

Mu'tazilah

We shall begin our discussion – and we shall explain later why – with the Mu'tazilah. The emergence of this sect took place during the latter part of the first century or at the beginning of the second. Obviously *'ilm al-kalam*, like any other field of study, developed gradually and slowly attained maturity.

First we shall enumerate the principal Mu'tazilite beliefs, or what is better to say, the basic and salient points of their school of thought. Second, we shall point out the well-known Mu'tazilite figures and speak of their fate in history. Then we shall give an account of the main outlines of the transitions and changes in their thought and beliefs.

The opinions held by the Mu'tazilah are many, and are not confined to the religious matters, or which according to them form an essential part of the faith. They cover a number of physical, social, anthropological and philosophical issues, which are not directly related with the faith. However, there is a certain relevance of these problems to religion, and, in the belief of the Mu'tazilah, any inquiry about the matters of religion is not possible without studying them.

There are five principal doctrines which, according to the Mu'tazilah themselves, constitute their basic tenets:

- (i) *Tawhid*, i.e. absence of plurality and attributes.
- (ii) Justice (*'adl*), i.e. God is just and that He does not oppress His creatures.
- (iii) Divine retribution (*at-wa'd wa al-wa'id*), i.e. God has determined a reward for the obedient and a punishment for the disobedient, and there can be no uncertainty about it. Therefore, Divine pardon is only possible if the sinner repents, for forgiveness without repentance (*tawbah*) is not possible.
- (iv) *Manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn* (a position between the two positions). This means that a *fasiq* (i.e. one who commits one of the "greater sins," such as a wine imbiber, adulterer, or a liar etc.) is neither a believer (*mu'min*) nor an infidel (*kafir*); *fisq* is an intermediary state between belief and infidelity.
- (v) *al-'amr bil ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* [bidding to do what is right and lawful, and forbidding

what is wrong and unlawful]. The opinion of the Mu'tazilah about this Islamic duty is, firstly, that the Shari'ah is not the exclusive means of identifying the *ma'ruf* and the *munkar*; human reason can, at least partially, independently identify the various kinds of *ma'ruf* and *munkar*.

Secondly, the implementation of this duty does not necessitate the presence of the Imam, and is a universal obligation of all Muslims, whether the Imam or leader is present or not. Only some categories of it are the obligation of the Imam or ruler of Muslims, such as, implementation of the punishments (*hudud*) prescribed by the Shari'ah, guarding of the frontiers of Islamic countries, and other such matters relating to the Islamic government.

Occasionally, the Mu'tazilite *mutakallimun* have devoted independent volumes to discussion of their five doctrines, such as the famous *al-'Usul al-khamsah* of al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar al-'Astarabadi (d. 415/1025), a Mu'tazilite contemporary of al-Sayyid al-Murtadha 'Alam al-Huda and al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad (d. 385/995).

As can be noticed, only the principles of *tawhid* and Justice can be considered as parts of the essential doctrine. The other three principles are only significant because they characterize the Mu'tazilah. Even Divine Justice – although its notion is definitely supported by the Qur'an, and belief in it is a necessary part of the Islamic faith and doctrine – has been made one of the five major doctrines because it characterizes the Mu'tazilah. Or otherwise belief in Divine Knowledge and Power is as much an essential part of the Islamic faith and principal doctrine.

Also in the Shi'ite faith the principle of Divine Justice is considered one of the five essential doctrines. It is natural that the question should arise: what is particular about Divine Justice that it should be counted among the essential doctrines, though justice is only one of the Divine Attributes? Is not God Just in the same manner as He is the Omniscient, the Mighty, the Living, the Perceiver, the Hearer and the Seer? All those Divine Attributes are essential to the faith. Then why justice is given so much prominence among the Divine Attributes?

The answer is that Justice has no advantage over other Attributes. The Shi'ite *mutakallimun* have specially mentioned justice among the principal Shi'ite doctrines because the Ash'arites – who form the majority of the Ahl al-Sunnah – implicitly deny that it is an Attribute, whereas they do not reject the Attributes of Knowledge, Life, Will, etc. Accordingly, justice is counted among the specific doctrines of the Shi'ah, as also of the Mu'tazilah.

The above-mentioned five doctrines constitute the basic position of the Mu'tazilah from the viewpoint of *kalam*, otherwise, as said before, the Mu'tazilite beliefs are not confined to these five and cover a broad scope ranging from theology, physics and sociology to anthropology, in all of which they hold specific beliefs, a discussion of which lies outside the scope of these lectures.

The Doctrine of al-Tawhid

Beginning with *tawhid* it has various kinds and levels: *al-tawhid al-dhati* (Unity of the Essence), *al-tawhid al-sifati* (Unity of the Attributes, i.e., with the Essence), *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* (Unity of the Acts), *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (monotheism in worship).

Al-Tawhid al-dhati

It means that the Divine Essence is one and unique; it does not have a like or match. All other beings are God's creations and inferior to Him in station and in degree of perfection. In fact, they cannot be compared with Him. The idea of *al-tawhid al-dhati* is made clear by the following two [Qur'anic] verses:

Nothing is like Him. (42:11)

He does not have a match [whatsoever]. (112:4)

A-Tawhid al-sifati

It means that the Divine Attributes such as Knowledge, Power, Life, Will, Perception, Hearing, Vision, etc. are not realities separate from God's Essence. They are identical with the Essence, in the sense that the Divine Essence is such that the Attributes are true of It, or is such that It manifests these Attributes.

Al-Tawhid al-'af'ali

It means that all beings, or rather all acts [even human acts] exist by the Will of God, and are in some way willed by His sacred Essence.

Al-Tawhid al-'ibadi

It means that except God no other being deserves worship and devotion. Worship of anything besides God is *shirk* and puts the worshipper outside the limits of Islamic *tawhid* or monotheism.

In a sense *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (*tawhid* in worship) is different from other kinds of *tawhid*, because the first three relate to God and this kind relates to the creatures. In other words, the Unity of Divine Essence, His Uniqueness and the identity of the Essence and Attributes, the unity of the origin of everything – all of them are matters which relate to God.

But *tawhid* in worship, i.e. the necessity of worshipping the One God, relates to the behaviour of the creatures. But in reality, *tawhid* in worship is also related to God, because it means Uniqueness of God as the only deserving object of worship, and that He is in truth the One Deity Worthy of Worship. The statement "*la ilaha illallah*" encompasses all aspects of *tawhid*, although its first signification is monotheism in worship.

Al-tawhid al-dhati and *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* are part of the basic doctrines of Islam. It means that if there is a shortcoming in one's belief in these two principles, it would put one outside the pale of Islam. No Muslim has opposed these two basic beliefs.

Lately, the Wahhabis, who are the followers of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, who was a follower of Ibn Taymiyyah, a Hanbali from Syria, have claimed that some common beliefs of the Muslims such as one in intercession (*shafa'ah*) and some of their practices such as invoking the assistance of the prophets (A) and holy saints (R) are opposed to the doctrine of *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*. But these are not considered by other Muslims to conflict with *al-tawhid al-'ibadi*.

The point of difference between the Wahhabis and other Muslims is not whether any one besides God – such as the prophets or saints – is worthy of worship. There is no debate that anyone except God cannot be worshipped. The debate is about whether invoking of intercession and assistance can be considered a form of worship or not. Therefore, the difference is only secondary, not a primary one. Islamic scholars have rejected the viewpoint of the Wahhabis in elaborate, well-reasoned answers.

Al-tawhid al-sifati (the Unity of Divine Essence and Attributes) is a point of debate between the Mu'tazilah and the Asha'irah. The latter deny it while the former affirm it. *Al-tawhid al-'af'ali* is also another point of difference between them, with the difference, however, that the matter is reverse; i.e. the Asha'irah affirm it and the Mu'tazilah deny it.

When the Mu'tazilah call themselves "*ahl al-tawhid*", and count it among their doctrines, thereby they mean by it *al-tawhid al-sifati*, not *al-tawhid al-dhati*, nor *al-tawhid al-'ibadi* (which are not disputed), nor *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. Because, firstly, *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* is negated by them, and, secondly, they expound their own viewpoint about it under the doctrine of justice, their second article.

The Asha'irah and the Mu'tazilah formed two radically opposed camps on the issues of *al-tawhid al-sifati* and *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. To repeat, the Mu'tazilah affirm *al-tawhid al-sifati* and reject *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*, while the Ash'arite position is the reverse. Each of them have advanced arguments in support of their positions. We shall discuss the Shi'ite position regarding these two aspects of *tawhid* in the related chapter.

The Doctrine of Divine Justice

In the preceding lecture I have mentioned the five fundamental Mu'tazilite principles, and explained the first issue, i.e. their doctrine of *tawhid*. Here we shall take up their doctrine of Divine Justice.

Of course, it is evident that none of the Islamic sects denied justice as one of the Divine Attributes. No one has ever claimed that God is not just. The difference between the Mu'tazilah and their opponents is about the interpretation of Justice. The Asha'irah interpret it in such a way that it is equivalent, in the view of the Mu'tazilah, to a denial of the Attribute of Justice. Otherwise, the Asha'irah are not at all willing

to be considered the opponents of justice.

The Mu'tazilah believe that some acts are essentially 'just' and some intrinsically 'unjust.' For instance, rewarding the obedient and punishing the sinners is justice; and that God is Just, i.e. He rewards the obedient and punishes the sinners, and it is impossible for Him to act otherwise. Rewarding the sinners and punishing the obedient is essentially and intrinsically unjust, and it is impossible for God to do such a thing.

Similarly, compelling His creatures to commit sin, or creating them without any power of free will, then creating the sinful acts at their hands, and then punishing them on account of those sins – this is injustice, an ugly thing for God to do; it is unjustifiable and unGodly. But the Asha'irah believe that no act is intrinsically or essentially just or unjust.

Justice is essentially whatever God does. If, supposedly, God were to punish the obedient and reward the sinners, it would be as just. Similarly, if God creates His creatures without any will, power or freedom of action, then if He causes them to commit sins and then punishes them for that – it is not essential injustice. If we suppose that God acts in this manner, it is justice:

Whatever that Khusrow does is sweet (shirin).

For the same reason that the Mu'tazilah emphasize justice, they deny *al-tawhid al-'af'ali*. They say that *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* implies that God, not the human beings, is the maker of human deeds. Since it is known that man attains reward and punishment in the Hereafter, if God is the creator of human actions and yet punishes them for their evil deeds – which not they, but God Himself has brought about – that would be injustice (*zulm*) and contrary to Divine Justice. Accordingly, the Mu'tazilah consider *al-tawhid al-'af'ali* to be contrary to the doctrine of justice.

Also, thereby, the Mu'tazilah believe in human freedom and free will and are its staunch defenders, contrary to the Asha'irah who deny human freedom and free will.

Under the doctrine of justice – in the sense that some deeds are inherently just and some inherently unjust, and that human reason dictates that justice is good and must be practised, whereas injustice is evil and must be abstained from – they advance another general doctrine, which is more comprehensive, that is the principle that "beauty" (*husn*) and "ugliness" (*qubh*), (good and evil), are inherent properties of acts. For instance, truthfulness, trustworthiness, chastity and God-fearing are intrinsically good qualities, and falsehood, treachery, indecency, neglectfulness, etc. are intrinsically evil. Therefore, deeds in essence, before God may judge them, possess inherent goodness or evil (*husn* or *qubh*).

Hereupon, they arrive at another doctrine about reason: human reason can independently judge (or perceive) the good or evil in things. It means that the good or evil of some deeds can be judged by human reason independently of the commands of the Shari'ah. The Asha'irah are against this view too.

The belief in the inherent good or evil of acts and the capacity of reason to judge them, upheld by the Mu'tazilah and rejected by the Asha'irah, brought many other problems in its wake, some of which are related to theology, some to human predicament; such as, whether the Divine Acts, or rather, the creation of things is with a purpose or not. The Mu'tazilah claimed that absence of a purpose in the creation is "*qabih*" (an ugly thing) and so rationally impossible. How about a duty which is beyond one's power to fulfil? Is it possible that God may saddle someone with a duty which is over and above his capacity? The Mu'tazilah considered this, too, as "*qabih*", and so impossible.

Is it within the power of a believer (*mu'min*) to turn apostate? Does the infidel (*kafir*) have any power over his own infidelity (*kufr*)? The answer of the Mu'tazilah is in the affirmative; for if the believer and the infidel had no power over their belief and infidelity, it would be wrong (*qabih*) to award and punish them. The Asha'irah rejected all these Mu'tazilite doctrines and held opposite views.

Retribution (al-wa'd wa al-wa'id)

"*Wa'd*" means promising award and "*wa'id*" means threat of punishment. The Mu'tazilah believe that God does not break His own promises (all Muslims unanimously accept this) or forego His threats, as stated by the Qur'anic verse regarding Divine promise:

Indeed God does not break the promise. (13:31)

Accordingly (the Mu'tazilah say), all threats addressed to the sinners and the wicked such as the punishments declared for an oppressor, a liar or a wine imbibor, will all be carried out without fail, except when the sinner repents before death. Therefore, pardon without repentance is not possible.

From the viewpoint of the Mu'tazilah, pardon without repentance implies failure to carry out the threats (*wa'id*), and such an act, like breaking of promise (*khulf al-wa'd*), is "*qabih*", and so impossible. Thus the Mu'tazilite beliefs regarding Divine retribution and Divine forgiveness are interrelated, and both arise from their belief in inherent good and evil of deeds determinable by reason.

Manzilah Bayna al-Manzilatayn

The Mu'tazilite belief in this matter emerged in the wake of two opposite beliefs in the Muslim world about the faith (*'iman*) or infidelity (*kufr*) of the *fasiq*. For the first time the Khawarij maintained that committing of any of the capital sins (*kaba'ir*) was contrary to faith (*'iman*) and equal to infidelity. Therefore, the perpetrator of a major sin is a *kafir*.

As we know, the Khawarij emerged after the incident of arbitration (*tahkim*) during the Battle of Siffin about the year 37/657-58 during the caliphate of Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali (A). As the *Nahj al-Balaghah* tells us, Amir al-Mu'minin (A) argued with them on this issue and refuted their viewpoint by numerous arguments.

The Khawarij, even after 'Ali (A), were against the caliphs of the period, and staunchly espoused the cause of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, denouncing others for their evil and calling them apostates and infidels. Since most of the caliphs indulged in the capital sins, they were naturally regarded as infidels by the Khawarij. Accordingly, they were adversaries of the current politics.

Another group which emerged (or was produced by the hands of vested political interests) was that of the Murji'ah, whose position with regard to the effect of capital sins was precisely opposite to that of the Khawarij. They held that faith and belief is a matter of the heart. One should remain a Muslim if one's faith – which is an inner affair of the heart – were intact, evil deeds cannot do any harm. Faith compensates all wickedness.

The opinions of the Murji'ah were to the benefit of the rulers, and tended to cause the people to regard their wickedness and indecencies as unimportant, or to consider them, despite their destructive character, as men worthy of paradise. The Murji'ah stated in unequivocal terms, "The respectability of the station of the ruler is secure, no matter how much he may sin. Obedience to him is obligatory and prayers performed in his leadership are correct." The tyrannical caliphs, therefore, backed them. For the Murji'ah, sin and wickedness, no matter how serious, do not harm one's faith; the perpetrator of the major sins is a *mu'min*, not a *kafir*.

The Mu'tazilah took a middle path in this matter. They maintained that the perpetrator of a major sin is neither a *mu'min*, nor he is a *kafir*, but occupies a position between those two extremes. This middle state was termed by the Mu'tazilah "*manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*."

It is said that the first to express this belief was Wasil ibn 'Ata', a pupil of al-Hasan al-Basri. One day Wasil was sitting with his teacher, who was asked his opinion about the difference between the Khawarij and the Murji'ah on this issue. Before al-Hasan could say anything, Wasil declared: "In my opinion the perpetrator of the major sins is a *fasiq*, not a *kafir*."

After this, he left the company, or as is also said, was expelled by al-Hasan al-Basri – and parting his way started propagating his own views. His pupil and brother-in-law 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd also joined him. At this point Hasan declared, "*'Itazala 'anna*", i.e. "He [Wasil] has departed from us." According to another version, the people began to say of Wasil and 'Amr "*'Itazala qawl al-'ummah*", i.e. "they have departed from the doctrines held by the ummah," inventing a third path.

Al-'Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar

Al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar is an essential Islamic duty, unanimously accepted by all Muslims. The difference occurs only in the limits and conditions related to it.

For instance, the Khawarij believed in it without any limits and conditions whatsoever. They believed that this twofold duty must be performed in all circumstances. For example, when others believed in the

conditions of probability of effectiveness (of *al-ma'ruf*) and absence of any dangerous consequences as necessary for this obligation to be applicable, the Khawarij did not believe in any such restrictions.

Some believed that it is sufficient to fulfil the duty of *al-'amr wa al-nahy* by the heart and the tongue i.e. one should support *al-ma'ruf* and oppose *al-munkar* in his heart and use his tongue to speak out for *al-ma'ruf* and against *al-munkar*. But the Khawarij considered it incumbent to take up arms and to unsheathe one's sword for the sake of fulfilling this duty.

As against them there was a group which considered *al-'amr wa al-nahy* to be subject to the above conditions, and, moreover, did not go beyond the confines of the heart and the tongue for its sake. Ahmad ibn Hanbal is counted among them. According to this group, a bloody uprising for the sake of struggling against unlawful activities is not permissible.

The Mu'tazilah accepted the conditions for *al-'amr wa al-nahy*, but, not limiting it to the heart and the tongue, maintained that if the unlawful practices become common, or if the state is oppressive and unjust, it is obligatory for Muslims to rise in armed revolt.

Thus the belief special to the Mu'tazilah in regard to *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* – contrary to the stand of the Ahl al-Hadith and the Ahl al-Sunnah – is belief in the necessity to rise up in arms to confront corruption. The Khawarij too shared this view, with the difference pointed out above.

Other mu'tazilite notions and beliefs

Whatever we said in the last two lectures was related to the basic doctrines of the Mu'tazilah. But as we mentioned before, the Mu'tazilah raised many an issue and defended their opinions about them. Some of them were related with theology some with physics, some with sociology, and some with the human situation.

Of the theological issues, some are related to general metaphysics (*umur 'ammah*) and some with theology proper (*ilahiyat bi al-ma'na al-'akhas*)¹. Like all other *mutakallimun*, the intended purpose of the Mu'tazilah by raising metaphysical questions is to use them as preparatory ground for the discussion of theological issues, which are their ultimate objectives. So also the discussions in the natural sciences, too, serve an introductory purpose for them. That is, the discussions in the natural sciences are used to prove some religious doctrines, or to find an answer to some objections. Here we shall enumerate some of these beliefs, beginning with theology:

Theology

(i) *Al-tawhid al-sifati* (i.e. unity of the Divine Attributes)

(ii) *'Adl* (Divine Justice).

- (iii) The Holy Qur'an (*Kalam Allah*) is created (*kalam*, or speech, is an attribute of Act, not of the Essence).
- (iv) The Divine Acts are caused and controlled by purposes (i.e. every Divine Act is for the sake of some beneficial outcome).
- (v) Forgiveness without repentance is not possible (the doctrine of retribution – *wa'd wa wa'id*).
- (vi) Pre al-ternity (*qidam*) is limited to God (in this belief, they are challenged only by the philosophers).
- (vii) Delegation of a duty beyond the powers of the *mukallaf* (*al-taklif bima la yutaq*) is impossible.
- (viii) The acts of the creatures are not created by God for five reasons²; the exercise of Divine Will does not apply to the acts of men.
- (ix) The world is created, and is not pre al-ternal (only the philosophers are against this view).
- (x) God cannot be seen with the eyes, either in this world or in the Hereafter.

Physics

- (i) Physical bodies are made up of indivisible particles.
- (ii) Smell relates to particles scattered in air.
- (iii) Taste is nothing but the effect of particles.
- (iv) Light is made up of particles scattered in space.
- (v) Interpenetration of bodies is not impossible (this belief is attributed to some Mu'tazilah).
- (vi) Leap (of particles) (i.e. *tafrah*)³ is not impossible (this belief, too, is attributed to some Mu'tazilah).

Human Problems

- (i) Man is free, endowed with free will; not predetermined (this problem, the problem of the nature of human acts whether [created by God or man], and the problem of Divine Justice, all the three are interrelated).
- (ii) Ability (*istita'ah*); that is, man has power over his own acts, before he performs them or desists from them.
- (iii) The believer (*mu'min*) has the power to become an infidel and the infidel (*kafir*) is able to become a believer.

(iv) A *fasiq* is neither a *mu'min*, nor a *kafir*.

(v) Human reason can understand and judge some matters independently (without the prior need of guidance from the Shari'ah).

(vi) In case of conflict between reason and Hadith, reason is to be preferred.

(vii) It is possible to interpret the Qur'an with the help of reason.

Political and Social Problems

(i) The obligatory nature of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar*, even if it necessitates taking up of arms.

(ii) The leadership (*imamah*) of the Rashidun Caliphs, was correct in the order it occurred.

(iii) 'Ali (A) was superior to the Caliphs who preceded him (this is the view of some of the Mu'tazilah, not of all. The earlier Mu'tazilah – with the exception of Wasil ibn 'Ata' considered Abu Bakr as the best, but the majority of the latter Mu'tazilah considered 'Ali (A) as superior).

(iv) Evaluation and criticism of the Companions of the Prophet (S) and their deeds is permissible.

(v) A comparative study and analysis of the state policies of 'Umar and 'Ali (A).

These represent a sample of the issues touched by the Mu'tazilah, which are far more numerous than what we have referred to. In some of these problems, they were contradicted by the Asha'irah, in some by the philosophers, in some by the Khawarij, and in some by the Murji'ah.

The Mu'tazilah never submitted to Greek thought and did not accept Greek philosophy indiscriminately, which entered the Islamic world contemporaneous with the emergence and rise of the Mu'tazilah.

On the other hand, with great courage, they wrote books against philosophy and philosophers, boldly expressing their own opinions. The controversy between the *mutakallimun* and the philosophers benefited both *kalam* and philosophy. Both of them made progress, and in the course of time came so close to each other that there did not remain any disagreement except on few issues. An elaborate discussion of the reciprocal services of *kalam* and philosophy, and an exposition of the essential differences between the two, are outside the scope of these lectures.

Transitions in the history of the mu'tazilah

Obviously, all the above-mentioned problems were not posed at one time and by any single individual. Rather, they were raised gradually by several individuals, expanding the scope of *'ilm al-kalam*.

Among these mentioned, apparently the oldest problem was that of free will and determinism, in which

the Mu'tazilah, of course, sided with free will. This is a problem which is posed in the Qur'an. That is, the Qur'an refers to this issue in a manner which stimulates thought on the subject. Because some verses clearly indicate that man is free, not coerced in any of his acts. On the other hand, there are verses which, with equal clarity, indicate that all things depend on the Divine Will.

Here the doubt arises that these two types of verses contradict each other. Accordingly, some explained away the verses upholding free will and supported determinism and predestination, while others explained away the verses which refer to the role of Divine Will and Intention, and sided with human freedom and free will. Of course, there is a third group which sees no contradiction between those two sets of verses⁴.

Moreover, this controversy between freedom and fate is frequently taken up in the utterances of 'Ali (A). Therefore, it is almost contemporaneous with Islam itself. However, the division of Muslims into two opposite camps, one siding with free will and the other with fate, took place in the second half of the 1st/7th century.

It is said that the idea of free will was first put into circulation by Ghaylan al-Dimashqi and Ma'bad al-Juhani. The Banu Umayyah were inclined to propagate the belief in fate and predestination among the people, because it served their political interests.

Under the cover of this belief that "everything is by the Will of God" – "*amanna bi al-qadri khayrihi wa sharrihi*" – "We believe in fate, bring as it may good or evil" – they justified their oppressive and illegitimate rule. As a result, they repressed any notions of free will or human freedom, and Ghaylan al-Dimashqi and Ma'bad al-Juhani were both killed. During that period the supporters of the belief in free will were called "*Qadariyyah*".

However, the problem of the infidelity or otherwise of the evildoer (*kufr al-fasiq*) had become a subject of controversy even before the issue of freedom and fate, because it was raised by the Khawarij during the first half of the first century about the time of the caliphate of 'Ali (A). But the Khawarij did not defend this view in the fashion of the *mutakallimun*. Only when the problem was raised among the Mu'tazilah, with the emergence of their doctrine of *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*, it took on the colour of a problem of *kalam*.

The problem of fate and freedom (*jabr wa ikhtiyar*) automatically brought in its wake such other problems as these: the problem of Divine Justice; the rational and essential goodness or badness (*husn aw qubh dhati wa 'aqli*) of things and acts; dependence of Divine Acts on purposes; impossibility of saddling a person with a duty exceeding his capacities, and the like.

During the first half of the 2nd/8th century one Jahm ibn Sakfwan (d. 128/745) voiced certain beliefs regarding the Divine Attributes. The writers of intellectual and religious history of Islam (*milal wa nihal*), claim that the problem of *al-tawhid al-sifati* (that the Divine Attributes are not separate from the Divine Essence – which the Mu'tazilah call their "doctrine of *tawhid*") and the problem of *nafy al-tashbih*, also

called *asl al-tanzih*, (which means that nothing can be likened to God) was expressed for the first time by Jahm ibn Safwan, whose followers came to be called the "Jahmiyyah."

The Mu'tazilah followed the Jahmiyyah in their doctrines of *tawhid* and *tanzih*, in the same way as they followed the Qadariyyah on the issue of free will. Jahm ibn Safwan himself was a Jabrite (i.e. a supporter of fate or predestination). The Mu'tazilah rejected his view of fate but accepted his view of *tawhid*.

The foremost among the Mu'tazilah, who established Mu'tazilism (*al-'itizal*) as a school of thought is Wasil ibn 'Ata', who, as mentioned earlier, was a pupil of al-Hasan al-Basri, and who parted company with his teacher in the course of a difference, to establish his own school. Two different versions of the cause why the Mu'tazilah came to be called by this name were mentioned earlier. Some others say that, in the beginning the term "*mu'tazilah*" was used to refer to a group of persons who remained neutral during the events of the Battle of al-Jamal and the Battle of Siffin, such as Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, Zayd ibn Thabit, and 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar.

Later when the issue of the faith or infidelity of *fasiq* was raised by the Khawarij, Muslims divided into two camps. One group of them took the third path, dissociating itself from the rest, being indifferent to their debates. They adopted the same kind of neutral attitude with regard to a theoretical problem as those like Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas had adopted in the midst of the heated social political climate of their time. This attitude caused them to be called "*mu'tazilah*" the "indifferent," a name which permanently stuck to them.

Wasil was born in the year 80/699 and died in 141/758–59. His views were limited to those on the negation of the Attributes [as distinct from the Essence of God], free will, *manzilah bayna al-manzilatayn*, *al-wa'd wa al-wa'id*, and opinions on some differences among the Companions.

After Wasil came 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, who extended and gave final shape to the views of Wasil. After him came 'Amr ibn Abi al-Hudhayl al-'Allaf and Ibrahim ibn Sayyar al-Nazzam. Abu al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzam, both, are considered eminent Mu'tazilites. *Kalam* got its philosophical colour at their hands. Abu al-Hudhayl studied philosophical works and wrote books in their refutation. Al-Nazzam presented certain views in the sphere of physics, and it was he who offered the view that bodies are constituted of atoms. Abu al-Hudhayl died, most probably, in the year 255/869, and al-Nazzam in 231/845–46.

Al-Jahiz (159/775–254/868), the famous author of the *al-Bayan wa al-tabyin*, is another eminent Mu'tazilite of the 3rd/9th century.

During the rule of the Banu Umayyah, the Mu'tazilah did not have good relations with the ruling authorities. During the early days of the Banu al-'Abbas, they took on a neutral stand⁵. But during the rule of al-Ma'mun, who was himself learned in literature, sciences and philosophy, they attracted the ruler's patronage. Al-Ma'mun, and after him al-Mu'tasim and al-Wathiq, were staunch patrons of the Mu'tazilah. All the three caliphs called themselves Mu'tazilites.

It was during this period that a heated controversy began extending to all corners of the vast Islamic dominions of the period. The issue under debate was whether Speech is an attribute of the Divine Act or an attribute of the Essence. Whether it is created and temporal (*hadith*) or uncreated and eternal (*qadim*) like Divine Knowledge, Power, and Life. The Mu'tazilah believed that the Qur'an is created (in time) and, therefore, is a creation of God (*makhlūq*) and so temporal. They also maintained that belief in the pre-ternity of the Qur'an amounted to infidelity (*kufr*).

The opponents of the Mu'tazilah, on the contrary, believed in the pre-ternity and uncreatedness of the Qur'an. Al-Ma'mun (r. 198/813 to 218/833) sent out a circular that any believer in the pre-ternity of the Qur'an would be liable to punishment. Many persons were thrown into prison and subjected to torture.

Al-Mu'tasim (r. 218/833 to 227/842) and al-Withiq (r. 227/842 to 232/847) also followed al-Ma'mun's practice. Of those who went to the prison during that time was Ahmad ibn Hanbal. This policy remained in force until al-Mutawakkil assumed power (r. 232/847 to 247/861). Al-Mutawakkil was not inclined in favour of the Mu'tazilah, and also most of the people were opposed to them. As a result the Mu'tazilah and their admirers suffered a reverse, nay, a reprisal. In the purges that followed, much blood was shed and homes were ruined. The period is remembered by Muslims as the times of "*mihnah*" – times of adversity and trial.

The Mu'tazilah never recuperated after this, and the field was left open forever for their opponents: the Ahl al-Sunnah and the Ahl al-Hadith. Nevertheless, there appeared some prominent personalities even during the following periods of their decline, like, 'Abd Allah ibn Ahmad Abu al-Qasim al-Balkhi, well-known as al-Ka'bi (d. 319/931); Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i (d. 303/915–6); Abu al-Hashim al-Jubba'i (d. 321/933) the son of Abu 'Ali al-Jubba'i; Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1024); Abu al-Hasan al-Khayyat; al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad, al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144); and Abu Ja'far al-'Iskafi.

1. Translator's Note: Both theology and metaphysics are referred to by the common term al-'ilahiyyat (lit. theology). Whenever only theology proper is meant, the phrase "bil-ma'na al-'akhsas" (lit. in its special sense) is added. Metaphysics, which deals with general problems, is termed "al-'umūr al-'ammah" (lit. the general issues).

2. Translator's Note: Some of these reasons are following: (1) Every human being is aware that his daily acts, such as going to the market or having a walk, for instance, depend on his will; he is free to do them if, he likes, and to abstain if he wills. (2) If all our acts are imposed upon us, there would be no difference between a virtuous act and a wicked one; whereas even a child makes a difference between a kind and a cruel act. He likes the first and detests the second. If all our acts are determined by God, they would be all alike; that is, there would be no difference between good and evil, between virtue and vice. (3) If God creates all our acts, it is pointless for Him to command some things and forbid others, and consequently to reward and punish accordingly. (4) If we are not free in our acts, it is unjust of God to create sins in creatures and then punish them on their account

3. Translator's Note: The notion of motion in leaps (*tafrah*) was first suggested by al-Nazzam. It means that a body undergoes discrete leaps during motion. The modern parallel of this idea of motion is one employed by quantum mechanics. Max Planck, in 1900, put forward the hypothesis that the charged particle – usually called the oscillator, or vibrator – which is the source of monochromatic light, absorbs and emits energy only in discrete quanta. It changes its energy not continuously, as supposed in the classical theory of radiation, but by sudden jumps (*tafrah*). In 1913 Niels Bohr, applying the quantum theory to subatomic phenomena, published the quantum theory of the atom. Since then quantum mechanics has become an important part of atomic physics

4. Translator's Note: The verses 57:22 and 4:78 seem to convey a meaning contradictory to that of 4:79 and 18:29. While the former imply total predestination, the latter explicitly support the idea of freedom. The Asha'irah attach basic importance to the former and the Mu'tazilah to the latter kind. The Shi'ah reconcile the two sets of verses and take an intermediary position. The following traditions from al-Shaykh al-Saduq's al-Tawhid, pp.360-362 (Jami'at al-mudarrisin fi al-Hawzat al-'Ilmiyyah, Qum), explain the Shi'ah position:

...Al-Imam al-Baqir (A) and al-Imam al-Sadiq (A) said: "Indeed God is of greater mercy than that He should coerce His creatures into sin and then punish them for that; and God is of greater might than that He should will something and it should fail to happen." They were asked, "Is there any third position between absolute predestination (jabr) and absolute freedom (qadar)?" They said: "Yes, vaster than the space between the heaven and the earth."

...Muhammad ibn 'Ajun says: "I asked Abu 'Abd Allah (A), 'Has God left men free [to do what they may like]?' He replied, 'God is nobler than that He should leave it upto them [to do whatever they may like].' I said, 'Then God has imposed their deeds upon them?' He said, 'God is more just than that He should coerce a creature into committing some act and then punish him on its account.'

Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali al-Washsha' says, "I asked al-Imam al-Rida (A) whether God has given men total freedom in their acts. He said, 'God is mightier than that.' I said, 'Then, has He coerced them into sins?' He replied, 'God is more just and wiser than that He should do such a thing.' Then he added, 'God, the Almighty, has said, "O son of Adam! I deserve more credit in your virtues than yourself, and you deserve more discredit for your sins than I; you commit sins with the power I have given you.'"

...Al-Mufaddal ibn 'Umar reports that al-Imam Abu 'Abd Allah (al-Sadiq) (A) said, "Neither total predetermination (jabr), nor total freedom (tafwid), but a position intermediate between the two (amr bayna amrayn)." I said, "What is amr bayna amrayn?" He replied, "It is as if you see someone committing a sin. You stop him, but he does not desist. So you leave him alone. Then if he commits that sin, it does not mean that since he did not heed you and you left him alone, you asked him to commit it."

See also Murtadha Mutahhari, *Insan wa sarnewisht* (Man and Destiny), for an elaborate discussion of this point.

5. Translator's Note: Some historians have advanced the theory of a connection between Mu'tazilite theology and the 'Abbasid movement. H.S. Nyberg, in his article on the Mu'tazilah in the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam, after remarking that "Wasil adopted a somewhat ambiguous attitude regarding 'Uthman and his murderers and that he left undecided the question of knowing who had the superior claim to caliphate, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, or 'Ali," says that, "All these apparently dissimilar lines converge on a common centre: the 'Abbasid movement. It is precisely Wasil's attitude which we must regard as characteristic of the partisans of the 'Abbasids...Every thing leads us to believe that the theology of Wasil and the early Mu'tazilah represents the official theology of the 'Abbasid movement. This gives us an unforced explanation of the fact that it was the official doctrine of the 'Abbasid court for at least a century. It seems even probable that Wasil and his disciples took part in the 'Abbasid propaganda...." Although Nyberg's conjecture is not sufficient to establish this hypothesis, further research may bring into light some conclusive evidence in the matter.

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