

A Critical Analysis of the Usool-e-Khamsa (Five Principles) of the M'utazila's In The Light of Islamic Teachings

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Abstract

Mu'tazila is one of the theologian schools of thought of the Muslims. They got originated in the eighth century Hijri when a student Wasil bin Ata made differences on some Islamic issues with his teacher Al-Hassan Al-Basri.

The differentiating point between the two was; what will be the position of a person after committing a major sin? He/She will be Muslim or not? Wasil bin Ata was of the view that such a person will be in an intermediate position (Neither Muslim nor non-Muslim) and he called him (Al-Manzil Bayn Al-Manzilatain). This was a new idea and terminology presented by Wasil bin Ata for the first time.

The Mutazila was once a strong and powerful sect in the Islamic state of Abbasyd regime. It affected the thoughts and lives of many Muslims. Later on the Mutazilas based their thoughts on logic and propagated them. They established Five Principles and always propagated them.

This article discusses the position of Mutazilas, their Five Principles and the differences with the basic Islamic believes and their effects on Muslim society and the arguments of other theologian schools of thoughts (especially Asha'aira and Maturidiyya) will also be discussed.

Key Words: M'utazila, Ashaira, Maturidiyya, Usool-e-Khamsa

Introduction

The term Mu'tazila is an Arabic word, which means "to leave", or "to withdraw". Mu'tazili theology starts back at Basra in 8th century after Wasil bin Ata left his teacher Al-Hassan Al-Basri by showing differences on an issue.

A theological dispute aroused on the subject of the Intermediate Position (Al-Manzil Bayan al-Manzilatain); after committing a major sin. Thus, he along with his followers, including Amr bin Obaid, were named as Mu'tazili. Later on they named themselves as Ahal-Tawhid Wal-adal centered on their preaching, which was to ground in reason the Islamic creedal system¹.

Though Mu'tazili banked on logic later and discussed several features of early Islamic and Greek philosophy, the candor of Islamic teaching was

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their preparatory point and decisive reference. Rival schools have leveled many charges against them: absolute authority to extra-Islamic standards, and reflection of more vicious polemical beliefs among various schools of theology than any independent truth. For example, Mu'tazili embraced collectively the principle of creation out of nothing (*ex-nihilo*). The other Philosopher who were Muslim apart from Al-Kindi, regard the perpetuity of this world in one shape or another. Taking of Greek philosophy as the preparatory point and taking it as the conceptual framework for examining and analyzing the world was the work of the philosophers (Muslim) and not of the Muslim theology expert in general.

From the beginning of Islamic civilization, and due to internal and external factors like intra-Muslim conflicts and debates of interfaith consecutively, some questions are under debate from Muslim theologians. Questions like whether the Qur'an is a creation or is eternal; whether Allah has created the evil; the matter of free will versus predestination; and Allah's attributes mentioned in Qur'an are to be deciphered figuratively or literally. Mu'tazili thoughts tried to deal with all such questions². As many of their beliefs were against the Islamic teachings therefore, many Muslim scholars specially the *Asha'airas and Maturidiyyas* answered their issue because they were the most effected and very close to them in time.

Tenets

There are five Principles/tenets of Mu'tazili:

1. Al-Tawheed (Divine Unity)

Mu'tazili strongly believes in *Al-Tawheed*, the unquestionable unity and oneness of Allah³. In this aspect, they and the majority of Muslims are the same. However, the different schools of theology differ in how to espouse Divine unity, which is in harmony with the commands of both, scripture and reasoning—a difficult undertaking to give Allah, ontologically different and categorically distinct, characteristics from materials, humans and nature. It is not easy to explain the Divine and transcendental in a limited human language. For instance, all schools of Muslim theology confronted the problem of upholding Divine attributes, without involving in theanthropism or clearing out Divine attributes, alluded in scripture, of any tangible connotation of the other.

The Mu'tazila's did this and tried to deny the existence of this attributes distinct from the Divine essence. Put differently, Allah is, for example, all knowing (omniscient) yet He grasps through His essence rather than

containing distinct wisdom separately. According to Mu'tazilis, this claim was to evade the diversity of co-eternals—anything that may censure the unquestionable oneness of Allah. Furthermore, they fall back to figurative explanation of Qur'anic verses or Hadiths with apparently humanlike matter. Most of other Muslims theologians did the same. Others go for either refraining from arriving at decision regarding these scriptures, or support them "without knowing how⁴."

The doctrine of *Tawhid*, according to Mu'tazili well known scholar Chief Justice Abdul Jabbar Ibne Ahmad, in a real Mu'tazili book which was translated in by Martin et al.(1997): it is the realization that Allah is matchless, and has qualities not shared by any creature. This is realized by the truth that this world has a Maker (*san'i*) who created it and is eternal and Almighty (*qaadir*) and that powerlessness (*al-ijz*) is out of possibility. He is all-knowing of the bygone, present and future and that (*jahl*) ignorance is impossible for Him. He is all-knowing of what was, is, and will be. He is eternity who was present in the past and will be present in the future (*hay'y*), and any misfortune and worries are not meant for Him. He witnesses the obvious (*mar'iyat*) and comprehends perceptible, and has no need of sense organs. He is sufficient in future and was sufficient in past (*ghani*). He has no physical body and no qualities of rest, color, movement, change, getting down or up, having form, being composite, and having form, limbs and other parts, eating anything or smelling things. Everything, other than Him, is dependent, and created. When a person knows all this, he/she knows Allah's oneness.

2. Al-Adal (Divine Justice)

Mu'tazili believe that evil is within human beings and that it exists in the will of human beings while their acts are because of the evil within. Allah has nothing to do with evil and does not want any evil from human beings. Punishment would be meaningless if Allah ordained evil from humans because they would be fulfilling the orders. Mu'tazila while using the principle of (*taklif*) say that Allah do not put burden over human beings which they cannot tolerate. They say it is against the human choice and free will.

Human beings should have belief on *iman* (faith) and should have conviction regarding Allah; do good deeds (*amal saleh*); and their *iman* should be displayed in their deeds, moral choices and relationship with Allah, other human beings and the rest of creatures. If everyone is in good health and well off, human beings will not realize their obligations like helping the needy and showing compassion to the marginalized and the deprived. Likewise, the

inequities in fortunes and the sufferings that befall them are essential parts of the trials of life. Everyone faces the trials. However, those who are wealthy, healthy and powerful are needed to use their privileges to help the needy and alleviate their miseries. On the Day of Judgment, the rich will be asked and made responsible for the Divine blessings (health and wealth) they enjoyed in this world. The less privileged and fortunate are asked to be patient and persevere. They are assured reward for their torments “beyond all reckoning”⁵.

The trials of life are, in particular, for adults with complete mental faculties. Children may face sufferings, and are sometimes seen to suffer, however, they are considered to be completely free from sin. Heavenly justice is assured through the *theory of compensation*. All those who suffer will be rewarded. This includes non-believers and, more importantly, children who are destined to go to *paradise*. The principle of ‘*adl*, according to Abdul Jabbar, is the belief that Allah is aloof from all sinful (*qabih*) things and all His actions are morally good. Furthermore, this is elucidated by the fact that all human actions of iniquity (*zulm*), disobedience (*jawar*), and the likes of cannot be His creation (*min khalqihi*). If a person assigns these attributes to Allah is involved in injustice (*safah*). Moreover, Allah has given the non-believers a free will and they can choose to do anything by their own will. Allah does not chastise the children of polytheists (*al-mushrikin*) in hellfire for their parents’ sins. Each person receives what it has done and Allah does not break His rules (*hukm*). Allah inflicts illness and ailments only to turn them to benefit. People who do not believe in these injunctions commit insolence to Him. Whatever He does, He does best for His creatures.

He imposes ethical and moral obligations (*yakallifuhum*) upon human beings and He has revealed to them what He has made obligatory for them and illuminated the path of enlightenment so that they could follow it. He has also shown the path of untruth (*tariq-e-batel*) so that people might evade it. Allah punishes His creatures only after making everything clear to them. In the same way, every reward we have is from Allah, as said that all good things you have is given by Allah⁶.

3. Promise and Threat (Al-waad wal waid)

This includes questions regarding *Qiyamah* (the Day of Judgment). Abdul Jabbar says that the principle of irreparable heavenly pledges and threats is the knowledge that Allah guarantees repayment (*Al-Thawab*) for the followers and warns punishment to disbelievers. Allah does not back out of His promises nor lies in what He says. In comparison to what the *murjites* hold⁷.

4. The Intermediate Position (Al-manzila byn al-manzilatyn)

A Muslim who commits a serious sin and dies without remorse is not believed to be neither a believer (*momin*), nor non-believer (*kafir*) but in a position between the two. *Momin* is a person who believes in Allah, and his/her belief reflected in his/her choices and actions. If a person is lacking in any of these two is not believed to be a complete *momin*.

On the other hand, a person does not become a *momin* by committing a serious sin. Therefore, such doers of serious sins are doomed to hell. Hell is not a place of one state of affairs. On the contrary, there are degrees of punishment based on the choices of people and degree of seriousness of sins. The intermediate position, although a position in hell, is lesser kind of retribution due to the belief of the Muslims and their other good actions. Mutazilites take on a middle position between Kharijites.

According to Abdul Jabbar, the belief of the intermediate position is⁸ the realization that whosoever commits either murder or fornicates (*zana*) or commits some serious sin, is a serious sinner (*fasiq*) and does not remain a believer. The case of such people is not the same as that of the believers, since such person is to be damned and cursed. However, he/she is not a non-believer who cannot marry a Muslim or cannot be buried in a Muslim graveyard after death. Contrariwise, he has an intermediate position, as contrasted to the *kharijites* who believe that he/she is a non-believer, or the Murjites who consider him/her a believer⁹.

5. Advocating the Good and Forbidding the Evil (Al-amr bil maroof wa al-nahay an al munkar)

According to Abdul Jabbar (as cited by Martin et al.,), advocating good is of two kinds: Advocating religious duties (*al-fara'id*) to those who neglect them (*dayya,aha*) is obligatory while the other is supererogatory (*al-nafila*) advocating supererogatory deeds to those who omit them (*tarakah*). On the other hand, forbidding people from evil is obligatory as evil is morally wrong doing. It is important to reach a place where evil cannot happen or to lead to something worse because the aim is that evil will not happen. Instead if a person reaches a point where only good can happen, so that it would be a preference then, where difficult circumstances can occur. Allah says if two Muslim parties start fighting with each other, the other Muslims should make peace but even then one of these commits cruelty over the other, so the other Muslims should fight against the cruel one. If that party agrees and stops violence, they should be given a chance and the matter should be resolved. (10)

Therefore keeping safe the society from evils is essential and Allah ordered the rest of the Muslims to bring peace.

The History of Development

Mu'tazili arose over an extended span of time, like all other schools. Abu Al-Hudhayl Al-Allaf, came after Wasil ibn'Amar ibn Ubayd and is thought to be the theologian who organized and systematized Mu'tazilism in Basra (Martin Et Al. 1997). While Bishr ibn al Mu'tamir organized another branch of the school in Baghdad.

Theologians lost much of the importance as a consequence of reaction against rationalism and increase in the number of Muslims throughout the world. The issue was further aggravated by the Minha, inquisition initiated under the Abbasyeds Caliph Al-Ma'mun. Mu'tazilis were indicted of being the provokers nonetheless the scheme was of Caliph's himself¹¹. The atrocity drive, anyhow, charged them and theology, generally, the support of the Muslim people.

In the 9th century, Mu'tazilis were compelled for violence and secondly the non-believers, deists, scholars and non-Muslim philosophers also pressed them. The opponents also worked with rational approach. Both worked with reasons.

Due to the persistent assaults, the theologians of Mu'tazilas presented their ideas in a systematic way. Abbu Ali Al-Jubbai led this mission in Basra although there were some differences among them on some issues. In the late tenth and early eleventh century Abdul Jabbar was prominent figure and because of this struggle many doctrines and methodologies of the school remained alive¹².

Theory of interpretation

Mu'tazilah banked on synthesis of revelation and reason. Their rationalism worked in the benefit of Islamic theological framework and the scripture. They validated, being the dominant Muslim theologians, allegorical understanding of the holy book. Abdul Jabbar (1965) has explained this in his book the explanation of five principles.

This methodology proceeded like: If the literal meaning of any verse of the Holy Quran is consistent with the meaning of the other part, then moving from the literal meaning can be justified. Especially where the meaning of the Ayate Mutashbihat is explained, one should be very careful like the meaning of the "hand" and "face" of Allah. Abdul Jabbar says that if there are two

meaning for resolving such issues, then the literal meaning will be preferred¹³. It should be noted that the book of the five principles is the explanation of his student Mankdim¹⁴.

1st obligation

The first obligation, according to Mu'tazilis, is that all human beings who have reached to adulthood and are mentally perfect should use their intellect to be sure on the existence of Allah and should know His attributes. People should think about the existence of universe and the reason behind its existence rather than thinking its existence as useless. When a person comes to the conclusion that there is someone behind the creation of the universe and that being is not dependent on any other person, then that person automatically acknowledges the wisdom and moral perfection of the being. Consequently, the creation of the universe cannot be questioned as meaningless, haphazard and in vain. People then will realize what this being wants from human beings and people will harm themselves by ignoring the plan and purpose of the Creator. This epitome is called *wujub-al-nazar* in Islamic theology which means reaching the ontological by using the reasoning power. Abdul Jabbar says about the "first duty"¹⁵ as speculative reasoning that directs to the realization of Allah, as He cannot be known as necessity (*daruratan*) nor through senses (*bil-mushahada*). Therefore, Allah must be known by contemplation and reflection.

According to Mu'tazili belief that "*al-nazar* is an obligation" even if a person does not claim any access to Holy Scripture or claiming to be the messenger differentiates them from other Islamic theologians. Other Muslim scholars believe that *al-nazar* only rests on the prophets or Holy Scripture¹⁶.

Reason and Revelation

Mu'tazilis had subtle concept concerning reason, revelation, and the connection among them. They emphasized the power of reasons and human intellect. They believe that reason and intellect guide people to know morality, Allah and His attributes. When this fundamental realization is arrived at and one discovers the truth about Islam and the Divine genesis of the Qur'an, the reason then communicates with scripture in such a way that reason and revelation together become the main source of knowledge and guidance for the Muslims. Harun Nasution in the *Mu'tazila and Rational Philosophy*, translated in Martin (1997), It gives the arguments that Mu'tazili's give place to reason rather than many other things. Those who oppose the Mu'tazilas say that

according to Mu'tazila human reasoning is enough to know about Allah. There always come contradiction among the reason and revelation and human reasoning and intellect is enough to understand the reality of Allah. And that human mind is enough to know the good and bad.

The reasoning of Mu'tazila is very well defined by Abu al- Hassan al Ashari which he described to Ibrahim al-Nazzam. He says that actions are of three sections. In the first action the human intellect is enough for discovering the morality. As human intellect can understand the revelation, for example justice and telling the truth are morally good things. And Allah has to order the humans ethically to act over them. The second type of action is that it can know the evil things like injustice and mandacity etc. Allah avoids these things. The third kind of action are those which a human being can not decide whether it is good or otherwise. These things can be known only through revelation. Abdul Jabbar (as translated in Martin et al., 1997) answers a question that why Allah cannot do anything against the common ethics: It is because that He knows the immorality of all unethical act and that He is self-sufficient without them...Actually Allah does not act like this. As He says: that he does not do any injustice to his people¹⁷.

The crux of 'Abul Jabbar's contention is that behaving immorally/unwisely roots from desire, deficiency and need. A person acts unwisely when he/she does not know that his/her deeds are loathsome as a result of lack of awareness, or due to some unavoidable need, physical or psychological. Allah is unquestionably self-sufficient, omniscient, and omnipotent, He is unconditionally devoid of needs and, accordingly, nothing is done by Him that's is evil, loathsome, unwise and ridiculous¹⁸.

The conflict between the two schools of theology was only limited and focused on obsession. Mu'tazilis were possessed with Divine justice while Ash'aris were fixated with Divine power.

Traditions and its Validity

Reports concerning authenticity are divided into two types in the Islamic disciplines. The first type is called recurrent reports (*mutawatir*). They are believed to have come down to humanity through series of narrations, concerning miscellaneous senders so that it is almost impracticable that all the narrators who are living in diverse regions and advocating often radically opposite views, would unite on inventing precisely similar lies and ascribe them to Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW), or anyone else. It is a valid criterion for substantiating a report. There may be people fitting in a sect/party and have

appeal for forging reports which propagate their interests. *Tawatur* depends on the numerousness of the narrators at every stage and also on the number of transmitters. Contrariwise, the second type is considered speculative as its authenticity does not meet the criteria of *Tawatur*.

Abdul Jabbar about Mutawatir reports says and other Mu'tazila also say that such kind of narrations are true. And a saying of a trustworthy narrator can be accepted if his saying is not contradictory with the theme of the Holy Quran.

According to Abdul Jabbar, concerning the branches of law, the Mu'tazilis accepted the non-mutawatir reports. While in the matter of basic tenets of Islam, the reports are not believed to be reliable. That is the main concern of Mu'tazilis that they never accept unauthentic sayings and they say it is a theological issue rather than the legal issue and any thing which do not come to the authentic source or the narrator is not trustworthy, they do not accept it¹⁹.

Conclusion

In the eighth century when the Muslims had come across many nations of the world, specially the Roman philosophy effected the Muslim scholars, the Muslim believes could not remain constant. In the meanwhile the Mutazili believes also effected the Muslim believes and it reached its climax when the Muslim Caliphs and its people adopted these believes. They not only adopted them rather tried to impose them on its people. Many Islamic scholars opposed them and explained the Islamic believes in its original form. Imam Ahmad Bin Hambal was one them who opposed the Mutazili believes and was tortured for a long time.

Asha'aira and Maturidiyya sholars came in opposition and discussed the Islamic believes. It effected the people and the later on Muslim Caliphs withdrew these believes. In this regard when the Mutazilas explained their five principles of Al-Tawheed, Al-Adal, Promise and Threat, The Intermediate Position, and Advocating the Good and Forbidding the Evil, the *Asha'aira and Maturidiyya* explained the true spirit of Islamic teaching and many people left their believes.

In the five principles, the Mutazilits are on extreme level and that they have interpreted them in their own own way. They are on different in many believes than the maximum moderate scholars of Islam and that is why their believes are always opposed by scholars at every age.

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