Al-Baqillani's Critique to Anthropomorphist's Concept of The Attributes of God

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Abstract

This article aims to delineate al-Baqillani's responses to the Anthropomorphists regarding their views on the attributes of God. As an Ash'arite, al-Baqillani disproved some theological doctrines formulated by this group in dealing with a number of theological topics; the speech of God, the Quran and its characteristics, and other attributes of God. He obviously shows his capacity and attempts to maintain the mainstream of Ash'arites' theological framework. Through this study, the author concludes that his theological position takes the combination between rationalistic method and application of the revelation. This research applied a textual analysis approach, using descriptive and analytical methods to investigate and analyze primary sources related to the issues. It also adopts the historical method to scrutinize several events on the subject.

Keywords: Islamic theology, anthropomorphism, the attributes of God, the Quran

INTRODUCTION

The anthropomorphic understanding of God has existed even before the teachings of Islam arrived. This issue was introduced to Islam as part of some theologians' attempts in viewing their theological matters. However, this is one of which caused crucial problem in Islamic theological discourse that called for contradictory opinions amongst theologians. Some of them were Anthropomorphists (*mujassima*), who relied their principle on corporeal bodies. They maintained that God's attributes as well as His activities are based on the physical basis. It is due to their rigid approach of the Quran as well as certain tendency to refer their doctrines to other beliefs in Christianity and Judaism. Hence, their concepts most probably are also influenced by those two religions. Before we discuss further, we would like to elucidate the background of the role of anthropomorphism within Islamic intellectual polemic.

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BACKGROUND OF THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC APPROACH TO THE QURAN

The Quran has two types of verses; the *muhkamat* and *mutashabihat*. Each type could have different perspectives towards their meanings. Based on some sources, both terms have been perceived differently (Denffer, 2007; Suyuti, n. y.). Here, we rely our definition on one of them as many researchers preferred. According to them, the *muhkam* verses give clear meaning and do not show ambiguity. All of these verses are clearly shown and have been arranged systematically. Meanwhile, the *mutashabih* are verses contain ambiguous meaning. Their context also shows unbinding elements, hence, leading to differences of opinion. What happened is that most commentators of the Quran as well as a number of theologians during their analysis and commentary of those ambiguous verses (*mutashabihat*) tended to differ amongst them, including in the matter of verses which depict the attributes of God. The existence of the *mutashabihat* verses is one of the problematic matters in understanding the Quran. These verses have been discussed by number of scholars even there are disputes amongst them (Ushama, 2002).

In the course of the history of Islam, the Muslims have made contacts with other religions such as Judaism and Christianity. Based on those religions, especially Christianity, the doctrine on the attributes of God believes that God might be described in physical form. His attributes are also possibly likened to the attribute of human beings (Sperling, 2005: 3542). Sometimes, many people who converted from these religions to Islam tried to understand its teachings based on their previous beliefs. Their process of understandings might err in terms of their learning of their new religion. Somehow, such a thing may influence certain conception of Jewish and Christian doctrines, which causes misunderstanding by merging them with the teachings of Islam, notably dealing with the attributes of God for instance, as maintained in Christianity. In Islamic theological discourse, there were some sects which had similar opinions in viewing the attributes of God. They believed that God has certain physical body which could be explained through the anthropomorphic perspective. Those were the Mujassimate groups as represented by *Hashwiyya* (Halkin, 1934), *Muqatiliyya* (Madelung & Walker, 1998), and *Karramiyya* (Zyssow, 1988). Their theological views basically adhered to Ahmad ibn Hanbal (Laoust, 1986), yet in certain extent they practiced rigid approach to the text which is different from his principle. They developed their own perspectives in viewing certain issues based on the anthropomorphic basis.

In the map of Islamic theological discourses, the *Mujassimate*s resided at the opposite views of the Mu'zalites and contradicted with the Ash'arites (Ibn Khaldun, 1996; Watt, 1973). They relied their way of understanding the Quran on the textual approach of humanistic perspective. On the contrary, the Mu'tazilites built their principles by understanding the Quran through the rational basis (*ta'wil*). Even though they regarded the Quran and hadith,

their tendency was to rely much on the reason. Those two groups placed the Ashʿarites in between them (Ibn Khaldun, 1996). The Ashʿarites applied the middle way in approaching the text which was neither liberal nor rigid. They were people of the tradition (*ahl al-Sunnah*). The founder of this group, Abu al-Hasan al-Ashʿari (d. 324 H/ 935 C.E.), was previously a supporter of Muʿtazilite's views for about forty years of his life. Yet, he finally declared himself to change his theological tendency to *ahl al-Haqq* (the people of truth)*,* adhering to Ahmad ibn Hanbal's principle (al-Ash'ari, 1969). In this position, he disagreed upon the Muʿtazilites' principle who possessed rationalistic basis, as well as to the Mujassimates who had anthropomorphic perspective. Therefore, his followers like al-Baqilani, Ibn Furak, and al-Isfiraini tried to develop his ideas to reject their arguments against the Mujassimates (Watt, 1973). Here, we will elaborate further our discussion on the study of our first figure, Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (d. 403 H/1013 C.E.) on his thoughts defending against the Anthropomorphists' views on the attributes of the God. But, before we explain further his ideas, we will firstly deal with the doctrines of the Mujassimites.

THE ANTHROPOMOSPHISTS AND THEIR DOCTRINES

To trace the doctrines of anthropomorphists, we have difficulty referring to their original works (Watt, 1985). A number of their principles were recorded by their opposing theologians who criticized their stance like the Hanabilites (ibn Qutaiba, n. y.), Ashʿarites (al-Ghazali, 2003), Shiʿites (al-Nawbakhti, 1984), and Muʿtazilites (al-Jahiz, 1964). Those people criticised their rigidity in approaching the text of the Quran as well as their reliance on the fabricated hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Their doctrine in understanding the Quran mostly comparing God's atributes with men (Mc Donald, 1985).

Epistemologically, the Anthropomorphists based their principle in approaching any text literally. They affirmed the textual interpretation without involving the rational argument. In this approach, they did not add any idea to those texts. They literally fathomed and formulated their views which were believed to be their theological concepts. Hence, they let the text spoke as it is. In such a way, they built their analytical conceptual doctrines. It is known through al-Shahrastani's account as translated by Kazi and Glynn (1969):

> *The anthropomorphists also say "We do not add anything of ourselves, nor do we pursue questions which our predecessors had not raised. They said, "what is between the two covers is God's speech. This is also what we say.*

Here, he delineated how the Anthropomorphists approached either the Quran or Hadith as their sources of theological doctrines. Hence, by virtue of such method they had their own principle mainstream which was contradictory to other theologians.

Originally, one of the sources from which we can trace their background is the circle of Abu al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 H/728 C.E.) (ibn Asakir, 1928). During his time a number of people had initiated in understanding the text literally. They used to have long discussions among them. Those people were called by other followers as the *Hashwiyya*. This term used to adress those traditionist whose ideas are very weak standard (Ed., 1978). Over the course of time, this group was developed very quickly and subdivided into several sects, one of which was the *Karramiyya* (Bosworth, 1978). Some heresiographers also addressed them by other terms; *Mujassima* (al-Tahanawi, 1996) and *Mushabbiha* (al-Jurjani, n.y.; Watt, 1973). Hence, all of these sects were grouped and referred to one main idea which is anthropomorphism. They dealt with several theological issues as elaborated next.

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Speech of God

The anthropomorphists asserted different views on the speech of God. Some believed that God originated His speech. Hence, His speech is created. The other groups maintained God speech is part of His attributes. It is one of God's properties. Al-Baghdadi (1995) reported the Anthropomorphists maintained God's speech is one variety of human speech and its words. God uttered by originating His speech as existing in His essence. To them, God's essence is space which is available for the originated things. One of their figures, the follower of Zurara ibn A'yan al-Rafidi believed that God's attributes are originated, hence, they are also part of human beings' attributes. God does not have special properties of living, knowing, willing, hearing, and seeing. All these attributes are created in Himself similar to as human beings. Other Anthropomorphists, the *Karramiyya*, contradictorily maintained that the speech of God (*kalam Allah*) is eternal, while His utterance (*qawl*) is originated consisting of words and sounds. God is able to talk and understand the other speeches with His power (al-Isfiraini, 1983; al-Baghdadi, 1995; al-Shahrastani, n. y.). He speaks by creating words and sounds in himself. (A. S. Tritton; 1972). Furthermore, they maintained too that God is knowing (*'alim*) with His knowledge (*ilm*), powerful (*qadir*) with his power (*qudra*), living with His life (*haya*), and willing with His will (*mashia*). He also has another attributes like hearing, and seeing (al-Shahrastani, n. y.).

Another Ash'arite, Al-Juwayni, also described *Hashwiyya's* notion on the speech of God. They believed that His speech, which comprised sounds and words, is eternal. They also stressed that the recited (*al-masmu'*) by a reader of the Qur'an is the essence of His speech because it is the sound of God. If that speech is written and arranged on any part of the body, it is regarded an eternal thing. To them, even the body is originated, yet it may switch into an eternal one including its words and sounds. Essentially, these two aspects are pre-existent (*qadim*). Furthermore, commenting on their views, al-Juwayni stated that their method was based on the denial of necessary knowledge

(*juhd al-darurat*). They held that the speech was eternal at the same time it was originated. It consists of sentences arranged by various different letters. Every letter could precede each other depending on the proper term. The first word possibly could be placed in the middle or the last. Hence, it could be concluded that such a theoretical approach obviously leads to conclusion on turning the created things into an eternal one (al-Juwayni, 1950). However, the Mu'tazilites maintained different from those antrophomorphists. They defined that speech as merely sounds and arranged letters. It is also created by a speaker (al-Hamadani, 1996) who has rational mind and knowledge which is cannot be banished from his soul (Peters, 1976). By this definition, all speeches are the same. There is no differences between the speech of God and the speech of human beings.

From the aforementioned reports, we can conclude that the speech of God, according to the Anthropomosphists, contains words and sounds, either eternal or originated. They did not differentiate between those things. Their views are contradictory to the Mu'tazilites who merely believed that speech is sounds and words, hence it is created. The anthropomorphists also viewed on the other aspects of the attributes of God. This matter will be further elaborated.

The Other Anthropomorphic Attributes of God
Having discussed the aforementioned topic on the Anthropomorphists' notion on the speech of God, here we deal with their principle pertaining His other attributes. It is obviously known from their theological framework that their main characteristic is likening God to the corporeal image.

Al-Shahrastani (n. y.) reported that the *Hashwiyya* group maintained their theological principle on the attributes of God by relying on the physical description. They asserted God in a materialized matter by affirming that God is in the form of a physical body, either His spiritual or physical aspect. He may move from one place to another, descend and ascend, and steadily sit. In addition, they also held that their God is allowed to be touched and shaken. It is even possible for devoted men to embrace and hug Him in this world and the hereafter if they could reach the highest level of sincerity and unity after performing and struggling with spiritual exercise. They also believed God is visible in this world. They could even visit Him or vice versa. One of the Mujassimite figures, Daūd al-Jawaribi, said that God has His specific form. He has body, flesh, and blood. He also has physical and parts of a body like hands, feet, head, tongue, eyes, and ears. All those parts do not resemble any creatures. Furthermore, God also has been depicted as having certain characteristics in His body. He is hollow right from His head to the chest, yet His other parts are solid. He also has long, thick, and frizzy hair.

In addition to their doctrines, the Anthropomorphists interpreted the *mutashabihat* verses based on their anthropomorphic principle. It is known

through analyzing a number of verses which they commented to show their principle of understanding. They interpreted some verses, like God's seat (*istiwa'*), face (*wajh*), hands (*yadain*), and descending (*al-nuzul*), in a way that they relied on corporeal basis. This is also valid in certain hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that they used to quote to express their ideas. For instance, they stated the *hadith* of God's creation of Adam, in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in his statement, "(God) created Adam in the form of the merciful (God)." (al-Bukhari, 2010: no. 2667). Furthermore, they added information to cement their stance even if it is invalid. As al-Shahrastani (n. y.) claimed, they said:

> God was sad due to the great deluge of Noah which causes His eyes red, His throne creaking like a straddle of the animal, and He pleases from every side with his four fingers.

In another place, he also narrated the Anthropomorhists' assesment about the Prophet's statement:

> God met me, He shook hands with me, and, kissed me and put His hand between my shoulders until I felt His cold fingers.

The aforementioned facts elucidate how God was described in humanistic manner. They likened Him to human beings who have physical and material elements. They believed that God sits on His chair where He puts His body that may cause noises because of His weight. The foregoing hadith also explains that the Prophet met God as if He met His companions. He shook, kissed and even putting His hands to the Prophet's shoulders. Al-Shahrastani's account clearly delineates the detailed principle of anthropomorphic doctrines. Even though he did not mention the status of the hadith, it is based on the mainstream of that particular group during his time.

The concept of attributes of God, as believed by the Anthropomorphists could be traced back to non-Islamic sources. It was proven by the fact that Muqatil ibn Sulayman's commentary of the Quran contains Jewish and Christian doctrines (A. Rippin, 1978; Nashaar, n .y.). His anthropomorphism is derived from those religions which complemented his interpretation. He was so much influenced by their doctrines, hence, he sometimes fabricated the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (al-Baghdadi, 2001; al-Dzahabi, 1995). For instance, al-Bukhari mentioned Muqatil's statement saying that Dajjal would appear in 150 H. His statement was truly proven that he was a liar because Dajjal did not appear then (al-Dzahabi, 1995). Furthermore, in elucidating his commentary Muqatil also relied on the *israiliyyat* narrations. This category of *hadith* is actually not used by a traditionist (*muhaddith*) due to its fabrication and invalidity. For instance, he narrated the hadith below (al-Malati, 1936):

> *'during the end of the day someone calls, where is the friend of Allah?, then, the group of angels step forward to sit with Him on the throne until they touch His shoulder''*

This hadith explains the physical activities of God and His angels during the day of resurrection which had not been narrated by any narrators. Another Anthropomorphist, Ibn al-Karram, also maintained his theological belief relying on Christianity in terms of the concept of God (al-Baghdadi, 1995; al-Nassar, 2009). In Christianity, God is described in the form of an image. It is even possible to picture God as well as His attributes in humanistic manner (Fuller, 2005: 5). The *Karramiyya* also depicted God as the One who has a body. They believed it as He is self-existent. He knows physical and corporal things. Therefore, according to them, He is a body who recognizes it similar form. Only the like can know the like (al-Nassar, 2009). Some of their adherents also developed this doctrine maintaining that every two things existing by themselves must be either in contact or contradict with them. Like the accident and substance which require to occupy in space. They also reside in certain direction. Thus, God, who has body and self-existent, is in a high place of the world. In Him, everything could be originated (al-Shahrastani, n. y.). However, this concept is rejected by Ibn Jawzi. To him it is impossible for God to contradict or be in contact with other things in the physical aspect since it will belittle God's existence which is merely occupying certain directions (al-Jawzi, n. y.) His existence cannot be limited to certain space and time, therefore, He is powerful over all things. Further arguments againts the Anthropomorphists would be elaborated further in the discussion of their opposite ideas.

The Quran and Its Characteristics
Having dealt with the antrophomorphists' views on the attributes of God, we present their ideas about the Quran and its characteristics. Based on the account reported by al-Shahrastani, the *Hashwiyya* formulated their principles in viewing the Quran and its features. According to them, the contents of the Quran, which comprises the words, sounds and written numbers, are eternal in nature. No speech is comprehensible without these elements (al-Shahrastani, n. y.). This concept is contradictory to both the Mu'tazilites (Abd al-Jabbar, 1996) and the Ash'arites (al-Shahrastani, n. y.) since they included certain aspects for things to be eternal which were excluded by both groups. Those features could be in the form of number, ink, paper and so on. They also proved their argument with the Íadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) (al-Bukhari, 2010: 7481), saying that on the Day of the Judgment, God will call all creatures loudly, hence, everyone will hear and obey it.

In addition, the *Hashwiyya* defended their principle on the revelation of the Quran. They maintained that things between the two covers are the speech of God revealed to the Angel Jibril. It is written in the text as well as in the Preserved Tablet (*Lauh al-Mahfuz*) and also heard by the Muslims in paradise

from God without veil or mediation (al-Shahrastani, n. y.). Moreover, they also maintained that the Quran which is uncreated is eternal existence. Its alphabetical words, bodies, colours, and sounds are created in nature by God (ibn Asakir). In this sense, His word (*kalam*) is eternal while all those features are originating (*hadithah*) from Him (Wolfson, 1976). In other words, the Quran is eternal even it is in material forms. (J. R. T. M. Peters, 1976).

Besides elucidating their doctrines of the Quran, al-Shahrastani also reported that the *Hashwiyya* also asserted the process of communication between Prophet Moses with God. They maintained it occured when he was revealed the holy book of *Tawra*. They described how Prophet Moses was addressed by God in the holy place of Sinai mount (al-Quran 20: 11-12). At the very beginning, he heard God's Speech like the sound of dragging chain (al-Shahrastani). According to Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150 H./767 C.E.) (Sahata: 1964), God spoke through His mouth (*mushafaha*) to Prophet Moses when he was 40 years old. When that communication was completed he was bestowed the *Tawra* from which he told his people about paradise and hell (Sulayman, n. y.). Furthermore, a Hanbalite follower, Abu Ya'la, also reported the *Hashwiyya*'s notion on how communication between God and Prophet Moses occured. When God spoke to him, Prophet Moses was in a state of instability because he was shocked by this extraordinary event. Then, God decreed unto him to open his eyes. Prophet Moses found hundred steps in front of him. This information, however, was doubted by Abu Ya'la in his comment about this hadith (Abu Ya'la, 1986). It was merely an argument proposed by them to promote their doctrines.

Therefore, it seems from the foregoing explanation that what the Anthropomorphists claimed is invalid because the status of this information is inaccurate. Their arguments may have been supported by the hadith, yet one of their objectives is to support their mission. This also stated by the ealier figure Muqatil ibn Sulayman, who related their ideas to physical aspects likening God with the human's image and activity (Sahata, 1994). Hence, by virtue of that the characteristic of their approach to the Quran is relying on anthropomorphism.

In short, the foregoing discussion elucidates the doctrine of Anthropomorphists in the Islamic theological discourse. They resided at the extreme opposite of the Mu'tazilites. However, they were also contradictory to the Ash'arites school. Hence, in response to their principles and to defend the Ash'arites' position, al-Baqillani criticised their doctrines which will be elaborated below.

AL-BAQILLANI'S CRITICISM TO ANTHROPOMORPHISM

Having described the theological doctrine of the Anthropomorphists, we would like to highlight al-Baqillani's theological responses to that particular group. As an Ash'arite theologian, it is known through his principle

arguments that he could place his position between the Mu'tazilites and the Anthropomorphists. He was able to give the moderate solution in responding to the issues in the doctrinal polemic, which later on was followed and further developed by other Asharites theologians after him. As far as the doctrines of anthropomorphism are concerned, al-Baqillani seriously criticised through several topics which will be delineated below.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

The Meaning of Speech
Al-Baqillani's definition of speech is contradictory to both the Mu'tazilites and the Anthropomophists. His rejection against them places him in between their notions. In this part, we would like to highlight his refutation to the second group which shows his moderation in thinking. In his work, al-Baqillani (1998) defined the speech:

$$الكلام هو معنى قائم فى النفس يعبر عنه بهذه الأصوات المقطعة$$
$$والحروف المنظومة$$

Speech is meaning existing in the soul expressed by those articulated sounds and arranged letters.

His definition of speech was obviously not only adressed to criticise the Mu'tazilites, but also the Anthropomorphists. Al-Baqillani criticized the latter group which affirmed that God speaks through His sounds and words which are eternal (*qadim*), the same thing to the sounds and words of human beings. They did not differentiate between them. As a result, this principle might cause an investigator to conclude the eternity of the creature (1986). In addition, al-Baqillani also reported that Anthropomorphists affirmed God's speech and considered it to be eternal, while the poem (*saj'*) is the originated thing. They believed that our words and sounds during the reading of the Quran are eternal (*qadim*) while during reading of the poem (*shi'r*) is originated. The one who recites the Quran, his recitation is eternal whereas when he recites the poem his recitation is originated. Those activities have different categories depending on the object of recitation. In the other words, he criticised their notion that the speech of God is considered as eternal, the samething with the speech of human beings, and in the other respect it is also originated. It is impossible for God at the same time to have two contradictory attributes.

Al-Baqillani, in other places, also responded to the concept of anthropomorphism on the eternity of words and sounds. Some anthropomorphist groups believed that God speaks through the Quran which comprises words and sounds (Shahrastani). Both words and sounds are eternal in nature different from those which belong to human beings. However, in response to this notion al-Baqillani stated such belief is problematic because their statement

is inconsistent. They mixed between the eternal and the originated in one object (*hululiyya*). By virtue of such notion, this consequently invalidates the existing *mushaf* of the Quran which we have. Our *mushaf* is written in words and recited by a reader which is originated. That recitation is not the Quran, the eternal one. Therefore, what we have is not the Quran revealed to the prophet MuÍammad (peace be upon him) which is also eternal. The same thing when we listen to those verses. As stated in his argument:

> *"....and it is forbidden for a person to utter through the symbol in the form of sound and word, and said that the eternal is possible to be mixed with the originated matter like the mixture between a thing with another...the school of Mushabbiha, Hululiyya, and Mujassima asserted that the speech of God is word and sound and both are eternal. I do not specify to anyone of them. This notion creates a consequence of the eternity of the world...[they said] that His speech is sound and word which are different from the originated sound and word which are used by the human beings. This is a false notion due to lead to the codex of the Quran, since its words used in this codex are the same words used in the others. Hence our Quran which we are reading is not the Quran because it contains the eternal words and sounds which are different from the originated words and sounds..."* (al-Baqillani, 1986, 162)

Hence, it seems from the aforementioned statement that we do not have the eternal verses of the Quran, but this is absolutely impossible since all the teachings of Islam rely on it.

Furthermore, al-Baqillani maintained the mainstream of Ash'arite theological framework through his own analysis. He asserted that the Speech of God is neither originated nor created. According to him, someone could not say that God's speech is a story or expression. He neither said that he told a story with God's speech nor expressed with His speech too. Al-Baqillani affirmed that we recite the speech of God, write and memorize it. We cannot attach to His speech with the originated things; sounds and words. We cannot combine between the pre-existent (*qadim*) with the originated ones (1986). As he noted:

> *"that the school of people of the truth [ahl al-Haq] that the eternal speech of God is not created, neither originated, neither circulating in process, neither creature, neither forming, neither formed, neither acting, neither acted, but it is eternal speech which He is speaking with it in His eternity. As He is speaking in a state of being eternal nothing precedes nor succeeds Him...(*al-Baqillani, 1986, 162)

Through this argument, it seems he rejected anthropomorphism by disapproving their weakness in combining between the eternity and the createdness.

Al-Qurtubi reported that in his further argument against those anthropomorphists, al-Baqillani also clarified their stance saying that God speaks through His eternal words and sounds. The eternity of the sounds have sequential and arranged words from the reciters. God's speech may also appear in the form of the unarranged words without any sequence (al-Qurtubi, 1995: vol. 2). In response to this claim, al-Baqillani delineated that by nature all words are different. There is no any single letter which is the same. They are sequential in terms of their position, hence, they are absolutely originated. It is also valid that God speaks through various languages adressed to different communities. Those sounds may happen contradictorily which impossibly combined into single sound at the same time. Each community has its own language. All these facts clearly illustrate that every thing has its own existence. The words and languages function independently, without mixing with each other. In addition, al-Baqillani elaborated by showing the existence of the colour. To him, we cannot demontrate white together with black since those colours are contrasting in nature. Hence, it is also true, Allah is One and only in His essence. His singleness is pure without any combination, division, and composition (al-Qurtubi). To make Him possible to inhere in a human's body is committing deviated theological principle which is rejected in mainstream Islamic theological principle.

Al-Ghazali (d. 503 H/1111 C.E.) (2003) also supported al-Baqillani's definition and rejected the Anthropomorphists' notion on the concept of speech. According to him, the speech comprises two main things; meaning and word. In terms of the meaning of speech, it is eternal and related to its essence of God. It consists of His commands, prohibitions and information (2003). Al-Ghazali further rejected their notion on who affirmed God's will and power existing in His essence which is also their substrate (*mahall*). Those attributes are only available in God's essence and inseparable. In other words, the Anthropomorphists held that God has two different aspects; the eternal and the originated one. The eternal is His essence while His attributes; will, powerful, speech, are originated in His essence which is their substrate. However, al-Ghazali disagreed upon such notion. To him, God has eternal attributes neither His essence nor it is separated from them. Those attributes are in His essence. He questioned, how does He speak yet does not have any attribute of speaking? (2003). The same thing for other attributes; powerful, will, and knowing. In this stance, al-Ghazali affirmed that all those attributes are eternal in His essence. His argument was also adressed to the Mu'tazilites who affirmed that God is powerful, living, and knowing with His essence. He further argued that all originated things (*hadith*) are possible existence (*jaiz al-wujud*), while the eternal one is necessary existence (*wajib al-wujud*). If His attributes originated in His essence (*hadithah*), then they are contradictory to the necessity of His existence. Therefore, His attributes and

essence are eternal in nature. Al-Ghazali elaborated his argument further by affirming that it is impossible for His essence to be the substrate (*mahall*) of the originated thing. It is impossible for Him to change His state from being eternal into originated one. It is impossible too for God that His essence has additional tenets attached to it. All these elements are possibly annihilated (*mumkin taqdir 'adamih*), hence they are originated matters (2003).

Al-Baqillani in another place further elaborated his views regarding the essence of speech. He maintained that the meaning that exists in the soul expressed by the symbol indicates its aspects. These could be in the form of speech which has been routinely spoken by a number of people and firmly established in community (al-Quran 14: 4). Allah has sent Musa (peace be upon him) to the people of Israel who spoke in Hebrew. He brought and delivered His messages in their language. The same thing for Prophet Isa (peace be upon him) who was also sent to his people who spoke in Shiriac. He delivered God's messages in their language. This also occurred to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who sent to the Arabs. His community spoke in Arabic through which he propagated to his people. God's messages were delivered to them following their language background too. As a result, the people recognized His commands and prohibitions very well. However, even though those messages were delivered in different languages; Hebrew, Shiriac, and Arabic, yet they are still one thing, the Speech of God. This speech does not change and contradict any object related to its relationship. As he mentioned:

> *"and it is compulsory to know that the real speech is the meaning existing in the soul and articulated through signs...He sent the Prophet Musa to the people of Israel with Hebrew. [The Prophet Musa] explained the eternal speech of God in the soul with Hebrew. He sent Isa, peace be on him, with Shiriac. And he delineated the speech of God to his people with their language...(*al-Baqillani, 1986, 158)

In addition, al-Baqillani underlined that the meaning of this speech could also be grasped through its writing. The writing may express the meaning of the one who speaks in his own language. Even though the words in those languages are different, the meanings exist in the soul. In other words, the speech of God could be expressed and understood by the people of each prophet (1986). Al-Baqillani also delineated other aspects of the speech expressed by signs and symbols. Someone could employ such an act by his/her gestures indicating his/her purposes. This was evidenced through the expression of Maryam during her silence in responding to her people when questioned the status of her son (the Quran 19: 29). This case also occured to Prophet Zakaria (al-Quran 3: 41). These people expressed the meaning of their speech existing in their soul with different facial expressions. Maryam replied to some questions adressed to her by using her hand, and Zakaria expressed to his people following the revelation from his God to

praise Him (*tasbih*). Both communicated to their people with different kind of communication similar thing to those who are dumb. They were able to communicate with others with their hands, expressions, and body language. Even if they were unable to speak, people around them were likely understand them (1986). By virtue of all these facts they proved that speech consists of meaning although expressed in different ways.

However, al-Baqillani's affirmation on the meaning of speech was strongly criticised by later Hanbalite theologian, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 H/1328 C.E) (Loust, 1986: vol. 3). He stated that even the Ash'arites believed that speech comprises of words (*lafz*) and meaning, yet they affirmed that the earlier were merely allegory (*majaz*) while the latter was the substance (*ma'na*). As a result, they fell into two dangerous positions; either to believe that the Quran is created or the Quran is not the speech of God (al-Najdi, n. y.: vol. 12). He also reported that speech merely indicated one meaning in the form of command, prohibition, and information. It is expressed in Arabic in the form of the Quran, in Hebrew which in the form of the *Tawra*, and in Shiriac that is the Bible (the *Injil)*. These considered the command and prohibition as elements of God's speech. To him, those people would like to simplify the different meanings of speech into one single meaning. Having criticised them, he proposed his own concepts of that matter by stating that the speech is divided into two; diction (*insha'*) and information (*khabr*). The *Insha'* is subdivided into requesting the acts and leaving the acts while information is divided into two; negation and confirmation. The word 'one' in the Ash'arite concept is still unclear. It could be one in its type (*naw'*), category (*jins*), and class (*sinf*). Hence, their idea is rejected (al-Najdi, n. y.: vol. 6).

Ibn Taymiyya further argued to the Ash'arites that Prophet Muĺammad (peace be upon him) delivered the message of the Quran not only its meanings, but also its words. He criticized their arguments, including al-Baqillani, and said their notion could lead to believing that the Arab people learned the teachings of Islam from a non-Arab who merely delivered the meaning of the Quran. However, the verses of the Quran show that the Angel Jibril revealed to him the Quran which is in the Arabic language (the Quran 16: 102-103). All those who narrated the Quran also uttered it either both words and meanings. According to Ibn Taymiyya, they did not read merely the meaning without words. If they recite only one aspect, then they were dumb people who were also able to express their will through their expression, not through their words. However, such a case is inapplicable to Allah, the Almighty because it will reduce His perfectness (al-Najdi, vol. 6). He further elaborated his arguments by affirming that the contradictory elements could not be combined in God's attributes; seeing and unseeing, knowing and unknowing, and speech and dumb. Thus, His attributes are absolutely perfect without their opposites. Furthermore, if the speech of God is only its meaning, there would be no difference between God's speaking to Mūsa and other prophets, nor the revelation behind the veil, nor the direct revelation by God too. It was employed immediately in the heart of the

Prophets. In addition, the argument that the Quran is only the meaning, it could demonstrate that the verses of the Quran are divided into two different parts. Some of them are speech of God while the rest are not His speech. The meaning is His speech, while the words are otherwise. However, according to ibn Taymiyya, this is contradictory to the principle of the mainstream of theological belief of the Muslim people. The Angel Jibril had come down to reveal all verses of the Quran to the Prophet (peace be upon him) as his obedience to Allah, the almighty to convey God's messages to his messenger. He and the Prophet (peace be upon him) could not have fabricated any single word because their task was only to deliver His words to human beings. Moreover, in other places, Ibn Taymiyya also asserted that the speech of God which was revealed in the Quran consists of word and meaning. It is proven by the fact that an interpreter or translator could not consider that his works on its interpretation and translation as the Quran itself. He may say that his work as commentary and translation *an sich*. On the other hand, Ibn Taymiyya (al-Najdi, vol. 6) argued if the Quran is only the meaning, hence, the translation could be also called the Quran because it substitutes all its meanings.

In response to the aforementioned criticism, some theologians after al-Baqillani attempted to uphold the Ash‘arites by clarifying their stance. Al-Qurtubi (d. 671 H/1273 C.E.) (1995: vol. 2), a commentator of the Quran, was one of them who cemented the Ash‘arites' notions. Regarding the speech of God, he asserted that His speech is meaning existing in the soul which is expressed in the form of words and sounds. The meaning appeared in the scriptures revealed to the Prophets. God's speech is one which is articulated in various different meanings in those books based on the languages of their people. It is argued, according to Ibn Furak, the single speech, comprising various different aspects; command, prohibition, information, inquiry, promise, and threat, is eternal which is impossible to change and contradict. This attribute is different from the speech of human beings that does not require any medium of speaking; lip and tongue. Moreover, al-Qurtubi added that God has stated in the Quran that He has many names and He was the one who revealed four different scriptures to His Prophets (al-Quran 2: 285). With this evidence, al-Qurtubi affirmed that we cannot say that those different names belong to a number of existence. On the contrary, those attributes merely belong to one name. They refer to the One God, the Almighty. His speech cannot be said as Arabic, Persian, or Hebrew. Only when it is articulated in Arabic it is the Quran, when it is verbalized in Hebrew it is the *Tawra*, and when it is conveyed in Divine Power (*rabbanniya*) it is the Bible (*al-injil*). In addition to this argument, he affirmed to the other aspects on which God is worshipped. God, Who is the One, has a number of various attributes as stated in His beautiful names. He is worshipped in the heaven as well as on the earth by all His creatures. They perform their obedience in different ways and expressions. Some of them remember Him in various ways. Some others also differently recite, interpret, and write the speech of God. It is proven by the fact too from the verse of the Quran in

31: 27. Some other verses also state that Allah uses the plural term 'We' to represent His singularity. These verses give clear illustration that God's role in preserving the Quran is also followed by those who memorize the Quran, the memorizers. Furthemore, al-Qurtubi also proved his arguments by relying on some Ash'arite theologians concerning the single speech of God. According to Ibn Furak, God commanded human beings to believe in Him, which implied that He prohibited His servants from disbelieving. His instructions were similiar to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in which he had to pray facing to *Bait al-Maqdis* in a specific period. At the same time He prohibited worshiping Him other than that particular time. This argument is also valid for other atttributes, His vision. God's vision of Prophet Adam in paradise is the same as His vision in this world. His hearing of Zaid's speech is the same as His hearing of Amr's speech, without any changes and differences in His essence (al-Qurtubi, 1995). Hence, God's attributes absolutely remained and have not changed His essence.

Another support for the Ash'arites is also shown by a later scholar of the Qur'an, al-Alusi (n.y.). In his preface of commentary of the Qur'an, he delineated the concept of speech in which he vindicates his position to al-Ash'arite theological school. He agreed with the notion that the speech has interrelated concept of the words and meaning. He divided it into two; the process of speaking (*al-takallum*) and the product of speech (*al-mutakallam bih*). The speech is the object of language which comprises word (*lafzi*) and mental activity of the speaker (*nafsi*). The first process is the one who is speaking in which he deals with his mouth (*lisan*) as well as his zones of articulation (*makharij*). This process produces audible sound to a listener. Furthermore, the activity of speaking when it is meant the mental speaking (*al-kalam al-nafsi*) is the internal activity of the speaker in which he has not yet articulated through all the acts of the limbs (*jawarih*). This activity is internal sound (*sawt maknawi*) produced by the soul. al-Alusi further elaborated his notions pertaining to the nature of Speech of God. According to him, His speech is eternal, well arranged, limitless, and timeless. It is divine word which is mandatory statement to all creatures. When His speech (*kalam Allah*) – the Quran- is recited, it is articulated in the worldly dimension reflected in the Arabic language. All God's messages to human beings are revealed through His speech which is in the form of words and meaning. As al-Alusi stated (n. y.: vol. 1: 11):

> *The mental speech (al-nafsi) is produced by a man who internally speaks through mental and arranged words which is in conformity with the articulated words...God's Speech is divine Words comprise mandatory statements which are immaterial form. Those words are eternal, well arranged, not sequential in their nature…and when (the Qur'an) revealed it is shown its mental words which is heard and written (in the muÍÍaf)…*

His argument is also proven by a number of verses in the Qur'an as well as the *Ḥadith*s of the Prophet (peace be upon him). They are verses dealing with this matter in Yusuf: 77, Zukhruf: 80, al-A'raf: 205, and Ali Imran: 154. Several *Ḥadith*s of the Prophet (peace be upon him) narrated by al-Tabrani and al-Bukhari also affirm his notion, as shown below:

عن أم سلمة أنها سمعت رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم و قد سأل رجل فقال :«إنى لأحدث نفسى بالشيىء لو تكلمت به لأحبطت أجرى» فقال عليه السلام: لا يلقى ذلك الكلام إلا مؤمن.

Narrated by Umi Salamah that the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, has been asked by a man saying: "Indeed, I talk to myself with a thing if I mention it my reward will be lost". The Prophet, peace be upon him, replied: "That speech would not be delivered except by a believer.

(Hadith. Al-Tabrani. The Book of the word "ha", vol.1.)

Al-Bukhari also narrated the *hadith Qudsi* in his *Sahih* (2010):

يقول الله عز و جل أنا عند ظنى عبدى بى و أنا معه إذا ذكرنى فإن ذكرنى فى نفسه ذكرته فى نفسى وإن ذكرني في ملإٍ ذكرته في ملإٍ خير منهم

Allah the Exalted says: 'I am as my slave expects me to be, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers Me inwardly, I will remember him inwardly, and if he remembers Me in an assembly, I will remember him in a better assembly (i.e., in the assembly of angels).

(Hadith. Al-Bukhari. The Book of Tawhid, no. 7405).

Those texts obviously delineate the inner aspect of the speech which is instilled in someone's heart. Hence, it seems from al-Alusi's arguments that the speech is not merely comprises words and meanings which both elements have interrelated concepts. They are product of pronounced speech (*al-kalam al-lafzi*) and the speech in the soul (*al-kalam al-nafsi*) adressing to any listeners.

In conclusion, the aforementioned arguments stated by al-Baqillani as well as other Ash'arites clearly delineate the meaning of speech and its related topics. Through their views too, they fundamentally disproved the Anthropomorphists' notions. Even though ibn Taymiyya had criticized them, his accusation could be invalidated by analyzing their supporters' notions, like al-Qurtubi and al-Alusi. Ibn Taymiyya's criticism was influenced by his stance of being the follower of Hanbalite school of thought which preferred to rely more on the textual approach to the Quran and avoid the rational way of understanding.

The Concept of Body (*Jism*) and Attributes of God
The Anthropomorphists believed that God is in the form of corporeal bodies together with their parts. He has hands, head, tongue, and other organs (al-Shahrastani, n. y.). Their notion is centralized to the doctrine that God has bodily materials. This doctrine was strongly rejected by al-Baqillani. In refuting the Anthropomorphists' views, he promoted his ideas regarding the definition of *jism* as well as its relevant matters.

According to al-Baqillani (1987), the term 'body' (*jism*) is a composed thing, which comprises measurement. This definition is also commonly introduced by other theologians. Al-Baqillani highlighted the concept of body (*jism*) and asserted that it is disconnected to God. Hence, it is impossible that God has composed materials. If He has body which comprises many organs, then those parts should have space and activity. Those organs will make contact with each other depending on their necessity through that space. To him, those spatial bodies would precisely inhere in substrate. These organs somehow are contradictory to the eternity of God, which is spaceless. As he explained:

> *"the reality of the body is it is composed [matter]...the characteristic of body is composed, and it is forbidden for the eternal to be formed...hence He is the Almighty who is not the body"*

(al-Baqillani, 1987, 220)

The claim that God has parts of bodies means comparing the Creator with the creatures, and according to al-Baqillani, this is a false concept because they believed that God in His eternity has spatial parts of body, which in turn is contradictory to the Islamic theological mainstream.

Furthermore, al-Baqillani also denied that God has corporeal body. As a result, He has organs with their own properties. These properties could be knowing, powerful, or having   contradictory attributes; unknowing and unpowerful. By virtue of that fact, it leads to confusion as to which one of these organs is being God because not every part has divine attributes. On the contrary, if every organ of that body has those properties, then, as a consequence, it also gives illustration that God is more than one, which

is similar doctrine believed in Christianity. Furthermore, the spatial bodies are also a contradictory fact when some parts of the body are moved while others are unmoved. Their movement, however, does not work perfectly. It seems al-Baqillani's rejections against the Anthromorphists' claim had shown some consequences. The idea that God has physical body means that He is created from a number of things because that is the substance of the body. Hence, it is impossible that He is eternal. In addition, it could also be inferred that it has accident ('*arad*) and essence (*jawhar*) for its substrate and activity. Their routines may also seem contradictory (Abd Allah, 1986). The corporal attributes of God are self-evident that it is not God, since it has many weaknesses as obviously explained by al-Baqillani in his arguments.

Further proof, as al-Baqillani argued, to reject the Anthropomorphists' notion is that he proposed the term 'thing' (*shay'*) instead of 'body' (*jism*) in describing God's activity. He rejected the latter and allowed the use of the former addressed to Him. The first term, when it relates to God, does not mean having particular species (*jins*) as well as the corporal elements while the second is not applicable to be addressed altogether with His name since it has certain connotations indicating that He has physical objects. According to al-Baqillani, the usage of the term 'body' (*jism*) signifies everything related to corporeal bodies. It comprises many elements embodied into one object, yet His existence is One. Lingustically speaking, the term 'thing' (*shay'*) is more general to appoint to either eternal aspects or originated things, as he delineated:

> *"our opinion is that the term 'thing' does not refer to one particular genus, neither to signify composition. It is possible the existence of thing is not the genus of genera...* (al-Baqillani, 1987).

Hence, their problem actually lies in naming God with such physical matters. Al-Baqillani noted the term 'thing' (*shay'*) has general and multi-interpretations. When it relates to corporeal body it consists of composed materials. The same thing when it refers to accident, it also has essence. Therefore, naming something should be based on certain reasons since it has many consequences. Al-Baqillani further added his concept by affirming that the names of God have been revealed to us through true information of the Quran and *hadith*. His names are derived from these stated sources, even though they contradict our reason, like God as a deceiver (*al-makir*) (al-Quran 3: 54) and a mocker (*al-mustahzi'*) (al-Quran 2: 15). In this respect, we have to retain those names for Him, because Allah told us to to do so, yet all these things should be traced back to the origin of the statement. The Anthropomorphists' reliance was on their speculative thought to God which is baseless from the revelation (1987). The abovementioned argument illustrates clear proof that they wrongly termed in naming God as the existent possessing bodily elements. This statement definitely contradicted to the principle of theological framework, which created a number of criticisms from their opponents. Here, al-Baqillani through his concept of name (*al-*

ism) and naming (*tasmiyya*), scrutinized the Anthropomorphists' views. He said that they did not realize their technical term which was loaded with certain conceptual principle. In this regard, he also criticized them that their notion caused theological simplification in delineating God's existence as well as their naming related to divine attributes.

In another place, al-Baqillani (1986) also elucidated his stance concerning *mutashabihat* verses which were literally understood by the Anthropomorphists. He analysed verse Taha: 5, in which he commented that the God's seat on the throne is not similar with His creatures. He believed that the throne has neither space nor place because God continously exists, as he noted:

> *"and we say: His seat is not the similiar to any creatures. And we do not say: Indeed the throne has bed and place, because Allah the Almighty exists without place. When he created place His existence is eternal, not changing"* (al-Baqillani, 1986, 65)

This is also evidenced by some facts narrated by both Abu Uthman al-Maghribi and al-Shibli. They maintained that God has always been eternal (*lam yazal wa la yazul*) while His throne is originated (1986). Al-Ghazali (d. 450 H/1111 C.E.) (2003), in his theological principle, also supported al-Baqillani's stance concerning that matter. He further commented that *mutashabihat* verses is deanthropomorphism (*tanzih*) of any claim that He settled down on the throne. Those who sat firmly there were precisely predestined whether they are greater, smaller or even similar in terms of its forms. When God is believed to have bodily elements, then He is touchable from any sides. Hence, these *mutashabihat* verses cannot be regarded as justification of the anthropomorphistic notion towards God.

Still in line with al-Baqillani, al-Ghazali (2003) also asserted his other views in rejecting anthropomorphism. He elucidated clearly his theological principle in his *Iqtisad* affirming that God has different attributes from His creatures. He has neither bodily elements nor accident. All physical aspects are composed from two or more substances. Al-Ghazali further detailed that if God possesses a physical form, then He is counted with certain quantities. As a result, He will require specific and preferable form in which it alternates and assesses into one specific way. Therefore, in such a condition He will not be a Creator, which is absolutely impossible for God. Al-Ghazali also argued in his other works (2006), that those verses which explain God's physical descriptions do not mean the real meanings which signify the physical aspects. Those statements should not be interpreted literally, but they should be fathomed as following the proper and appropriate interpretations related to God, the Almighty. For instance, the word 'movement' (*intiqal*) from one place to another does not mean that God has similar activity as human beings who move too but God has His own activities which are exclusively appropriate for Him using certain equivalent terms.

A later theologian after al-Ghazali, al-Razi (d. 606 H/1209 CE.) (1993), also cemented the position of Ash'arites' theological framework in rejecting anthropomorphism. Al-Razi reported that the *Karramiyya*, one school of Anthropomorphists, did not admit to say that Allah has corporeal body which indicates the composed matter comprising several parts of bodies. They meant by such term is that God does not require substrate, and it is a substance subsists by itself without any dependence of the body (Shaikh, 2006). According to him, their statement was unclear, since they used contradictory terms. However, according to al-Razi, following from their argument on the speciality of God's attributes, it could be inferred that God requires space, direction, and all things perceived by the senses. So, He must be single or indivisible substance (*al-jawhar al-fard*) which is spaceless and undivided. However, their naming of such term by the so called 'body' (*jism*) has illustrated that it seems that it has been produced by the composition of a number of elements. It also has certain properties; long, deep, and broad related to any directions. This is humiliating and belittling His existence, since no one Muslim would agree upon such belief. Accordingly, their argument in claiming that God does not need the substrate was merely a due to their dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) and fear (1993).

From the aforementioned delineations, we can conclude that the Ash'arite theologians, in rejecting anthropomorphism, had different basic theological principles. They attempted to deny the epistemological foundation on the terminological background of the concept of the body and the attributes of God.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discusion on anthropomorphists' views on the attributes of God and al-Baqillani's responses delineates the Asharite theological stance. His critique to their doctrines of the Quran, and the attributes of God seems to be driven by his attempt to maintain the mainstream of Ash'arites' theological framework. Through studying of a al-Baqillani's thought in responding these topics, it shows that his place takes far different position from those Anthropomorphists (*Mujassima*). This group emphasized more on the application of the literalist approach in understanding the text of the Quran and the hadith, while his notion affirmed the more balance between rationalistic method and applying revelation. The Ash'arite theological position applied a combination of both methods in a harmonious and appropriate way - makes this school more flexible and correct, and hence acceptable in the Muslim community.

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