The Theological Discourse on Divine Attributes: A Comparative Study of Ashʿarite, Māturīdite, and Muʿtazilite Perspectives

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Abstract: This study examines the theological perspectives on Divine Attributes among the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, and Muʿtazilite schools, highlighting their doctrinal differences and methodological approaches. While the Ashʿarīs affirm Divine Attributes as neither identical to nor separate from God's essence, the Māturīdīs emphasize rational-textual balance, rejecting anthropomorphism without negating attributes. In contrast, the Muʿtazilites deny eternal attributes, arguing they compromise God's unity (*tawḥīd*), and interpret scriptural anthropomorphisms metaphorically. Employing a critical-analytical method, this research reveals how these schools navigate the tension between divine transcendence and scriptural literalism. The findings underscore the Ashʿarī-Māturīdī alignment against Muʿtazilite rationalism, while noting subtle divergences between them. The study contributes to broader Islamic theological discourse by clarifying these schools' positions on Divine Attributes.

Keywords: *Divine Attributes, Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, Muʿtazilite, Islamic Theology.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis perspektif teologis tentang Sifat Ketuhanan dalam mazhab Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, dan Muʿtazilah,

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menguraikan perbedaan doktrinal dan metodologis mereka. Ashʿarī menegaskan Sifat Ilahi tidak identik dengan esensi Tuhan tetapi juga tidak terpisah, sementara Māturīdī menekankan keseimbangan rasional-tekstual dan menolak antropomorfisme tanpa menafikan sifat. Sebaliknya, Muʿtazilah menolak sifat abadi demi menjaga kemurnian *tawḥīd* dan menafsirkan ayat antropomorfis secara metaforis. Dengan pendekatan analitis-kritis, penelitian ini mengungkap ketegangan antara transendensi Ilahi dan literalisme teks. Temuan menunjukkan kesamaan Ashʿarī-Māturīdī dalam menentang rasionalisme Muʿtazilah, meski dengan perbedaan subtil. Studi ini memperkaya wacana teologi Islam dengan memetakan posisi ketiga mazhab tersebut.

Kata Kunci: *Sifat Ketuhanan, Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, Muʿtazilah, Teologi Islam.*

Introduction

The question of divine attributes did not receive in-depth theological treatment during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.[1] Contemporary Muslims tend to accept the attributes of God as described in Al-Qur'an, without engaging in speculative inquiry into their underlying meanings.[2] God possesses absolute perfection, and His attributes are numerous. Nevertheless, God has revealed a portion of His attributes to humankind in Al-Qur'an.[3]

God is free from any flaws or weaknesses, and nothing can be compared to Him. If such deficiencies were attributed to God, His majesty and transcendence would undoubtedly be diminished. Such a notion stands in direct contradiction to His saying in Al-Qur'an: *Qul huwa Allāh Aḥad, Allāh al-Shamad, lam yalid wa lam yūlad, wa lam yakun lahū kufuwan aḥad.*[4] The issue of the divine essence and attributes is one that has frequently sparked debate among theologians, due to the intricate and often contentious relationship between them.[5] This discourse began in the early centuries of the Hijrah with Jahm bin Shafwan, and later evolved into an intellectual controversy between the

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[1] Farid Suleian, "'Chapter 3: The Divine Attributes in Islam Intellectual History up to the Time of Ibn Taymiyya.' In" Ibn Taymiyya and the Attributes of God," n.d., https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004499904_004.

[2] Al-Maqrīzī, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī. *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār*. p. 350.

[3] Shabbir Akhtar, "The Quran and the Secular Mind: A Philosophy of Islam," *Routledge*, 2008.

[4] QS. 112: 1-4.

[5] Arslan, "A Better Argument for Tawḥīd?: Philosophical Discussions of Divine Attributes in the Sharḥ Al-ʿaqāid Tradition.," *SOPHIA*, 2025, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-024-01018-w.

Ashʿarite and Muʿtazilite schools within the framework of Islamic theology (*ʿIlm al-Kalām*).[6]

When examining the Ashʿarite and Māturīdite schools, many scholars of Islamic theology assume that they constitute a single unified creed. This perception is reinforced by the common assertion that both Ashʿarite and Māturīdite scholars are among the leading authorities of Ahl al-Sunnah.[7] Undoubtedly, both Imam Asyʾari and Imam Maturidi operated within a shared theological orbit, with the primary aim of defending Sunni orthodoxy and opposing the doctrines of the Muʿtazilites. However, it would be inaccurate to claim that the two schools agreed on all core theological issues, let alone on secondary details. This divergence arises in part from the fact that Imam Asyʾari adopted the methodology of Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal, which was characterized by a strict adherence to textual literalism and a limited engagement with rational argumentation. Although Imam Asyʾari made some modifications to this approach, his underlying commitment to Hanbalite thought constrained his capacity for broader rational exploration. Even when he departed from certain Hanbalite principles, he did so cautiously and without abandoning their foundational assumptions.

As for Imam Maturidi, he was nurtured within the intellectual tradition of the disciples of Imam Abu Hanifah—a tradition marked by rational inquiry and deductive reasoning. This is unsurprising, given that the Ḥanafī school itself is grounded in principles such as analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) and juristic preference (*istiḥsān*). [8]In light of this, it is untenable to claim that the two theologians (Imam Asyʾari and Imam Maturidi) were in full agreement on foundational matters, let alone on secondary issues. It would be a mistake to assume complete overlap between their methodologies in every domain. This very question has preoccupied numerous scholars, who have attempted to assess which of the two theological traditions granted greater authority to human reason.

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[6] Wolfson, Harry Austryn., "The Philosophy of the Kalām," *Cambridge*, no. Harvard University Press, (1976).

[7] Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Maturidi Theology,* Edinburgh University Press, 2021, pp. 75-76.

[8] Chaker, Aref, "The Life of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi and the Socio-Political and Theological Context of Central Asia in the Tenth Century.," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies*, 2016.

This perspective requires reconsideration and correction, as there are differences—albeit slight—between the two schools. Indeed, the founders of these schools, Imam Asy'ari and Imam Maturidi, never met at any point in time, and neither was the other's teacher or student. Each school of thought spread in different regions, and neither was predominant in the areas where the other gained influence. Despite both founders claiming to uphold the doctrines of the early generations (*salaf*) through a rationalist theological method, they nonetheless diverged from certain beliefs of the salaf in specific matters.[9] Additionally, both schools deviated from the practices of the Companions of the Prophet and those who followed them in their approach to the transmission and reasoning in religious matters.

Throughout its development, numerous theological schools within Islam have addressed the issue of divine attributes. First, the Ashʿarites, who believe that God's attributes are inherent in His essence, meaning they are neither identical to His essence nor entirely separate from it. The Muʿtazilites, on the other hand, presented a negative view regarding God's attributes, arguing that God does not possess knowledge, power, life, and so forth. Second, the Māturīdī school, which opposes all forms of anthropomorphism and corporealism, without denying the existence of God's attributes. Third, the Muʿtazilites reject the views of the two preceding schools, maintaining that God's attributes should not be conceived as distinct from His essence. They do not permit the acknowledgment of separate attributes for God, in contrast to the stance taken by the Ashʿarites.[10].

The rationalist theology of the Muʿtazilites faced strong opposition from the salaf, particularly from the Hanbalī school and its followers after the death of al-Maʾmun during the Abbasid period.[11] The resistance to the Muʿtazilites persisted until a theological school was founded by Imam Asy'ari, who was originally from the Muʿtazilite camp. This school is known as the Ashʿarī

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[9] Abdrassilov T.K., Nurmatov Zh.Y., Abzhalov S.U., Hwang S.I. Principles of Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi on the Divine Nature // Bulletin of the L.N. Gumilyov ENU. Historical sciences. Philosophy. Religion Series. 2023. – Vol. 144. – №. 3. – P. 153-166. DOI: https://doi.org/10.32523/2616-7255-2023-144-3-153-166

[10] Ṣubḥī, Aḥmad Maḥmūd., "Fī ʿIlm Al-Kalām: Dirāsah Falsafiyyah Li-Ārāʾ al-Firaq al-Islāmiyyah Fī Uṣūl al-Dīn," *Dār Al-Nahḍah al-ʿArabiyyah,* Beirut, 1980.

[11] Diwan Taskheer Khan, "'Mu'tazilaism: An Introduction to Rartionality in Islam.' International Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences (IJEAS)" Vol. 4 (2017).

school. In Samarkand, there were also opponents of the Muʿtazilites, led by Imam Maturidi. This school came to be known as the Māturīdī school.[12]

Based on this brief overview, several questions arise: What are the views of the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, and Muʿtazilite schools regarding divine attributes? Therefore, the researcher aims to address this issue in the present study titled "The Issue of Divine Attributes between the Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, and Muʿtazilite Schools". The methodology employed in this study is a critical analytical approach. The researcher hopes that this scholarly work will be beneficial and can serve as a reference or complement to other academic research.

The Concept of Divine Attributes

There is a distinction in meaning between the beautiful names of God (*al-asmāʾ al-ḥusnā*) and His attributes. The names of God refer to His essence and the perfection of His attributes.[13] For example, the name *al-Samīʿ* (The All-Hearing) signifies the essence of God and the perfection of the attribute of hearing, while the name *al-Bashīr* (The All-Seeing) signifies the perfection of the attribute of sight. As for the attributes of God, they denote the perfect qualities of the divine essence, and do not refer to any specific aspect of God's essence alone. Therefore, the attributes are broader and more inclusive than the names, as each name represents only one specific attribute.[14]

As for the divine attribute, it is derived from the name of God, *Allāh*. It has already been established that names give rise to attributes. The evidence that names denote meanings, and that these meanings are attributes, is found in the Qur'anic verse: *To God belong the best names, so invoke Him by them.*[15] The term *al-ḥusnā* here follows the pattern of *fiʿlā* and means 'the utmost perfection in beauty'. Perfection can only be achieved if it refers to profound meanings and commendable attributes. If the names were merely proper nouns without any connotation of meaning, they could not be described as beautiful. This serves as evidence for the derivation of attributes from names. The attribute of Divinity

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[12] Marco Demichelis, ""Between Muʾtazilah and Syncretism: A Reappraisal of the Behavior of the Calipathe of al-Maʾmun," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* Vol. 71 (n.d.).

[13] Parasto Ghaderi, ", "A Comparative Study of the Issue of God's Names and Attributes in New Theology and Transcendental Wisdom." Vol. 6 (2023).

[14] *Fatāwā al-Shabkah al-Islāmiyyah*. Accessed November 18, 2009 (1 Dhū al-Ḥijjah 1430 AH). p. 763.

[15] QS. 7: 185.

(*al-Ilāhiyyah*) is an attribute of deservingness, meaning that God, exalted be He, is deserving of Divinity and deserving of worship.[16]

The attributes of God, Exalted be He, are divided into several categories based on various considerations,[17] among which are the following: (1) The consideration of affirming and negating God's attributes; (2) The consideration of the attributes' connection to His essence and actions; (3) The consideration of the establishment of the attributes and their evidence. The first category is further divided into two subcategories: (1) Attributes that God, Exalted be He, has affirmed for His essence through the verses of Al-Qur'an or by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). These are referred to as the *absolute attributes*; (2) Attributes that God, Exalted be He, has negated for His essence, or that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has negated. These are referred to as negated or negative attributes.

The second part is further divided into three categories, which are:[18] (1) Attributes related solely to God, Exalted be He, and are referred to as the intrinsic attributes of God (*al-shifāt al-dzātiyyah*); (2) Attributes related to God's will, power, and decree, and are referred to as the active attributes of God (*al-shifāt al-fiʻliyyah*); (3) Both intrinsic and active attributes. The third is further divided into two categories: (1) Attributes mentioned in the Qur'anic verses and the Prophetic Sunnah, known as the transmitted attributes (*al-shifāt khabariyyah*); (2) Attributes understood through both reason and revelation, known as the rational and transmitted attributes (*al-shifāt al-samʻiyyah al-ʻaqliyyah*).[19]

The Views of the Theological Sects on Divine Attributes

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[16] Erlwein, Hannah C., and إيرلواين هنا. "Fakhr Al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Question 'Why Worship God?' وسؤال الرازي الدين فخر." *Journal of Qurʻanic Studies* 21, no. 2 (2019): 39–67. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26747997; Hannah C. Erlwein, "Moral Obligation to Worship God Alone: Fakhr al-Din al-Razi Analysis in the Tafsir." *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies,* 21: 103-120. DOI:10.5617/jais.9371

[17] Anik Masriyah, "BUKTI EKSISTENSI TUHAN Integrasi Ilmu Kalam dengan Filsafat Islam Ibnu Sina," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 19, no. 2 (December 21, 2020): 32, https://doi.org/10.18592/jiiu.v19i2.3399.

[18] Al-Rājiḥī, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn ʿAbd Allāh. *Durūs fī al-ʿAqīdah.* p. 7.

[19] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, *Dirāsah Fī ʿIlm Al-Kalām* (Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020).

The discourse on divine attributes has been a central theme in Islamic theology, provoking deep reflection and debate among various theological schools. Different sects have articulated diverse positions regarding how God's attributes relate to His essence, how they should be understood—literally or metaphorically—and to what extent reason and revelation should be employed in explaining them. This section explores the distinctive perspectives of major theological schools which have contributed significantly to the shaping of Islamic doctrinal thought concerning the nature and attributes of the Divine.

The Ashʿarite Theological Views on Divine Attributes[20]

The Ashʿarites took an inconsistent stance regarding belief in the Divine attributes, filled with contradictions.[21] They were unable to fully align with the Salafi school, as they agreed with the Salaf in some aspects but disagreed in others. A similar approach was also taken towards the Muʿtazilite school, as they agreed with them in certain aspects while differing in others.[22]

First, God is unlike anything; He is All-Knowing, All-Powerful, and Alive. God does not resemble anything, for if He were to resemble created things, He would be subject to their attributes. He is One, for if there were more than one deity, the management of the world would not be in accordance with its laws and order. As He says in the Qur'an: *law kāna fīhimā ālihah illā Allāh lafasadatā*. God is All-Knowing, for actions that are precise and orderly can only be performed by one who understands them. The harmony in human nature, the life that God has endowed in it, the celestial bodies with their sun, moon, and stars, all of these point to the fact that the Creator of these things is

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[20] The Ashʿarīs (Ashʿariyya) constitute a prominent school of Islamic theology (kalām), traditionally attributed to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324 AH/936 CE), who broke away from Muʿtazilī rationalism. The Ashʿarī school employs rational proofs and dialectical arguments (adilla ʿaqliyya wa kalāmiyya) to defend Islamic doctrine against theological opponents, including Muʿtazilites and philosophers, while adhering to the methodological framework of Ibn Kullāb (d. 240 AH/854 CE). See, Al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm. *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal (The Book of Religious Communities and Theological Schools)*. Edited by ʿAbd al-Amīr al-Muhannā and ʿAlī Ḥasan Fāʿūr. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d., p. 66.

[21] Koca, Özgür. "Causality in the Early Period: Muʿtazilites and the Birth of Ashʿarite Occasionalism." Chapter. In *Islam, Causality, and Freedom: From the Medieval to the Modern Era*, 16–39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

[22] Amir Amir Reza Kusuma, "TAUHID SEBAGAI LANDASAN KEBUDAYAAN MASYARAKAT," *Jurnal Ilmiah Spiritualis: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Tasawuf* 9, no. 1 (March 25, 2023): 115–35, https://doi.org/10.53429/spiritualis.v9i1.453.

knowledgeable of their nature and essence. Likewise, it is inconceivable that creations could arise from anyone other than the Living and All-Powerful.[23]

Second, the attributes of God are neither identical to His essence nor separate from it. The attributes of God are inherent in His essence, meaning they are neither His essence nor something other than it. It is inconceivable that God could be living without life, knowledgeable without knowledge, powerful without power, [24]or willing without will, for the concept of knowledge implies the possession of knowledge, the concept of power implies the possession of power, and the concept of will implies the possession of will. As God says in the Qur'an: *wa mā taḥmilu min untsā wa lā tadhaʿu illā bi ʿilmihi*[25], *anzalahū bi ʿilmihi.*[26]

But does the Ashʿarite's opposition to the Muʿtazilites in their claim that the attributes of God are identical to His essence mean that he affirms these attributes as distinct from the essence? The Ashʿarite cannot adopt this position, as it is the belief held by Christians and leads to the doctrine of the Trinity.[27] Rather, he affirms these attributes as inherent in the essence, neither being the essence itself nor something other than it. He disagrees with the Muʿtazilites because he sees their stance as a negation of the attributes, in addition to the conflation of their meanings.[28] For example, the meaning of knowledge is different from the meaning of power, just as life and other attributes are distinct. Indeed, the Muʿtazilites interpreted the difference between knowledge and power by claiming a distinction between the knower and the known. [29]

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[23] ʿAwwājī, Ghālib ibn ʿAlī. *Firaq Muʿāṣirah Tantamil ilā al-Islām wa Bayān Mawqif al-Islām Minhu.* p. 218.

[24] Muhammad Kholid Muslih, Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi, and Muhammad Sofian Hidayat, "THE WESTERN PRAGMATISM PHILOSOPHY BASED ON KALÂM JADÎD'S PERSPECTIVE," *ULUL ALBAB Jurnal Studi Islam* 24, no. 2 (December 19, 2023): 256–82, https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v24i2.22888.

[25] Ḥusayn, Fawqiyyah. "Muqaddimah." In *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī. Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1977. p. 43.

[26] QS. 35: 11.

[27] Aicha Lahdhiri, "The Attributes of God in Medieval Islamic Thought: the Conception of the Omnipotence of God between the Qur'anic verses and the Islamic theology." *Perspectivas,* Vol. 7, No. 1, 2022, pp. 19-30.

[28] Catarina Belo, "Mu'tazilites, Al-Ash'ari and Mainonidees on Divine Attributes." *Veritas (Porto Alegre),* Vol. 52, No. 3, Jan. 2007, pp. 117-131.

[29] Mesut Akdere, Darlene Russ-Eft, and Natalie Eft, "The Islamic Worldview of Adult Learning in the Workplace: Surrendering to God," *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 8, no. 3 (August 2006): 355–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422306288428.

However, the Ashʿarite does not find this a sufficient argument and thus, they would fall into the position of saying: "O Knowledge of God, forgive me," because, according to them, if the essence and attributes are not differentiated, there would be no distinction between the meaning of knowledge and any other attribute. The affirmation of the distinct meaning of each attribute from the others, in the Ashʿarite's view, can only be achieved by asserting that these attributes are inherent in the essence. On the other hand, the Muʿtazilites claim that knowledge and its essence are the same, and so the concepts of knowledge and power are identical. This would imply that one could know through power or act by knowledge. Since this is not the case, it becomes evident that the two concepts are distinct.[30]

The third, The Connection Between God's Eternal Knowledge and Created Knowledge. The Ashʿarite almost adopts a stance regarding God's eternal knowledge of created things, asserting that divine knowledge encompasses what has been, what is, and what will be. In other words, it extends from the knowledge of the nonexistent to the existent. [31]The Ashʿarites affirmed knowledge of the existing world. However, if the known existence is created and everything else is also created, how can God's knowledge of it be eternal? Does the Ashʿarite align with the Muʿtazilite view, as they argue there is no separation between God's knowledge and the created world? The affirmation of the eternality of knowledge is clear: God knows both the existent and the nonexistent with a single, eternal knowledge. His knowledge of an event when it occurs is the same as His knowledge of it before it happens, and His knowledge of what will be is intrinsically the same as His knowledge of the present state of affairs. There is no distinction between what is possible and what is actual, or between what is realized and what is expected. For God's knowledge, all information is on the same plane.[32]

The fourth, anthropomorphic attributes (*al-shifāt al-khabariyyah*). One of the fundamental positions of Imam Asy'ari regarding the anthropomorphic (*al-*

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[30] Al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Al-Ibānah ʿan Uṣūl al-Diyānah*. Cairo: Dār al-Anṣār, 1977. pp. 47–48.

[31] Jarman Arroisi et al., "Understanding 'God as Reality': Analysis of the Ontological Approach in the Tradition of Islamic Philosophy and Sufism," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 1 (June 12, 2022): 138–63, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.121.07.

[32] Al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Al-Lumaʿ fī al-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Bidaʿ*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Munīr, 1955. p. 3.

*khabariyya*h) attributes is his insistence that the words of God must be understood according to their apparent and real meaning, and should not be interpreted metaphorically unless there is definitive proof necessitating such interpretation. If the apparent meaning of the Qur'anic expression indicates generality, it is not permissible to divert it from that general sense without clear evidence. Accordingly, Imam Asy'ari affirms what is stated in the Qur'an regarding God's 'two hands' and 'face', among other attributes. For instance, God's statement: *"What I have created with My two hands"* is to be understood literally, affirming the reality of the 'two hands', and it is impermissible to deviate from this apparent meaning toward metaphorical interpretations merely based on speculative reasoning or sectarian claims.[33]

But does affirming the divine attributes imply anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*)? Imam Asy'ari responds to this concern by referring to the Qur'anic verse: *limā khalaqtu bi yadayya*. [34]There are only a few possible interpretations of God's statement, "My two hands," according to Imam Asy'ari. If one were to interpret it as referring merely to divine blessing or power, that would be rejected—in line with his principle that Qur'anic wording must be understood according to its apparent meaning unless there is compelling evidence for metaphorical interpretation or specification. In the absence of such evidence or contextual indicators, language does not permit metaphorical reinterpretation.[35] If, on the other hand, the phrase was taken to mean literal, [36]corporeal hands, this would amount to anthropomorphism (*tajsīm*), which he also explicitly rejects. Thus, the only valid understanding, in his view, is that God has two hands which are neither powers nor blessings, nor are they corporeal limbs. Rather, they are hands unlike any other, affirming the attribute without modality (*bilā kayf*). Although Imam Asy'ari affirms this without likening God to creation, he maintains that the term "two hands" implies duality and even goes as far as to say that both of God's hands are right hands. This reflects his

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[33] Al-Ashʿarī, Abū al-Ḥasan. *Al-Lumaʿ fī al-Radd ʿalā Ahl al-Zaygh wa al-Bidaʿ*. Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Munīr, 1955. p. 3.

[34] Ramon Harvey, "Transcendent God, Rational World: A Maturidi Theology, Edinburgh," *University Press*, 2021.

[35] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. p. 282.

[36] Masriyah, "BUKTI EKSISTENSI TUHAN Integrasi Ilmu Kalam dengan Filsafat Islam Ibnu Sina."

broader theological method: to affirm all attributes as they appear in the revealed texts, without interpretation (*taʾwīl*). [37]

The Ashʿarite school adopts a nuanced position on Divine Attributes, affirming them as neither identical to nor separate from God's essence [38](*shifāt ghayr al-dzāt wa ghayr ghayrihā*), thereby avoiding the pitfalls of Muʿtazilite negation (*taʿthīl*) and anthropomorphic literalism (*tasybīh*). They uphold God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) while insisting on a literal, non-metaphorical reading of scriptural attributes (e.g., God's "two hands"), interpreting them *bilā kayf* (without modality) to preserve divine incomparability. This approach reconciles rational theology with textual fidelity, though it risks implicit duality (e.g., dual "right hands") and contrasts with Māturīdī's greater rationalist flexibility and Muʿtazilite allegorical hermeneutics. Their stance reflects a mediating theology between Salafi literalism and Muʿtazilite rationalism, albeit with unresolved tensions in reconciling eternity with created knowledge.[39]

Al-Maturidi's Theological Perspectives on Divine Attributes

Al-Māturīdī's theological perspectives on divine attributes offer a distinct approach within Islamic scholastic thought, [40]particularly regarding the nature and characteristics of God (Allah). His views represent a middle path between the rigid literalism of some traditionalist schools and the rationalist approaches of others, such as the Muʿtazilites.[41] The following aspects of Al-

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[37] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. p. 283.

[38] Fuad Mahbub Siraj, "Kosmologi dalam Tinjauan Failasuf Islam," n.d.

[39] Akdere, Russ-Eft, and Eft, "The Islamic Worldview of Adult Learning in the Workplace."

[40] Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi, "DHA>T DAN S{IFAH TUHAN DALAM KONSEP TAUHID MUʿTAZILAH" 5, no. 1 (2010).

[41] The Māturīdīs represent a theological tradition following Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī (d. 333 AH/944 CE), who was born in the mid-3rd century AH in Māturīd (or Māturīt), a town near Samarkand in Transoxiana. Al-Māturīdī received his Islamic education in the scholarly centers of Samarkand and Bukhara, studying under teachers who were considered intellectual descendants of Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150 AH/767 CE) - one of the foremost figures in Sunnī jurisprudence - through one or two generations of transmission. This established him within the intellectual lineage of Abū Ḥanīfa's disciples. While al-Māturīdī regarded himself as Abū Ḥanīfa's intellectual heir and systematic expositor, adopting his positions in both jurisprudence (fiqh) and theology (ʿaqīda), he nevertheless developed a distinct theological school with original contributions. Like Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324 AH/936 CE) and in contrast to the traditionalist Ahl al-Ḥadīth, al-Māturīdī

Māturīdī's methodology further clarify the intellectual foundations of his thought and its impact on Islamic theology.[42]

The first, characteristics of Al-Maturidi's methodology is a balance between reason and revelation. Al-Maturidi advocated for a balanced approach between rationality (*ʿaql*) and textual revelation (*naql*). He regarded it as erroneous to rely exclusively on transmitted texts or, conversely, to exaggerate the role of reason. Instead, he argued that the proper stance of the intellect lies in mediating between the two. Al-Maturidi justified this moderate position by referencing the Qur'anic verse: *wa kadzālika ja'alnākum ummatan wasathan*.[43]

This balanced position is firmly grounded in the religion itself, as moderation represents the true spirit of Islam, which calls for adopting the middle path in all matters. The spirit of moderation has been a dominant feature in Islamic thought across its various domains. For instance, both al-Māturīdī and the Ashʿarites occupy a middle ground between the traditionalists (*al-salaf*) and the Muʿtazilites. Similarly, Imam Syafi'i represented a median position between Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanifah in jurisprudence. Likewise, Islamic philosophers sought to mediate between religion and philosophy. [44]

The second, intellectual independence. [45]This refers to refraining from partisanship toward a specific school or opinion, and instead pursuing the truth regardless of where it leads. Intellectual independence rejects blind adherence

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affirmed the validity of theoretical reason (al-ʿaql al-naẓarī) and endorsed rational inquiry (al-naẓar wa al-istidlāl) in theological matters. However, diverging from Muʿtazilī thought, he rejected reason as the sole source of religious knowledge, maintaining that the Qurʾān and Sunna constituted primary sources for deriving religious truths. His most significant distinction from al-Ashʿarī lay in his acceptance of practical reason (al-ʿaql al-ʿamalī) and the doctrine of moral ontology (al-ḥusn wa al-qubḥ al-ʿaqlīyān).

[42] Jamal Jamal and Amir Reza Kusuma, "HAK ASASI MANUSIA DAN TANGGAPAN ISLAM TERHADAPNYA," *Journal of Islamic and Occidental Studies* 1, no. 2 (December 17, 2023): 173–89, https://doi.org/10.21111/jios.v1i2.30.

[43] QS. 2: 143.

[44] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. pp. 295–298.

[45] Nirhamna Hanif Fadillah, Amir Reza Kusuma, and Rofiqul Anwar Anwar, "Comparative Study of Ijtihad Methods Between Ahlussunnah and Syiah," *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 6, no. 1 (February 9, 2022): 83, https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiyah.v6i1.6837.

to any thought system when it contradicts the truth. The middle-path approach advocated by al-Māturīdī fosters such independence of thought.

The third, a holistic perspective. Al-Māturīdī was characterized by his comprehensive and integrative outlook, linking particulars to universals and referring secondary issues back to their foundational principles. This reflects a philosophical approach that does not stop at isolated details or surface-level disputes but instead seeks to understand the underlying truths that unify them.

The fourth, integration of thought and action. For al-Māturīdī, the value of thought lies not in its abundance or abstraction, nor in indulging in theoretical speculation or futile verbal argumentation, but rather in the alignment of thought with action. The purpose of knowledge and reflection is to guide behavior and inform righteous deeds. [46]

The fifth, focus on meaning and substance. As a consequence of connecting theory with practice, al-Māturīdī emphasized the importance of meaning and content over form. He did not stop at superficial doubt or linguistic form but sought the deeper essence, exploring the substance beneath appearances. His focus was on uncovering the significance, revealing the intended message, and actualizing its implications. [47]

The sixth, critical orientation. A hallmark of al-Māturīdī's method is his critical stance. His engagement with opposing views was not limited to mere presentation or rejection; rather, he thoroughly analyzed these views, traced them to their foundational principles, and sought the root causes of their errors. As described by al-Nasafi, al-Māturīdī's method in disputation resembled that of a relaxed interlocutor who, with calculated calm, lets the opponent speak at length—confident that their own arguments will ultimately expose the weaknesses and inconsistencies in the opposing position. [48] By integrating these characteristics—balance, intellectual independence, holistic thinking, practical

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[46] Mohammad Latief et al., "Analyzing the Concept of Basyar as Human: A Semantic Study of The Qur'an," n.d.

[47] Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi et al., "GOD AND COSMOS AS REALITY: An Inquiry to the Interconnection among Islamic Philosophical Doctrine," *Jurnal Theologia* 30, no. 2 (December 23, 2019): 157–76, https://doi.org/10.21580/teo.2019.30.2.4455.

[48] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. pp. 301-302.

application of knowledge, focus on meaning, and critical analysis—Al-Māturīdī established a theological approach that harmonized reason and revelation. His work continues to influence Islamic theological discourse, particularly in the understanding and interpretation of divine attributes, offering a framework that respects both tradition and rational inquiry.

Al-Māturīdī opposes the position of the Muʿtazilites, as represented by the view of al-Ka'bi, who claims that a divine attribute is simply the description of the describer. Al-Māturīdī argues that if an attribute were truly only a description of the describer, it would invalidate the Qur'anic assertion of both essence and attributes, and would undermine the discussion of motion, stillness, or any other characteristic inherent in entities when affirming their limits. Al-Māturīdī asserts that al-Kaʿbi's view of attributing God's qualities to mere speech is not permissible because intellects are created, and God is not described as created. If this were acceptable, it would lead to the possibility of describing God as both a reformer and corrupter, good and evil, which is clearly false. Therefore, an attribute is not merely a statement, as this would open the door to falsely attributing such descriptions to God. For al-Māturīdī, God is described only by what He has described Himself with from eternity. In his exegesis of the Qur'anic verse: *'ammā yashifūn*.[49] He maintains that this serves as a refutation of the Muʿtazilite claim that the divine attributes are merely descriptions made by human beings. For if the attributes were nothing more than such attributions, there would be no meaningful distinction between the praise of some and the blame of others. Thus, it is established that the attributes possess a reality beyond mere human descriptions.

Al-Māturīdī also opposes the Muʿtazilite view that a divine attribute is merely the negation of its opposite. He argues if the meaning of the statement "He has always been All-Hearing and All-Seeing" were limited to merely denying ignorance, blindness, or deafness, then it would have sufficed to say explicitly that He is not ignorant, blind, or deaf. However, one could say of a thing that it is not ignorant, incapable, or deaf, without necessarily implying that it is knowledgeable, powerful, or hearing. Therefore, if the intent behind such descriptions were nothing more than the negation of opposites, then one

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[49] QS. 6:100.

might as well say that God is "sound and whole" merely by negating their opposites—which is evidently insufficient.[50]

Expressions in Al-Qur'an that may imply anthropomorphism or corporealism—such as references to God's "face", "eyes", or the notion of "establishing Himself upon the Throne"—should not be interpreted literally in a manner that contradicts the intended meaning of the Qur'an.[51] Rather, such passages must be interpreted in light of verses that emphasize God's transcendence (*tanzīh*), and must be understood in a sound and valid way consistent with the norms of the Arabic language. Alternatively, the precise meaning may be deferred to God's knowledge, without affirming any anthropomorphic implications.[52]

Al-Māturīdī emphasizes the necessity of adhering to the attributes by which God has described Himself, noting that God has affirmed positive attributes for Himself. He argues that if mere negation were sufficient to convey the intended meaning of affirmation, then explicit affirmation would be unnecessary. Al-Māturīdī supports the affirmation of meaning for divine attributes by asserting that if it were impermissible to affirm real meanings for attributes—such as spatiality or other qualities—it would likewise be impermissible to deny them. He questions how an attribute can be characterized if it lacks a real meaning. Through this line of reasoning, al-Māturīdī seeks to establish that divine attributes carry real meanings and are not limited to mere negations, since negation alone does not realize the essence of an attribute.[53]

According to al-Māturīdī, the explanation of God's attributes and His perfection must be done in a manner that excludes any possibility of resemblance, equivalence, or comparison. This underscores the belief in an absolute and unparalleled Divine essence and power as a fundamental

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50 Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, *Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām*. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. 300–301.

51 Zulfiqar Ali Shah, *Anthromorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Tradition: Representing the Unrepresentable,* The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2012, London, pp. 494-500.

52 Al-Māturīdī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Samarqandī. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. 12, 32.

53 Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, *Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām*. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. 283, 295–298, 300–301.

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theological principle. In al-Māturīdī's view, the Muʿtazilite approach endangers faith in God's existence by negating His attributes and divine perfections. Therefore, when it is stated that God is Wise (*ḥakīm*), [54]it affirms that wisdom is an essential and inherent attribute of God. Any attempt to interpret God's attributes in a purely figurative or rationalistic manner leads not only to conceptual errors but also obscures true knowledge of God, ultimately reducing the Divine to an undefined and unknowable abstraction.[55]

According to al-Māturīdī, the relationship between God's attributes and His essence is a complex issue that must be approached with intellectual rigor and reverence. He maintains that every human being must affirm the oneness of God while refraining from equating His essence with any form of comparison or speculative questioning about the "how" (*kayfiyyah*) of His attributes. This implies that God's attributes are neither identical to His essence nor entirely separate from it, but rather they are affirmed in a manner befitting His transcendence, without delving into their modality.[56]

According to al-Māturīdī, the divine attributes are names for actions that reflect a perfect and coherent order. These attributes are not merely indicators that God is not ignorant or incapable; rather, they are real evidences of knowledge and power.[57] To reduce attributes to mere negations (such as "not ignorant") or to deny their substantive meaning renders the divine names as mere titles. If the attributes fail to convey real meanings, then the names become nothing more than honorary labels—stripped of content. In such a case, the statement that "God has always been thus" becomes meaningless, for mere titles hold no significance in eternity. Therefore, al-Māturīdī affirms that divine attributes possess a real and established meaning: they are not merely

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[54] Mohamad Latief, Amal Fathullah Zarkasyi, and Amir Reza Kusuma, "PROBLEM SEKULER HUBUNGAN AGAMA DAN NEGARA MENURUT ALI ABDUL RAZIQ," *Fikri : Jurnal Kajian Agama, Sosial dan Budaya* 7, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 146–69, https://doi.org/10.25217/jf.v7i2.2542.

[55] Ibn al-Bayāḍī. *Ishārāt al-Marām min ʿIbārāt al-Imām Abī Ḥanīfah*. p. 118.

[56] Al-Māturīdī, Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Samarqandī. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. 12, p. 32.

[57] Hamid Zarkasyi et al., "Ibn Rushd's Strategic Intellectual on Theology Islamic's Thought," in *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the Third International Seminar on Recent Language, Literature, and Local Culture Studies, BASA, 20-21 September 2019, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia* (Proceedings of the Third International Seminar on Recent Language, Literature, and Local Culture Studies, BASA, 20-21 September 2019, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, Surakarta, Indonesia: EAI, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.20-9-2019.2296715.

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descriptors by human observers, nor are they simply negations of opposites.[58] The interpretation of these meanings is intrinsically linked to the broader theological stance on whether to affirm or negate divine attributes.[59]

The Muʿtazilah and Their Theological Views on Divine Attributes

The Mu'tazilites unanimously denied the divine attributes.They [60] argued that affirming the divine attributes contradicts the concept of Tawhid (the oneness of God). The founder of the Mu'tazila school, Washil bin ʿAtha, explicitly stated: "Whoever affirms the existence of an eternal attribute has affirmed the existence of two gods. [61] Although this statement is simple and brief, it encapsulates the Mu'tazilite doctrine regarding divine attributes. It indicates that Wasil ibn Ata considered Tawhid to be absolute and indivisible, a view that was later clarified by the Mu'tazilite scholars. According to them, attributes are parts and aspects of God, and affirming them would necessitate the existence of multiple eternal beings, which contradicts Tawhid. Therefore,

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[58] Ramon Harvey, "Philosopher of Samarqand: Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's Theory of Properties." pp. 77-90. There are other examples of Kindian echoes in the work of al-Maturīdī. See his statement, "the philosophers term [the human being] the microcosm" (wa-huwa alladhı sammathuˉ al-ḥukamaˉ al-ʿalam al-ˉṣaghıɾ) (al-Maturīdī 2010, 67). This appears to derive from al-Kindī who writes, "those of the ancient philosophers possessing discrimination who did not speak our language termed the human being the microcosm" (tusamma dhawˉ ū al-tamyızi min ˉḥukamaˉi al-qudamaˉi min ghayri ahli lisaninaˉ al-insaˉ naˉ ʿalamanˉ ṣaghranˉ) (al-Kindī 1950, vol. 1, 260). Also, al-Maturīdī's use of the word maˉiyya (whatness) fnds a precedent in al-Kindī's On First Philosophy (Fı al-falsafa al-ˉūla)ˉ (Adamson and Pormann 2012, 30). The most likely source for these teachings is directly from al-Kindī's student Abū Zayd al-Balkhī (d. 322/934) or indirectly via al-Maturīdī's Muʿtazilī rival Abū al-Qasim al-Kaˉʿbī who is known to have met Abū Zayd (Rudolph 2015, 159). But the circulation of written material through less famous channels cannot be ruled out.

[59] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. 300–301.

[60] "The Mu'tazila is an Islamic sect that emerged in the late Umayyad period and flourished during the Abbasid era. This group relied on pure reason in understanding Islamic creed, influenced by certain foreign philosophies, which ultimately led to their deviation from the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaʿah. They have been referred to by various names, including: the Mu'tazila, the Qadariyya, the Adliyya, the People of Justice and Unity (Ahl al-ʿAdl wa al-Tawḥīd), the Moderates (al-Muqtasida), and the Threateners (al-Waʿīdiyya). The name 'Mu'tazila' became associated with them after Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā' withdrew from the study circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and formed a separate group, due to his position on the issue of the 'intermediate position' (al-manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn). Al-Ḥasan commented, 'Wāṣil has withdrawn from us (iʿtazalana Wāṣil),' hence the name." Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. ʿAbd al-Amīr Muhannā and ʿAlī Fāʿūr, p. 81, Dār al-Maʿrifah

[61] *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by al-Shahrastānī, vol. 1, p. 46.

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they insisted on the necessity of denying the divine attributes to preserve the unity of God.[62]

Although this statement is simple and brief, it succinctly encapsulates the Mu'tazilite belief in divine attributes. It indicates that Washil bin 'Atha considered Tawhid to be singular and indivisible, a belief that was further clarified by later Mu'tazilite scholars. According to them, attributes are parts and components of God, and affirming them would necessitate the existence of multiple eternal beings, which contradicts the concept of Tawhid. Therefore, they asserted the necessity of denying divine attributes in order to maintain the unity of God.[63]

The ideas of the Muʿtazilites and their exploration of the issue of divine attributes remained largely limited to what Washil bin ʿAthaʾ had initially introduced, without significant depth or expansion in scholarly inquiry, until the mid-second century AH. Up to the time of Shaykh Abu Hasyim, Muʿtazilī scholars generally refrained from explicitly affirming or denying the attributes and their modalities. However, Abu Hasyim affirmed them in a qualified manner, whereas Abu Qasim al-Balkhi explicitly rejected them.[64] Abu Ali al-Jubba'i, Abu Bakr bin al-Ikhshad,[65] and Abu al-Hassan al-Basri[66] denied the states (*aḥwāl*) which Abu Hasyim affirmed, such as being in opposition, existing, alive, capable, perceptive, willing, and disliking. Regarding God's

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[62] Catarina Belo, "Mu'tazilites, Al-Ash'ari and Mainonidees on Divine Attributes." *Veritas (Porto Alegre),* Vol. 52, No. 3, Jan. 2007, pp. 117-131.

[63] Sayyid Qutb, *Khashaish Al-Tashawwur al-Islamiwa Muqawwamatuh* (Beirut: Dar al-Syuruq, 1980).

[64] Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī: His name is ʿAbd Allāh ibn Aḥmad ibn Maḥmūd al-Balkhī, also known as Abū al-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī. He was a leading figure among the Muʿtazilites and a contemporary of al-Jubbāʾī. The Kaʿbiyya school of Muʿtazilism is attributed to him. He was an active proponent of Muʿtazilite theology and authored several works. He died in 329 AH.See: *Al-Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn*, al-Isfarāyinī, p. 80; *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, al-Dhahabī, vol. 14, p. 313; *Lisān al-Mīzān*, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, vol. 4, p. 429; *Al-Aʿlām*, al-Ziriklī, vol. 4, p. 65.

[65] Abū Bakr ibn al-Ikhshād: His name is Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī ibn Bayghajūr, known as Abū Bakr ibn al-Akhshīdh (also rendered as al-Ikhshīd or al-Akhshādh). He was one of the prominent leaders and ascetics among the Muʿtazilites, known for his eloquence and knowledge in Arabic and jurisprudence. He died in 326 AH. See: *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, al-Dhahabī, vol. 15, p. 217; *Lisān al-Mīzān*, Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, vol. 1, p. 553; *Al-Aʿlām*, al-Ziriklī, vol. 1, p. 171

[66] Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī: His full name is Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Ṭayyib. He was one of the eminent scholars of the Muʿtazilah. Born in Basra, he later resided in Baghdad, where he died in 436 AH. See: *Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ*, al-Dhahabī, vol. 17, p. 587; *Al-Aʿlām*, al-Ziriklī, vol. 6, p. 275.

knowledge, they said it has the same manifestation as ours, and it is additional to His essence. [67]

After affirming the attribute of the essence, which is where the disagreement arises among them, they affirmed other attributes such as the localization (*taḥayyuz*) of the substance (*jawhar*) and the attribute of existence. Similarly, this applies to all other essences. They claim that the essence of Allah, after having the attribute by which it differs from other essences, has four other attributes: eternity, life, knowledge, and power, and they argue that these are derived from the essential attribute, such as localization in substance.[68] Then, when He is described by these attributes, it becomes necessary, because He possesses the attribute of power (*qudrah*), that actions are valid for Him. And because He possesses the attribute of knowledge (*ʾilm*), it is necessary that He can make judgments and have a connection to the known. Likewise, because He is alive (*ḥayāh*), it is essential for Him to have perception (*idrāk*), and when the perceiver exists, it is obligatory for the perceived to also exist.[69] The Mu'tazilite tradition believes that God is one and has no attributes. The Mu'tazilites argued that what is referred to as attributes by other groups is actually the essence of God Himself. What other factions consider to be attributes is, in the view of the Mu'tazilites, nothing other than the essence of God Almighty.

The Mu'tazilites see themselves as the people of monotheism and justice by denying the attributes of God. Their goal in this denial is to purify the oneness of God. The Mu'tazilites attempted to resolve this issue by stating that God has no nature. Their definition of God, as explained by al-Asiri, is negative. God does not have knowledge, power, needs, etc. This does not mean that, for them, God is ignorant, does not govern, or does not live. God still knows,

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[67] Syamsuddin Arif et al., "Epistemologi dan Teologi dalam Pemikiran al-Ghazali tentang Ilmu Kasyf," *TSAQAFAH* 16, no. 2 (November 16, 2020), https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v16i2.4765.

[68] Substance (Jawhar): It is an essence which, when it exists in external realities, does not exist in a subject. It is classified into five types: prime matter (*hayūlā*), form (*ṣūrah*), body (*jism*), soul (*nafs*), and intellect (*ʿaql*). This classification depends on whether the substance is immaterial or not. If immaterial, it either relates to the body through governance and management—this is the intellect—or it does not, in which case it is the soul. If it is not immaterial, then it is either composite or not. See: *Al-Taʿrīfāt*, al-Jurjānī, p. 137.

[69] *Al-Kāmil fī al-Istiqṣāʾ fīmā Balaghanā min Kalām al-Qudamāʾ*, by Mukhtār ibn Maḥmūd al-ʿAjjalī, known as Taqī al-Dīn al-Najrānī. Edited by: Sayyid Muḥammad al-Shāhid. Edition: [unspecified]. Publisher: Committee for the Revival of Heritage – Cairo, Year of Publication: 1420 AH, pp. 217–218.

governs, and so on, but knowledge, governance, and the like are not attributes in the true sense of the word. This means that God knows through His knowledge, which is inherently Himself.[70]

In term of *tanzīh* (purification), all Muslims agree on the oneness of God (*tawḥīd*), but the Muʿtazilites place particular emphasis on the absolute purification (*tanzīh*) of God from the attributes of created beings. Their view of *tawḥīd* opposes both the Jewish portrayal of God on one hand, and the views of the corporealists (*mujassimah*), anthropomorphists (*mushabbihah*), and literalists (*hashwiyyah*) on the other.[71] For the Muʿtazilites, God is entirely free from the limitations of creation. *Laysa ka mitslihī sya'* is a decisive verse, and in light of it, every verse whose apparent meaning suggests the attributes of created beings is interpreted (God is neither a body, nor a shadow, nor an image, nor flesh, nor blood). This is a denial of the corporealists who have made God a body, and a critique of the Old Testament idea that God created Adam in His image.

It has been shown above that most of these are negative attributes meant to deny any human conception of God, affirming that "there is nothing like Him". The Muʿtazilites did not intend to deny any kind of resemblance or similarity between God and human beings or any human imagination of Him. God is fundamentally different. However, they could affirm positive attributes that are unique to God, such as monotheism, eternity, and self-sufficiency. These are positive in wording but negative in meaning. Monotheism means the denial of any partner for Him, eternity signifies the negation of creation, and self-sufficiency indicates that all beings are in need of Him, while He needs nothing. As for the positive attributes, both in wording and meaning, which the Muʿtazilites attributed to God's essence, these include power, life, and knowledge. These are attributes ascribed to God, while their opposites—weakness, death, and ignorance—are not ascribed to Him.[72]

The possibility of attributing these qualities—power, knowledge, and life—to human beings does not imply any resemblance or similarity between

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[70] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. pp. 122-.١٢٣

[71] Namam Salman, "Mu'tazila and the Theology of Tanzih." *KUFA REVIEW,* No. 3, Issue 1, Winter 2014, pp. 63-87.

[72] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. p. 125.

humans and God, because these attributes are ascribed to God due to His essence, while they are ascribed to humans based on an external meaning beyond their essence. Despite this exalted transcendence of God above the attributes of created beings, the matter is not without difficulties. Some of these difficulties concern the relationship between God's essence and His attributes, while others pertain to the descriptive attributes of God, whose apparent meaning may suggest similarity.[73]

The attributes of God are identical [74]to His essence. Despite our ignorance of the true nature of the divine essence, we can describe it with attributes without implying anthropomorphism. To understand the Mu'tazilite position in this regard, we must consider that they sought to counter the Christian notion of the divine hypostases. The belief that the divine essence is a substance comprised of hypostases, such as existence, knowledge, and life, led to the idea of the hypostases being independent of the essence and attributed to the personhood of God, culminating in the incarnation of the second hypostasis—the hypostasis of knowledge—in the Son.[75] In response to this belief, the Mu'tazilites denied the description of God as a substance and considered the attributes as the essence itself without altering it.[76] Therefore, the attributes of God are not independent realities; rather, they are mental constructs, and the different aspects of these constructs do not imply multiplicity in the essence itself. For example, the essence may be described as distinguished, self-subsistent, and capable of receiving attributes. Similarly, the divine essence is one, and the attributes multiply based on the different perspectives through which it is considered. For instance, when we say "knowing", we affirm knowledge in the essence and negate ignorance from it, and when we say "powerful," we affirm the essence and negate weakness from it. [77]

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[73] Maḥmūd Ṣubḥī, *Fī ʿIlm al-Kalām (al-Muʿtazilah)*, 4th ed. (Alexandria: Al-Thaqāfah al-Jāmiʿiyyah Foundation, 1982), p. 115, quoting from *Al-Intiṣār* by al-Khayyāṭ.

[74] Akdere, Russ-Eft, and Eft, "The Islamic Worldview of Adult Learning in the Workplace."

[75] Qutb, *Khashaish Al-Tashawwur al-Islamiwa Muqawwamatuh*.

[76] Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, "PEMIKIRAN TOKOH ISLAMISASI ILMU PENGETAHUAN," n.d.

[77] Maḥmūd Ṣubḥī, *Fī ʿIlm al-Kalām (al-Muʿtazilah)*, 4th ed. (Alexandria: Al-Thaqāfah al-Jāmiʿiyyah Foundation, 1982), pp. 115–118, quoting from *Al-Intiṣār* by al-Khayyāṭ.

The Mu'tazilites respond to the distinction between the known and the possible. When one says, "God is knowledgeable", it affirms knowledge as part of His essence and negates ignorance from Him. Similarly, when one says, "God is capable", it affirms power as part of His essence and negates weakness from Him. When one says, "God is alive", it affirms life and negates death from Him. In other words, the meaning of saying "knowing" is the affirmation of the essence and the negation of ignorance from it. [78]The distinction in attributing qualities to the essence of God is rooted in the difference between their negated opposites. The difference between God being knowledgeable, capable, or alive essentially refers to the contrast with the negated opposites of ignorance, incapacity, and death.[79]

Knowledge, power, and life are attributes of the essence. The attributes of God are of two types: eternal attributes, [80]by which God is described and cannot be attributed their opposites, and attributes of action, which entail God's description through the existence of their effects, such as being the Creator or the Provider.[81] Additionally, God can be described by these attributes and their opposites, such as (the Giver of life–the Creator of death), (the Avenger–the Forgiver), (the Compeller–the Merciful), (the Honorer–the Dishonorer).[82]

The interpretation of the attributes related to the divine reports (*khabariyyah*) presented another challenge for the Mu'tazilites. After they took their stance on the absolute transcendence of God to the extent of denying any resemblance between God and humans, they faced the issue of verses that seemingly suggest anthropomorphism.[83] The Mu'tazilites interpreted these verses in a manner that aligned with their absolute purification (*tanzīh*) of God.

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[78] Achmad Khudori Soleh, "Al-Ghazali's Concept of Happiness in The Alchemy of Happiness," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 12, no. 2 (December 13, 2022): 196–211, https://doi.org/10.32350/jitc.122.14.

[79] Quoted from *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by al-Shahrastānī, p. 65.

[80] Mohamad Mohamad Latief et al., "Framework Richard Walzer Terhadap Filsafat Islam Dalam Bukunya; Greek Into Arabic Essay On Islamic Philosophy," *Jaqfi: Jurnal Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam* 7, no. 1 (June 29, 2022): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.15575/jaqfi.v7i1.12095.

[81] Salma Saeed Amer Al Mansoori, "Attributes of God in Creedal Doctrines." *Journal of Posthumanism,* Vol. 5, No. 4, Apr. 2025, pp. 1-19. DOI: https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i4.1139

[82] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. p. 125.

[83] Guillaume, Alfred. "Christian and Muslim Theology as Represented by Al-Shahrastānī and St. Thomas Aquinas." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 13, no. 3 (1950): 551–80. http://www.jstor.org/stable/608464.

They employed one of three methods for their interpretation: (1) The richness of the language in indicating multiple meanings through a single term; (2) The eloquence of the Arabic language and the frequent use of metaphors, similes, and figurative expressions by the Arabs, which constitutes the majority of their interpretations of ambiguous verses; (3) A slight alteration in the reading of certain verses, based on the variation in recitations.

The Mu'tazilites interpreted the verses that seem to imply that God has a hand, face, or eye.[84] They cited the verse where the Jews said, "*The hand of God is chained; their hands are chained, and they are cursed for what they said. Rather, both of His hands are extended.*"[85] This is a figurative expression that signifies the ultimate generosity of God and denies any notion of stinginess, as the utmost act of generosity is for God to give with both hands. The Mu'tazilites built their metaphor on this understanding.[86] The hand, in general, signifies blessing, support, and assistance.[87] Ther face of God refers to God Himself.[88] Just as the poor of Mecca might say, "Where is the noble face of an Arab who will save me from humiliation?"–implying a person of nobility and honor–similarly. In the Qur'anic verse *wa li-tushnaʿa ʿalā ʿaynī*[89] meaning "that you may be brought up under My eye", the phrase is a metaphor expressing divine care and protection, with the address directed at Moses that is, "under Our eye" means "under Our knowledge and care".

Likewise, the Muʿtazilites rejected any physical or sensory interpretation implied by the word *istiwāʾ* (settling or rising),[90] in the verse of the Qur'an: *al-Rahman ʿalā al-ʿarsy istawā*. In line with their commitment to *tanzīh* (absolute transcendence), the Muʿtazilites interpreted the Qur'anic term "*istiwāʿ*"—often translated as "established" or "rose"—as a metaphor, specifically meaning sovereignty or dominion rather than any physical elevation or spatial occupation. They argued that attributing spatial qualities to God would violate

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[84] Baljon, J.M.S. "QUR'ANIC ANTHROPOMORPHISMS." *Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988): 119–27. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20839882.

[85] (Qur'an 5:64).

[86] Al-Ashʿarī, *ibid.*, pp. 242–243.

[87] QS. 48: 10; QS. 38: 75; QS. 36: 71

[88] QS. 55: 27; QS. 76:9

[89] [Qur'an 20:39],

[90] S. M. Mukarram Jahan, "Muʿtazilite Philosophy: Basic Features." *Centre for the Study of Comparative Religions and Civilizations,* Jamia Millia Islamia, Okhla, New Delhi, Nov. 7, 2020, pp. 1-15.

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His incomparability (*laysa ka mitslihi syayʾ*). Thus, *istiwāʾ ʿala al-ʿarsy* ('established over the Throne') is understood to mean God's complete authority and control over creation, not physical enthronement. It may also imply superiority in rank or status, as in the expression "gold is above silver" or "the prince is above the minister." In such usages, the notion of "above" (*fawqiyyah*)[91] refers not to physical elevation but to dignity, authority, or value. The Muʿtazilites adopted this understanding when interpreting divine attributes, particularly verses that might suggest anthropomorphic or spatial implications, emphasizing instead God's transcendence beyond all physical dimensions or human-like qualities.[92]

Likewise, the Muʿtazilites interpreted Qur'anic verses that suggest descent (*nuzūl*)[93], coming (*majīʾ*)[94], or ascension (*ʿurūj*)[95] in a way that avoids implying any form of physical movement.[96] God does not descend, come, or ascend, nor does anything descend to Him or ascend to Him in a physical or corporeal manner, as indicated in His saying: *ilayhi yashʿudu al-kalim al-thayyib wa al-ʿamal al-shāliḥ yarfaʿuhu*.[97] Because everything that is connected to God is beyond the meaning of anything material or perceptible, the intended meaning of His descent is kindness and provision, as stated in His verse.[98] It is well known that iron or goods do not descend from the sky; thus, descent signifies simply reaching a destination. Likewise, ascent signifies the superiority of good speech and righteous deeds, and their elevation. The verses of "companionship" (*maʿiyyah*)[99] and nearness (*qurb*)[100] are metaphorical according to the Mu'tazilites. This is all metaphorical and cannot be understood literally, as the true meaning of companionship (*maʿiyyah*) implies mixing and proximity, which is definitively negated for God. However, He is near, not through

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[91] QS. 20:5; QS. 6:154

[92] Koca, Özgür. *Islam, Causality, and Science: Perspectives on Reconciliation of Islamic Tradition and Modern Science.* of *Elements in Islam and Science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

[93] QS. 18:1; QS. 76: 23.

[94] QS.89:12; QS. 6:157

[95] QS. 32: 10

[96] Jaffer, Tariq. "The Muʿtazila on Covenantal Theology: A Study of Individualist Approaches." *Oriens* 49, no. 1/2 (2021): 131–71. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27130844.

[97] QS. 35: 10

[98] QS. 57: 25

[99] QS. 57: 4

[100] QS. 16: 128

proximity, and distant, not through separation. Thus, the meaning of companionship here is assistance and guidance, and similarly, the term "near" refers to a metaphorical nearness.[101]

Similarly, the Muʿtazilites rejected the literal sensory interpretation of the light in the verse: *Allāhu nūr al-samāwāt wa al-ʿardh*.[102] Every rational person knows by necessity that God is not the light that spreads over walls, nor is He the light emanating from the sun or moon. Rather, the meaning is that "God is the illuminator of the heavens and the earth", just as light guides to the path.[103]

Thus, the Muʿtazilites aimed to negate any physical perception of God, purifying the concept of divinity from the impurities of Isra'iliyat, corporealists, and anthropomorphists. However, it is said that the verses of analogy are numerous–this is the basis for those who lean toward corporealism and anthropomorphism. Yet, the verses of transcendence (*tanzīh*) are clearer in their implications and offer a higher level of conceptual understanding. This is because, as Ibnu Khaldun expressed, corporeality implies imperfection and need.[104] The Muʿtazilites based their interpretations on a specific methodology, which was to refer the ambiguous verses (*mutasyābihāt*) to the clear ones (*muḥkamāt*). For them, the clear verses were those that aligned with their belief in the absolute transcendence (*tanzīh*) of God from the attributes of created beings and humans. Therefore, all the verses whose apparent meaning suggests corporealism or anthropomorphism were considered ambiguous and were interpreted in light of the clear verses: *laysa ka mitslihī syay'*.[105]

The Theological Discourse on Divine Attributes: A Comparative Study of Ashʿarite, Māturīdite, and Muʿtazilite Perspectives

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[101] Miner, Maureen, Bagher Ghobary-Bonab, and Martin Dowson. "Development of a Measure of Attachment to God for Muslims." *Review of Religious Research* 59, no. 2 (2017): 183–206. http://www.jstor.org/stable/26378501; Esmaeil Alikhani, Hajj Muhammad Legenhausen, "Nearness to Allah." *Religious Inquiries*, Vol. 7, No. 14, Dec. 2018, pp. 5-22.

[102] QS. 24: 35

[103] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah ʿalā al-Jahmiyyah wa al-Muʿaṭṭilah*. pp. 378–425.

[104] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. *Al-Ṣawāʿiq al-Mursalah ʿalā al-Jahmiyyah wa al-Muʿaṭṭilah*. p. 359.

[105] Zarkasyi, Amal Fathullah, Dirāsah fī ʿIlm al-Kalām. Ponorogo: Jāmiʿat Dār al-Salām Kontūr li al-Ṭibāʿah wa al-Nashr, 2020. p. 131.

The Ashʿarī, Māturīdī, and Muʿtazilite schools of Islamic theology developed distinct approaches to understanding Divine Attributes, reflecting broader debates about God's nature, scripture, and reason. While all three schools uphold God's transcendence (*tanzīh*) and reject anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*), they diverge significantly in their ontological and epistemological frameworks. This section examines their points of convergence and divergence, analyzes their methodological foundations, and explores their implications for Islamic theology and contemporary discourse.

The Ashʿarīs affirm Divine Attributes as real yet neither identical to nor separate from God's essence (*shifāt ghayr al-dzāt wa ghayr ghayrihā*), adopting a literal reading of scripture while avoiding anthropomorphism (*bilā kayf*). In contrast, the Māturīdīs harmonize reason and revelation, permitting cautious metaphorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) when necessary. The Muʿtazilites, however, reject eternal attributes entirely, arguing that affirming them compromises God's unity (*tawḥīd*). For them, attributes are either negations or reducible to God's essence, with scriptural anthropomorphisms interpreted allegorically.

Ontologically, the Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs agree that attributes are real and eternal, but they differ in their metaphysical structuring. The Ashʿarīs view attributes as inherent in God's essence without being separate entities, thus avoiding multiplicity. The Māturīdīs, influenced by Ḥanafī rationalism, treat attributes as manifestations of God's actions, ensuring coherence without composition. The Muʿtazilites, however, deny any real distinction between God's essence and attributes, fearing that affirming independent attributes would lead to a Christian-like trinitarian view.

Epistemologically, the Ashʿarīs prioritize textual authority, rejecting speculative interpretation of ambiguous verses. The Māturīdīs, while also scripture-based, integrate rational proofs to reconcile apparent contradictions. The Muʿtazilites, in contrast, subordinate scripture to reason, reinterpreting anthropomorphic descriptions to fit their rationalist framework. This methodological split, underscores a deeper tension in Islamic thought: whether revelation should be understood literally, contextually, or allegorically.[106]

These theological differences have practical consequences for tawḥīd and devotional practice. The Ashʿarī and Māturīdī positions allow for a relational

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[106] Wolfson, Harry Austryn., "The Philosophy of the Kalām."

understanding of God, where attributes like mercy and power shape worship and ethics. The Muʿtazilite approach, while philosophically rigorous, risks rendering God abstract and impersonal, potentially alienating believers who seek a more intimate divine connection. Historically, Ashʿarī-Māturīdī dominance in Sunni orthodoxy reflects a preference for balancing transcendence with scriptural fidelity.

In modern Islamic discourse, these schools remain influential. Salafis critique Ashʿarīs for residual anthropomorphism and Muʿtazilites for excessive rationalism, while Māturīdī thought is seen as a moderate alternative. Muʿtazilite rationalism resurfaces in debates on science, human rights, and hermeneutics, particularly among reformist thinkers. Meanwhile, Ashʿarī traditionalism continues to shape mainstream Sunni theology, demonstrating the enduring tension between literalist and rationalist approaches.[107]

Despite their differences, all three schools seek to uphold God's absolute oneness while navigating the challenges of scriptural interpretation. The Ashʿarī-Māturīdī synthesis has historically provided a stable theological foundation, whereas Muʿtazilite thought remains a provocative counterpoint. Their ongoing dialogue enriches Islamic theology, ensuring that debates over Divine Attributes remain central to understanding God's nature and humanity's relationship with the Divine.[108]

Conclusion

In the discourse on divine attributes, the three major theological schools within Islam demonstrate distinct approaches. The Ashʿarites adopted an ambiguous and at times contradictory stance. They did not fully align with either the Salafi or the Muʿtazilite positions, instead selectively incorporating aspects from both. This eclectic method reflects an attempt to mediate between literalism and rationalism, though it often resulted in theological inconsistencies in their conceptualization of God's attributes.

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[107] Aicha Lahdhiri, ""The Attributes of God in Medieval Islamic Thought: The Conception of the Omnipotence of God between the Qur'anic Verses and the Islamic Theology," Perspectivas, Vol. 7, (2022).

[108] Zulfiqar Ali Shah, "Anthromorphic Depictions of God: The Concept of God in Judaic, Christian and Islamic Tradition: Representing the Unrepresentable," *The International Institute of Islamic Thought,* London (2012).

In contrast, al-Māturīdī viewed divine attributes as mere names for actions within a coherent and orderly system. These attributes do not imply the presence or absence of particular capacities, but rather serve as nominal designations. According to this view, once an attribute ceases to apply, what remains is simply an honorary title. Hence, the notion of the eternal nature of such attributes loses its substantive meaning when interpreted solely as a matter of naming.

The Muʿtazilites, on the other hand, consistently rejected any understanding of attributes that implied resemblance to created beings. They held that what other schools considered as attributes are, in fact, inseparable from God's essence. Their interpretive framework relies on a rationalist methodology that prioritizes unequivocal *(muḥkam)* verses over ambiguous *(mutasyābih)* ones, particularly those that may suggest anthropomorphism. They interpreted such verses in light of the definitive principle articulated in "There is nothing like unto Him." These divergent perspectives reflect the broader theological debates in Islamic thought concerning the nature of divine attributes and their relationship to God's essence, ultimately shaping the evolution of Islamic theology and philosophy.[]

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