

‘ABD AL-JABBAR’S DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract

This article will analyze ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s view on the definition of knowledge. It will show that not only are ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s definitions of knowledge influenced by his theology, but that they were developed throughout his intellectual development. Some views of the late Mu‘tazilites on ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s definitions of knowledge will be highlighted.

Introduction

The definition of knowledge has been the fundamental element of epistemological discussion among Muslim theologians (*mutakallimun*) since the foundation of their theological doctrines. They attempt to explain what knowledge really meant in order to find acceptable definitions that could be applied to God and man, to revelation and to reason.¹ Therefore, we find that there are various definitions of knowledge presented by them.

The disagreement on the definition of knowledge stems from different reasons: Two of these relate to the way they understand the nature of knowledge and also their interpretations on the concept of definition. Thus, before discussing Abd al-Jabbar’s definition of knowledge, it is important to discuss the two reasons mentioned by the Mutakallimun.

The Nature of Knowledge

We observe that the views of Muslim theologians regarding the nature of knowledge can be divided into three major divisions: The first sees that the nature of knowledge as that which is known

¹ Rosenthal, F. M., *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 46-7.

immediately (*daruri*);² hence, there is no need for a definition for this or one may say, that it is impossible to define. This view was introduced by Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606/1210). He argues that one knows his own existence by immediate knowledge (*‘ilm daruri*) which does not need proof or reflection (*nazar*). Since one’s knowledge of oneself is immediate, and it is specific knowledge (*‘ilm al-khass*), hence knowledge in general terms (*ma‘na al-‘amm*) must be that which is also immediately known (*daruri*).³ Hence, if a general meaning of knowledge is immediately known, it does not need a proof or a definition. In addition, al-Razi maintains that if knowledge is acquired and needs definition, it is either defined by itself or by others. He argues that in both cases they are false. For other than knowledge is defined (*yu‘raf*) by knowledge, and if knowledge is defined by another, it will imply a circle (*dawr*), since each depends on each other. This implication, he insists, is implausible.⁴

The second view considers that the definition of knowledge is discursive (*nazari*), but difficult to define. This view was supported by al-Juwayni (d. 478/1085) and al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111). They argue that the way to identify knowledge is through division (*al-qisma*). However, this division could only differentiate between assent (*‘ilm tasdiqi*) and belief (*i‘tiqadat*), but not identify knowledge per se (*mutlaq al-‘ilm*).⁵

The third view believes that the definition of knowledge is discursive and not difficult to define. The majority of Muslim scholars, including philosophers and theologians from the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites, incline towards the third view.

² For the views of the *mutakallimun* on *‘ilm daruri*, see Binyamin Abrahamov, “Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* XX (1993), 20-32.

³ For ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s view on Immediate Knowledge see my article, “Immediate Knowledge According to al-Qadi ‘Abd al-Jabbar” in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* XXIII (2013), 101-115.

⁴ Cf. al-Razi, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* or *Tafsir al-Kabir*, 32 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978), 2: 186-187.

⁵ Cf. al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf Istilahat al-funun*, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1998), 2: 1056.

Hence, our concern here is the third view, since it is the view of the majority of the *mutakallimūn*.⁶

The Concept of Definition

The *mutakallimūn*, in general, have their own way of defining things. Their disagreement on the concept of definition also contribute to a difference on the definition of knowledge. Explaining the nature of definition, Abu Hashim al-Jubba'i (d. 321/933) states:

There are a lot of things that we would like to define; yet, we are unable to find a suitable and concise terminology for that meaning. Therefore, we need to mention the rules or guidelines (*ahkam*) that are related to it and the states that refer to it...for the aim of a definition is to clarify its aims (*aghrad*). As it is permissible for an interpreter (*mufassir*) to deal conclusively with his interpretation based on what he thinks suitable either to add or to reduce, to prolong or to summarize, similarly it is also permissible in the context of definition.⁷

From this passage, one might observe that the concept of definition by Abu Hashim is neither complicated nor sophisticated. The general rule is that the definition interprets the meaning of the thing defined and will not lead one to become ignorant (*jahl*) of it. The definition must also omit anything that is outside the thing defined. In addition, a definer must have the freedom to interpret what he thinks suitable in his definition. When these rules are fulfilled, the definition of a thing is acceptable.⁸

Abu al-Husayn al-Basri (d.436/1044), however, disagrees with this method of definition. He believes that the definition must explain the reality of the thing defined. Therefore, definition for him is a

⁶ Cf. al-Tahanawi, *Kashshaf*, 2: 1057.

⁷ °Abd al-Jabbar, *al-Mughni fi Abwab al-Tawhid wa al-°Adl*, 16 Vols. edited by a group of scholars led by Taha Husayn, (Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Culture, 1960-1969), 12: 14-15.

⁸ For information regarding °Abd al-Jabbar's arguments on the differences of the definition of knowledge among the Mu°tazilites see *Mughni*, 12: 14-6.

revealer (*kashif*) of the meaning and the reality of the thing defined. Preferring the view of Abu al-Husayn over the majority of the Mu^ctazilites, Ibn al-Malahimi argues that if there is no definition of knowledge, and we were asked about its reality, it is appropriate for us to use words that reveal its reality and become a definition of knowledge.⁹

There is also a debate regarding defining something by changing (*ibdal*) it with another word. ^cAbd al-Jabbar (415/1025), in one of his book, clearly accepts this form of definition when he defines reflection (*nazar*) with thinking (*fikr*).¹⁰ Ibn al-Malahimi, however, disagrees with ^cAbd al-Jabbar. He argues that changing the word will not explain the attribute that distinguishes the thing defined from others. For instance, if you define knowledge as clarification (*tabayyun*), then one would ask you what clarification is.¹¹ He argues further that the aim of defining something is to explain the characteristic and judgments (*ahkam*) that reveal its reality and distinguish it from others. Therefore, defining something by changing it for another word will not suffice, since it does not reveal the reality of the thing defined. Therefore, it is an inappropriate method of definition. Ibn al-Malahimi also reports a similar view from Abu al-Husayn in the latter's *Sharh al-^cUmad*; therefore, both of them reject ^cAbd al-Jabbar's definition of reflection as thinking.¹²

Early Mu^ctazilites Definition of Knowledge

Early Mu^ctazilites mostly agreed that knowledge is from the genus of belief or conviction (*i^ctiqad*).¹³ Therefore, they use the word *i^ctiqad* to define knowledge. Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi (d. 317/931), a Baghdadi Mu^ctazilite, for instance, defines knowledge as "believing

⁹ Ibn al-Malahimi, Mahmud b. Muhammad. *Kitab al-Mu^ctamad fi Usul al-Din*, ed. M. McDermott and W. Madelung, (London: al-Hoda, 1991), 12.

¹⁰ ^cAbd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 4.

¹¹ According to Ibn al-Malahimi, Abu al-Husayn accepts this form of definition in his *Tasaffih* and *Ghurar*, but rejects it in *Sharh al-^cUmad*. Cf. Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu^ctamad*, 17-8.

¹² Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu^ctamad*, 13.

¹³ ^cAbd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 16 & 60.

the thing (to be) as it is".¹⁴ His definition, however, has been criticized by many theologians.¹⁵

Abu al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, (d. 429/1037), an Ash'arite theologian, for instance, rejects this definition with the argument that defining knowledge as "believing the thing (to be) as it is", implies a similarity between knowledge and belief. This similarity is implausible since it includes belief through uncritical imitation (*taqlid*) and mere chance (*sudfah*) in knowledge; for a lucky person (*mubkhit*) and uncritical imitator (*muqallid*) could believe the thing as it is, without knowing it. In addition, it would include one who has presumption (*zann*) and doubt (*shakk*). This implication clearly contradicts what has been agreed among grammarians (*ahl al-lugha*), that a knowing person (*°alim*) is certain of what he knows without any doubt or disbelief.¹⁶

°Abd al-Jabbar's Definition of Knowledge

°Abd al-Jabbar defines knowledge¹⁷ with various definitions in at least four¹⁸ of his works, namely *al-Mughni*, *al-°Umad*, *Sharh*, and

¹⁴ Al-Baghdadi, *Usul al-din*, (Istanbul: Dar al-Funun fi Madrasa al-Ilahiyyat, 1928), 5. Marie Bernand, based on Vajda's report, mistakenly attributes this definition to °Abd al-Jabbar cf. Bernand, *Le Problème De La Connaissance D'Après Le Mugni Du Cadi °Abd al-Gabbar*, (Alger: Société nationale d'édition et de diffusion, 1982) 265.

¹⁵ Abu Ya°la, Muhammad b. al-Husayn b. al-Farra'. *al-Mu°tamad fi Usul al-Din*, ed. W. Z. Haddad, (Beirut: Dar el-machreq, 1974), 32; *Mughni*, 12: 17. This definition was also rejected by Plato, see his *Theaetetus*, trans. M.J. Levett, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 338; Conrford, F. M. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge, 1935), 142.

¹⁶ Cf. al-Baghdadi, *Usul al-din*, 5; *Mughni*, 12: 17-18.

¹⁷ F. Rosenthal mentions the significance of °Abd al-Jabbar's analysis on the definition of knowledge in the *Mughni*, but he does not elaborate on it since he received the *Mughni* after the completion of his *Knowledge Triumphant*. He considers that °Abd al-Jabbar's *Mughni* as one of the most complete references by classical Muslim theologians in dealing with the definition of knowledge. See *Knowledge Triumphant*, 51 & 63.

¹⁸ M. Bernand has discussed two definitions of knowledge mentioned by °Abd al-Jabbar in the *Mughni*. She concludes that both definitions are problematic since they used the word *al-shay'*, see her *Le Problème* 265.

al-Muhit.¹⁹ At the early stage²⁰ of his prolific academic life, °Abd al-Jabbar preserved the traditional Mu°tazilites' method of defining knowledge by using the word belief (*i°tiqad*).²¹ In *al-°Umad*, he defines knowledge as: "the belief that satisfies the soul that its object (*mu°taqad*) is as one believes it to be".²² At this stage, °Abd al-Jabbar was still strongly connected with the definition of Abu Hashim al-Jubbai (d. 321/933).²³ Therefore, he defended the method of defining knowledge as a type of belief. °Abd al-Jabbar maintained that the Ash°arites' argument rejecting this definition, that "if knowledge (*°ilm*) is belief (*i°tiqad*), therefore, a knower (*°alim*) is a believer (*mu°taqid*)", would not imply that God has "become a believer" since the nature of knowing is different between humans and God. While the former knows with knowledge, the latter knows with His essence (*bi dhatih*) and not with knowledge (*al-°ilm*). Therefore, God is not a believer (*mu°taqid*).²⁴

°Abd al-Jabbar argues that if we assume that God knows through knowledge, either that knowledge exists or it does not exist. It is implausible for God to know through the non-existent knowledge; since, if so, it would be possible for us to know with non-existent knowledge as well. However, this is not the case. Therefore, knowledge must exist, either it is eternal or temporal.²⁵

He argues further that if we assume that knowledge is eternal (*qadim*), this implies the existence of multiple eternal existences

¹⁹ °Abd al-Jabbar, *al-Mughni* 12: 13; Cf. Mankdim or Manakdim, Shashdiw, Ahmad b. Abi Hashim al-Qazwini (°Abd al-Jabbar). *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsa*, ed. °A. K. °Uthman, (Cairo: Maktabat Wihba, 1965), 46; Ibn al-Malahimi, *al-Mu°tamad*, 14.

²⁰ The chronological order of °Abd al-Jabbar's works is based on his own report. He writes that *al-°Umad* was written before he dictated the *Mughni*. While *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsa* was dictated before the completion of the *Mughni*. Cf. *Mughni*, 20: (2), 258. I suggest that *al-Muhit* was dictated after *al-°Umad* and before the *Mughni*. For his definition of knowledge in it is similar with that in the *Sharh*, which I believe indicates similar thinking.

²¹ For more on this, see Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 63.

²² See Mankdim, *Sharh*, 45; cf. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 211.

²³ Abu Hashim relates knowledge to man's psychological reaction. Thus, he defines knowledge as "believing a thing (to be) as it is to one's own satisfaction (*ma°a sukun al-nafs ilayh*)". *Mughni*, 12: 14; Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 63.

²⁴ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 27-8.

²⁵ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 185.

(*ta°addud al-qudama'*). This implication is unacceptable because it would imply the existence of more than one God.²⁶ Likewise, °Abd al-Jabbar argues that it is implausible for God to know through temporal knowledge (*°ilm muhdath*), since this implies that God, who is omniscient (*Allah al-°Alim*), is a combination of an eternal essence and temporal knowledge. This implication, he believes, is inconsistent with the concept of *tawhid*. Therefore, it must be rejected.²⁷

Hence, due to the intellectual developments that related to theological disputes among the *mutakallimun*, °Abd al-Jabbar came up with other definitions of knowledge.²⁸ He needed a precise as well as concise definition that would cover all aspects of knowledge, exclude everything that was not included in it and of course escape criticism from his opponents.²⁹ Therefore, one might observe that in the *Muhit* and *Sharh*, °Abd al-Jabbar omitted all of the controversial words that he used in the *al-°Umad* definition, such as *i°tiqad* and *shay'*. He minimizes the words and focuses only on the tranquility of the soul (*sukun al-nafs*). Hence he defines knowledge as "what necessitates tranquility of the soul".³⁰

²⁶ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 195-7. °Abd al-Jabbar maintains that accepting the existence of eternal attributes of God implies a belief similar to Dualism (*al-Thanawiyya*) or Trinity in Christianity, who believed in more than one eternal being. For more detailed arguments on this, see Ibn Mattawayh, *Majmu° al-Muhit bi al-Taklif*, ed. J.J. Houben, (Beirut: Imprimeria Catholique, 1965)

(2), 175-84.

²⁷ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 186-8.

²⁸ This can be observed through his theological journey starting as an Ash°arite and ending up as a follower of the Mu°tazilite. Based on that approach one might observe that °Abd al-Jabbar always responds positively to the new knowledge he found throughout his intellectual journey. Therefore, it is normal for him to omit his definition of knowledge several times as a response to the Ash°arite's criticism especially when some of their arguments are plausible. The pressure here is not political but merely intellectual. For his early educational background see °Abd al-Karim °Uthman, *Qadi al-Qudat °Abd al-Jabbar b. Ahmad al-Hamadhan*, (Beirut, 1386/1967), 72.

²⁹ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 13.

³⁰ "*Al-Muqtada li sukun al-nafs*" or "*ma yaqtadi sukun al-nafs*" Cf. al-Malahimi, *Mu°tamad*, 14; Mankdim, *Sharh*, 46

However, this definition was again not secure from critics. This time his quarrel was not against the Ash'arites, but his own student, Abu al-Husayn al-Basri. The latter disagrees with 'Abd al-Jabbar's newly created definition of knowledge. He argues that 'Abd al-Jabbar's definition lacks what he calls the correspondence with the known (*al-mutabiq li al-ma'lum*).³¹

Hence, we find at a later stage of his academic life, 'Abd al-Jabbar defines knowledge in the *Mughni* differently from that in his previous works. Here, he defines knowledge as "the *ma'na* which produces tranquillity of the knower soul with respect to what he obtained".³² 'Abd al-Jabbar believed that true knowledge can be known when the soul of the knower becomes tranquil (*sukun*) towards what he knows without any doubt (*shakk*), assumption (*zann*) and mere chance (*sudfa*). However, he states that the *ma'na* must fall under the genus of belief in order to be considered knowledge.

In the *Mughni*, 'Abd al-Jabbar omits two words that have been targeted by the critics, *i'tiqad* and *shay'*. As a replacement, he uses the word "*ma'na*" (accident), one of the most ambiguous words in *kalam* terminology. Defining knowledge with the term *ma'na* was not popular among the Mu'tazilites; instead they prefer to define knowledge as a type of belief.³³ Thus, in order to understand 'Abd al-Jabbar's methodology for defining knowledge, it is both necessary and worthwhile to dwell on the meaning of the terms used.

Firstly, when 'Abd al-Jabbar defined knowledge as the *ma'na* which preserves the tranquillity of the learner's soul for what he

³¹ Cf. Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu'tamad*, 14.

³² "*Al-'ilm huwa al-ma'na al-ladhi yaqtadi sukun al-nafs al-'alim ila ma tanawalahu*", *Mughni*, 12: 13. According to Peters, Vajda Georges, in his "La Connaissance chez Saadia", is the first Western scholar to translate the word *sukun al-nafs* with the meaning of tranquillity of the soul. This was followed by Marrie Bernand in her "La Notion De 'Ilm Chez Les Premiers Mu'tazilites", in *Studia Islamica*, 36, 1972, 23-45 "*Le 'ilm chez les premiers Mu'tazilites*". She translates it as "*tranquillite de lame*". Cf. Peters, J. R. T. M. *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazili Qadi l-Qudat Abu l-Hasan 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad al-Hamadhani* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 49.

³³ Cf. al-Baghdadi, *Usul al-din*, 5; Abu Ya'la. *al-Mu'tamad fi Usul al-Din*, 32; *Mughni*, 12: 17.

obtained, what kind of *ma'na* was he referring to, and how did he relate this *ma'na* to knowledge? Secondly, how is the tranquillity of one's soul capable of determining true knowledge? Does this imply subjectivism? To answer these questions, we must first take account of the meaning of *ma'na* in his usage.

The Concept of *Ma'na*

The Basrian Mu'tazilites believe that every being is composed of atoms (*jawhar*) and accidents (*'arad*). *Ma'na* is one of the terms used to describe an accident. Others are cause (*'illa*), attribute (*sifa*) and assessment (*hukm*). A particular accident is named differently depending on the perspective from which it is described.³⁴

K. Reinhart brilliantly describes the position of these four terms in the example of an apple. He explains that *ma'na* is used to describe the ontological nature of a quality, insofar as it can be imagined to be apart from the thing in which it resides. Thus, "redness" is the "redness" of the apple's being red, and is said to be, as "redness," its *ma'na*; but, when the redness is considered causative (of the apple's being red), it is called *'illa*. The quality that it causes, namely the apple's redness, is called *sifa*; the *sifa* is the attribute, or adjective, in the phrase "the red apple". Declaring the apple to be red, or assessing it to be red, or predicating the redness of the apple, is an "assessment" (*hukm*). In the phrase "this apple is red", "red" is the *hukm* of the apple.³⁵

According to Wolfson, the word *ma'na* is an Arabic translation of the Greek word *pragma* (thing), which is also translated as *shay'*.³⁶ He states that, in Christianity, the word *ma'ani* (plural *ma'na*) is used by Yahya b. °Adi to describe the three members of the Trinity beside other terms, such as *aqanim* (hypostases) and *ashya'* (things). Due to the influence of Christianity on the understanding of *ma'na*, the

³⁴ Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 155-8.

³⁵ Reinhart, Kevin, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought* (New York: State University of New York, 1995), 147.

³⁶ Wolfson, Harry A. *The Philosophy of Kalam*, (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 11.

Mu^ctazilites, since Wasil b. ^cAta', rejected the Sifatiyya's view that God's attributes are the eternal *ma^cna*.³⁷

In Islamic theology, the theory of *ma^cna* was introduced by Mu^cammar (d. 215/830). Al-Khayyat explains Mu^cammar's theory of *ma^cna* as follows: having observed that of the two contiguous bodies at rest one began to move, while the other did not, Mu^cammar inferred that a *ma^cna* must inevitably abide in the one and not in the other, and it is on account of that *ma^cna* that the former is moved, for, were it not so, then the one would not be more capable of motion than the other.³⁸ Hence, *ma^cna* in Mu^cammar's theology is something that is distinct from something else. According to al-Razi, Mu^cammar is reported to have said that the *ma^cna* are also called things (*ashya'*),³⁹ and, evidently, because they exist in bodies as their subject, they are also called "accidents".⁴⁰

In contemporary Islamic studies, the concept of *ma^cna* in the theology of Mu^cammar received considerable attention from certain Western scholars.⁴¹ Frank considers that the *ma^cna* in Mu^cammar's theology means an accident. After examining Mu^cammar's views from several sources, Frank suggests that Mu^cammar was troubled by the question of why things differ from each other. The answer given by him is that things and accidents both differ and are the same because of what he calls *ma^cna*. This *ma^cna* is described by him as abiding in bodies, from within which it acts as the cause of motion (*haraka*) and rest (*sukun*) and all the other accidents of the bodies in which it abides.⁴² In the *Muhassal* of al-Razi, Mu^cammar is reported

³⁷ Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 117.

³⁸ Al-Khayyat, Abu al-Husayn ^cAbd al-Rahim Muhammad b. ^cUthman al-. *Kitab al-Intisar wa al-Radd ^cala Ibn al-Rawandi al-Mulhid*, ed. A. Nader (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1957), 46. Cf. Wolfson, Mu^cammar's Theory of *Ma^cna*, in *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of H. A. R. Gibb*, (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 675.

³⁹ Al-Razi, *Al-Muhassal fi afkar al-Mutaqaddimin wa al-Muta'akhhirin min al-^cUlama' wa al-Hukama' wa al-Mutakallimin*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyyah, n.d.), 104.

⁴⁰ Wolfson, "Mu^cammar's Theory of *Ma^cna*", 679.

⁴¹ The contention of Western scholars on the concept of *ma^cna* has been summarized by H. Wolfson in his article, "Mu^cammar's Theory of *Ma^cna*", 673-88.

⁴² Frank, "*Al-Ma^cna*: Some Reflection on the Technical Meaning of the Term in the *Kalam* and Its Use in the Physics of Mu^cammar", in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* LXXXVII (1967), 248-9.

to have said that the *ma°ani* are also called *ashya'* (things),⁴³ and, evidently, because they exist in bodies as their subject, they are also called "accidents".⁴⁴

Later, R. Frank studied the term *ma°na* as it is used by several *mutakallimun* in order to clarify its technical meaning in *kalam* in general.⁴⁵ He concludes that *ma°na* in its technical sense refers to an entity that determines something or, in his more technical term, "an immediate, intrinsic causal determinant". Explaining his understanding of the theory of *ma°na*, he states that the actuality of the accident of motion (*haraka*) in the subject, for instance, is the immediate causal determinant of its being in motion, and that the other accidents are the immediate intrinsic causes of its being (perceiver) *mudrik*, desirous (*mushtahi*), omniscient (*°alim*) and so on. In this sense, the term is an equivalent of the term "cause" (*°illa*).⁴⁶ In other words, Frank explains that *ma°na* is used to describe the ontological nature of a quality to the extent that it cannot be imagined to be apart from the thing in which it resides.⁴⁷

In his writings °Abd al-Jabbar does not only use *ma°na* in his definition of knowledge, but also for pain (*alam*)⁴⁸ desire (*shahwa*),⁴⁹ capacity (*qudra*)⁵⁰ and speech (*kalam*).⁵¹ He is

⁴³ Al-Razi, *Muhassal*, 104.

⁴⁴ Wolfson, "Mu°ammar's Theory of *Ma°na*", 679.

⁴⁵ He reports that the use of the word *ma°na* in Islamic theology represents accident (*°arad*), perception (*idrak*), motion (*haraka*), the modes of being in space (*akwan*), desire (*shahwa*), pain (*alam*), power (*qudra*), knowing (*°ilm*) and cause (*°illa*). Cf. Frank, "Al-*Ma°na*: Some Reflection," 249.

⁴⁶ Frank explains that the differences between *sabab* and *°illa* is that the first is used to detonate the element in a chain of causes or factors in a causal sequence leading from some initial end or event to a resulting event in another subject. The relation between *sabab* and its result (*musabbab*) need not be necessary. Meanwhile, *°illa*, on the other hand, is used in a strict sense, most commonly as the direct or primary determinant cause that produces its effect (*ma°lul*) immediately and necessarily. In short, *°illa* is a direct and primary cause and *sabab* is a chain of causes which is not direct. See Frank, *Al-*Ma°na*: Some Reflection*," 250.

⁴⁷ Reinhart, *Before Revelation*, 147. See Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 157.

⁴⁸ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 13: 3-9. cf. Heemskerck, Margaretha T. *Suffering in the Mu°tazilite Theology: °Abd al-Jabbār's Teaching On Pain and Divine Justice*, (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 81.

⁴⁹ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 4: 19; cf. Heemskerck, *Suffering*, 78.

⁵⁰ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 5: 49.

considered one of Muammar's successors who developed his theory of *ma'na* further technically. Mu'ammad's theory of *ma'na*, however, is not widely accepted among other 'Abd al-Jabbar's predecessors. Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i, for instance, as reported by 'Abd al-Jabbar, considers that *ma'na* has a non-technical "meaning".⁵² Meanwhile, Abu Ishaq b. 'Ayyash denied that pain is a *ma'na*. Instead, he maintains that we suffer a pain because of the absence of soundness (*sihha*) as a result of injury.⁵³

In the modern works most of the writers translate *ma'na* in 'Abd al-Jabbar's theology based on the context of their discussion. Hourani, in his work on 'Abd al-Jabbar's ethics, translates *ma'na* as "ground". When explaining 'Abd al-Jabbar's statement, "Know that, although a single definition embrace evils as we have explained, the respects (*wujuh*) in which they are evil differ".⁵⁴ Hourani maintains that respect (*wajh*) is similar to "ground" which is "*ma'na*" or *'illa*. He posits that these terms are familiar in Islamic jurisprudence in the sense of "ground for a prohibition or command of the *shari'a*".⁵⁵ Peters, in this regard, accepts Wolfson's translation of *ma'na* as accident, yet he also translates it as "qualifier". He explains that *ma'na* is a "qualifier" or accident which causes something to be entitled to a quality. Therefore, he argues that a living being is qualified as "speaking" (*mutakallim*) because of a qualifier (*ma'na*, here *kalam*) which inheres in another substrate.⁵⁶

The translation of *ma'na* as a "qualifier" has been accepted by Bernand⁵⁷ and Heemskerck.⁵⁸ However, in the context of knowledge,

⁵¹ 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 7: 82; cf. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 158.

⁵² Therefore, he maintains that we cannot call God *ma'na*, since its meaning is the intention of heart (*qasd al-qalb*) to speaking of what he means. However, he considered that it was permissible to say that God is *ma'niyy* in the sense that God is meant, when God is spoken of in speech (*kalam*) and tradition (*akhbar*) 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, v, 253.

⁵³ 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 9: 59. cf. Heemskerck, *Suffering*, 79-80.

⁵⁴ 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 6(i): 61.

⁵⁵ Hourani, F. George. *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics Of 'Abd al-Jabbar*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 63.

⁵⁶ He considers that Hourani's translation of *ma'na* as "ground" is vague, therefore need to be defined, cf. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 157-8.

⁵⁷ Bernand also gives other translation of *ma'na* such as synonym of ground (*'illa*), which is based on Hourani's translation; causal entity; incorporeal reality; and

Bernand translates it as a 'specific accident'. This can be observed through her translation of °Abd al-Jabbar statement⁵⁹ as follows:

La science est l'accident spécifique (*ma^cna*) qui implique, chez le sachant, la tranquillité de l'âme à l'égard de l'objet auquel la science s'applique. En cela, la science se distingue de tout autre genre de connaissance. Et ce *ma^cna* n'a en propre une telle qualification (*hukm*) que lorsqu'il consiste en une conviction (*i^ctiqad*) qui concerne l'objet tel qu'il est; cette conviction est alors une croyance (*i^ctiqad*) produite selon un mode particulier (*waqa^ca °ala waghī mahsusī*).⁶⁰

However, for the meaning of *ma^cna* in this context, I prefer K. Ghaneabassiri's translation as "entitative ground" is preferable. He states that "according to °Abd al-Jabbar, the *ma^cna* of our knowledge of a thing, to be not equivalent to the reality of the thing [body], corresponds to it as it really is".⁶¹ He also explains that °Abd al-Jabbar's definition of knowledge, through the notion of *ma^cna*, ontologically relates the world outside of humans to the internal experiences of 'conviction' and the 'tranquillity of the self'.⁶²

This sense of *ma^cna* will serve our purpose to indicate its significance in °Abd al-Jabbar's theological epistemology, for our concern here is the ontological aspect of *ma^cna*. Thus, Ghaneabassiri's interpretation of *ma^cna* prepared a considerable ground for us to demonstrate the relation between °Abd al-Jabbar's theology and his definition of knowledge. °Abd al-Jabbar's text that concerned this study is in the *Mughni* (fifth), when he discusses whether it is permissible to describe God as being a *ma^cna*. He says that:

direction. For her usage on these meanings see her *Le Problème*, 77-8, 138, & 321.

⁵⁸ For her interpretation in *ma^cna* as "pain" see, Heemskerck, *Suffering*, 78-9.

⁵⁹ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 13.

⁶⁰ Bernand, *Le Problème*, 273.

⁶¹ Ghaneabassiri, Kambiz, "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*", in *Journal of Islamic Studies* XIX (2008), 81.

⁶² Ghaneabassiri, "Epistemological Foundation", 81.

the *mutakallimun* use the term *ma'na* in reference to cause (*'illa*) of qualification, as they say: “a moving being (*mutaharrik*) is moving by virtue of a *ma'na*, and compares this with saying: “it is moving by virtue of a cause” (*'illa*). *Ma'na* in this sense is not used with reference to God [i.e. He does not move or is a moving thing with *ma'na*].⁶³

From the previous explanation, we can see that 'Abd al-Jabbar acknowledges that *ma'na* can have the sense of “cause of a qualification”; and it can also mean “something whose existence has been established”. *Ma'na* in the context of his definition of knowledge, in our opinion, is from both senses. 'Abd al-Jabbar believes that *ma'na* is a cause for us to know and also it is a real existence.

Therefore, one might observe that by choosing the word *ma'na* in his definition of knowledge, 'Abd al-Jabbar excludes the application of this definition to God. For, if this definition is applied to God, that implies that He knows with an “accident” (*ma'na*; here knowledge), which is real existence. If so, he needs to answer another question, that is, if this *ma'na* is real existence, is it pre-eternal or temporal? This question is considered problematic for most Mu'tazilites.⁶⁴

Thus, based on a theological background that is established by Wasil b. 'Ata' who denied the existence of God's attributes,⁶⁵ 'Abd al-Jabbar and other Mu'tazilites developed their definition of knowledge that concerns only human knowledge. From here, one might observe the influence of theological doctrine in the development of his theory of knowledge.

The word *ma'na* used in 'Abd al-Jabbar's definition of knowledge refers to the actuality of knowing in one self which

⁶³ 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 5: 253.

⁶⁴ A similar use of the word *ma'na* is observed when he describes that an agent who has body is omnipotent (*qadir*) with *ma'na*. Without this *ma'na* he cannot be considered as able. The point here is that there is distinction between God who is *qadir* by the virtue of his essence (*bi dhatih*) and other able agents who become capable with a *ma'na*, which is capacity, cf. *Mughni*, 5: 49.

⁶⁵ Wolfson, H., *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 117.

becomes the cause for his state of knowing. The existence of this *ma^cna* can be identified through the existence of the tranquillity in the knower's soul (*fi nafs al-^calim*).⁶⁶

The Tranquillity of the Soul

°Abd al-Jabbar bases his definition of knowledge on the tranquillity of the knower's soul. The concept of the tranquillity of the soul (*sukun al-nafs*) plays an important role in °Abd al-Jabbar's views on knowledge and in the distinction he makes between real knowledge and belief based upon uncritical imitation (*taqlid*) or traditionalism. He maintains that the tranquillity of the soul is self-evident and every subject immediately finds in himself this state (of the tranquillity of the soul). In describing this state, °Abd al-Jabbar reports:

The distinction one of us finds in him, when observing himself, between his being convinced that Zayd is in the house because he sees him, and his being convinced that he [Zayd] is there because an unknown person informed him, he finds in one of the two situations an additional state he does not find in another situation. It is this additional state we point to by saying 'tranquillity of the soul'.⁶⁷

According to M. Bernand, the discussion of the tranquillity of the soul among the Mu^ctazilites, was started by Abu °Uthman al-Jahiz (d. 254/868)⁶⁸ as a response to the first Arab philosopher, al-Kindi, who defined certainty (*yaqin*) as the tranquillity of understanding with the correctness of a proposition (*qadiyya*) with evidence (*burhan*). However, the first Mu^ctazilite who employs *sukun al-nafs* in the definition of knowledge is Abu Hashim al-Jubba'i.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ See also Frank, "Abu Hashim's Theory of States: Its Structure and Function", in *Actas, IV Congresso de Estudos Arabes e Islamicos*, (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 85-8.

⁶⁷ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 46-7; cf. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 48.

⁶⁸ Bernand, "La Notion De °*Ilm*", 23-4.

⁶⁹ Al-Kindi was a friend of al-Ma'mun and al-Mu'tasim. His association with these two sovereigns, plus the fact that he fell into disfavour during the reign of al-Mutawakkil (and was even deprived temporarily of his extensive library), lead one to suspect at least a tendency towards Mu^ctazilism on his part. However, the Mu^ctazilite scholars after him do not consider him one of them. Perhaps his

°Abd al-Jabbar and his predecessors have been criticized for using the word *sukun*, which literally means ‘unmoved’ in his definition of knowledge. The critic argues that the word *sukun* is normally used as the opposite of movement (*haraka*). Thus, defining knowledge with the word *sukun* is inconceivable since it is not from the genus of belief and normally applies to bodies.⁷⁰

In reply to this critic, °Abd al-Jabbar responds by saying that the word *sukun* in his definition of knowledge is metaphorical (*majaz*). He argues that it is permissible to use metaphorical words in the definition as long as they illuminate the reality of the defined thing. °Abd al-Jabbar agrees that the literal meaning of *sukun* is opposed to (movement) *haraka*, but, when combined with *nafs*, it means ‘tranquillity of the soul’.⁷¹

Explaining this issue further, °Abd al-Jabbar writes:

It is certain that the knower (*°alim*) realizes the difference between what he knows and what he assumes and believes...We describe this as tranquillity of the soul (*sukun al-nafs*). For a human will not find any confusion (*idtirab al-nafs*) in his belief that is based on knowledge compared to belief based on assumption (*zann*). Therefore, it is plausible to use this word (*sukun*) in defining knowledge...for that reason we refer to the tranquillity of the soul to the knower (*°alim*) and not to knowledge (*°ilm*).⁷²

This passage indicates that °Abd al-Jabbar, in his definition, emphasized the role of the knower (*°alim*). The knower decides whether what he believes in is knowledge or other. From here, one might observe that °Abd al-Jabbar was closely influenced by his theology in developing his definition of knowledge. Knowledge here

inclination toward philosophy is more obvious; hence he was included in the rank of philosophers. For more on this, see P. Adamson, “Al-Kindi and the Mu°tazila: Divine Attributes, Creation and Freedom”, in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, XIII (2003), 45-77.

⁷⁰ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 47.

⁷¹ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 48.

⁷² °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 20.

becomes personal because it is no longer determined by the outsider, but by one's own psychological state. Here, one might observe the role given by °Abd al-Jabbar to the human self.

This inclination indicates the influence of the doctrine of human free will in °Abd al-Jabbar's definition of knowledge.⁷³ For one might observe that free will of human being is a fundamental theology of the Mu°tazilites since it is the foundation for the second principle of their theology which is the justice of God (*al-°Adl*). Thus, in his definition of knowledge, °Abd al-Jabbar never fails to assert the doctrine of free will as every human being could decide whether his belief is knowledge or other than this.

However, although he considers that the existence of knowledge is determined by one's personal psychological state, i.e., through the tranquillity of the soul, yet °Abd al-Jabbar rejects the definition of knowledge that is based on the production of a precise act by the knower.⁷⁴ In this regard, he argues against those who accept this definition:

Say to him, when it is possible to define something with the rules that refer to it [the thing defined], it is necessary to do so and it is inconceivable to define it with the rules referring to something else, although it is related to it. We know that what we have mentioned about the tranquillity of the soul is referring to knowledge; whereas the occurrence (*wuqu°*) of action orderly is referring to the knower.

⁷³ Maha Freimuth considers that the *sukun al-nafs* in °Abd al-Jabbar's definition of knowledge is a divine assistance (*al-lutf*) which assures them of the correctness of their conviction. See Freimuth, Freimuth Maha E. *God and Human in Islamic Thought: °Abd al-Jabbar, Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 59.

⁷⁴ A similar definition was ascribed to Abu Bakr Ibn Furak (d. 406/1016). Cf. al-Amidi, Sayf al-Din, °Ali b. Abu °Ali, al-. *Abkar al-Afkar fi Usul al-Din*, 4 vols., ed. I. al-Ajuz, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, 2002), 74. However, when I refer to Ibn Furak's *Kitab al-Hudud*, he apparently defines knowledge with a different definition. Therefore, I suggest that perhaps Ibn Furak mentions this definition in his other work; this seems to be possible for he lived during the period where the *mutakallimun* were more loose in their concept of definition. We may observe this pattern among other *mutakallimun* such as al-Ash°ari and °Abd al-Jabbar who define knowledge with more than one definition.

These actions probably will occur or will not, because the knower sometimes knows something that is never occurring, let alone in an orderly fashion.⁷⁵

°Abd al-Jabbar also argues that the existence of tranquillity of the soul is known immediately by every man, but that was not the case for the production of precise acts; for the latter needs proof (*dilala*) to be confirmed. Therefore, he insists that his definition that is based on the tranquillity of the soul is preferable.⁷⁶ However, if everyone is in the position to say that his soul is at rest, then we have a kind of subjectivist relativism: whenever he decides his soul is at rest, his belief will be knowledge, so in some sense his belief's being knowledge is "up to him" rather than on the belief's relation to the way things really are. Therefore, one might ask whether °Abd al-Jabbar believes in the subjectivism of knowledge.⁷⁷

Based on °Abd al-Jabbar's statement, the answer is 'no'. In the *Mughni*, °Abd al-Jabbar indicates that those who believe that the truth is based on one's view are mistaken (*akhta'a*). His main argument is that the subjectivists reject the immediate knowledge (*ilm daruri*) of human beings such as sensory (*mushahadat*) and direct (*badihiyyat*) knowledge. Hence, he argues, based on this view, it is possible for one to believe that a black thing is white or vice versa; the universe is eternal (*qadim*) and temporal (*hadith*) at the same time. Since the falsity of these examples is immediately recognized by every *compos mentis* person; hence, the fallacy of this view is obvious.⁷⁸

In contrast, °Abd al-Jabbar emphasizes the objectivity of knowledge. He clearly indicates in the *Mughni* that knowledge must correspond to reality. °Abd al-Jabbar supports his view based on the legacy of his predecessors. In this regard, he writes:

What our *shuyukh* [Abu °Ali, Abu Hashim and Abu al-Hudhayl] (may Allah have mercy on them) say about knowledge is that it is of the genus of belief. When the belief is related to the object as it is, and

⁷⁵ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 21.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For Peters' comment on this question, see his *God's Created Speech*, 48.

⁷⁸ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 47-9.

occurs in a way that necessitates tranquillity of the soul (*sukun al-nafs*), it is knowledge (*°ilm*). When it is related to the object as it is not, it is ignorance (*jahl*). When it is related to it in a way that confirms it (*yuqawwihi*), but does not necessitate tranquillity of the mind, it is neither knowledge nor ignorance.⁷⁹

This passage indicates that, in order to become knowledge, certain belief must relate to the object as it is, and occurs in a way that necessitates the tranquillity of the soul. Otherwise, it is ignorance or something else. According to G. Hourani, knowledge, according to °Abd al-Jabbar, has both specific objective and subjective differences: [a] an intellectual content corresponding to reality in the manner of truth, and [b] a psychological state of satisfaction and tranquillity. Both characteristics are necessary to constitute knowledge.⁸⁰ However, one might ask why is it necessary to add [b]; for [a] seems sufficient?

The answer to this question can be observed from °Abd al-Jabbar's refutation of Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi's definition of knowledge.⁸¹ He argues that [b] is necessary, since without tranquillity of the soul in the definition of knowledge, a blind imitator (*muqallid*) or a merely fortunate person who knows by chance (*mabkhut*) will also be included since they may believe something (to be) as it is and assume that they feel the tranquillity of the soul yet they are not a knower (*°alim*).⁸²

Ibn al-Malahimi (d. 536/1141) explains that the meaning of the tranquillity of the soul is that the confidence (*tama'nina*) of the soul lies in the way that, if a doubt is raised about his belief, as one might say "you cannot guarantee that your belief is not false; he will not be in doubt (*lam yatashakkak*)". He explains that a *muqallid* may assume that he has tranquillity of the soul but, in reality, he is not. If one

⁷⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁸⁰ Hourani, G., *Islamic Rationalism*, 17.

⁸¹ °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 17-18; Al-Balkhi defines knowledge as "believing the thing (to be) as it is." Al-Baghdadi, *Usul al-din*, 5. Marie Bernard, based on Vajda's report, mistakenly attributes this definition to °Abd al-Jabbar cf. Bernard, *Le Problème*, 265.

⁸² °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 20.

says to the *muqallid* that “you take your belief (*madhhabuka*) from someone with the possibility that he is wrong. Therefore, you cannot guarantee that your belief is true since it was based on the foundation (*asl*) that is not secure that it was not wrong”. In this situation, the *muqallid* must be confused (*idtirab*) about his belief after that.⁸³

Another question that one might ask on this issue is that if the tranquillity of the soul is the only measurement of knowledge, is it plausible for an ignorant person to claim that he has knowledge based on the tranquillity of his soul? This question was asked earlier by Abu ʿUthman al-Jahiz (d. 254/868) regarding the tranquillity of an ignorant soul.⁸⁴

In responding to this question, ʿAbd al-Jabbar argues that an ignorant person only assumes that he has tranquillity of the soul. He is like somebody who sees the mirage (*sarab*) and thinks that it is water. Then, after investigating, he will realize that he is wrong. Although he imagines that he has the tranquillity of the soul because his belief does not correspond with reality, it is not knowledge.⁸⁵ This situation is similar to those who are ignorant in religious belief. When they find out that their belief is untrue, then they will leave it and embrace the new one which they consider to be the truth.⁸⁶

The abovementioned explanations indicate that ʿAbd al-Jabbar’s understanding of the reality of knowledge consists of two parts, subjective and objective. The subjective part, which is the state of tranquillity in the soul, is clearly mentioned in his *Mughni* definition. Yet, he did not mention the objective part of it, which corresponds with the reality of the outside world (*al-mutabiq li al-waqiʿ*). Therefore, a new question that arises is why ʿAbd al-Jabbar does not include this objective part in his definition of knowledge in the *Mughni*.

ʿAbd al-Jabbar does not include this fact in his *Mughni* definition of knowledge because he believes that the correspondence with reality is well known and accepted among the Muʿtazilites. Therefore, he considers it as a preliminary element (*muqaddimat*) of

⁸³ Ibn al-Malahimi, *Muʿtamad*, 15-6.

⁸⁴ ʿAbd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 37.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-25; Freimuth, *God and Human*, 55-59; Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism*, 17.

⁸⁶ ʿAbd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 37.

the definition of knowledge. What he appears to indicate here is that regardless of whether it was mentioned in the definition or not, it was well known among the Mu°tazilites that knowledge must correspond with reality. On this matter, he writes:

Our teachers, Abu °Ali and Abu Hashim (May Allah have mercy on them) mention that “knowledge is believing the thing (to be) as it is”, when it is derived from certain aspects, although they are differed regarding the terms used....The definition must cover something that differentiates the defined thing (*mahdud*) from others. However, since they know that the aim of definition is unveiling (*kashf*) the objective, it is possible for them in many of their definitions (*hudud*) to mention preliminaries for it (*muqaddimat lahu*). Also, it is possible sometimes to include in the definition something which is possible without it, if it was deleted. [For instance] we saw that they define a living being (*al-hayy*) as he whom actualizes (*yasihhu*) knowing (*°alim*) and power (*qadir*). If they only confine themselves to one of them [either knowing or powerful], it is correct, but they mention both of them; for it [meaning] will be clearer (*akshaf*).⁸⁷

°Abd al-Jabbar, in fact, realizes the importance of the first part of his teachers' definition of knowledge as “believing the thing (to be) as it is”. This can be observed when he clearly indicates that only the *ma°na* from the genus of belief [which brings the tranquillity of the soul] is considered knowledge; otherwise it is not knowledge.⁸⁸ Additionally, we can also detect this fact in his *al-°Umad* definition.⁸⁹

However, in the *Mughni*, he omits this element in his definition of knowledge. Instead, he focuses on the second (subjective) part of the definition [the tranquillity of the soul]. His argument is that the first part of his teachers' definition is only a preliminary point; so it is

⁸⁷ Ibid., 13-4.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁹ Cf. Mankdim, *Sharh*, 45; cf. Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu°tamad*, 14.

possible not to mention this fact in his definition of knowledge. By this, °Abd al-Jabbar wants to establish that correspondence with the reality (*mutabiq lil-waqi°*) is a consensus among the Mu°tazilites, albeit their differences on the use of words in defining knowledge, or, even if he does not mention it in his definition, that fact remains.⁹⁰ It is arguably clear that °Abd al-Jabbar has an account of *sukun al-nafs* that builds in the idea that one's soul should be at rest; therefore, he no longer needs the additional criterion, so it is no surprise that he eliminates it.

However, one might still ask why °Abd al-Jabbar went through all this development in his definition of knowledge. It appears as if this development was due to his responsive attitude towards the theological disputes during his time.⁹¹ °Abd al-Jabbar was familiar with theological disputes on the definition of knowledge, hence, he tried to present a definition that was acceptable to various *kalam* groups.

He was a contemporary to the Asharites prominent theologians, Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 403/1013) and Abu Mansur al-Baghdadi (d. 429/1037). Both al-Baqillani and al-Baghdadi had rigorously criticized the use of the words belief (*i°tiqad*) and thing (*shay'*) in the definition of knowledge by the Mu°tazilites. They argue that (i) the use of the word *i°tiqad* will imply that God is a believer (*mu°taqid*) and (ii) the use of word *shay'* implies that some known non-object (*ma°lum*), such as an associate (*sharik*) to God, will be excluded from knowledge.⁹²

°Abd al-Jabbar rejects their arguments in various places in his works. His arguments are based on the different nature of knowing between human beings and God. While the former knows with knowledge the latter knows with His essence. °Abd al-Jabbar rejects the existence of God's attributes. He suggests that God's attributes

⁹⁰ *Mughni*, 12: 15.

⁹¹ Cf. Kreamer, Joel, L. *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age*, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1-3.

⁹² Al-Baqillani, *Al-Tamhid al-Awa'il fi Talkhis al-Dala'il or Kitab al-Tamhid fi al-Radd °ala al-Mulhida al-Mu°attila wa al-Rafida wa al-Khawarij wa al-Mu°tazila*, ed. Richard J. McCarthy, (Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1957), 25; al-Baghdadi, *Usul al-din*, 5-6.

will imply the existence of more than one eternal existence (*ta‘ddud al-qudama’*).⁹³

Therefore, in his endeavour to offer an acceptable definition of knowledge by everyone, ‘Abd al-Jabbar changes his definition of knowledge in *al-‘Umad*, which includes both words, *i‘tiqad* and *shay’*. According to even Ibn al-Malahimi, ‘Abd al-Jabbar defines knowledge in his other work, *al-Muhit*, only as “what necessitate tranquillity of the soul”.⁹⁴ However, in the *Mughni*, his latest work of the three, ‘Abd al-Jabbar develops a new definition of knowledge that excludes both words, *i‘tiqad* and *shay’*, but replaces it with the word *ma‘na*, which is not popular among his predecessors.

Some Responses from the Late Mu‘tazilites

‘Abd al-Jabbar’s definition of knowledge in the *Mughni*, however, was rejected by later Mu‘tazilite scholars, including his immediate student, Abu al-Husayn al-Basri. In this regard Abu al-Husayn preferred the definition of knowledge by Abu Hashim that preserved the correspondence to reality as the first part of the definition. He noticed that ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s definition of knowledge lacked this meaning which was vital in differentiating knowledge from other kinds of belief. On this, he argued that, if we suppose that certain beliefs are not as it is (*la ‘ala ma huwa bihi*) and we assume that it will necessitate the tranquillity of the soul, it is not knowledge. However, if knowledge is only “what necessitates tranquillity of the soul”, as claimed by ‘Abd al-Jabbar, inevitably, we must accept the previous assumption as knowledge.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s method in defining knowledge differently from his predecessors has been pursued by Ibn al-Malahimi, a follower of Abu al-Husayn al-Basri. In his work, *al-Mu‘tamad fi usul al-din*, al-Malahimi rigorously criticized the definitions of knowledge by his predecessors. Firstly, he agreed with Abu al-Husayn in rejecting ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s definition of

⁹³ ‘Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 27-8. Cf. Mankdim, *Sharh*, 195-7.

⁹⁴ Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu‘tamad*, 14. This definition is also preferred by Mankdim from *al-‘Umad* definition. Cf. Mankdim, *Sharh*, 46.

⁹⁵ Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu‘tamad*, 14.

knowledge,⁹⁶ and, secondly, he argued against Abu Hashim's definition, which was accepted by Abu al-Husayn. As a result, Ibn al-Malahimi suggested a new definition of knowledge as "the living being's grasping something in such a way that that thing's being otherwise is excluded".⁹⁷

Ibn al-Malahimi commences his contention by arguing that the proposition that knowledge is from the genus of belief is not a consensus among the Mu'tazilites. Although Abu 'Ali, Abu Hashim and 'Abd al-Jabbar consider that knowledge is under the genus of belief,⁹⁸ there are other scholars who disagree with them. Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi (d. 317/931), for instance, reports the view that knowledge is not from the genus of belief, but knowledge itself is a separate genus. Meanwhile, Abu al-Hudhayl al-'Allaf (d. 235/849), as reported by 'Abd al-Jabbar, believes in two different views. The first one is that knowledge and belief are from the same genus, but his second view, however, is similar to that reported by Abu al-Qasim.⁹⁹

Ibn al-Malahimi's main argument against Abu Hashim's¹⁰⁰ definition is that the use of the words *'itiqad* and *sukun al-nafs* is problematic since it excludes God's knowledge. He argued that God's knowledge was neither belief nor necessitates the tranquillity of the soul. Although he realized 'Abd al-Jabbar's argument in defending Abu Hashim's definition by claiming that God has no knowledge because God knows via His essence, yet Ibn al-Malahimi was not convinced by that argument. Instead, he believed that 'Abd al-Jabbar's argument is inappropriate in terms of its linguistic regulation.¹⁰¹

'Abd al-Jabbar's position on this issue is that, he believes that God is a knowing being (*'alim*), yet God does not know through knowledge. Instead, God knows through His essence (*bi dhatih*). Therefore, since God has no knowledge, it is inconceivable to include

⁹⁶ 'Abd al-Jabbar's definition in *Muhit, Sharh and Mughni*, but not in *'Umad*. Cf. Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu'tamad*, 14; Mandkim, *Sharh*, 53.

⁹⁷ Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu'tamad*, 18.

⁹⁸ 'Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, 12: 25.

⁹⁹ Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu'tamad*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ This definition is also accepted by 'Abd al-Jabbar in *al-'Umad* and Abu al-Husayn al-Basri.

¹⁰¹ For his arguments in detail, see Ibn al-Malahimi, *Mu'tamad*, 18.

God in the discussion of the definition of knowledge. Nevertheless, the other question one might ask is, how does °Abd al-Jabbar prove that God is a knowing being if he maintains that God has no knowledge?

To answer this question, we need to clarify °Abd al-Jabbar's concept on how to confirm the existence of knowledge (*ithbat al-ilm*). According to °Abd al-Jabbar, there are two ways to establish the existence of knowledge in a subject. The first is based on introspection, and the result is the existence of the tranquillity in one's soul. The second is based on the external perception that is based on the precise act (*fi'l al-muhkam*). What he means by precise act is an action that results in a systematic, orderly and efficient presentation. In this way, we can confirm the presence of knowledge in others.¹⁰²

He argued that the precise act was an indication that the subject for whom it was possible differs from the subject for whom it was not possible, and the (first) subject is characterized by it in a way which supposes that this quality is due to him by a cause (*°illa*).¹⁰³ This cause, according to °Abd al-Jabbar, is the state of knowing. Hence, this precise act requires more than the pure ability (*qudra*) to act; it requires knowledge in order to produce mostly a certain composition or order in this act.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, based on this concept of confirming knowledge, °Abd al-Jabbar argued that God produces precise acts; the existence of this precise act was a proof that God is a knowing subject. As examples, he mentioned the creation of living beings (*hayawanat*), God's administration of the orbits (*falak*) and their composition, His subjugation (*taskhir*) of the wind, and His control (*taqdir*) of winter and summer. All of these acts provide clearer proof and are more precise than human writing. It is also a great explanation (*bayan al-°azim*) that God is a knowing subject.

¹⁰² °Abd al-Jabbar, *Mughni*, xii, 23.

¹⁰³ Mankdim, *Sharh*, 156; cf. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 51.

¹⁰⁴ As examples, °Abd al-Jabbar mentioned speaking and writing. A subject who can do these acts in a way which is really precise must be characterized by the corresponding knowledge. See, Mankdim, *Sharh*, 157; cf. Peters, *God's Created Speech*, 51-2.

Thus, he explained that the way to know God as a knowing subject was through a precise act. Therefore, according to °Abd al-Jabbar, it was not a problem if the definition of knowledge does not include God's knowledge in it, since God has no knowledge and does not even need any.

Conclusion

From the abovementioned discussion, we can observe that, in defining knowledge, °Abd al-Jabbar considered his theological doctrines as a foundation. His belief that God has no knowledge has resulted in defining knowledge based on a human perspective. This method can also be observed among other Mu°tazilite theologians. On the contrary, the Ash°arites rejected this method. Instead, they developed the definition of knowledge that was applicable to both man and God. Therefore, the Ash°arites could not accept that the term *i°tiqad* was used in defining knowledge since it implies that Allah is *Mu°taqid*.

However, this general tendency among the Mu°tazilites did not prevent °Abd al-Jabbar from criticizing his predecessors' definition of knowledge. He did not hesitate to state his ideas that sometimes contradicted his predecessors' opinions. His method in dealing with the definition of knowledge was well adopted by the Muslim theologians after him. We can observe this analytical approach among the theologians from both schools of thought, the Ash°arites and the Mu°tazilites. According to °Abd al-Jabbar, the tranquillity of the soul was the foundation for one to know the existence of knowledge in oneself. However, to know the existence of knowledge in others, one had to know it through the production of the precise actions of the doer.

°Abd al-Jabbar developed at least four definitions of knowledge throughout his works. The first is in *al-°Umad* and the last in the *Mughni*. The reason for this development was probably due to his intellectual maturity in response to his contemporary's criticism. However, his last definition was rejected by the late Mu°tazilites. Abu al-Husayn al-Basri, for instance, preferred the definition of knowledge presented by Abu Hashim. Al-Basri rejected °Abd al-Jabbar's definition on the grounds that it lacked the essential part

of the definition, which was 'the correspondence to reality' (*mutabiq li al-waqi^c*). Ibn al-Malahimi, in turn, disagreed with all of the definitions of knowledge by his predecessors, and, therefore, developed a new definition.



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