What Makes us Human? Maturity of the Intellect (Kamal al-‘Aql) According to al-Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar

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The main objective of immediate knowledge according to ʿAbd al-Jabbar is to prepare the ground for the person to be ready for his obligations. ʿAbd al-Jabbar calls this state kamal al-aql (the maturity of the intellect). When one arrives at this stage, one will be considered ready for rational obligation. ʿAbd al-Jabbar believes that man has an innate capacity to know the divine command that develops in him.

Keywords: human, maturity of the intellect, immediate knowledge, ʿAbd al-Jabbar

Introduction

The maturity of the intellect according to ʿAbd al-Jabbar is the starting point for the obligation (taklif). In Islam (Al Fārūqī, 1968, p. 366), arriving at the age of puberty (bulugh) is considered one of the signs of the maturity of one’s intellect. When one reaches this age of puberty, one will be considered baligh and ready for the obligation, except for the insane (majnun). Before that period, a person will not be considered an obligated person (mukallaf).

In the Majmuʿ al-muhit, Ibn Mattawayh (1965, p. 6) reported that in order for one to become ready and capable of implementing the obligation (taklif), it is incumbent upon God to establish a foundation for man to achieve this goal. This foundation according to ʿAbd al-Jabbar is based on two parts: (i) knowledge that develops the maturity of the intellect (kamal al-aql) and (ii) the foundation of proof (usul al-adilla) (Ibrahim, 2013).¹

Maturity of the Intellect

The maturity of the intellect and the foundation of proof generally develop simultaneously, for example, the knowledge that man is the agent of his own act because that act occurs following his will (irada), intention, (qasd), and action. This according to ʿAbd al-Jabbar is the maturity of the intellect and also the foundation of the proof. After all immediate knowledge occurs in a person, that person will be ready for the obligation (taklif). The process of obtaining this knowledge needs no effort from human beings; it will be created by God. Therefore, the maturity of the intellect (kamal al-aql) will definitely occur in every human being.

From the previous explanation, one might observe that the intellect according to ʿAbd al-Jabbar is something special. He considers that intellect (ʿaql) is a group of specific knowledge that, if present in the mukallaf, will be adequate for a mukallaf to reflect for acquiring proof and to perform the obligatory (ʿAbd

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² ʿAbd al-Jabbar also considers that usul al-ʿadilla is immediate knowledge.
al-Jabbar, 1960, p. 375). Therefore, in his definition of the intellect (‘aql), ʻAbd al-Jabbar does not follow the method of Muslim philosophers (faylasuf) who define it as substance (jawhar). 2 He argues that it is inconceivable to consider the intellect as substance, for substance is included in the universe (kawn). It is possible for substance to exist without the existence of every genus that it related to. 3 Therefore, substance can exist with the universe and its opposite. If that is applied to the intellect and knowledge, the implication is that it is possible for the intellect to exist with knowledge and its opposite (which is ignorance). This implication, according to ʻAbd al-Jabbar, is inconceivable. 4

Therefore, when ʻAbd al-Jabbar speaks about the kamal al-‘aql, what he means is the completion of the creation of immediate knowledge by God in the mukallaf. Supporting his argument, ʻAbd al-Jabbar (1960, p. 376) stated that if this certain knowledge is available in man, he will become a rational (caqil) person even without others. And if he has other things but not this knowledge, he will not become rational. Hence, the author posits that it is important to bring up this knowledge in order to understand what ʻAbd al-Jabbar means by the maturity of the intellect. This knowledge is:

First, one’s knowledge of one’s own situation (hal), such as willing (murid), dislike (karih), and believing (mu’taqid). Someone who does not know his own situation must have been lacking (muntaqis) in knowledge. So, it is inconceivable for him to obtain any other knowledge without having knowledge of his own situation. This knowledge is considered the foundation (asl) for knowledge of the relationship between the action and the actor. For if one who does not know that a person is willing and believing, one will certainly not know that an action performed by him is based on his intention and will. Therefore, this knowledge is considered the first foundation in immediate knowledge. (Descartes, 1986, p. 36) 5

Second, knowledge of the situation of perceptible objects (mudrakat) is based on the principle of non-contradiction. It is impossible for a body to be in two different places at the same time. ʻAbd al-Jabbar argues that if this knowledge is unknown to the mukallaf, it is implausible for him to confirm (ithbat) the existence of accidents (a’rad) and their temporality. Similarly, without this knowledge, the temporality of the bodies and the relationship between the action and the agent will not be possible. Knowledge of the situation of perceptible objects is considered the foundation (asl) for all knowledge. As a result, a rational person will know that it is impossible for a body to become eternal (qadim) and temporal (muhdath) at the same time; or a thing (shay’) exists and does not exist at the same time (ʻAbd al-Jabbar, 1960, p. 384).

Also, understanding of the reality of perceptible objects is important, primarily to reject the view of those who believe in the bodily existence of God (mujassima). On this, ʻAbd al-Jabbar argues that this knowledge is needed to prove that the body and the accident are created. Hence, we cannot say that God has a body since this implies that God is created (muhdath). This implication is impossible since God is an eternal being.

Third is knowledge of ethical principles. Examples of this knowledge are the evilness of wrongdoing (zulm), ungratefulness (kufr al-ni’ma), and lying that has no benefit in it and not to avoid danger, the goodness of charity (ihsan), and courteousness (tafaddul) (Leaman, 1980, p. 129). One also knows certain obligations,

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2 For Muslim philosophers (faylasuf)’ discussions on the intellect, see Davidson H., Al-Farabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect. This work discusses the link between Greek and Arabic understanding of intellect and the various transformations the concept of intellect underwent in Islamic philosophy.

3 I suggest that what ʻAbd al-Jabbar means here is that the substance (jawhar) or essence is available even before the existence of the quiddity (ma ’hiya) of a thing.

4 However, ʻAbd al-Jabbar accepts the use of substance for the intellect in the sense of the foundation of knowledge (asl li al-‘ulum). Mughni, xi, 376-377.

5 This type of knowledge is similar with a foundation of knowledge meditate by Descartes, René in his philosophy cogito ergo sum, (I think therefore I exist).
such as thanking a benefactor (shukr al-mun'im), rejecting harm from oneself (daf al-darar 'an al-nafs), returning trust (wad' a) when asked, and to be just (insaf). Similarly, according to Hourani (1971, pp.107-13) one also knows the goodness of censuring (dhamm) evil (al-qabih) when there is no obstacle (manc) and the goodness of censuring failure to perform (ikhlal) the obligation when the obstacle is absent (irtif'a).

This basic ethical knowledge according to 5Abd al-Jabbar must be obtained by the mukallaf; otherwise, fear (khawf) of not doing reflection (nazar) will not appear. For this, fear is the basis that leads human beings to reflect. Hence, the beginning of obligation (taklif) is based on fear. Also, knowledge of the justice (‘adl) of God is impossible without knowledge of ethical judgment. For when the difference between good and evil is unclear, there is no ground to purify (yunazzah) God from evilness (muqabbahat) and to attach to him something good (muhsanat). Therefore, knowledge of basic ethical judgment is one of the essential foundations for all acquired knowledge either from the intellect or revelation (‘Abd al-Jabbar, 1960, p. 384).

Fourth, the knowledge of some motives (dawa‘i). Knowledge of divine assistances (altaf) is invalid without it. When the basic principles of harm (darar) and benefit (nafc), such as pure harm (darar al-mahd) must be avoided and pure benefit (nafc al-mahd) must be performed, are unknown, it is inappropriate for a person to be obligated (‘Abd al-Jabbar, 1960, p. 385). However, motive for ‘Abd al-Jabbar is not a necessary condition of the act. The acts of a sleeper and of an unaware person (sahi), for instance, occur without a motive.

Thus, 5Abd al-Jabbar uses the notion of motive and intention (qasd) only to demonstrate that human beings are the agents of the acts they produce (Madelung, 1991, p. 146). On this, he argues that man’s acts are his own since they occur in accordance with his own motives and intention.

Fear and Obligation

After one has already obtained all this knowledge, one achieves the maturity of intellect. At this level, one is ready and capable of receiving and implementing the obligation. For 5Abd al-Jabbar, this maturity of the intellect is the starting point when a person becomes obligated. However, there is another important requirement for one to become an actual obligated person; this requirement is fear (khawf). This fear generally will appear in human beings during the process of obtaining the maturity of the intellect (Ibn Mattawayh, 1965, p. 156). But if this fear does not occur during that process, God would certainly create this fear at the time of maturity by sending a divine idea (khatir) to the human mind either directly or through the mediation of the angel. Hence, everyone who has obtained maturity of his intellect will immediately experience the fear of not doing reflection.

Apparently, based on the previous explanation, 5Abd al-Jabbar believes that there is no gap between the maturity of the intellect and the obligation (taklif). Since the fear will appear at the latest during the maturity of the intellect, after one achieves the maturity of the intellect, one immediately becomes an obligated person (mukallaf). 5Abd al-Jabbar believes that “the maturity of the intellect” is the sole factor that makes human beings become obligated.

Conclusion

Immediate knowledge is an important foundation for one to become capable of acquiring knowledge. From immediate knowledge, one is able to obtain (i) the maturity of the intellect (By obtaining it, one has the intellectual ability to perform the task of acquiring knowledge); (ii) the foundation of proof (usul al-adilla) (This foundation is a set of principles for one to base his argument on it in his effort to acquire knowledge); and
(iii) the sense of fear (This fear will become a motivation for one to reflect in order to acquire knowledge). With all these in mind, ʿAbd al-Jabbar systematizes the process of acquiring knowledge. So, when one achieves one’s intellectual maturity, one must start to acquire certain knowledge that becomes obligatory upon him.

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