, then each claim, al-Māturīdī thinks, would be equally valid or invalid and the *muqallid* in his grasping of religious truths would be in no better epistemic state than one who grasps religious falsities, (hence the rejection of *taqlīd* in creedal matters is tantamount to a rejection of knowledge by epistemic luck). Yet, as Pessagno (1979) also notes, in terms of pure faith, one needn’t conclude that al-Māturīdī is excluding someone whose faith is based on *taqlīd* as being outside the faithful community, but strictly speaking they wouldn’t *know* their faith to be true in the indubitable fashion that is generally expected in the realm of knowledge.

6.1. Dalīl, Burhān & Ilhām

Now, it is important to consider that by proof, as we have touched upon earlier, al-Māturīdī is generally using the term *dalīl* and hence it doesn’t necessarily imply a categorical syllogistic demonstration. This is crucial in trying to understanding the sorts of evidence which are deemed necessary to fulfil the conditions of justification in solidifying one’s faith with knowledge based on appropriate evidential grounds, and leaves open the nature of evidence to some extent. Thus, “al-Māturīdī’s statements on proof in this first chapter ought not to be read as meaning strict philosophical proofs” (Pessagno 1979). However, al-Māturīdī is quick to condemn “knowledge” that is the product of a spiritual experience (*ilhām*). For according to al-Māturīdī, to rely on *ilhām* as the prime source of one’s religious knowledge, as with *taqlīd*, results in a case where

¹⁴⁵ J. Meric Pessagno. “Intellect and Religious Assent”. *The Muslim World 1*, (1979), 21-22.

each religious group claims to have an experience which supports the truth of their religious doctrines, and so once again one is none the wiser as to which one of them is a genuine or true experience, unless we recourse to using rational proofs to determining the truth of the matter. Thus, “the knowledge of God (*‘ilm*) and what He has commanded us to do is an accident (*‘araḍ*) which is obtained only by inference (*istidlāl*) from evidences.”¹⁴⁶

According to al-Māturīdī, faith (*īmān*) in the true linguistic sense is an assent (*taṣḍīq*) of the heart, in contrast to knowledge per se (*ma’rifa*). However, for al-Māturīdī this does not mean that no intrinsic connection exists between knowledge and faith, on the contrary indeed it does! But what is the nature of the relationship? Pessagno explains that for al-Māturīdī, in the context of its relation to faith,

Knowledge is a *sabab*, a channel, a motive, an occasion (in the general philosophical sense) which induces one to believe, just as the state of ignorance may possibly lead to unbelief. This is precisely the role of knowledge that he [al-Māturīdī] had outlined in other terms in the first chapter and in the twenty-sixth chapter [of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*] where he spoke of the necessity of reasoning as a way to religious knowledge ... As a result, al-Māturīdī can espouse the formula that one may call faith knowledge, but that what is meant by that phrasing is that it is assent with (*‘inda*) knowledge. Such is his solution for the problem of the relationship of faith to reason.¹⁴⁷

Thus, proper faith is to be grounded with knowledge. What is interesting is the extent to which al-Māturīdī’s position seems much closer to the Mu’tazilites in terms of their emphasis on the scope of intellect, as opposed to the epistemic scepticism that the Ash’arites often seem to view the intellect, in being much more limited than their theological adversaries. One example of this related to the topic at hand, is the normative claim that man is responsible to know God by rational speculation even in the absence of a revelatory message brought before him. On this issue, Hikmet Yaman notes that, “Al-Māturīdī agrees with the Mu’tazilīs that reason is responsible for acquiring knowledge of the existence of God even if no prophet was sent by God for this purpose.”¹⁴⁸ In a similar regard, Yaman observes that, “another disputed point between the Māturīdīs and the Ash’arīs involves the responsibility of a teenager who reaches intellectual maturity (*‘aql*), but not physical maturity (*rushd*) i.e., the case of

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 23

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 24-25.

¹⁴⁸ Hikmet Yaman. “Small Theological Differences, Profound Philosophical Implications”. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 51, (2010), 181.

the *ṣabī 'āqil*. The Māturīdīs maintain that such a person is responsible for his faith and acquiring knowledge of God, while the Ash'arīs do not share this view.”¹⁴⁹

6.2. Maturidite Subjective Faith

What is also interesting to note, as Yaman explains, is that “the Māturīdīs and Ash'arīs embrace basically the opposite positions when they present their ideas surrounding the validity of blindly following another's opinion (*taqlīd*) ... [Māturīdīs] argue that such *īmān* [based on *taqlīd*] is valid, unlike the Ash'arīs' disapproval of the validity of the *muqallid's* *īmān*.”¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, that is not to suggest, as ought to be clear, that valid *īmān* constitutes knowledge nor that *īmān* that's built on *taqlīd* is not in itself acting contrary to divine command known by intellect ('*aql*) and tradition (*sam* '). According to Yasin Ramazan Başaran's analysis of the relevant passages in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, “Al-Māturīdī invalidates *taqlīd* in order to protect the reality of one's Faith [*īmān*] since the notion of blindly following another's judgement endangers *personal* assent. If there is no valid personal assent, there is no sound Faith either. In fact, what Al-Māturīdī advocates, therefore, is the *subjective* Faith, which is individual, neither communal nor representative, assent to God.”¹⁵¹ According to Başaran, for al-Māturīdī, the faith of an individual differs from another in its degree of certitude. That is, “the state of being convinced is all a subjective level and cannot be known by anyone other than the agent and God.”¹⁵² The importance of the notion of subjective faith here apparently means that the “soundness of a *dalil* [essential to supporting theistic and Islamic belief] can vary from person to person” and so “the notion of subjective faith also helps us understand why there is no fixed border between *taqlid* and *ijtihad* in Islamic theology.”¹⁵³ Moreover, “al-Māturīdī maintains that by means of reasoning man should contemplate on divine wisdom embedded in creation and conclude the existence of its eternal (*al-qadīm*) Creator, Who is ultimately different from all temporal things.”¹⁵⁴ And that, according to Sahilun A. Nasir, “al-Māturīdī's view on *ma'rīfa* (the highest

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 181.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 182.

¹⁵¹ Yasin Ramazan Başaran. “The Idea of Subjective Faith in al-Maturidī's Theology”. *The Journal of Islamic Research*, (2011), 48.

¹⁵² Ibid. 50.

¹⁵³ Ibid. 53.

¹⁵⁴ Hikmet Yaman. “Small Theological Differences, Profound Philosophical Implications”. *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 51, (2010), 181.

level of knowledge to know of Allah) is based on the human thought and reason. It can be understood either that *ma'rīfa* can be obtained by the use of merely human reasoning and also that human reasoning is capable of obtaining *ma'rīfa*.¹⁵⁵

6.3. Maturidite Theistic Evidence

Now, crucially according to Başaran, for al-Māturīdī “a good *dalil* must be able to convince a fair-minded opponent of a claim’s truthfulness. The term ‘convince’ deserves a special attention here because there is no rational or emotional fixed level of being convinced for all. Soundness of a *dalil* can vary from person to person. Thus, the state of being convinced is all a subjective level and cannot be known by anyone other than the agent and God.”¹⁵⁶ This is important to consider because the nature of the evidence required for the Maturidite position sheds important light on the sort of theistic evidentialist position it may adopt, as well as the potential to see how it *could* fit on reformed epistemology. This will be at the heart of considering the Maturidite position in light of contemporary philosophy of religion. However, before we do that we ought to consider now, what sort of theory on the nature of knowledge itself (particularly in the context of religious beliefs) the Maturidite position is advocating.

It seems to me that the position runs close to a JTB account. Consider first the nature of justification on the Maturidite account. First, it is clear that like the other traditions or schools of *Kalām*, a necessary condition for knowledge is the fulfilment of a sort of meta-level requirement, namely, that one *knows* that they *know* that *p*. In other words, it is not sufficient that one’s religious belief is caused by processes or factors external to the believer in question, rather it must be internal: they must recognise for themselves in reference to some evidence (argument, inference?) that the belief grounded on such evidence is sufficient for knowledge. They must recognise the reasons that justify the belief in question. It is also clear that in the context of religious belief, al-Māturīdī and his school, think that there is an epistemic duty that must be fulfilled, namely that the belief be based on some inferential evidence. Thus, justification involves the belief

¹⁵⁵ Sahilun A. Nasir. “The Epistemology of Kalām of Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī”. *Al-Jāmi‘ah* 43, (2005), 352

¹⁵⁶ Yasin Ramazan Başaran. “The Idea of Subjective Faith in al-Maturidi’s Theology”. *The Journal of Islamic Research*, (2011), 50.

being grounded in some adequate reasons drawn out from inferential evidence, but also involves the fulfilment of and non-violation of the relevant epistemic duties.

However, as we have also noticed for al-Māturīdī (at least according to Başaran), there is a central subjectivist component such that it is not sufficient – at least as far as one’s religious belief is concerned – that some sort of evidence is merely available, but that the believer bases his or her belief on this evidence rather than merely being connected up to those in the epistemic community who accessed this evidence or generated the knowledge for the community (Greco). Hence, the Maturidite position emphasizes the importance of personal cognitive awareness in obtaining the justification necessary for religious knowledge. Let us explore this in further depth, with reference to contemporary epistemological theories in philosophy of religion.

6.4. Māturīdī and Contemporary Religious Epistemology

As we have seen thus far, the Maturidite position like the other traditions of *Kalām*, forthrightly rejects the place of *taqlīd* in matters of faith, holding that belief on the basis of some argument or evidence (*dalīl*) is essential to grounding one’s faith proper, such that it is sufficient for knowledge. Hence, it would be proper to think of the Maturidite position as being within the rank of ‘theistic evidentialism’. However, as noted, the question remains as to what form of theistic evidentialism we understand the Maturidite position to be affirming. As we have touched on earlier, the notion of *dalīl* is to some extent wide ranging and includes a number of potentially different forms of ‘evidence’, not necessarily confined to strict indubitable logical demonstrations. Moreover, as just quoted above, it would appear that according to the Maturidite position the soundness of a *dalīl* can vary from person to person, such that being convinced by certain *adilla* is “subjective” in some sense. So, perhaps the Maturidite position could align well with an evidentialist position which allows seemings, experience and intuition as sufficient forms of evidence grounding one’s theistic and Islamic belief, where the nature of the evidence required, depends to some extent on the subjective individual in question?

The problem here seems to be the confrontation the Maturidite position has with *ilhām* or religious experience (for lack of a better term), being used as the evidential support related to one’s religious beliefs. As we have seen, like some of the other *mutakallimūn*,

the problem of religious diversity has been cited to rule out these sorts of ‘evidence’ as being sufficient to ground one’s religious beliefs. This is supposedly because members of other faith traditions also claim to have religious experiences or *ilhām*, and so there would be no way to independently verify one’s own religious beliefs: each faith group makes the same claim based on (private) experiences through which there is no way to check which one is legitimate as opposed to the other. In any case, people have all sorts of delusionary experiences, so how would one know without good argument, that one didn’t experience something of that kind? So, it seems that seemings, experience and intuition all fall roughly under the same sort of improper way to ground one’s religious beliefs on the Maturidite view, as explained by al-Māturīdī’s position in stated at the beginning of his magnum opus, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. But then again, isn’t there another way in which one could employ reason without it having to be some sort of formal inference?

6.5. Inference or Conclusion of Reflection?

Robert Audi makes a distinction between what he calls “conclusions of inference” and “conclusions of reflection”. The former refers to an inference “premised on propositions noted as evidence.”¹⁵⁷ In contrast, the latter refers to “a conclusion formed through rational inquiry or searching reflection.”¹⁵⁸ Michael Bergmann describes the latter as conclusions “which are not based on inferences from premises but instead emerge *noninferentially* from an awareness of a variety of observations, experiences, and considerations over a (perhaps long) period of time.”¹⁵⁹ The point to stress here is that, although the conclusion arises noninferentially, it may arise through rational reflection which draws on a number of potential considerations culminating in a certain strong *seeming* that a particular proposition (i.e., God exists) is true. In the context of a discussion concerning “theistic seemings” Bergmann notes that, “many recent and long past observations, experiences, testimony, considerations, and the traces of these retained in memory [may be the source] out of which these theistic seemings emerge noninferentially *upon reflection*.”¹⁶⁰ Thus, despite the apparent Maturidite rejection of

¹⁵⁷ Robert Audi. *The Good in the Right* (Princeton, 2004), 45.

¹⁵⁸ Michael Bergmann. “Religious Disagreement and Epistemic Intuitions”. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements 81*, (2017), 37.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 37.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 37.

ilhām or religious experience per se, as the means of justification for one's religious faith such that one's belief is sufficient for knowledge, might we understand the insistence on the internal access to certain *adilla* in terms of a "conclusion of reflection" as opposed to a "conclusion of inference"? In the case of "conclusions of reflection", rationality would seem to require that, although an inference in the strictest sense is not present, the theistic/religious seemings which arise noninferentially as a consequence of rational reflection and inquiry, must of course still be epistemically appropriate responses to the relevant experiences, observations and memories which act as the reflective sources of the (doxastic) seeming, which culminate in one taking certain theistic/religious propositions to be true. Therefore, not just any old reflection and experience is relevant: only those which would appropriately put one in the proper epistemic position to accept the theistic and specifically Islamic propositions in noninferential manner.

One obvious problem with this becomes in the context of Maturidite thought becomes apparent however, when we consider the sorts of evidence (*adilla*) that al-Māturīdī cites as reasons for believing in God in his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, such as a classical Islamic version of the cosmological argument.¹⁶¹ Therefore, it would seem to the notion of "conclusions of reflection" doesn't quite fit into the Maturidite picture of the sorts of evidences required of the believer in order that his or her faith may be appraised with knowledge. Yet, we may instead read into the notion of "conclusions of reflection" in terms of tacit inferences, or what Audi has elsewhere coined "structurally inferential" beliefs. Audi makes a distinction between "structurally inferential" beliefs and "episodically inferential".¹⁶² Consider a standard case of an inferential belief. Take the case of a detective arriving to a crime scene looking for clues as to who committed the crime. In this case typically we might think that the detective S infers from a collective of evidence E, which he has consciously taken account of, to the conclusion C, that and so committed the crime. This would be what Audi refers to as an "episodically inferential" belief. In contrast, one may come to hold a belief by way of inference, but that inference may be tacit or made unconsciously. For instance, Audi gives the following example: "consider S's believing that his brakes are worn, for the reason that

¹⁶¹ Cf., Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* (Dar al-Yamiyat al-Misriyya), 88.

¹⁶² Robert Audi. *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 234.

they squeak ... we must not assume that it [i.e. the belief that his brakes are worn] is produced by *inference*, understood generically as a process of passing from one or more premises to a conclusion [i.e. episodically inferential]. *S* might simply note the squeak, and, having a *standing belief* that squeaky brakes are worn, form the belief that his brakes are worn.”¹⁶³ In this case although *S*’s belief isn’t typically or episodically inferential, it is still structurally inferential, as it is based on other (prior) beliefs or propositions that *S* holds, but the inference was “largely unconscious” and in any other sense instantaneous.

Now, considering again the notion of a “conclusion of reflection”. As Bergmann puts it “observations, experiences, testimony, considerations, and the traces of these *retained in memory*” may be the source of one’s theistic seemings.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, we may think of “conclusions of reflection” as harnessing noninferential seemings, or we may perhaps think of them in terms of producing structurally inferential tacit beliefs; beliefs which are formed almost unconsciously and instantaneously, but given our standing beliefs retained in memory, “some argument underlies”.¹⁶⁵ But how and why is this relevant to our considerations of the position upheld by the Maturidite *mutakallimūn*? Well, what it may suggest is that although the Maturidite position excludes religious experience and henceforth a standard Reformed epistemological position among its ranks, it nevertheless may allow us to see the sort of *adilla* required by the Maturidite School for the believer to have his or her faith appraised with knowledge, almost retain the fundamental pragmatic-epistemic intuition, that relieves the believer from the demands of having to engage in explicit Natural Theology or *Kalām* in order to know the religious beliefs in question, any demand most believers would be unlikely to meet.

Consider then the following example borrowed from McAllister and Dougherty, let’s say “it *seems* that you have violated a moral law... [and] intuitively grasp a support relation between this experiential content, in conjunction with your background evidence [i.e., standing belief(s)], and a proposition about God; for instance, you tacitly perceive that violating a moral law implies that there is a moral law, that the existence

¹⁶³ Ibid. 235.

¹⁶⁴ Michael Bergmann. “Religious Disagreement and Epistemic Intuitions”. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 81, (2017), 37.

¹⁶⁵ Robert Audi. *The Structure of Justification* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 238.

of a moral law supports the existence of a moral lawmaker, that the only plausible moral lawmaker is God.”¹⁶⁶ So, the idea then could be that, upon one’s reflecting over their moral conduct to come to *see* that they have impinged upon some moral law; that they have committed an objectively immoral act. Thus, upon this reflection and its concomitant seeming, and due to standing background beliefs that one holds, namely that if there is moral law there must therefore be a moral lawgiver i.e. God, one tacitly perceives the support relations between the theistic seeming elicited upon reflection and rational inquiry, and the proposition that God exists or maybe specifically that one is guilty before God for this act of immorality. A more straightforward example could be a sort of design (tacit) inference. More straightforward in the sense that, human beings seem to have a natural tendency to make agent-based design inferences. So, let’s assume again upon some form of rational reflection, one comes to see that: everything in nature and the world, seems to have a teleological goal or purpose. Then let’s say that given one’s typically ‘common-sense’ or natural standing belief that ‘anything which has a purpose has a maker’, and that means the world as a whole must have a Maker, culminating with the belief that God exists (as that Maker), here we can say that one might tacitly perceive those support relations between the initial seeming that the world elicits purpose and that God therefore exists. Of course, if one consciously traces the steps in this reasoning the inference would no longer be tacit and merely structural, but would be formal and episodically inferential.

6.6. Maturidite RE?

The significance of this idea is to see how the Maturidite perspective, despite its obvious insistence on the necessity of the believer having (some form of actual or potential) access to arguments or reasons for his theistic beliefs, and hence embracing a strong theistic evidentialist stance, the possibility that through ordinary tacit inferences elicited through the sort of intuitive reflection expected of most religious believers, it allows the epistemic demands of Maturidite position to almost ground an important intuition of the Reformed epistemological stance, which has it that believers can be justified and warranted in the absence of conscious access to arguments of natural theology.

¹⁶⁶ Blake McAllister and Trent Dougherty. “Reforming reformed epistemology: a new take on the *sensus divinitatis*”. *Religious Studies* 55, (2018), 11.

However, there are two potential problems with this approach that might mean it is unable to satisfy the demands of Maturidite thinking here.

First, the question remains as to whether the insistence is that the internal access to theistic arguments must be *actual* in the immediate conscious sense, or whether it may merely be present in some semi-conscious sense, but yet *potentially* accessible in the fullest sense. That is to say, perhaps the Maturidite epistemic demand is that the believer consciously access the reasons and arguments for himself that indicate the truth of his religious beliefs. Second – and related to the notion of truth conductivity – is the importance of the extent to which the arguments themselves do not merely give one some thin or weak level of *prima facie* justification (in the contemporary sense in which it is often used), but rather that the arguments themselves must be truth conducive, where the justification required for knowledge is obviously one which truth conducive, something which mere *seemings* for example would evidently lack. Now, this is important when we think of the sorts of tacit arguments and structurally inferential beliefs which may be tacitly perceived by the average believer. Perhaps the Maturidite stance would consider the sort of intuitive teleological or design inference noted above, as insufficient for the truth-conducive justification necessary for warrant and hence knowledge. There may be a way around this, but we shall leave it for later discussions in the last section, for now we may conclude that the theistic evidentialism of the Maturidite School, most probably insists on the subject having conscious access and a certain type of *adilla* for his religious belief to be appraised with knowledge.

Finally, we ought to rule out any form of “Sensible Evidentialism” in the Maturidite position. This is because – as Başaran points out – the position of al-Māturīdī on the knowledge of one’s religious assent is the advocating of a “subjective Faith, which is individual, neither communal nor representative.” Therefore, the Sensible (or communal) Evidentialism which may be possible given the position of some in the Ash’arite School, and hence the adoption of a quasi-Reformed epistemological stance, is not possible on Maturidite thinking, because for one’s faith or assent to be appraised with knowledge it must be grounded in a person’s subjectivity, not in terms of evidences present in the community, which he or she has not had direct apprehension of. In this regard then, it would seem that the Maturidite positions edges closer to that of ‘Abdul

Jabbār's Mu'tazilism. Although this is to some extent still speculative and indeed requires more research.



CHAPTER VII

TAYMIYYAN-HANBALISM

7.1. Ibn Taymiyya on Īmān

We ought to begin this section on Taymiyyan Hanbalite theology, with recognition of an immediate difference as to how Ibn Taymiyya understands *īmān*, in contrast to what we have seen from the schools of *kalām*. Ibn Taymiyya resolutely rejects the notion of *īmān* as being simply synonymous with *taṣdīq* (assent) in matters of faith. According to Ibn Taymiyya, this view originates with the Murji'ites and Jahmiyya. For Ibn Taymiyya, *īmān* is rather to be understood as,

A derivation of the word *amn*, having the meaning of 'feeling safe and secure', 'the mind being peacefully at rest' ... the word *īmān* is usable only with regard to report, the reporter of which is to be trusted and relied upon. A report about the unseen is just the case. In the same way, when two persons share between them the same knowledge about something, we describe the situation by saying 'they *ṣaddaqa* each other', and not 'they *āmāna* each other', because it is not a matter concerning the unseen, in which each one of them would have to trust and rely upon the other without himself seeing it. All the Qur'anic examples of the usage of the word attest to this.¹⁶⁷

Roughly the idea is that, at the semantic level, by definition *īmān* cannot simply refer to *taṣdīq* and by its very essence, pertains only to matters of the unseen (*ghayb*), unlike *taṣdīq* which can apply to both matters seen and unseen. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya does of course grant that *taṣdīq* has its place in the definition of *īmān*. He states,

In admitting that the most basic element of *īmān* is *taṣdīq*, we must also admit that it is a very particular kind of *taṣdīq* in the sense that ritual worship (*ṣalāt*) is a particular kind of prayer ... and this particular kind of *taṣdīq* has a number of natural and necessary sequels which form an integral part of the meaning of the word *taṣdīq*.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Kitāb al-Īmān* (Dār al-Tadamun, 1997), 243.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 244.

Thus, although *taṣḍīq* does not constitute the essence of *īmān* alone—as was case according to the *mutakallimūn*—it is an integral part of *īmān*, and yet, it is a special and particular type of *taṣḍīq*. The particularity of this assent for Ibn Taymiyya of course, is its tight connection with that theoretical element of *taṣḍīq* and its practical dimension. As Ibn Taymiyya puts it, *īmān* “must be accompanied by the ‘works of the heart’ (*a ‘māl qalbiyya*) which, in their turn, necessarily demand bodily acts.”¹⁶⁹ Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya holds a standard scripturalist theory of *īmān* evident in the apparent readings of the Qur’an and Sunna, in tripartite fashion: assent, declaration, and action. That is, belief in the heart, declaration and utterance on the tongue, as well as practice in deeds with the limbs.

That being said, of course, Ibn Taymiyya thus includes both an epistemic and pragmatic understanding with the meaning of *īmān*. In fact, we may speak perhaps of an epistemic and moral division in Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of the relationship between *taṣḍīq* (assent) and sound or proper *īmān* (faith). The moral dimension of *īmān* requires that declaration and action combine proper assent, a lack thereof, would be morally reprehensible. Nevertheless, the epistemic component or assent grounded in *knowledge* of that to which one assents, can be investigated on its own terms, and a lack in that regard is to be view primarily, as being epistemological reprehensible i.e., irrational (of course it may also be morally questionable as well, but we shall have to leave this latter issue for another occasion of exploration). Thus, it is to this particular epistemic dimension of *īmān* which we will focus on here concerning Ibn Taymiyya’s perspective, but of course, we note the important caveat that it alone, is not sufficient for *īmān* in God and Islam, even if what we present of a Taymiyyan view demonstrates that the corresponding theistic/Islamic belief is sufficient for *knowledge*.

7.2. The Sources of Knowledge

Following a popular division among Muslim theologians, Ibn Taymiyya divides the sources of knowledge into three primary sorts:

The ways of knowing are three, the first: sense perception (*ḥiṣṣ*) both internal (*bāṭin*) and external (*ẓāhir*), and it is through [sense perception] by which one knows particular existent

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. 255.

things. The second: by rational examination and inference (*al-i'tibār bi'l-nazar wa'l-qiya's*). However, knowledge obtained through this [latter source], can only be acquired after perceptual knowledge. What is given to us as particularized through perception, the same thing is given to us by reason and inference universally and unqualifiedly. By itself [reason and inference] do not produce knowledge about particular things. It only makes what is specific as general, and what is particular as unqualified. While universals (*al-kulliyāt*) are known through reason, particulars (*al-ma'ayināt*) are known through sense perception. Third: report (*khabr*) – and report is about universals and particulars, seen (*al-shahīd*) and unseen (*al-ghāib*). Report is general and comprehensive, whilst sense perception – particularly sight – is more perfect.¹⁷⁰

For Ibn Taymiyya then, there are principally three sources of knowledge: (1) sense perception, (2) reason, and (3) report (i.e., testimony). Crucially, he appears to elevate the importance of sense perception and critically marks out an important distinction between what exists only in the mind (*fi al-adhhan*), and what actually exists in extra-mental reality (*fi al-a'yan*). These epistemic distinctions place Ibn Taymiyya firmly in the ranks of 'empiricism' by giving pristine role to sense perception as providing the essential building blocks for our knowledge, and sees him reject universals as real aspects of extra-mental reality, thus further reinstating his empiricist sentiments. Taymiyya's broadly empiricist epistemology is to some extent evident in his treatment of attaining knowledge of God by means of His signs, as this primarily relies on our immediate experience, perception and interaction with the world out-there, much more than it does the abstract deductions of reason. Yet, crucial to Ibn Taymiyya's epistemic scheme is his notion of *fiṭra*.

7.3. The Concept of Fiṭra

The concept of *fiṭra*, to which we will now turn, is at the heart of the Taymiyyan epistemic system and undergirds all the other cognitive faculties. The *fiṭra* is a Quranic concept which refers to the “natural constitution” upon which God created human beings. In Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology, the *fiṭra*, is “perhaps best rendered as by the term ‘original normative disposition.’” With the emphasis here on *normative*, and this “strong sense of normativity is both moral *and* cognitive”.¹⁷¹ That is, in the Taymiyyan sense, the *fiṭra* refers to a pristine innate primordial compass which guides human beings to correct cognition in apprehending truth and moral goodness. As Mehmet Sait Özervarlı (2013, 47) puts it, the *fiṭra* represents the “original and distinctive qualities

¹⁷⁰ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar' ta'arud al-'aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 7:324.

¹⁷¹ Carl Sharif El-Tobgui. *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Brill, 2020), 260.

that would direct activities if left unaffected by his or her family or social environment.”¹⁷² Jon Hoover (2007, 39) suggests that the *fiṭra* may be viewed in Ibn Taymiyya’s thought as “an *innate* faculty.”¹⁷³ But that need not mean the *fiṭra* stands as a faculty for knowing in its own right, but instead, as the operative focal-point to which all other faculties turn, and *in-turn*, are steered toward the truth by it. Ibn Taymiyya insists that, God “made the *fiṭra* of His servants disposed to the apprehension and understanding of the realities [of things] and to know them. And if it were not for this readiness (i.e., *fiṭra*) within the hearts/minds (*qalb*) to know the truth, neither speculative reasoning would be possible, nor demonstration, discourse or language.”¹⁷⁴ Providing it is intact, the *fiṭra* is that which makes knowledge possible for humans.

The *fiṭra* then, as the primordial state underpinned with its normative function, acts as the very ground for the knowledge of all things. For in the Taymiyyan scheme, “the proper functioning of *all* our epistemic faculties ... is predicated in *all* cases on the health and proper functioning of the *fiṭra*”.¹⁷⁵ And it is in virtue of the sound *fiṭra*, a humans “knowledge of truth and his confirmation of it, and the recognition of falsehood, and his rejection of it” is grounded, for “whenever there is truth, the *fiṭra* would naturally accept it”, and likewise “whatsoever is false, the *fiṭra* would naturally reject”.¹⁷⁶ Thus, what grounds the conditions of knowledge according to Ibn Taymiyya, seem to be not necessarily some *internally accessible* reasons, but rather the *external* conditions of: (1) the proper function of the *fiṭra* which is, (2) truth aimed, and is (3) only realised in a milieu which is congenial for its proper function. “In short, knowledge is founded on *fiṭra*, and acquired through religious instruction [or true testimony] (*khabr*), sense perception (*hiss*), and rational reflection (*nazar*).”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² Mehmet Sait Özerveranlı. “Divine wisdom, human agency and the *fiṭra* in Ibn Taymiyya’s Islamic thought”. In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* eds. A. Kokoschka, B. Krawietz and G. Tamer (De Gruyter, 2013), 47.

¹⁷³ Jon Hoover. *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism* (Brill, 2007), 39.

¹⁷⁴ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar’ ta’āruḍ al-’aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 5:62.

¹⁷⁵ Carl Sharif El-Tobgui. *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Brill, 2020), 271.

¹⁷⁶ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *al-Intiṣār li-Ahl al-Athar: Naqḍ al-Mantiq* (Dār ‘ālam al-Fawā’id, 2014), 65.

¹⁷⁷ Nurcholish Madjid. *Ibn Taymiyya on Kalām and Falsafa: A Problem of Reason and Revelation in Islam*. Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1984), 73.

7.4. Taymiyyan Noetic Structures

Now, as we have seen above, we find a paralleled discussion among the *Kalām* schools concerning the classification of necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*) and acquired knowledge (*‘ilm muktasab*). First, as a consequence of this division between necessary and acquired knowledge, the *mutakallimūn* can generally be seen to embrace a classical foundationalist formulation of the structure of knowledge (as we’ve also seen). Second, what is stipulated as being part of the category of *‘ilm ḍarūrī* for the *mutakallimūn*, is considered to be indubitable. Third, the account of the kinds of beliefs that the *mutakallimūn* can generally be seen to restrict the category of *‘ilm ḍarūrī*, follows a classical foundationalist account of properly grounded *noninferentially* based beliefs. Therefore, in general it seems reasonable to think that the *mutakallimūn* were classical foundationalists of sorts. Now, as we have also come to see, given that the *mutakallimūn* did not generally consider knowledge of God to be within the category of *‘ilm ḍarūrī*, they stipulated the principle of *wujūb al-naẓar* or the duty to reason and condemned faith by *taqlīd* (mere imitation), insisting that true knowledge of God can and must only arise through a process of reasoning based on proper evidences (*adilla*). Thus, the necessity of natural theology as a philosophical enterprise rooted in an evidentialist approach to theism, is grounded to a large extent (if not entirely) on the distinction between *‘ilm ḍarūrī* and *‘ilm muktasab* in the classical foundationalist sense in which the *mutakallimūn* have outlined it.

In contrast to this epistemic picture, Ibn Taymiyya rejects not the *‘ilm ḍarūrī*—*‘ilm muktasab* distinction, but widens the former, breaking away from the arbitrary classifications of classical foundationalism, and re-routes the source of warrant in externalist terms (to put it in the contemporary jargon), setting up a unique foundationalist position which greatly differs from the classical foundationalist scheme, avoiding the major objections to it. In doing so, Ibn Taymiyya allows us to rethink the place of natural theology, and sets up an alternative route to knowledge of God based on an inference through signs (though not being an inference in the typical sense), which escapes the necessity of reasoning to God through deductive or inductive means in order that one’s belief be warranted. Let us try to spell out more clearly these epistemic moves, before moving on to consider in depth, his alternative ‘inference’ to the methods of classical natural theology or *kalām*.

The Taymiyyan epistemic scheme predicated on the concept of *fiṭra*, is able to broaden the ‘epistemic-foundations’, widening the scope of necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*), contrary to the restrictive ‘semi-classical’ foundationalist model generally upheld by the *mutakallimūn*. In affirming foundationalism *simpliciter*, Ibn Taymiyya writes,

The proof which leads to knowledge through discursive reasoning (*bi’l-nazar*) must be one that goes back to premises known necessarily from the *fiṭra* (*muqaddimāt ḍarūrīyya fiṭrīyya*). For all knowledge that is not known necessarily (*ḍarūrī*) must go (back) to necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*). For if rationally inferred premises are always established by other rationally inferred premises it will lead to circularity or an infinite regress.¹⁷⁸

Ibn Taymiyya goes on to add that the latter two accounts ought to be rejected, and so, “there must be intuitive primordial knowledge which God initiates in [a person’s] heart/mind (*qalb*), and the aim of all proofs is to go back to it.”¹⁷⁹ Ibn Taymiyya recognises then, that some beliefs count as knowledge not by way of inference, but rather, in and of themselves so to speak, forming our necessary knowledge (*‘ilm ḍarūrī*). For Ibn Taymiyya, beyond the admission of the same sorts of ‘necessary knowledge’ upheld by classical foundationalist’s: i.e., self-evident a priori logical truths (*badīhiyyāt*), as exemplified by the law of non-contradiction (*al-jam‘ bayna al-naqīdayn*), or that which is evident to the senses (*ḍarūra ḥiṣṣīyya*), which, given its internal (*bāṭin*) and external (*ẓāhir*) dimension for Ibn Taymiyya, covers both beliefs which are incorrigible, and those which correspond to extra-mental particulars. He also admits of other kinds of necessary knowledge, for instance, knowledge of God. Most *kalām* theologians, unlike Ibn Taymiyya, considered theological truths of this type as only being obtainable “through reasoning (*nazar*). This is because such knowledge is not necessary knowledge (*ḍarūrī*), but is, on the contrary, acquired knowledge (*muktasab*).”¹⁸⁰ But, according to Ibn Taymiyya, “the affirmation of the Creator and His perfection is innate (*fiṭrīyya*) and necessary (*ḍarūrīyya*) with respect to one whose *fiṭra* remains intact.”¹⁸¹ Ibn Taymiyya also admits as necessary knowledge that which results from sound rational inference (*ḥusun al-nazar*). This means that, even inferences through rational inquiry, may result in a sort of necessary knowledge impressed upon

¹⁷⁸ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar’ ta’arūḍ al-‘aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 3:309.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 3, 309.

¹⁸⁰ Nicholas Heer. “The Priority of Reason in the Interpretation of Scripture: Ibn Taymīyah and the Mutakallimūn”. In *Literary Heritage of Classical Islam: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of James A. Bellamy* ed. Mustansir Mir (Darwin Press, 1993), 187-188.

¹⁸¹ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 6:73.

one's mind, such that its denial isn't possible and hence must be accepted necessarily.¹⁸² Ibn Taymiyya also admits of *at least* two additional kinds of necessary knowledge: knowledge by mass transmission or testimony (*al-akhbār al-mutawātir*) – this he shares with his fellow theologians in deeming a necessary type of knowledge – as well the knowledge of 'moral truths'.¹⁸³ As for the former, Ibn Taymiyya holds that knowledge obtained from this source is necessary and certain (*qaṭ'ī*).¹⁸⁴

In all such cases, these beliefs would be *properly basic* with respect to *warrant*, not because they are mere subjective preferences, but because they are the consequence of properly functioning cognitive faculties grounded on a sound *fiṭra* which – when functioning in a congenial environment – guides one's cognition appropriately to the acquisition of true-beliefs. As Ibn Taymiyya states – directing his criticism to the *falāsifa* – “just as they confined certitude to the syllogistic form, they have limited certitude to the subject matter of the propositions they have upheld: [i.e.] the sensory, the *a priori*, the multiply transmitted, the experiential, and the intuitive. It is known that there is no evidence in favour of rejecting other propositions [additional to these]”.¹⁸⁵ Hence, the arbitrary nature of the restrictive epistemic moves of classical foundationalists. Additionally, in contradistinction to a 'classical foundationalist' setup that insists in foundational beliefs being only those which are *timelessly* indubitable (perhaps more Cartesian than *kalām based?*), Ibn Taymiyya allows for *potentially* fallible belief sources to still produce properly basic beliefs, for the health and pristine functioning of the *fiṭra* varies relative to the individual 'knower' in question. As Anke von Kügelgen puts it, for Ibn Taymiyya, “the evident or speculative character of a concept does not depend on the subject matter, but on the soundness of the innate intelligence [i.e., *fiṭra*] and the senses [i.e., the other conjoined “organs of perception”]”.¹⁸⁶ Therefore, the deliverances of one's cognitive faculties may be received in the basic necessary (*ḍarūrī*) fashion, or as acquired (*muktasab*) in virtue of some inference. At the same time, these faculties are fallible and maybe erroneous in

¹⁸² Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 9:28-29.

¹⁸³ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd' 'ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu'assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 474.

¹⁸⁴ For an overview of Ibn Taymiyya and knowledge by mass transmission cf., el-Tobgui, “From Legal Theory to Erkenntnistheorie: Ibn Taymiyya on Tawātur as the Ultimate Guarantor of Human Cognition”, *Oriens* 46 (2018): 6-61.

¹⁸⁵ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd' 'ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu'assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 265.

¹⁸⁶ Anke von Kügelgen. “The Poison of Philosophy: Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle For and Against Reason”. In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* eds. A. Kokoschka, B. Krawietz and G. Tamer (De Gruyter, 2013), 300.

their judgements, if the *fiṭra* is not intact to steer them toward the truth. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya’s scheme oscillates between strong-moderate foundationalism, with the relative ‘strength’ being determined by the *fiṭra*.

As we have come to understand it then, in contrast to the majority of the *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Taymiyya believes that knowledge of God does not need to be demonstrated by way of argument, but is something known by the *fiṭra* upon which all human beings have been created. The *mutakallimūn* generally saw rational speculation or argument to the existence of God as an obligation upon all human beings (*wujūb al-naẓar*), whether in the Mu’tazilī sense of, as soon as one reaches maturity, or in the Ash’arī sense of when one reaches the state of maturity *and* receives the message by way of a Prophet. Although, as el-Tobgui notes, Ibn Taymiyya doesn’t necessarily reject this in principle, “since the Qur’ān is full of exhortations to “look” (*fa’ nẓurū*, etc.) and to ponder. *Rational reflection* (in the sense of looking and pondering) is therefore fundamental, in Ibn Taymiyya’s view, to reaching and maintaining authentic conviction in the truth of Islam.”¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya does allow *taqlīd* (imitation) as he does *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in matters of faith (*īmān*), depending on the capacity of the subject in question.

Epistemically speaking, the *mutakallimūn* seem to adhere to the logic of theistic evidentialism, which roughly has it that belief in God is only justified (or warranted) by way of good arguments, and if one knows no good arguments, then one’s theistic belief isn’t warranted. As we have seen this position appears to be grounded in the *mutakallimūn*’s foundationalism: given the admittance of only four types of foundational (or properly basic) beliefs, with belief in God being excluded.

7.5. An Inference Through Signs

As an alternate method to the traditional arguments by way of categorical syllogism or *reductio ad absurdum* offered by the *falāsifa* and *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Taymiyya prioritises another form of “inference” (although ‘inference’ in a non-traditional sense), which is founded on the Quranic notion *āya*. The term *āya* literally refers to “sign” (it

¹⁸⁷ Carl Sharif El-Tobgui. *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation* (Brill, 2020), 64.

is also used in reference to verses of the Quran), in the sense of it being “a token of God’s power and will”.¹⁸⁸ Ibn Taymiyya considers the Quranic use and function of *āya* (plural: *āyāt*) the proper way in which we ought to establish God’s existence, in contrast to the long-winded methods of the *falāsifa* and *mutakallimūn*. For one thing, he considers knowledge of God to be *fiṭrī*, that is, innate and necessary knowledge. So the need for arguments is in most cases lacking. But Ibn Taymiyya also takes umbrage with certain philosophical methods used for the attainment of knowledge of God, for instance he chastises the *falāsifa* for their insistence that knowledge by way of a categorical syllogism (*al-qiyās al-shumūl*) is the apodictic method to knowledge, including knowledge of God’s existence. In fact Ibn Taymiyya regards this method as only proving a universal notion shared between two particulars, and universals only exist in the mind. Hence, it fails to prove God in His particular extra-mental existence.

By contrast – as Von Kügelgen puts it – for Ibn Taymiyya his alternative is “‘God’s method of proof through signs’ (*istidlāluhu ta’ālā bil-āyāt*)” which he considers “an immediate – that is a *fiṭrī* knowledge – insofar as the signs indicate the existence of one Creator”.¹⁸⁹ So, the concept of a sign (*āyā*) as ‘proof’ for God’s existence, on Ibn Taymiyya’s view, is intrinsically linked to *fiṭra*. Indeed, this is what Ibn Taymiyya explains when he writes that, “proving the existence of God by way of signs (*āyāt*) is obligatory. This is the way of the Qur’an, and inherent in the *fiṭra* of His servants”, adding that, “the sign (*āya*) indicates the object itself of which it is the sign. Every created being is a sign and a proof of the Creator Himself”.¹⁹⁰

For Ibn Taymiyya this method is radically different from the methods of the *falāsifa* (philosophers) because according to him, “the difference between a sign (*āya*) and a syllogism (*qiyās*) is that the sign entails the entity of which it is the sign”,¹⁹¹ whereas the (categorical) syllogism championed by the *falāsifa*, only proves a universal concept in the mind, which shares something in common between a multiplicity of existents. For Ibn Taymiyya, *istidlāl bi’l-āyāt* is the prophetic way: “it was the method of the

¹⁸⁸ Afnan Fatani. “AYA.” In *The Quran: An Encyclopedia* ed. Oliver Leaman (Routledge, 2006), 85.

¹⁸⁹ Anke von Kügelgen. “The Poison of Philosophy: Ibn Taymiyya’s Struggle For and Against Reason”. In *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya* eds. A. Kokoschka, B. Krawietz and G. Tamer (De Gruyter, 2013), 323.

¹⁹⁰ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 1:48.

¹⁹¹ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd’ ‘ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu’assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 194.

prophets—may God bless them—in proving the existence of God to [make] mention of His signs (*āyāt*) ... [and] God's method of proof through signs are plentiful in the Quran".¹⁹²

He stresses the point that, through means of natural signs, God's existence is proven, that is, His particular nature rather than an abstract concept of a Necessary Being say, stripped from distinct knowable qualities: His signs point to Him individually and prove His essential nature as the One Being upon whom all else depends:

His signs entail Him individually and whose conceptualization precludes plurality in Him. Everything else other than He is evidence of His Self and signs of His existence ... no contingent existent can be actualized without His very self being actual. All contingent existents are entailed by Him; they are evidence and a sign of Him.¹⁹³

But this 'inference' through signs proposed by Ibn Taymiyya, is not to be conceived as an inference of any traditional kind. It doesn't appear to work on the basis of clear steps or premises. Indeed, this is what Ibn Taymiyya seems to suggest where he writes that, "affirming one's knowledge of the Creator and prophecy does not depend on any syllogistics (*al-aqīsa*), rather this knowledge is attained from the signs (*āyāt*) that prove a specific matter that is not shared by others. These matters are known by means of necessary knowledge (*bi'l-ilm al-ḍarūrī*) which does not require discursive reasoning (*naẓar*)".¹⁹⁴ Perhaps, then we might think of Ibn Taymiyya's inference through signs along the lines of what John Henry Newman (d. 1890) coined a "natural inference". According to Newman, this "*natural* mode of reasoning is, *not from propositions to propositions, but from things to things ... [and the] antecedents commonly are not recognized by us as subjects for analysis [here]; nay, often are only indirectly recognized as antecedents at all. Not only is the inference with its process ignored, but the antecedent also*" (Newman (1909), 330-331).¹⁹⁵ For Newman, this inference is predicated upon a particular "instinct" or "instinctive perception" (1909, 260).¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Ibid. 193-194.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 197.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. 401.

¹⁹⁵ John Henry Newman. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Longmans, Green, and Co, 1909), 330-331.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 260.

In Taymiyyan terms then, this might be to suggest that Ibn Taymiyya’s *istidlāl bi’l-āyāt* could be seen as a sort of “natural” inference or *istidlāl*, in which an apprehension of the antecedent—in this case the signs of God in the natural world—results in an immediate grasping of the consequent (i.e., theistic belief). For Ibn Taymiyya, *istidlāl bi’l-āyāt* clearly works from things to things, as is evident in his saying that “the very knowledge of the indicant entails the knowledge of the very thing indicated, just as the sun is the sign of daylight”.¹⁹⁷ Moreover, this knowledge is only actualised, on the grounds that one’s “instinct” or rather disposition (*fiṭra*), is intact and prepared for this recognition.

As we have seen then, for Ibn Taymiyya, the pristine way to reach knowledge of God is in reference to the many signs which indicate His existence and particular nature. Whether those signs be what he refers to as “*āyāt al-anfus*”: signs within one selves, or “*āyāt al-āfāq*”: signs within the horizon and cosmos.¹⁹⁸ Evidently, according to Ibn Taymiyya, such knowledge is *fiṭrī*: a natural product of sound cognition. Thus, this knowledge is thought to be rooted in the sound cognition of one’s *qalb* (heart/mind): the head of all cognition,¹⁹⁹ and the locus of *fiṭra*, which guides all the faculties to their true north. Hence, through the apprehension of God’s signs, “when the *fiṭra* is left unspoiled, the *heart/mind* knows God, loves Him and worships Him alone”.²⁰⁰

Significantly, according to Ibn Taymiyya, “the signs of God are always known through sense perception”,²⁰¹ which as Wael Hallaq notes, includes both its ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dimensions (*al-bāṭin wa’l-zāhir*).²⁰² Above we spoke of interpreting Ibn Taymiyya’s inference through signs in terms of a “natural inference”, and this may well be an accurate way of construing it, yet, the emphasis on sense perception here also allows us to view things in additional light. In his “Perceiving Design” Del Ratzsch—drawing on the ideas of Thomas Reid (d. 1796)—argues that belief in a designer from the apparent design in nature, can be formed *noninferentially* akin to the way in which we form our ordinary perceptual beliefs. Crucially, he suggests that some disposition

¹⁹⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd’ ‘ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu’assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 194.

¹⁹⁸ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar’ ta’arūḍ al-’aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 3:108.

¹⁹⁹ Cf., Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 9:308.

²⁰⁰ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Amrāḍ al-Qulūb wa-Shifā’uhā* (al-Maṭba’a al-Salafiyya, 2018), 26.

²⁰¹ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 2:48.

²⁰² Wael Hallaq. “Ibn Taymiyya on the existence of God”. *Acta Orientalia* 52, (1991), 66.

to form these beliefs is integral to this outlook, or as he puts, it must be “built into our cognitive nature”.²⁰³ Concerning Reid’s view, he concludes that, “Reid must be read as holding the view that ... recognition of a mark as a mark of design is perceptual.”²⁰⁴ In following Del Ratzsch, we might think that Ibn Taymiyya holds a similar view in connecting our innate disposition (*fiṭra*) to form theistic beliefs—upon an apprehension of the signs in nature—and our sense perceptual faculties. That is, given our *fiṭrī* disposition to form beliefs about God, our sense perceptual faculties may be geared up to form *noninferential* beliefs about God from perceiving His signs in nature. This knowledge in the Taymiyyan view, arises through the proper function of the *fiṭra* (in conjunction with the relevant cognitive faculties), upon an apprehension of these signs, and grasps the necessary concomitance between sign and signified, as “the created beings that indicate the Creator (*al-dalāla ‘alā al-khāliq*) ... [are] concomitant with its Creator, it’s not possible that they exist without the existence of their Creator, just as He cannot exist without His knowledge, power, will, wisdom, and mercy”.²⁰⁵ And this theistic knowledge is necessary with respect to one whose “*fiṭra* remains intact”.

However, although we have suggested that an apprehension of these signs occurs through sense perception, it may also include signs tied more intimately to “reason” in the philosophical sense: through a pondering or rational reflection. Perhaps then theistic belief may be elicited upon ponderance of the natural world, through an apprehension of the sheer contingency of all that exists other than God, for “it is known that, apart from God, all contingent existents entail the essence of the Lord, may He Be exalted; they cannot exist without the existence of the essence of the Lord”.²⁰⁶ Indeed, for Ibn Taymiyya pointing to God’s signs to prove His existence “are [of] the rational *fiṭrī* methods (*al-ṭuruq al-‘aqliyya al-fiṭriyya*) which the Quran adopts”,²⁰⁷ and hence “the rational methods that people endowed with reason know by their *fiṭra*”.²⁰⁸ Therefore, although it may always be the case that in some manner sense perception (external and/or internal) is involved in the apprehension of signs, that need not exclude reason (*‘aql*), which may be at the heart of reflection upon God’s signs as well.

²⁰³ Del Ratzsch. “Perceiving design”. In *God and Design: Teleological argument and Modern Science* ed. Manson N. (Routledge, 2003) 129.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 130.

²⁰⁵ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd’ ‘alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu’assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 245.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 195.

²⁰⁷ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 1:49.

²⁰⁸ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt* (Dār al-Qalam, 1980), 76.

This also need not mean that the process includes discursive reasoning (*nazar*), just because reason is involved in the reflecting, rather it may be as we have suggested above a form of “natural inference” or perhaps something closer to what Audi has described “conclusions of reflection” mentioned in the previous chapter. These conclusions of reflection may include a variety of experiences, memories, and considerations, but may also perhaps include what Ibn Taymiyya refers to as simply “preliminary intellectual reflection (*bidāya al-‘uqūl*)”,²⁰⁹ that is, what results from the most basic and initial impressions of reason (*‘aql*) itself. Hence, one may entertain in one’s mind the collection of *āyāt* in one’s self and the world ‘out-there’, sensing the utter contingency of all physical existents including the universe, and thus, upon such reflections on these different signs, when one’s *fiṭra* functions properly the *qalb* as the seat of all cognition, can know that God exists in a properly basic way.

7.6. Taymiyyan-Hanbalism and Contemporary Religious Epistemology

Given the above presentation of Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology of religious belief, it seems quite evident that in contrast to the *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Taymiyya forthrightly insists that knowledge of God may be attained even in the absence of discursive reasoning or philosophical arguments. This of course does *not* mean that for Ibn Taymiyya arguments have no place or that one cannot attained knowledge of God through means of inference, on the contrary, Ibn Taymiyya thinks that one can! Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyya’s primary alternative (due to it producing *‘ilm ḍarūrī* as opposed to merely *‘ilm muktasab*) is his “inference through signs” grounded on his understanding of *fiṭra*. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya unlike the schools and thinkers of *Kalām* clearly upholds a position that we can—in following contemporary terms—deem Reformed epistemological. Thus, we will use the remainder of this section to briefly spelt out this thesis, and consider the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya’s view might be compatible with the leading epistemic theory undergirding Reformed epistemology: proper functionalism. But let us begin by considering a formal outline of a ‘Taymiyyan’ model of RE:²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Al-Radd’ ‘ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn* (Mu’assasa al-Rayyān, 2005), 297.

²¹⁰ For this model expounded upon in full, cf., Jamie B. Turner “An Islamic Account of Reformed Epistemology”. *Philosophy East and West* 21, (2021).

- (1) God as the Creator of the universe has instilled within human beings different cognitive faculties in order that they may acquire true beliefs about Him.
- (2) God created all of mankind upon an innate natural constitution (*fiṭra*). This *fiṭra* urges them to recognise Him, to know Him and to worship Him alone.
- (3) The *fiṭra* has been set to work in tandem with other cognitive faculties for the production of beliefs; such faculties include, particularly in the context of theistic belief, the heart (*qalb*). When one's *fiṭra* functions properly, it 'triggers' within the heart an immediate awareness of God. This awareness arises within the intuition of the heart by the natural workings of the *fiṭra* upon it.
- (4) The proper function of these faculties, which produces basic awareness of God, typically arises from one's direct experience of the many 'signs' (*āyāt*) that God has placed within the world, which allows one to experience knowledge of Him in a basic manner. This knowledge of God comes to one in the basic sense in that it is immediate and involuntary.
- (5) Therefore, through the epistemic role of the *fiṭra* in connection with the heart, upon the apprehension of God's distinct 'signs', belief in Him is reached immediately without the need for inference or propositional evidence.

It seems clear, given the above, that Ibn Taymiyya's religious epistemology is compatible with the above (five) points and more precisely even seems to lay them out for us. First, the Qur'an makes the theological position of premise (1) explicit. For instance, we read:

It is God who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing, sight and hearts [i.e., thinking minds] that you might be thankful.²¹¹

Thus, human beings are said to have entered into the world without any prior knowledge, but through their God given faculties, they are able to acquire knowledge such that they can come to know God and henceforth worship Him. So premise (1) is pretty evident then from an Islamic perspective, and so we can swiftly move on.

At the centre of this Reformed epistemological model and Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology more generally, as we have seen is his the notion of *fiṭra*. Given what we

²¹¹ Qur'an 16:78.

have stated above we need not repeat its meaning, other than to say that it is clear according to Ibn Taymiyya then, that God created us upon *fiṭra* and it is integral in our coming to know Him. Thus, in coming back to premise (2), namely that God created human beings upon *fiṭra* with the urge to recognise Him, and in conjunction with premise (1), that God created within human beings cognitive faculties in order that they may know Him, it follows that God has created human beings upon a common nature which predisposes them toward the knowledge and recognition of Him.

Now, in his epistemic scheme Ibn Taymiyya acknowledges a number cognitive faculties, such as the faculty of sense perception (*ḥiss*), reason (*‘aql*) and the heart/mind (*qalb*) more generally as the centre of all cognition. In the case of *fiṭra* however, as suggested above, it is not construed as being an independent faculty in the same sense. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that the residing place of *fiṭra* is the heart/mind. He writes that, “just as God made the physical bodies ready to be nourished with food and water, and had it not been for that, it would not have been possible to nourish and nurture them [i.e., the bodies], and just as the physical bodies have the faculty to distinguish between suitable nourishment and its opposite, so is there in the heart a faculty to distinguish truth and falsehood that is greater than that”.²¹² That ‘faculty’ residing in the heart/mind then is *fiṭra*. But, in what sense are the heart/mind and *fiṭra* cognitively related? And what bearing does it have on the way in which theistic belief can arise for the believer? Consider the following:

Qalb —→ *Fiṭra* —→ Properly Basic Theistic Belief

The diagram above aims to highlight the cognitive relationship between the *qalb* and *fiṭra* for the production of belief in God. First, consider the *qalb*’s epistemic function: Ibn Taymiyya writes: “If it [the *qalb*] were left in the condition in which it was created, void of any remembrance and free of any thought, then it would accept knowledge free of ignorance and see the clear truth about which there is no doubt; consequently it would believe in its Lord and turn to Him in repentance.”²¹³ Similarly, he writes that, “the *qalb* in itself is not receptive except to the

²¹² Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Dar’ ta’āruḍ al-‘aql wa-l-naql* (Dār al-Kunūz, 1979), 5:62.

²¹³ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 9:313

truth [i.e. including theistic truths]. When [nothing] is placed in it, it receives only that for which it was created.”²¹⁴ The implication then, is that one can come to know of God simply by the proper function of the *qalb*. But how is this connected to *fiṭra*? Ibn Taymiyya asserts that “when the *fiṭra* is left unspoiled, the heart knows God, loves Him and worships Him alone”.²¹⁵ *Fiṭra* – when functioning properly then – is said to enable the *qalb* to come to knowledge of God in a “basic” way. Therefore, through the natural workings of *fiṭra* upon the faculty of the *qalb*, man is able to know God. And hence, as Ibn Taymiyya puts it, “the affirmation of a Creator and His perfection is innate and necessary with respect to one whose *fiṭra* remains intact”.²¹⁶ Elsewhere adding that, “the acknowledgement of God’s existence, and knowledge of Him, and loving Him, and unifying Him, are *from the fiṭra, and firm in the qalb*.”²¹⁷ Hence, one can know in the faculty of the *qalb* that God exists in a basic manner, but such knowledge can only be achieved when one’s *fiṭra* is functioning properly. Thus, given the above and that premises (1) through (3) outline the epistemic manner in which theistic belief may be acquired in a basic way, we ought to now consider how such belief may in fact originate. Finally, we may complete the model in reference to the fact that, as we have seen, for Ibn Taymiyya these basic beliefs about God may arise through an apprehension of God’s ‘signs’. Providing one’s cognition grounded on *fiṭra* is function properly, then one will come to know God even in the absence of argumentation and so premises (4)-(5) are evident.

To complete this section as a whole then, we finally need to ask about how Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology of religious belief (and even epistemology in general) fares up against a proper functionalist outlook on knowledge (or warrant to use the contemporary term). Remember that, according to proper functionalism (roughly), a belief is warranted, *iff*: it is produced by properly functioning truth tracking cognitive faculties, in environments to which those faculties have been designed to apply. Crucially of course, this epistemic theory is *externalist* in nature. As we have seen above, it appeared from an exploration of Ibn Taymiyya’s epistemology that knowledge is grounded on, (1) the proper function of the *fiṭra* which is, (2) truth aimed, and is (3)

²¹⁴ Ibid. 9, 313.

²¹⁵ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Amrāq al-Qulūb wa-Shifā’uhā* (al-Maṭba’a al-Salafiyya, 2018), 26.

²¹⁶ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 6:73.

²¹⁷ Ibid. 16, 461.

only realised in a milieu which is congenial for its proper function. Therefore, we may surmise that although Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology is not a carbon copy of Alvin Plantinga's (which is quite obvious of course), it is nonetheless broadly compatible with it, and gives us perhaps a glimpse if not more, of a Taymiyyan epistemology translated into the contemporary idioms of philosophy of religion.



CHAPTER VIII

FUSING RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGIES IN ISLAM

In this penultimate section of the thesis, I want to consider how we might be able to synthesise the intuitions that we find in the *kalām* approach—with its emphasis on theistic evidentialism—and the Hanbalite traditionalist approach—with its emphasis on a “Reformed epistemology”. On reflection, I think there are roughly three ways in which this could be achieved, with the second and third being able to be combined with the first.

Roughly, the first way in which we might be able to synthesise these approaches is by connecting the *kalām* evidentialist intuition that theistic/religious belief need be based upon evidence in order that it may be warranted for the believer, and the Hanbalite intuition that the believer need not have access to philosophical arguments for his or her belief, through the sort of ‘Sensible Evidentialist’ approach that Wykstra advocates which we have made mention of earlier. As we will come to see, there are ideas within both of the two approaches within the Islamic theological tradition which make this synthesis plausible.

The second way in which this might be achieved, is by referring to the idea of a tacit inference. Here we would make a distinction between basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs, and point out that some beliefs although formed in immediate fashion, are not necessarily basic in the strict sense. That is, they are formed immediately but are tacitly (or unreflectively) inferred from other beliefs. This approach would allow the possibility of satisfying intuitions on either side of the spectrum concerning TE and RE within the Islamic tradition, because if it is formed immediately it may not be overly epistemically burdening on the subject, but at the same time, it can meet some theistic evidentialist criteria.

Finally, the third way to approach this might be by recognising what DePoe has referred to as non-conceptual awareness within the context of forming theistic beliefs. Here we make a distinction between two forms of cognitive awareness, and apply it to the case of theistic and religious arguments. In doing so, it aims to show how it is that the average religious believer can still meet some theistic evidentialist requirement on justification or warrant (a *kalam*-like intuition), but at the same time, the religious believer will not be expected to meet epistemic demands which are over-burdening (an *athari*-like intuition), such that even the non-theologian can come to warranted theistic/religious belief in line with a theistic evidentialist demand on warrant. Let us explore these three approaches now in more depth.

8.1. The First Way: A Fiṭra-Based Sensible Evidentialist Approach

This approach is an extension of what we have already touched upon earlier in our section pertaining to Ash'arite religious epistemology. There we noted that according to at least one trend within the classical Ash'arite position, the duty to reason to or argue for the existence of God (and veracity of Islam), can be conceived in light of the distinction between an individual duty or obligation (*farḍ 'ayn*) and a communal duty or obligation (*farḍ kifāya*). Thus, it might be possible to expect that the theologians of the Islamic tradition engage in the sort of theological activity which includes conjuring up proofs for the existence of God, such that the epistemic health of the religious community is dependent upon this activity, whilst relieving the common believer of this epistemic duty. We noted that this idea might make sense in light of Wykstra's sensible evidentialism, but I want to make this idea more explicit here and connect it with a Taymiyyan perspective.

First, the plausibility of this approach can be strengthened by the consideration of the traditional division of religious duties within the context of Islamic jurisprudence. In simplified terms, the Muslim faithful have within the realm of *fiqh*, been divided into either the segment of the community who are the *muqallidūn* i.e., those who are dependent on scholars to derive religious rulings, and that smaller segment of the community who are the *mujtahidūn* i.e., those capable of deriving religious rulings from the scriptural sources themselves. Roughly, this is a division between the common believer and the religious scholar. Second, although the philosophical schools have not

been made the central focus of this particular thesis, on this occasion we will do no harm in taking inspiration from a Muslim philosopher in trying to connect this jurisprudential insight to theological epistemology. The Muslim Aristotelian Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 CE)—known in the West as Averroes—famously made a three-fold distinction of the Muslim faithful in terms of their theological/philosophical understandings, method and pursuits.²¹⁸ According to Ibn Rushd, the common believer, *mutakallim* and philosopher differ in those three ways, in how to approach and dialogue with the religious texts.²¹⁹ Without expounding upon the details of Ibn Rushd’s position or defending it in anyway as far as it was intended to be applied by him, we may take inspiration from the idea that the methods and approaches to the religious tradition differs depending on which segment of the community you are wedded to. And rather than embracing Ibn Rushd’s three-fold distinction, we can simply adopt the tradition Islamic jurisprudential distinction, whilst appropriating his theological-philosophical intuition.

The upshot of this is that the division of epistemic labour among the Muslim faithful will put upon them differing sorts of epistemic duties—the fulfilment of which are necessary for justification and hence knowledge within a *kalām*-based framework—which differ depending upon which part of the community you are wedded to. In this sense, we might expect that the learned in the community—who have the intellectual tools, conceptual framework and awareness of central philosophical insights concerning the existence of God and veracity of Islam—are deontological justified in believing in God (and by extension Islam) *iff* they have good arguments for that belief (or those beliefs). By contrast, the common believer may not be thought of as being situated in a position in which he or she can properly fulfil that epistemic duty, and hence can’t be expected to fulfil a duty that is beyond their his or her reach. Nevertheless, their justification for believing in theism and/or Islam, at least from a *kalam* and theistic evidentialist perspective, shouldn’t be free from being grounded in propositional evidence. Consequently, as suggest previously, one might strike a connection in “sensible evidentialist” fashion, by considering it that it be epistemically reasonable from a deontological perspective, that the common believer is connected to

²¹⁸ Ibn Rushd. *Fasl al-Maqal*. Trns. GF Hourani in *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Ed. R. Lerner dan M. Mahdi (The Free Press of Glencoe, 1986), 165-170.

²¹⁹ Ibid. 171-172.

the set of evidence derived by the scholarly class of the epistemic community, through a testimonial chain. In this way, their belief in God/Islam would be both basic and non-basic in some sense. This particular approach has also been defended by Colin Ruloff, who argues that in light of potential defeaters for one's religious belief(s)—such as a defeater from religious diversity—it may be possible for the common believer to defeat (or deflect) that defeater, by coming to be aware that there are individuals, experts of sorts, in the broader epistemic community who do possess the relevant propositional evidence to address the defeater in question.²²⁰ This idea does also run closely with the thought that it's principally the task of the *mutakallimūn* to “refute opponents of the religion”, as alluded to earlier. That being said, we haven't gained much ground thus far over what we already covered in the section concern the Ash'arite school and contemporary religious epistemology, what we really need to do now, is to see how this can also fit and combine with a Taymiyyan approach. That is, how we can further synthesise the broadly theistic evidential and Reformed epistemological intuitions expressed in these different traditions, together.

The way in which this is to be achieved according to this *first way*, is by limiting the epistemic function of *fiṭra*, making the distinction between theistic and Islamic belief more explicit, and by re-considering the role of reason or inference, in a Taymiyyan paradigm. Now, although as we have seen, the *kalām* position emphasises that justified religious belief ought to be grounded in inference, some of the *mutakallimūn* have allowed that knowledge of God in some sense be grounded in *fiṭra*. For example, the Ash'arite *mutakallim* al-Shahrastānī (d. 1158 CE), explicitly stated that, “the Creator (Exalted is He!) is too well known for His existence to be pointed to by anything, and the recognition of Him (Exalted is He!) is through *fiṭra*.”²²¹ Similarly, another Ash'arite *mutakallim* al-Aṣfahānī (d. 967 CE) stated that, “a generalized knowledge of God, is firmly rooted in the soul, and it is in the knowledge of every person that he is created.”²²² Now, it is clearly from this particular passages that these *mutakallimūn* might be willing to grant that *fiṭra* has some role to play concerning one's theistic knowledge, but it ought to be stressed that this knowledge is of a limited kind. That is

²²⁰ Colin Ruloff. “Evidentialism, warrant, and the division of epistemic labor”. *Philosophia* 31, (2003), 194-198.

²²¹ Al-Shahrastānī. *Kitāb al-Muṣāra'a* (Cairo, 1997), 89.

²²² Al-Aṣfahānī. *Kitāb al-Dhari'ah* (Dār al-Salām, 2007), 199.

to say, not necessarily knowledge of God in the fullest sense, but *at least* knowledge of God as Creator. In fact, when we come to consider Ibn Taymiyya's numerous passages concerning knowledge of God by *fiṭra*, it is primarily of God as Creator that he comes to emphasise, such as in his saying that, "the affirmation of the Creator and His perfection is innate (*fiṭrīyya*) and necessary (*darūrīyya*) with respect to one whose *fiṭra* remains intact."²²³

As a result of the above, we might conclude that the principle epistemic function of *fiṭra*, is to give us a knowledge of a concept of God which ranges from thin-thick depending on certain caveats, but is primarily a concept of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Consequently, when it comes to this understanding of *fiṭra* within an Islamic epistemology, the distinction between theistic and Islamic belief is explicit: *fiṭra* gives us access to knowledge of God (in some sense), and might act as the basis of background beliefs relevant to inferences to Islamic belief, but does not strictly give us knowledge of Islam in the fullest sense. We might give this idea additional weight by further considering an important and particularly important epistemic concern for the *mutakallimūn*, namely the problem of religious diversity. For whilst this problem is evident when it comes to considering divergent religious beliefs, when it comes to the concept of God, there is far more convergence and one might think that the strength of one's *seeming* that God exists as Creator is not sufficiently worrisome to warrant it defeated by such a problem. Therefore, we might think that it is unproblematic to think that theistic belief can be properly basic for a believer on the *kalām* view, but unlike Islamic belief, which as succumbing to such problems as that of religious diversity, requires further propositional evidence.

Finally, Ibn Taymiyya himself makes it clear that *reason* does have an important role to play in the context of Islamic belief and particularly the veracity of Islamic revelation. Considering the following passage:

Reason points to the trustworthiness (*ṣidq*) of the prophet in a general and absolute way. [Reason] is like an untrained man (*‘āmmī*), who, if he knows the expertise of the *mufīṭ* [M] and points someone else [S] towards him, explains to the latter [S] that the former [M] is a scholar and a *mufīṭ*. When the untrained man, who points to the *mufīṭ*, disagrees with the *mufīṭ*, it is incumbent upon the one who requests a *fatwā* [S] to submit to the teachings of the *mufīṭ*. Now, consider the untrained man says to the one who requests a *fatwā* [S]: "I am the foundation (*al-*

²²³ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya. *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (Mujamma' al-Malik Fahd, 1995), 6:73.

aṣl) of your knowledge that he is a *muftī*. Now that his teachings oppose my teachings, if you give preference to his teachings over mine you dismiss (*qadaḥta*) the source by which you found out that he is a *muftī*.” The one who requests the *fatwā* [S] answers: “Once you acknowledged that he is a *muftī* and once you pointed to this fact, you acknowledged the necessity of following him rather than following you, and this is what your pointing (*dalīl*) acknowledged. My agreement with you regarding this particular knowledge [namely knowing who is the *muftī*] does not mean that I also agree with you in your knowledge about other issues. Your mistake in disagreeing with the *muftī*, who is more knowledgeable than you, does not mean that you are also mistaken in knowing that he is a *muftī*.²²⁴

In this interesting parable in his *Dar’*, as Frank Griffel explains, “the untrained man (*‘āmmī*) verifies the expertise and the trustworthiness of another person – namely the *muftī* ([M]) – quite similar to how al-Ghazālī’s character witness points to the chief witness’ truthfulness (*ṣidq*). In their two respective parables, the untrained man and the character witness represent reason. In both cases their task is to point to the truthfulness of those who in this parable represent revelation ... These similarities between Ibn Taymiyya’s and al-Ghazālī’s parable again illustrate that both hold reason verifies revelation.”²²⁵

Now, if Griffel’s analysis is correct, this means that it is possible to conceive of a Taymiyyan perspective as actually suggesting that in some sense reason (*‘aql*) is what verifies revelation; it is that source by which one comes to *know* that the revelation is veracious.

8.2. The Second Way:

This approach seeks to re-appropriate the notion of *fiṭra* along the lines of what Dougherty and McAllister have suggested concerning the epistemic function of the *sensus divinitatis* in forming theistic beliefs. According to Dougherty and McAllister, the *sensus divinitatis* functions to produce a particular *seeming* that *p*, by forming a tacit inference that gives rise to that particular *seeming*. For instance, suppose “we undergo an experience with propositional content; for instance, it seems that you have violated a moral law. Through the *sensus divinitatis* we intuitively grasp a support relation between this experiential content, in conjunction with your background evidence, and a proposition about God; for instance, you tacitly perceive that violating a moral law

²²⁴ Quoted in: Frank Griffel. “Ibn Taymiyya and His Ash’arite Opponents on Reason and Revelation: Similarities, Differences, and a Vicious Circle”. *The Muslim World 1*, (2018), 36-37.

²²⁵ Ibid. 37.

implies that there is a moral law, that the existence of a moral law supports the existence of a moral lawmaker, that the only plausible moral lawmaker is God, and, hence, that violating the moral law makes you guilty before God.”²²⁶

This idea means that when an individual forms a belief about God on the basis of *fiṭra*, they are actually engaged in some form of inferential reasoning, and yet at the same time they will come to hold their belief in immediate fashion. Therefore, it might be able to satisfy a *kalām*-inspired theistic evidentialist criteria on knowledge of God, as well as being able to satisfy the Taymiyyan intuition that belief in God should come relatively easily and needn’t be the result of longwinded philosophical arguments, but rather can simply be the product of *fiṭra* when intact. The former idea can be expressed by saying that *fiṭra* “operates by tacitly engaging in natural theology”.²²⁷

Moreover, this approach would actually connect well with the first way that we have just outlined as well. In this case, we might think that whilst *fiṭra* operates on a tacit level in order to form theistic beliefs about God and by extension Islam, the scholarly community of the faithful, can more explicitly rehearse the steps of the inference and perhaps further cement the beliefs by considering further implications and potential objections. In other words, the ability of the scholarly class to engage in sophisticated conscious rehearsals of these sorts of tacit inferences engaged by *fiṭra*, allows there to be some congruence between this position and a sensible evidentialist one.

Consequently, we might think that this approach goes some way to connect the *kalām*-inspired and Taymiyyan positions together quite nearly. Before we consider which of these approaches is the most plausible, let’s turn now to consider our third and final way to connect these positions together.

²²⁶ Blake McAllister and Trent Dougherty. “Reforming reformed epistemology: a new take on the *sensus divinitatis*”. *Religious Studies* 55, (2018), 18.

²²⁷ *Ibid.* 22.

8.3. The Third Way:

This final approach draws on the work of John DePoe,²²⁸ and aims to reconcile the apparent problems which both of the positions we're considering seek to address, as well as their central intuitions. The *mutakallim* theistic evidentialist is likely to think that its standards are necessary for the believer to achieve in order to have warranted belief in theism and Islam, in order to escape the problem that liberal standards give, by allowing all sorts of other faith traditions to pass as warranted. On the other hand, the Taymiyyan might object to the overly strenuous standards that the *mutakallim* theistic evidentialist lays down, rather they might think that those standards would prevent the ordinary believer from being attributed with warranted belief in theism and Islam, when it is clear that they do possess warranted beliefs of that kind, or at least it should be possible and the *kalām* standards make it unattainable.

In order to mediate these concerns, this approach draws on an important distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness in arguing that theistic evidentialist standards need not be unattainable such that the ordinary believer must lack sufficient warrant for knowledge concerning her theistic and Islamic beliefs. And at the same time, that these standards need not be so loose as to permit warrant for any manner of religious beliefs. Let us then consider the distinction between these two types of awareness, (a) conceptual, and (b) non-conceptual.²²⁹ The paradigm case of the former, is simply a belief. When some person *S* believes that *p*, he or she has awareness of *p* in virtue of holding the belief that *p*. In other words, *S* is conceptually aware of *p* because he or she is aware *that* something is the case, and hence employs the relevant concepts about *p* in forming the belief that *p*. By contrast, one is non-conceptually aware of something when one is directly aware of something without any mediating awareness, which includes conceptual mediation. Non-conceptual awareness is often expressed in terms of a subject being aware *of* something being the case, without necessarily being aware *that* it is the case. The paradigm case of this sort of non-conceptual awareness is “direct acquaintance”.

²²⁸ John DePoe. “What’s (Not) Wrong with Evidentialism”. *The Global Journal for Classical Theology* 13, (2016), 1-17.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* 8.

Bertrand Russell writes that one is directly acquainted with some object, when one stands in a “direct cognitive relation to the object, i.e. when [one] is directly aware of the object itself.”²³⁰ In other words, for one to be directly acquainted with some object, one will have an immediate, non-inferential and non-conceptual awareness of it. Crucially, this idea helps to explain how one may have some sort of awareness of their reasons for believing something to be true, even if they are not conceptually aware of those reasons. DePoe offers an example as to how this might go:

In the case of automatic driving, a person can drive for a long stretch of time and suddenly realize that he has been driving without being conceptually aware of the fact that he has been driving. Of course, the person wasn't *unconscious*, nor is it plausible to believe that the person has been *completely unaware* of his driving. Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain how he was able to navigate his vehicle without causing a wreck. On my analysis, cases like automatic driving demonstrate the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual awareness. The driver is *non-conceptually aware* of his mental activities while driving, but he is not conceptually aware of them until he has that jolting realization.²³¹

In this particular example, we can see how it is possible to be aware of perhaps a number of mental and physical activities without being conceptually aware of them. In another example, DePoe illustrates how this might work in the case of *reasoning*, as opposed to merely a practical form of act. He mentions how he was sitting in his office one occasion, and he experienced slight tremors. Consequently, he became convinced that he was experiencing an earthquake. Having reached this conclusion, he reflected upon how he had reached the conclusion, recovering a fairly complex line of reasoning that his mind had managed to assemble almost instantaneously. Accordingly, DePoe argues that these sorts of experiences, illustrate how we might be *non-conceptually* aware of elaborate patterns of reasoning, which may only be understood through after-the-fact careful introspection and reflection. Nonetheless, and crucially, it shows how it might be possible to have an awareness of reasons for believing something to be true, without being conceptually aware of those reasons.²³²

This is crucial because, according to DePoe, it is plausible to think that most religious believers even among the common faithful, are aware of reasons for what they believe, even if that awareness is non-conceptual. As DePoe, puts it, “these reasons, however,

²³⁰ Ibid. 9.

²³¹ Ibid. 10.

²³² Ibid. 12.

typically are not brought to the level of conceptual awareness without the right promptings. Furthermore, it typically takes significant time and introspective reflection to find the right way to describe accurately what those reasons are precisely.”²³³ According to DePoe, many religious folk “while having no formal training in philosophy or theology, often are able to describe reasons they have for their religious beliefs. Sometimes—perhaps more often than not in my experience—these reasons aren’t entirely bad. These people sometimes state reasons that sound like a cosmological or teleological argument for the existence of God (although they would never use the technical vocabulary that is found in academic discussions of these arguments).”²³⁴ Elsewhere, he adds that “many people may possess sufficiently strong evidence that grounds their religious beliefs, yet they may not be able to express their grounds for holding their religious beliefs in ways that are conceptually scrupulous or luminous ... In many cases, it is clear that given more time and conceptual resources the nascent ideas held by the common folk could be expressed more fully in ways that are more logically rigorous.”²³⁵

The upshot of this of course, is the idea that the common faithful among the Muslim (epistemic) community for instance, might be aware of good reasons for theism and Islam, such that they would be able to satisfy some theistic evidentialist standard necessary for warrant. At the same time of, as DePoe puts it, this doesn’t mean that “the only way ordinary folks could hold them [i.e., their religious beliefs] is through advanced training in philosophy, history, or theology ... ordinary folks may have good reasons for their religious beliefs even though they do not have an advanced education.”²³⁶ Nonetheless, this also does not mean that they lack awareness of good reasons for their religious beliefs, only that their awareness is of a non-conceptual kind, and we might think, in combining these ideas with a sensible evidentialist position, that it is the job of the scholarly class to develop these reason in conceptually luminous fashion. Thus, this gives us another interesting way to attempt a synthesis between the *kalām* and *Taymiyyan-atharī* positions.

²³³ Ibid. 11-12.

²³⁴ Ibid. 12.

²³⁵ John DePoe. “Classical Evidentialism”. In *Debating Christian Religious Epistemology* eds. John M. DePoe and Tyler Dalton McNabb (Bloomsbury, 2020), 21.

²³⁶ John DePoe. “What’s (Not) Wrong with Evidentialism”. *The Global Journal for Classical Theology* 13, (2016), 1-17.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have attempted to outline the distinct trends and perspectives concerning the epistemology of religious belief, within the classical Islamic theological traditions. In doing so, I have attempted to situate these broadly medieval epistemic and theological positions within the conceptual framework of contemporary epistemology and philosophy of religion.

In particular, the thesis sought to consider the extent to which certain theo-epistemic trends within Islamic theology, might be best understood or incorporated under a broadly “theistic evidentialist” framework, and those which might be best understood as embracing a sort of “reformed epistemology”. At the same time, it sought to consider how some of the theo-epistemic views within Islamic theology map onto contemporary normative epistemological theories concerning the nature of knowledge, particularly those of internalist vis-à-vis externalist theories, which would neatly align with either a theistic evidential or a reformed epistemological perspective.

Following the introduction in chapter I, the thesis then considered a general outline of the particular trends or schools within the Islamic theological tradition which were the focus of the thesis, namely the Mu’tazilite, Ash’arite, Maturidite and Atharite schools, in chapter II. On the basis of those general remarks concerning those theological schools, a general epistemic theme of emphasis was attempted to be made detectable particularly concerning the dynamics or relationship between reason and revelation. These remarks formed the basis by which the epistemic trends within these distinct theological schools was to be further developed.

Chapter III laid out the basic concepts and frameworks within contemporary epistemology, which are essential for the project the thesis entails to carry out, as well

as forming the necessary background into which theistic evidential and reformed epistemological positions make sense, and can be shown to have epistemic merit. Chapter IV then began to do the important work on the basis of the concepts outlined in the previous chapter, by considering how distinct ideas within epistemology have developed into at least three primary approaches to religious epistemology within contemporary philosophy of religion: theistic evidentialism, reformed epistemology and fideism (as well as presuppositionalism). The chapter laid out those positions or trends within contemporary religious epistemology, the first two of which positions were the central focus of the thesis when applied to epistemological positions within Islamic theology. This chapter considered some of the complexities of these positions and trends within them, as well as marking out differences and spaces where the positions overlap and interact with each other. This latter point is crucial for the consideration of a merging between certain positions within the Islamic tradition.

Chapter V initiated the central focus of the thesis, by beginning to analyse and assess the first of the Muslim theological schools under consideration: the Mu'tazilite school. It also sought to translate the classical Mu'tazilite perspectives into a contemporary religious epistemological framework. As a school of *kalām* the Mu'tazilites emphasised the importance of reason in theological issues, and aimed to emphasise the importance of *wujūb al-naẓar* or the duty to engage in discursive reasoning, in order for one's theistic and Islamic faith to attain sufficient epistemic appraisal for knowledge. In drawing in particular on the Mu'tazilite theologian 'Abd al-Jabbār, the chapter demonstrated how the classical Mu'tazilite position was best framed in theistic evidentialist terms, under the guise of a JTB or causal account of knowledge to put it into contemporary terms.

Chapter VI – VIII continued the aforementioned endeavour first by considering the other main schools of *kalām*: the Ash'arite school (in chapter VI) and the Maturidite school (in chapter VII). In light of their *kalām*-based approach to the Islamic tradition, unexpectedly both of these Sunni schools of *kalām* were shown to be best situated in a theistic evidentialist framework. Although the schools differ to some extent concerning the legitimacy of faith grounded in *taqlīd*. The Ash'arite tradition was shown to lay down some epistemic positions from which an important synthesis could be achieved between the *kalām* schools and the *atharī* school.

Chapter VIII explored the Atharite and specifically Taymiyyan understanding of this trend within the Islamic tradition. This *atharī-Taymiyyan* position represented the most contrasted of the trends among the theological schools explored within the tradition. Rather than being best built into the framework of theistic evidentialism, this particular perspective aligned much more readily with reformed epistemology, with the emphasis on *fiṭra* and the rejection of the epistemic requirement of believers having propositional evidence for theism and Islam to be appraised with knowledge of the relevant propositions. Moreover, the Taymiyyan *fiṭra*-based epistemology, neatly aligned with an externalist account of warrant, as opposed to the broadly internalist epistemological positions evident in the schools of *kalām*.

In chapter IX, I attempted to wed together and bridge the gap of the central intuitions apparent in the contrasting trends within the Islamic theological tradition, namely *kalām*-based theistic evidentialism and *atharī-Taymiyyan* reformed epistemology. In doing so, three distinct but in some sense intertwined approaches were considered to bring the synthesis together: (1) a sensible evidentialist approach, (2) a tacit-inference based approach, and (3) a non-conceptual awareness based approach.

Overall, I think the thesis has gone some way to address the primary research questions and has made important steps forward for further discussion

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