The Mu'tazila's Semantic Apologetic Arguments

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Abstract— One of the most important issues in Islamic studies is the interpretation of the sacred texts of Al-Quran and al-Hadiths. Many interpretation theories have been created, such as ration-based interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-Ra'yi*), text-based interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-Ma'tsūr*), and linguistic-based interpretation. This paper aims at discussing one of language theories (semantics) which had been developed by Mu'tazila, one of the prominent Islamic theological schools. As the paper is a kind of a library research, it makes use of main references or documents of Mu'tazila's thoughts as the primary data. The study reveals that the main theological thought character is defensive-apologetic on its doctrines. Language is one of Mu'tazila's means made for defending their doctrines and beliefs. Therefore, this group was known as the most productive school in writing ideas related to linguistic theories, which become references of Muslim scholars to the present day.

Keywords—semantic, theology, apology, Mu'tazila

I. INTRODUCTION

Mu'tazilais not just merely a theological stream, but it is a school of thought espoused by a group of Muslims who uphold the five principles in the life of their intellectual and practical, namely: unity (*al-Tauḥīd*), justice (*al-'Adl*) promise and threat (*al-Wa'dwa al-Wa'ied*), a middle position between the two positions (*al-Manzilahbayna al-Manzilatayn*), and command for doing good and forbid any of bad thing as *munkar* (*al-Amr bi al-Ma'rūfwa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar*) [1]. These five principles are crystallized into a way of life (world view) of Mu'tazila in responding any issues of religious, social and political. Ahmad Amin more firmly stated that Mu'tazila is a comprehensive research method: empirical, logical, doubt (doubt) and analogical [2].

Epistemologically, Mu'tazila's knowledge, as stated by al-Jahiz (159 H-255 H/ 775 M-868 M), came from three sources: the really authentic history (*al-Khabar al-Qāhir)*, the experience of empirical reality (*al-'Iyān al-Zahir*), and logic or intellect (*al-'Aql al-Mustadil*) [3] [4]. However, al-Jahiz clearly said, that logic (al-'Aql) was the main arbiter to decisive all of that. He said; "All things (objects) have two votes: birth judgment (outer judgment) that was doing by the senses (empirical reality) and evaluation of mental (inner jugdment), namely by logic. The logic became the argument (*ḥujjah*) [3].

Imam Yahya bin Husayn (245 H-298 H / 859 AD-911 AD), who also one of Mu'tazilah's figures, he also stated that there were three sources of knowledge: common sense, holy Qurān, and empirical experience [5]. While al-QadiAbd al-Jabbar (359 H-415 H / 969 M-1025M), figure Mu'tiazilah the last generation of Mu'tazilah's figures added another source of Mu'tazilah'sknowledge, that is the convention (*ijma'*). According to him, there were four sources of the argument: logic (*al-'Aql*), the Koran (*Qur'an*), Hadith (*al-Hadith)*, and ijma '(*al-ijma'*) or conventions [6]. The analogy (al-qiyas), was not explicitly mentioned as a source of knowledge, according to Abd al-Jabbar, because it was included in the convention *(ijma')* or the Koran or the Sunnah [6].

Al-Qasab concluded that Mu'tazila's knowledge system was built on two main pillars two main pillars; the mind and language in its broad terms. Common sense of logic and language, according to al-Qasab, are two Mu'tazila's main weapons to interpret the texts [7]. For the Mu'tazila, the language approach was very important for interpreting scriptural texts [7], especially those texts which they considered to contain any ambiguous meaning *(mutastyābih, ghumūd, or mubham)* [8] [9]. That was becoming reason of why many Mu'tazilah's figures have very intensive discussion of language, *nahwu* (grammar) and balaghah (rhetoric) and become the leading figures in the two disciplines. Among them were Sibawayh (148 H-180 H / 765 AD-796 AD), Quthrub (d. 206 H), al-Jāhidz (159H-255H), Ibnu Jinnī (00-392H/ 00-1002M), al-Zamkhsyari (457 H-538 H/1074 M-1143 M), al-Mubarrid (210 H-286 H/825 M-899 M), dan al-Farā' (144 H-207 H), Abu Ali al-Farisi (288H-377 H / 900M-987 AD), Abu al-Hasan al-Rummānī (296 H-384 H / 908 AD-994 AD) [10].

II. METHODS

This study was a kind of a library research that relied on the classical references discussing Mu'tazila's thoughts. There were many important references and sources including the work of Ibn Kholdum "*Muqaddimah*." It was also supported by other important written documents. The data in the form of ideas and opinion were analyzed qualitatively by comparing one idea to other ideas to reconstruct Mu'tazila's arguments.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. Kalam

Knowledge of *Kalam* (theology), according to Al-Fārābī, is "the skills *(ṣinā'ah)* that can help someone who mastered it to defend his opinions and actions, as well as to breaking any other opposite arguments" [11]. Ibn Khaldun defines Knowledge of Kalam as "knoewledges of rational arguments to defend the belief (faith), and denied or argue the innovation experts *(ahlual-bid'ah)* who deviated from the belief (faith) of *Salaf* and Sunnah scholars" [12].

These two definitions explain that Knowledge of Kalam (theology) is the defensive argument (defensive-apologetic) against any other views that have been believed by its adherents. The main task of the theologian is to defend the truth of Islam and its fundamental teachings (the Qur'an). Then evolved into interpretative defense arguing against the fundamental doctrine of the teachings on their theological sects such as the Mu'tazila and the Sunnah, both of them are two major sects that existed in Islam.The defense of theology and theological doctrine forced the theologians, Mu'tazila primarily, to create good theories based on pure logic and language arguments to strengthen their arguments. The first problem encountered by Mu'tazila is the question of the meaning of Allah's word. In Mu'tazila`s view, word of God or Allah's word is not a part of the nature of Alloh, but the deed or acts of God. Therefore, the kalam or Allah's word is not *qadīm* (earlier in the past) but *ḥadīts* (a new and created) and created (creature as *makhlūq*). This Mu'tazila view matched with the principle of *tauḥīd* which is absolutely interpretedonly God is Allah, the only one (who) *qadīm*. This was stated by al-Qhādhi Abd al-Jabbār, following:

> "In view of our sect, the Quran is the Word of God and revelation from Him, it is creation (makhlūq) and new (muhdats), was revealed to the Prophet to be a marker and the evidence of his prophethood. Alloh created Quran for us as a reference to determine the lawful and the unlawful. Therefore, we must be grateful, praise and purify Him [6].

The above statement asserts that kalam *(utterance)* according to Mu'tazila is the creation of the speaker *(mutakallim)* itself. It is separate or nonattached to the speaker's self which in Mu'tazila term referred to as artificial nature *(nature of fi'il)*, not the nature of the substance.

The Mu'tazila's concept of this, feels very strange and awkward, thus forcing them to make the theories that seem apolegtik at all. For example, they insist on the view that kalam (the utterance) not appear fom any movement or vibration on the vocal cords or other organ specific for talking [6]. For them, the kalam may appear or occur from someone speech whenever talk with tounge without due process of vibration or mechanical compression or longitudinal waves which impedes through specific medium as in modern linguistic theory. Because according to them, the kalam is something that is understood and heard *(mudrakun wamasmū'un)* [6]. Kalam is a well-organized letter arrangement that produces a certain meaning. In his other work, Al-Qādhi Abdul Jabbār said that the kalam is *al-Hurūf al-Manzūmah wa al-Aswāt al-Muqatta'ah.* The kalam is

something which are systematically arranged in a letter form and units of sound [6]. This means that Mu'tazila only recognized that kalam was a mix between a set of letters and sounds, but did not recognize any of sound sources or sound-producing tools.

Thus, it seemed that Mu'tazila did not see the process of how a speech or the sound or the phonemes was produced by a specific organs of speech and formed a speech utterance. However, they rather looked at the results as a language statement form, whether it was sounded and written. These mu'tazila's arguments were incomprehensible from the perspective of linguistic theories, but it should be viewed from the perspective of their theological theory. In this context, it was associated with the main pillars or principles of Mu'tazila theology, namely tauḥīd. This was because the discussion of this kalam, was not merely talking about human language or language, but it was also related to God's Word; the Qur'an, how it exists and how it appears.

In the view of the Mu'tazila, God is totally different from creatures, outside of space and time, and intangible body or not having any body shapes with organs. Therefore, if a kalam is generated from vibration or movement of an organ of speech, so did the Word of God occur through the same process. Of course, this can not be justified because it conflicts against with the principle of tauḥīd. On the basis of this logic, Mu'tazila was that Kalam Allah is created *(makhlūq)* and is new *(muhdats)*.

The Mu'tazila view got a hard denial, rejection and refutation by other theologians, especially from Sunni members who argued that Kalam Allah is *qadīm* because it was God's nature, not actions. Abu al-Ma'ali Juwaini, one of the leading Sunni theologians, proposed the theory that distinguished between the Word of God Qadim and the Hadith. *Kalam Qadim* was the word of God which was not a form of verbal language but it was still in the form of ideas or meanings which was in the substance of God, he called it as the *Kalam Nafsi (al-Kalām al-Nafsī*- meaning ideas or potentials). While Kalam Allah that has been in the form of verbal language is new *(hadīts)*. That is, the word in the form of letters, words and sentences that were new (hadith), while the meaning contained in it was *qadīm* [13] [14].

In contrast to Al-Qādhi Abdul Jabbār, Ibnu Jinni as a very productive theologian and Mu'tazila's linguist, he defined the language starting from a sound, not from the letter. He said, the language was the sound or speech expressed by each social group members to convey their wishes [15]. Ibn Jinni also acknowledged the instrument or the organ as a source of sound. According to him, the sound was an incident (al-'Ardh) that occured simultaneously going in and out with breath straightly stopped or unstopped. Once it passed through the throat, mouth and lips, it became the sound of utterances as a result due to the pressure and the impulse. The tone of sound that appeared varies due to the differences in places or manners [15].

In relation to Kalam, Ibn Jinni did not define it as Abdul Jabbār did, but he rather emphasized on the aspect of its useful which he distinguished it with *Qoul*. The difference between both of them can be summarized as follows:

1) The word Qoul used for expressions implies to belief or opinion *(al-I'tiqadāt Wa al-Bara')*, as an example:

"*Fulānun yaqūlu biqouli Abī Hanīfata, wa yazhabu ilâ qouli Mālik*". This statement does not merely say that Fulan imitates Imam Abu Hanîfah and Imam Mâlik's words without adding or reducing, but that is to say that the Fulan follows or believes the opinions and ideas of Imam Abu Hanîfah and Imam Mâlik [15].

2) Beliefs and ideas, are symbolized and expressed with Qoul, not with *Kalām* because the beliefs and the ideas are more similiar to Qoul than *Kalām*. Its resemblance can not be understood or comprehended except through other media, such as symbols of sound or utterances. This is equivalent to Qoul whose meanings sometimes are incomprehensible except through other media. For example, if someone says *Qāma* (standing), then the word can not be understood because it is not a perfect form. Therefore, in order for the word to be understood then it needed another assistance which is "*fā'il*", for example, *Qāma Zaidun*. So, it does mean that Qoul needs help to perfect its form. This means the same as beliefs and ideas, so that both would be understood apparently if they were supported with other help, namely the word or sound symbol [15].

3) Kalām is not like the case above, it is an independent sentence, a self-contained sentence, the perfect meaning and it does not need for any other help. Therefore, the evidence of the difference between the two is that it has been a mutual agreement to mention the Qur'n with Kalāmullāh, not *Qoulullah* [15].

B. Language and Meaning

The language functions according to al-Jāhiẓ is to explain (*al-Bayān*), or according to Al-Qādhi Abdul Jabbār and other Mu'tazila figures is to give information (*Al-Inbā' wa al-Ikhbār*) [9]. These functions are indeed to be emphasized that language is merely the tool of communicating and transferring information or knowledge by human beings to others as social beings. In the process of communication or the transferring of knowledge, of course, it involves two parties namely the presenter or speaker and receiver. In order for the message or information which is submitted by the speaker can be understood by the recipient, the code or symbols which is used -have been first known in advance by both parties. In addition to discussing the "speaker" and "recipient", the most important pillar of the semantic is a sign system that includes a s*ignifier, (al-Dāl), signified (al-Madlūl) and referent (al-Marja').* In the semantics of the language, the marker is a word or phrase, signified is its meaning, referent is the object referred to..

Related to this, Mu'tazila formulates theories to understand the meaning or urgent message in here. There are two key terminologies which become the basis of the Mu'tazila's semantic theory; *al-Muwādha'ah* (convention) and *al-Qashd* (intention). What is meant by al-Muwādha'ah is that when a person (speaker) wanted to deliver a message to others (receiver, audience) through the language, first, that person had to know that the language or sentence to be served and

delivered was already fully understood by the recipient of the message. Because, if not, the recipient will not be able to understand what is desired by the speaker at all [16]. That is, words or sentences delivered by the speaker to the listener should have a common meaning, equally understood by both parties.

Thus, convention and intentions are two main elements or pillars that are interrelated and inseparable in Mu'tazila' semantic theory. According to Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid,*al-Muwādha'ah* (convention) and *al-Qashd* (intention) are two conditions that must be fulfilled in the process of understanding the meaning in the Mu'tazila theory. *Al-Muwādha'ah*, according to him, is to understand the meaning that born from the relationship between the marker (*al-Dāl*) and signified (*Al-Madlūl*) in the form of words (*al-Mufradāt*) included in *muwādha'ah* which is meaning of referent in the form noun, attribute or identity. However, the meaning of the phrase *Muwādha'ah is* only tentative, not yet as constant meaning. While the meaning of *al-Qashd* (intention) is to understand the meaning that was born from the relationship between the marker (*al-Dāl*) and sginified (*Al-Madlūl*) in the form of sentences (*al-Jumlah*), whether in the form of interrogative sentences, affirmative sentences, or imperative sentences [9].

However, the Nasr Hamid's conclusion is criticized by Jādullah Bassām Sāleh. According to him, the Nasr Hamid's conclusion was overwhelming and he failed to understand the concept of *dalālah* initiated by Mu'tazila, especially al-Qādhi Abd al-Jabbār. According to Jādullah, *al-Qashd* (intention) in the Mu'tazila's terminology is identical to *al-Wadh'u* (convention)(Sāleh).

The most important of these three pillars is related to the intention (al-Qashd). The intention here is the speaker's intention or purpose. The speaker was a major focus in Mu'tazila's semantic theory because it does not merely understand the speaker from fellow human beings but also understands the meaning of God the Exalted Speaker (*al-Mutakallim*) through His Word.

Ibn Jinni explained that basically the word *"qashd"* in Arabic means intentions, leading and directing to an object, whether true or false, although sometimes in certain circumstances has meaning of the intentions to something in a consistent and constant way [17]. Abu Hilāl al-Askari has linked *qashd* with *dalālah*. According to him, *dalālah* is everything that may be used as guidance (to understand the meaning), whether with intentional or not by the perpetrator. This means that *al-Qashd*, according to al-Askari, is the meaning of any action that a person (speaker) wants. While other meanings that arise from the structure of the sentences and the meaning which understood by the recipient or listener is not the essential meaning or origin (*al-Ma'nābi al-zāt*), but only incidental significance (*al-Ma'nābi al-'Ardh*) [17].

If *Al-Qashd* is the necessity of knowing the meaning which is intended by the speaker, both man and God, then how to know that *al-Qashd*? Related to this, the Mu'tazila scholars are no different from other groups, especially the Sunnis. They are

equally dictated from the popular *dalālah* disseverances: *Dalālah Lafẓiyah* (verbal meaning) and *Dalālah Ghoiru Lafẓiyah* (nonverbal meaning). Verbal meaning is the original meaning of a word that is equally understood by its users, either correspondent meaning or appropriate (*muthābaqah,* significance of conformity), implicit meaning (*tadhammun*) and inherent meaning (*istilzām*). The verbal meaning, according to al-Amidi, can be determined by means of two ways: *First*, there is the successive information. It means that a word has a certain meaning that is understood consecutively from one generation to the next. *Second* is the information of a particular person or a trusted individual. From these two ways, the majority of the meaning is known in the first way [18]. The meaning of the God's language contained in the holy book (Quran), as affirmed by al-Rāzi, is also known in the first way, in a particular relation, especially to the verses that are *qath'iy* (definitely exact), while the second way is generally occurs in the passages whose meaning is *dhanni* (allegations). However, interpreting the verses that *dhanni* also can not perceive arbitrarily, but still refer to the meanings of the language that is commonly known, rather than guessing any other meaning [19]. While according to al-Subuki, in addition to the meaning of being understood in two ways as mentioned by al-Amidi, the meaning can also be produced by using any inductive reasoning or analogy [20].

C. Expansion of Meaning

In the reality, words cannot always be interpreted lexically or general meaning of the original. When talking or conveying messages, someone often uses a word or language that is indirectly on the target of the intended meaning. The use of the words in such way is natural, demands of human instincts as social beings restricted to social ethics and beliefs. Related with this phenomenon, Mu'tazila created a theory that had been used to escape from the original meaning of a word or to expand the meaning. They summarize theory in the concept of essence (*ḥaqīqah*)and *majaz* (metaphor). Through the concept of the dualism of essence (*ḥaqīqah*) and *majaz,* Mu'tazila is freely build its apologetic semantic arguments.

The essence (*ḥaqīqah),* by Abu al-Husain al-Bashri al-Mu'tazily, is defined as a word which give a mutually agreed meaning at the time of the communication process [21]. While *majâz* is the opposite, that is "a word that gives the meaning which is not or is not mutually agreed upon at the time of the communication process" [22]. In essence, the *ḥaqīqah*is the original or lexical meaning of a word, while *majāz*is an extension of the original meaning. People who try to finalize the theory of the *ḥaqīqah*and *majāz* in meaning as above is al-Jāhidhz [23]. Creation and innovation in conveying the message through a metaphorical language (*majāz*) in order to be more aesthetically pleasing, according to al-Jāhidhz, it can be justified throughout its meaning or the message so it can be understood equally both of the speaker and receiver.

Al-Jāhidhz also stated that the *majāz* is not merely related to the delivery of the message, but it is also a way to understand the message of a word or phrase that is arranged in a variety of

compositions and in a variety of context at any situation. This is reflected in the statement as follows.

The Arabs have their proverb, a derivation and composition system. The position (and situation) whenever they talk, according to them, is to show for a certain meaning and purpose that they want. There are a wide variety words of situations raised, each of them has dalâlah (meaning) of its own. Anyone who does not understand all of this, then he cannot explain (ta'wil) al-kitāb and al-sunnah, especially on ordinary words and the proverbs. If people like this facing "al-al-kalām (Sentence, text) and any other knowledge that have related with him while he did not master this knowledge at all, then he will be broken and damaging others [3].

To strengthen his theory, Al-Jāhidhz presented an examples in the holy Qur'an and the Arabic poetry one of them is a derivation from the word "*akala*" "Akala" the following.

الذين قالوا إن الله عهد إلينا أن لا نؤمن لرسول حتى يأتينا بقربان تأكله النار,

The word "*ta'kulu*" in the paragraph above, according to Al-Jāhidhz, it can not be interpreted in ḥaqīqah means eating. The fire can not eat, but it burns, burning up or crushed(al-Jaḥiẓ, 1998, p. 47). He strengthened this opinion again by an Arabic poetry, such as the following

أكل الدهر ما تجسم منها * وتبقى مصاصها المكنونا
"The time has devastating all appears thereof.
That the remaining was absorbed and hidden" [3].

In the further developments, the semantic theory especially majāz, became highly productive machines and creatively it is used by Mu'tazila to defend their doctrine of ideology with doing any interpretation or *ta'wīl* on verses of the Al-Quran that they considered *mutasyābihāt*. This seemed stated clearly by Syarīf Ridha that the interpretation (ta'wïl) on al-Qurān has associated with two things:

1) The differences of opinions over the issue of al *muhkam* and *al-mutasyābih* [6].

2) The political and theological conflict [24]. Then, the theory of al-muhkam and *al-mutasyābih* and ta'wïlare finalized by al-Qāsim al-Rassi in 246 H. In his work, *Ushūl al-Tauhīd*, al-Rassi elaborated a *ta'wïl* started from the issue of worship. According to him, the essence (ḥaqīqah) of worship, there were three; Knowing God, knowing the behavior that are pleased and that is not blessed by God, and carry out the command of God and away from the ban of God. All of that, said al-Rassi, can be known through the four-ways or arguments; the reason (ratio), the holy book Koran, the Sunnah and the ijma'(convention). Each of these four ways are from origin (*ushul*) and branches (*furu'*). The logical argument which is categorized as an origin (ushul) has been agreed by intellectuals (*al-Uqalā'*), While others -branch categorized is still leaves a difference. The difference of this view is due to differences in methods and theories in viewing the object. *Al-Muhkam*is the origin, whereas *al-Mutasabihāt*is the branch. The Sunnahon the origin category is that have been agreed of its validity

(*mutawātir*), While sunnah that still in dispute is considered as a branch [19].

The categorizing on origin and branch by al-Rassi was a strategy to ease the process of *ta'wïl* corresponding to whatever Mu'tazila wanted, summing up the meaning of a word or sentence coming out from its original meaning according to their ideology. The ideology which was built with a sturdy and tight was formulated in the five pillars, as has been mentioned earlier in this article.

IV.   CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the meaning or interpretation of a text, especially the holy texts, although it was built on a linguistic argument, but in fact it is not neutral at all, it had been loaded with many interests and defensive argument of the perpetrators ideology, including by groups Mu'tazila. The linguistic theories, especially semantics, was also projected as their aplogetic arguments.

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