

MALAY EPISTEMOLOGY AS SEEN IN MALAY THEOLOGICAL WORKS WRITTEN IN JAWI FROM THE 17th TO THE 19th CENTURY

(Epistemologi Melayu seperti yang dilihat pada penulisan Teologi Melayu yang ditulis dalam Tulisan Jawi dari Abad ke-17 hingga Abad ke-19 Masihi)

Mohamad Nasrin Mohamad Nasir
mnasrin10@gmail.com

Institute of the Malay World and Civilization,
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

To cite this article (*Rujukan artikel ini*): Mohamad Nasrin Mohamad Nasir. (2022). Malay Epistemology as seen in Malay Theological works written in Jawi from the 17th to the 19th century. *Malay Literature*, 35(1), 47–64. [http://doi.org.10.37052/ml35\(1\)no3](http://doi.org.10.37052/ml35(1)no3)

Received: Peroleh:	2/3/2022	Revised: Semakan	22/4/2022	Accepted: Terima:	2/6/2022	Published online: Terbit dalam talian:	5/6/2022
-----------------------	----------	---------------------	-----------	----------------------	----------	---	----------

Abstract

This paper intends to investigate the issue of knowledge and ways of acquiring that knowledge as it is seen in the writings of Malay scholars in Jawi. Malay scholars chosen here are those who have written on this issue via their many writings. Malay writings on Islam are known simply as *kitab*, denoting their Islamic heritage and background. Within this *kitab* genre there exist writings on theology (*aqidah*), jurisprudence (*fiqah*), and Sufism (*tasawwuf*) amongst others. For the sake of this paper, this study is limited to the texts mainly in theology. The aim here is to study issues connected to knowledge to come to the epistemology of Malay thinkers. It is presumptuous to think that Malay thinkers are uniform in their thinking and monolithic in their interpretation of religion. The facts speak for themselves that Malay thinkers comprised of a mixed bunch with many from different backgrounds and teachers, thus making one unified epistemology difficult, if not impossible. This research include those texts which

are still being published and read by many around the country and in many instances are influential in the formation of the Malay Muslim mindset. The formation of concepts within the mind and thus making a particular view on Islam had begun with the teaching of these primary texts. Perhaps with the study of this aspect of Islamisation, people would be better equipped to understand the Malay Muslim mind of today.

Keywords: Jawi, Malay, intellect, epistemology, theology, *akl*

Abstrak

Makalah ini akan mengkaji isu berkaitan dengan ilmu dan cara mendapatkan ilmu seperti yang dilihat daripada penulisan ulama Melayu dalam tulisan Jawi. Ulama yang dipilih ialah mereka yang telah menulis tentang isu ini dalam penulisan mereka. Penulisan Melayu mengenai Islam dikenali sebagai kitab sebagai menandakan warisan keislaman dan latar belakangnya. Dalam penulisan kitab, terdapat penulisan mengenai aqidah, fiqah dan tasawwuf di samping aspek yang lain. Had kajian makalah ini hanya kepada kitab aqidah. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengkaji isu yang berkaitan dengan ilmu untuk memahami epistemology ulama Melayu terdahulu. Anggapan bahawa pandangan mengenai semua ulama Melayu itu adalah sama dalam pentafsiran agama mereka adalah tidak adil. Fakta menjelaskan yang sebaliknya. Ulama Melayu mempunyai pelbagai pendekatan dan pentafsiran yang bergantung pada kepelbagaian latar belakang dan guru mereka, sekali gus menjadikan satu wadah epistemologi sebagai suatu yang sukar dilakukan, jika tidak mustahil. Kajian ini melibatkan teks yang masih diterbitkan dan dibaca di pelbagai tempat dalam negara, sekali gus memainkan peranan penting dalam pembentukan minda Melayu Muslim. Pembentukan konsep di dalam minda dan pemahaman tentang Islam bermula dengan pengajaran teks primer ini. Penyelidikan ini akan memudahkan kefahaman tentang Islamisasi minda Melayu Islam hari ini.

Kata-kata kunci: Jawi, Melayu, intelek, epistemologi, aqidah, akal

INTRODUCTION

In the academic world, the issues of epistemology have always been under the purview of philosophy. If philosophy is the universal principle that govern a person's worldview, then it must exist even where there

is no specific philosophical tradition in a particular culture. For how can a particular culture build their civilization if they do not have any epistemology to guide them. In the Malay world, issues connected with philosophy have always been dealt with under the subject matter of religion. Epistemological issues which are fundamental towards the building block of knowledge and “knowing how to know” have always been discussed under the main influence of Islam. To find the meaning and content of epistemological discussion as seen in the Malay world, this paper shall try to conduct an epistemological investigation via the utilization of religious texts associated with Islam. The epistemological enquiry conducted here would deal with knowledge, how to know, what are the limits of reasoning, or intellect and what is the role of religion or theology in this act of knowing.

Most western studies had concentrated more on the *hikayat* genre, for example epics, stories, poetry, or *pantun* in Malay when discussing Malay literature. This has unfortunately ignored the complex discussions which were occurring in the *kitāb* genre which are prevalent amongst the Malay Muslim scholars. Kitāb genre refers to texts written regarding Islam, such as theology, *fiqh*, *usul fiqh*, and early Islamic history. They were mainly written in a book form, thus the name *kitab*.

The texts chosen are texts which are still used in the teaching of religion in contemporary Malay society today. As this would be a series of articles dealing with epistemology, this research would begin with theology. The reason Islamic theology is chosen is because according to the majority of the scholars, it is the highest of all religious science and studying it should be the beginning of one’s understanding of Islam as it deals with God’s Essence and His Prophets. As is clear today, this hierarchy of knowledge in Islamic theology is a major staple in the teaching of students at the madrasah.

The *Kitab* genre: Theology

Islamic theology or *Usuluddin* (principles of Religion) is also known as *Ilmu al-Tawhid* (Knowledge of God’s Oneness). Unlike the development of Islamic Theology in the long heritage of books (*turath*) written in Arabic, Islamic theologies here tends to be a compilation of books translated into one single coherent text which are later taught to madrasah students. The writers of these texts in general are educated in Mecca and its surrounding areas. They are usually taught by well-known teachers who have domiciled in those cities and come from a long line of teachers teaching Islamic Theology.

There are many Jawi texts written by Malay scholars that touch upon theology. Most of them are summaries or commentaries upon the *Sifat 20* of al-Sanusi and are used even in the contemporary setting to teach theology to the masses. Al-Sanusi's most famous text, *Ummul Barahin*, is a concise form of his main writings on theology. Sanusi had written in 3 parts in explaining his views on the Muslim Aqida. The *Umm al-Barahin* is the shortest version of it.

The setting of the usage of these texts includes but not limited to *majlis ilmu* after the evening (Maghrib) prayers where the texts are read aloud by local *Ustaz* and commented upon. These lectures are popular and sometimes are recorded and put online on various Youtube channels. This research aims to provide an overview of epistemology as these Malay scholars have taught in these texts.

***Al-Durr al-Thamin fi Aqa'idi al-Mu'minin* (The precious pearl in the Faith of the Believers)**

This text was written by the prolific Daud ibn 'Abd 'Allah al-Fathani (d.1847)¹. As with many theological works written in Jawi, the text consists of quotations and translations from other established work, mainly in Arabic. *Durr al-Thamin* is no exception, but with additional notes written by Daud. As we shall see, some parts are similar to later works in Jawi, but there are creative additions from Daud to other parts. As the focus is on epistemology, this research therefore look at parts of the text that deal with issues connected to knowledge, the definition of knowledge, ways of acquiring knowledge, limits of the intellect, and the role of reason in understanding knowledge. As the context used is theology, therefore knowledge has to do with Islamic theology and the issues connected to it.

In the case of *al-Durr al-Thamin*, the text itself was written and completed in 1232 H/1817 CE (Bradley, and was written with the aim of elucidating the principles of religion (*usuluddin*) and knowledge of God (*ilmul tawhid*).

The method employed has been a direct translation from the primary sources and a commentary supplemented upon the text written by Daud himself. However, it is unclear where the border is, for example, between the translation and the additional comments. It should be enough that the focus is on epistemology and limit the discussion on theology to a bare minimum unless necessary for the sake of the objectives in this paper.

Durr al-Thamin begins conveniently with a definition of theological knowledge and here Daud follows the views of Shaikh Ahmad bin Muhammad al-Suhaimi who is of the opinion that the definition of knowledge has to be based upon 10 principles (*mabadi'*). In other words, "anyone who wants to achieve a perfect mastery over knowledge has to know the 10 principles"². They are:

1. Its definition (*hadduhu*)
2. Its subject matter (*mawdu'uhu*): God's essence and the essence of all His Prophets, what is essential, impossible, and possible to His essence³.
3. Its place (*wad'uhu*): From Abul Hasan al-Asy'ari and other scholars who follow him.
4. Its name (*wasmuhu*): Ilmu Kalam, Usluddin, Ilmu Tawhid etc⁴.
5. Its benefits (*ghayatuhu*): Benefit of studying this knowledge is the ability to discern between true beliefs and bad or corrupt beliefs.
6. Its ruling or judgment (*hukmuhu*): It is compulsory knowledge for all Muslims who are able.
7. Its meaning (*maksuduhu*): Issues connected to God etc.⁵
8. Its origins (*istimdaduhu*): Qur'an & Prophetic traditions (hadith Nabi)⁶
9. Its benefits (*fa'idatuhu*): Eternal happiness in the world and the hereafter. In the hereafter, he is able to witness God's face.
10. Its relation to others (*nisbatuhu*): This is religious knowledge.

Aqidatun Najin fi ilmi usul al-Din

The text was written by Zain al-Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani(d.1913) or famously known as Tuan Minal. The full title of the text is *Aqidatun Najin fi 'ilmi Usul al-Din* (The Successful Creed in discussing the knowledge of religion) which was first published in Egypt in 1890 while the author was domiciled in Makkah. The text has experienced many printings since then. It is one of the most popular texts used in the teaching of the Islamic creed at mosque around the country. Recently the text has been romanized and it is that version that this paper shall be using.

In general, the *Aqidatun Najin* is a translation of the *Ummul Barahin* of as-Sanusi with Tuan Minal's commentary upon it. The *Ummul Barahin* has been translated and published; however, it is a very condensed text. The

Aqidatun Najin, however, adds many commentaries by Tuan Minal and this commentary tradition also allows the teacher of the text to add their own comments to it when teaching it in the mosque, thus the popularity of the text amongst many in Malaysia.

When compared to the older *al-Durr al-Thamin* by Daud al-Fatani above, this text is much easier going as it avoids much of the theological intricacies found in the *Durr al-Thamin*. In other words, the *Aqidatun Najin* is a much readable text when compared to the *al-Durr al-Thamin*.

In the introduction of the text, after the usual praises and salutations, Tuan Minal tells readers on how he was asked to write the book. He says, “God has made my affairs well and some of the brothers have asked me to write a book on Principles of Religion (*Usul al-Din*), whereby I have merely translated the *Muqaddimah* of Shaikh Sanusi and I added upon its words of commentary so that his statements are made clear.”⁷

His method is by translating a statement from the *Ummul Barahin* of Sanusi and giving his commentary hereafter. The book can be divided into 5 chapters with an introduction. The discussion on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is gained can be seen in the introductory chapter. The epistemology section comes right at the beginning of the book. The author, Tuan Minal explains that those who want to gain knowledge have to know 10 principles of knowledge which has been made into an Arabic poetry or *nazm* with 3 lines⁸. He, however, does not translate it from the Arabic. The same *nazm* which deals with the 10 principles of knowledge is also found in the *al-Durr and al-Thamin* above.

Following *nazm*, the 10 principles are:

1. The definition of knowledge.
2. The place of knowledge.
3. The use of knowledge.
4. Its priority.
5. Its relation to other parts of knowledge.
6. The deliverer of such knowledge.
7. The name of the knowledge.
8. The place which it originates from.
9. The ruling of religion upon it.
10. Issues connected to it⁹.

These 10 principles are then applied to the knowledge of God as it is the subject of the book. Therefore, for example, the use of the knowledge of theology is to be able to know all of God's attributes, the attributes of all of His Prophets by a knowledge that is certified and achieve eternal happiness¹⁰. Its priority is that theology is the most respected knowledge when compared to every other knowledge because it is based upon God's and the Prophet's essence. It is respected because that knowledge is relying upon God's essence.

Therefore, on Tuan Minal, the knowledge of theology or *Usuluddin* is the highest of all knowledge and the most respected when compared to the rest. Thus, in effect, making his book the most beneficial book of them, all because of the subject matter.

He then continues to explain that the deliverer of this knowledge is Abul Hasan al-Ash'ari, the originator of the Ash'arite school of theology, and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi and those who follow them¹¹. The name ascribed to this knowledge is theology or *Kalam* and it originates from the tradition (*hadis*) of Qur'an and evidence based upon reason (*dalil aqal*). The ruling upon it is that it is obligatory (*wajib*) upon all Muslims who have achieved the age of responsibility (*mukallaf*), be male or female.

He asserts this further by stating that all other knowledge are mere parts of this one principal knowledge. Theology or *usuluddin* is *the primer scientia* or the ultimate prime knowledge that one should study for all other knowledge are mere appendages to it. To know religion, properly Muslims should master this knowledge and thus are able to lead their life with it¹².

Tuan Minal then digressed to discuss what is having knowledge (*pengetahuan*) in general. His definition is that knowledge is that which is known to be coherent with its reality (*hakikatnya*). He then goes on to explain that ignorance (*jahil*), which is the opposite of having knowledge, is divided to 4 divisions:

1. Ignorance is divided into two divisions: (a) Simplified (basic) ignorance and (b) Composite (*murakkab*) ignorance.
2. Doubts (*syak*): which arise when similarities are thought to arise in two contradictions.
3. *Zhan*: that is heavier in his heart in knowing or lighter in his heart in not knowing.
4. *Waham*: lighter in his heart in knowing and heavier in his heart in not knowing.

From 2 to 4, these are the strength of knowing, for example, if we were to give percentages, ignorance is 0 percent in knowledge of something, doubt (*syak*) is 50 percent in knowing something, *zhan* is 60 percent and *waham* is 70 percent in knowing. This can also work either way with *Waham* being 70 percent in not knowing, *Zhan* is 60 percent in not knowing, and *Syak* is 50 percent in not knowing something. In both of these schemes, ignorance is 0 percent and means total non-knowledge of the issue or of anything.

For Tuan Minal, in regard to having faith (*iman*), there is no faith if the individual has any of the above four categories of ignorance. In other words, a person who has faith is a person who has 100 percent knowledge of *Usuluddin* or *Ilmu Tauhid* or *Ilmu Kalam* as he explains it in the book. Thus, elevating theology to be the primary knowledge of all religious knowledge and it has to be acquired in order for Muslims to have faith. In other words, being ignorant means not having faith and thus not being a Muslim. As he says, "If a person believes in God and His Prophets with ignorance, *syak*, *zhan* or *waham*, then he is a kafir!"¹³

In the following section, after this, he goes on to explain about those whose beliefs are based upon imitation of others (*taqlid*). For Tuan Minal, this imitation is not based upon knowledge and thus is not based upon any evidence or rational argumentation (*burhan*) and therefore, according to the majority of scholars, this particular individual does not have faith too. Some scholars say in regard to these individuals they are known as weak *kafir* (*dhaif*). He, however, does not elaborate more about his own position on this particular issue.

He then proceeds to discuss an important epistemological question and that is the ways of acquiring knowledge. For Tuan Minal as with other Ash'arite theologians, there are three ways of acquiring knowledge and they are first truthful reports (*khobar yang sadiq*). "They are those reports which are from God and His Prophets and successive or continuous (*mutawatir*) reports that has achieved such numerosity that reason could not contemplate on them being false."¹⁴

The second source or way of acquiring knowledge is by the internal (*gharizah*) intellect (*akal*) which he does not elaborate upon. The third source is the healthy five senses. He then proceeds to explain what is meant by each of the senses. At the end of his explanation, he mentions that the knowledge by which we know God and His Prophets are not known via the five senses but only via teachings or source of religion (*syara'*) and the healthy intellect.

Knowledge then is divided into conception (*tasawwur*) and assent (*tasdiq*) and the meaning of the first is we are neither able to verify (*ithbat*) nor reject (*nafi*) it such as the conception that the world is everything that is not God. The meaning of assent is the knowledge by which we are able to verify or reject as we know God's eternal is fixed and confirmed (*ithbat*), while everything new is rejected from Him¹⁵. This definition of conception and assent here is explained via the utilization of theology, but this division of knowledge actually comes from traditional logic (*mantiq*).

Thus, the discussion on epistemology is outlined in the teaching of theology as can be seen here in the texts of *Aqidatun Najin*. The place of reason or intellect is secondary when compared to the true *khobar* (*khobar sadiq*) which is similar to the teachings of theology. In fact, one of the oldest writings in Jawi on theology, i.e., the *Aqa'id an-Nasafi*, also has this as the first definition of tools for knowledge acquisition.

“The means of obtaining knowledge for the creatures are three: first, the five senses, second, true report (*khobar sadiq*)¹⁶; and third, reason.”¹⁷

In another section which deals with what is the ruling on the study of Principles of Religion (*Usul al-Din*), here Tuan Minal explains about what is the ruling for individuals to study *Usul al-Din*. Is it compulsory? If so, who compels it? Is it the reasoning of the intellect or God through His laws? Here in this discussion, we might get a view of Tuan Minal, and al-Sanusi on what is the role of the intellect in this epistemology. Tuan Minal begins by quoting al-Sanusi who said that ruling in Shariah are divided into three divisions; first, the ruling from God (*sharak*), secondly, the rule of reasoning of the intellect and thirdly, the rule of the normative aspect of society (*adat*)¹⁸.

Interestingly, according to Tuan Minal, the view of al-Sanusi is that in regard to God's essence, the ruling in regard to it is that it is only from the intellect and not from the other two. This probably means that in order for someone to accept God's existence, he is to do it via the utilization of his reasoning and intellect.

Following Sanusi again, Tuan Minal accepts that the ruling of the intellect is divided into three. It is existing (*wujub*), impossibility (*istihalah*), and possibility (*jawaz*). What is *wajib* according to Sanusi is the thing “where nonexistence is not ascribed to it; what is impossible is the thing where existence is not ascribed to it; what is impossible is that the thing according to the reasoning it either exists or not in existence”¹⁹.

Tuan Minal also brings the view of Shaikh Tilmisani who said, “Thus for a particular thing that is ruled by the intellect, its existence and

permanency, then it is impossible for it to be not, according to reasoning. Thus, it is *wajib* upon it to have an atomic form in movement or at rest, i.e., to accept either of the two states. Surely, to accept either one of it is permissible for it for example to choose to move and not stay at rest, it is permissible for it but not compulsory upon it.”²⁰

Tuan Minal then continues to explain that for everything that is reasoned by the intellect to be non-existence and not fixed by the intellect, it is an impossibility. For example, the non-movement or non-stationary state of a particular thing, then that thing is an impossibility.

“Those things which according to reasoning exist and non-exist are the same, that thing is possible. For example, the choosing of the entity to either move in a certain way or the other, it is valid according to reasoning that the entity is moving forever or in stationary forever.”²¹

The discussion on the ruling according to reason is brought here according to the author of the *Ummul Barahin* is because “the reader is required to know those things which are *wajib* for God’s essence to be, those things which are impossible (*mustahil*) for God’s essence to be and those things which are permissible for it to be.”²²

Therefore, according to Tuan Minal, we are to know these three divisions so that we can be good at it and fixed in our hearts in regard to it so that we come to know and be successful in the knowing of God and His Prophets. “According to Imam al-Haramain (al-Juwayni) and the majority of the scholars (ulama); to know these three divisions is to have the intellect. Those who do not know them then that person does not have reasoning.”²³

Apart from the explanation above, we may ask the question of what is the limit of reason or intellect in this epistemology? This is not mentioned specifically here for the book is dealing with God. However, Tuan Minal does mention the relationship of God’s laws (*sharak*) and human intellect (*akal*), which we might envisage to mean the position of the intellect when viewed from the angle of God’s law (*sharak*) in this religious epistemology constructed here.

To Tuan Minal, the Mu’tazilites are those who say that all of God’s rulings are fixed with the help of the intellect (*akal*) and God’s sayings in the Qur’an are mere supplements to them. In other words, the intellect is primed in Mu’tazilah theology when compared to God’s sayings in the Qur’an in regard to the rulings of shariah.

It is clear that on Tuan Minal his position is not that of the Mu’tazilites for it is the direct opposite to it. Thus, limiting the intellect to a mere supplement to God’s laws (*shara’*).

Minor works: *Bidayah al-Hidayah & Sirajul Huda*

In another text which is popular in the teaching of theology at the intermediate level (Wan Shaghir, 2000), *Sirajul Huda*, there is a section which deals with definitions of knowledge. The author, Muhammad Zain al-Din Sumbawi had divided the knowledge to four types:

1. Essential (*Dharuri*) knowledge: that knowledge that does not arise from the building of arguments or knowledge that is not the result of argumentation like the knowledge that one is half of two.²⁴ This looks similar to the discussion of rational axioms in Islamic philosophy for the example given therein.
2. Opinion-based (*Nazari*) knowledge: that knowledge that arises from the opinions (*nazar*) and by which arguments are based upon.
3. Guess based knowledge (*Badihi*): that knowledge that arises due to the process of trial and error. Knowledge that requires testing (*kira atau cuba*).²⁵
4. Acquired (*kasbi*) knowledge: those knowledge that arises from an effort (*usaha*) such as the passing of someone upon something and he opens his eyes to see it. That is, his effort in seeing it by opening his eyes, is the knowledge of that thing passed.²⁶

Another text from around the same period of time with the *Sirajul Huda* is the *Bidayah al-Hidaya*. According to Wan Shaghir²⁷ and Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani²⁸, both of these texts are used as elementary books used in the teaching of beginner students. The *Bidayah al-Hidayah* of Muhammad Zain Acheh (1757)²⁹ and *Sirajul Huda* (undated) of Muhammad Zainuddin as Sumbawi both are brief texts which the students are taught and sometime memorise. Wan Shaghir goes further in asserting that these texts were usually taught at the elementary level of study for religious studies students in the madrasah in the east coast of Malaysia.

The *Bidayah al-Hidayah* was completed in 1757 and published much later. The earliest printed details of the text we have been from Maktabah al-Mirriya in Makkah edited by Ahmad al-Fatani who was then the director of the printing presses in Makkah (Wan Shaghir, 1999:8).

Epistemologically speaking, the *Bidayah al-Hidayah* is similar to the *Sirajul Huda* in its division of knowledge.

A Modern Treatise: *Risalah Misbahul Munir*

Of a more interesting take is a short treatise titled *Risalah al-Misbah al-Munir fi Ma'rifatillah al-Qadir* (The Luminiscent Lantern in elucidating the Knowledge of God all-Willing) written by Abd al-Aziz ibn Ismail al-Fatani printed in 1989. There is a section which deals with the strength of the intellect in argumentation.

He begins by saying that there are 3 rulings on the intellect:

1. What is compulsory upon the intellect?
2. What is impossible for the intellect?
3. What is permissible, is i.e., neither compulsory nor impossible for the intellect?³⁰

He goes on to explain that the first basically means what is thought by the intellect to be true because the thing is true in itself like God exist. "For when we think with our intellect surely, we would come to the conclusion with an intellect that is true because God is true and the other which is compulsory to intellect".³¹

For that which is impossible for the intellect is, for example, that God doesn't exist. "For when we think with our intellect, surely, we would judge or conclude with a negative because there is no God that is not (or is impossible)".³²

From this explanation from a contemporary text then it becomes clear that theology is to guide the intellect rather than the other way around. Such an understanding of epistemology is then a guided epistemology rather than a philosophical one.

Risalah Misbah al-Munir basically proved it beyond doubt that Ash'arite theology is to guide the intellect into thinking what it should be thinking rather than allow creativity in the running of reason or the intellect. Ashes'arite theology, as it is taught here in these texts, encourages the intellect to listen to theological axioms as propounded by Ashes'arites and provide arguments in support of them. Unlike other writings which we have seen above and which are taken and adapted into Malay from al-Sanusi, the *Misbah al-Munir* teaches a more dependent epistemology upon whatever is said by God's law.

As'arite theology, as propounded here, teaches the intellect to obey the teachings of theology and argues for its subservience in the eyes of *shara'*. The intellect, however, has a role to play in acknowledging the

priority and primacy of faith for the intellect we can never understand and accept faith. The author of Misbahul Munir asserts further “It is clear from the explanation of the rulings of the intellect that knowing them is a ladder to knowing faith and becoming firm in one’s faith because faith is the acceptance in the heart of someone, thus that acceptance cannot come to be without the understanding of these three rulings of the intellect. And those individuals who do not understand those rulings sometimes do not have any faith at all in his heart. And thus, those who do not have any faith or belief are known as the ignorant. Those ignorant of God, his faith is not valid and when it is invalid, his religion also becomes invalidated. Because the validity of religion is dependent upon the validity of faith because the meaning of faith is acceptance (*tasdiq*) in the heart, i.e., the acceptance of the heart of everything that is brought by the Prophet in regard to religious works.”³³

It is clear that the argument is connected to the understanding of what is accepted by the intellect and what is rejected by the intellect as explained above. And that argument leads towards faith and belief being accepted by God. Therefore, the intellect actually has a role to play and one would say a major role here.

The position is unclear for we can still ask, where does reason or the intellect get the idea that there are things which are compulsory upon it to accept or reject if not from the intellect itself. If acceptance of this as the main premise than it would mean, the intellect should be the first primary principle in the acceptance of religion and religious theology rather than the other way around.

The writer of Misbahul Munir understands the primacy of the intellect in the guiding of the heart into accepting the truths of faith and religion. However, instead of elevating that to its proper primary position, he relegated the authority of the intellect to the fourth place in his schema of compulsoriness in religion. To him, when we say something is compulsory (*wajib*) in religion, it is compulsory first of all to God’s law (*shara’*)³⁴, second to accidents (*aradh*), third to human law or customs (*adat*) and fourth to the intellect³⁵. This, however, is the minority view of the writer of Misbahul Munir when compared to the other writings which refer quite heavily to al-Sanusi as we can see in the section before this.

DISCUSSION

As we have seen above in the respective section above, most of the manuscripts were translations from the original Arabic. As the texts chosen

are connected to the principle of religion, thus the texts chosen to be translated by the authors are texts from the Ash'arite school of theology. The texts chosen are the commentaries on the *Ummul Barahin* of al-Sanusi. The commentaries are many as the *Ummul Barahin* was a popular text. Its popularity is mainly due to its condensed form, which allows the opening of the text to commentaries by scholars. As a result, there are hundreds of commentaries on the *Ummul Barahin* .

Amongst the most popular ones include the commentary (*Sharh*) by Ibrahim, Laqqani, Nasafi, and Taftazani. Our selected authors here who have written in Jawi were all familiar with these commentaries for they were all educated in scholarly circles in Makkah and its surrounding areas (Azra, 2004; Hurgronje, 1970).

The Jawi authors had translated and included parts of many commentaries of *Ummul Barahin* with added commentaries of their own. The result is a text with direct translations from the commentaries as well as original commentaries from the Jawi authors themselves. This confluence of texts from various sources with added commentaries which are unique to the authors, are a regular staple in the Jawi text tradition, which I shall call the genre of Jawi religious texts.

Unlike other texts which are accepted by many European scholars which deals with history, epic stories and Malay poetry which are also written in Jawi, these Jawi religious texts are unique in the sense that they do not contain additions nor omissions throughout history. Amin Sweeney, the insightful scholar of Malay Jawi texts, attributes this to the way these religious texts are studied in the madrasah. These texts were normally studied with a teacher who seldom added anything to the body of the text itself, even when they teach by using the text. The act of teaching a text is an active act which necessitates commentary and interpretation to it. These are normally not added to the body of the text but added by the students to the margins of the texts studied. These became known as *hashiyah* in Arabic but are not integral towards achieving an understanding of the text itself. As a result, these texts remain the same text as they are produced by the individual authors back in the day.

As this paper is regarding epistemology, it is clear that the epistemology that is propounded here is the religious Ash'arite theological epistemology.

Philosophical approach as seen in the writings of ahl Falsafa have not been consulted by our writers. This is perhaps due to as-Sanusi's own predilection with *falasifa* who he constantly reminded his readers to avoid (Olson, 2020:13). Sanusi would even exhort his readers to avoid other prominent Muslim scholars and theologians just because they have dabbled

in *falsafa*. These scholars include Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and even Baydawi whose words Sanusi regarded to be “meaningless”:

“Let the beginner be wary of efforts on his part to draw the principles of his religion from books that are stuffed (*hušiyat*) with the discourse of the philosophers (*falāsifa*) – books whose authors are intent on disseminating their foolishness and those of their views that are patent unbelief, the impurity of which they hide through those of their specialized terms and expressions that are obscure to most people, the majority of which are in fact meaningless words! Examples are the works of al-Imām al-Faḥr [Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī] and the Rays of al-Bayḏāwī, and those who followed their example”.³⁶

This teaching of al-Sanusi is regarded to be canon by our writers and translators of the *Ummul Barahin* analysed here. As a result, the role of reasoning or the intellect vis a vis the primary sources of Islam which are vague, to say the least. Perhaps because of this lack of reference to writings by other Muslim theologians apart from Sanusi has led towards an ambiguity on the role of the intellect vis a vis religion.

Although each of the texts analyzed here indicate and delegate some role to reasoning or the intellect, it is vague in the sense of whether reasoning on its own can determine knowledge. For if knowledge is from God, then should not be ascertaining it be from our own independent reasoning? Our acceptance of the Quran should be based upon our reasoning, independently of the Qur’an and based wholly on the intellect. For to accept the authority of the Quran is surely an act based upon reasoning (*akl*), it could not be otherwise.

It is interesting while at the same time contributing to the ambiguity in regard to the role of *akl* is that how each of the writings discussed here uses principles derived from reasoning in their division of the *Usul al-Din*. Where they might indicate their ambiguity in the issue of whether the *akl* or the intellect can know God independently from His laws (*sharak*), in their own writings and in fact following al-Sanusi’s *Ummul Barahin*, the division of God’s essence and attributes to *wujub* (compulsory), *istihala* (impossible) and *jawaz* (permissible) all are based upon reasoning. It is this reasoning that has given them the ability to discuss God’s essence and attributes as well as His prophet’s essence and attributes, thus indicating the high role the intellect has in determining and deciding discussion.

CONCLUSION

By way of a general conclusion, we can say that Malay epistemology based upon the books of theology by Malay scholars of the 18th to 19th century has a discussion on knowledge, division of knowledge and ways of

acquiring knowledge. However, the discussion is not straightforward and is dependent upon our understanding of al-Sanusi's teachings in the Ummul Barahin. One of the characteristic features of Malay epistemology here is that it does not give a clear authority to reasoning, but it does understand the role reasoning or the intellect has to play in people's comprehension of principles of religion (Usul al-Din). Other important findings include the emphasis of the writings here to dismiss the teachings of Muslim theologians who have engaged with philosophy (*falsafa*) and this is probably because of the position held by al-Sanusi himself (Olson, 2020).

NOTES

1. Francis R. Bradley, *Forging Islamic Power and Place: The Legacy of Shaykh Daud Bin Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2016).
2. Durr al-Thamin, p.5.
3. Durr al-Thamin, p.6.
4. Durr al-Thamin, p.7.
5. Durr al-Thamin p.8
6. Durr al-Thamin, p.9.
7. Aqidatun Najin, p.2.
8. Aqidatun Najin, pp.10-11.
9. Aqidatun Najin, p.11.
10. Aqidatun Najin, p.12.
11. Ibid.
12. Aqidatun Najin, p.13.
13. Aqidatun Najin, p.14.
14. Ibid.
15. Aqidatun Najin, p.15.
16. "... kedua khabar sadiq (ya'ni berita yang benar)," *The oldest known Malay Manuscript: A 16th Century Malay Translation of the 'Aqa'id of al-Nasafi* (al-Attas, 1988), p.53. In regards to the dating of the text, Proudfoot had criticized al-Attas's view on the dating system (Proudfoot, 2006, p.1 ff.2). Russell Jones (1990) and Werner Kraus (1992) had questioned the same thing and more by basing themselves on philology and providence of the text. Recently Ahmat Adam (2021) had also criticized al-Attas via his knowledge of the Malay calendar. Interestingly Adam does not follow Proudfoot's assertions (Adam 2021, p.137).
17. Ibid, p.67 for the English translation.
18. Aqidatun Najin, p.23.
19. Aqidatun Najin, p.27.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Aqidatun Najin, p.28.
23. Aqidatun Najin, p.29.

24. Siraj al-Huda, p.85.
25. Siraj al-Huda, p.85.
26. Siraj al-Huda, p.86.
27. W. Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah, *Wawasan Pemikiran Islam Ulama Asia Tenggara*, vol. 1–7 (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 2000).
28. Ahmad Fathy al-Fatani, *Ulama Besar dari Patani* (Bangi: Penerbit UKM, 2002), 67.
29. W.Mohd.Shaghir Abdullah, *Penyebaran Islam & Silsilah Ulama Sejagat Dunia Melayu*, Jilid 7 (Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Fathaniyah, 1999), pp.1-17.
30. Misbah al-Munir, p. 25.
31. Ibid.
32. Misbah al-Munir, p.25-6.
33. Misbah al-Munir, p.26.
34. God’s law is based upon the 5 schematic rulings that rule Muslim actions and they exist in all situations. They are, *wajib* (compulsory), *sunat* (recommended), *haram* (forbidden), *makruh* (reprehensible) and *harus* (permissible). See Misbahul Munir, p.15.
35. Misbahul Munir, p.27
36. This is from the Ummul Barahin and is taken from Olson, Caitlyn. “Beyond the Avicennian Turn: The Creeds of Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi (d.895/1490)”, *Studia Islamica* 115 (2020), pp.101-140.

REFERENCES

- Ahmat Adam. (2021). Unsur tasawuf dalam sistem kalender peribumi di Nusantara. In Tawarikh Melayu dan Melaka. *SIRD*, 135-172.
- Azymardi Azra. (2004). *The origins of Islamic reformism in Southeast Asia: Networks of Malay-Indonesian and Middle Eastern Ulama' in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries*. Allen & Unwin. .
- Bencheneb, H., “al-Sanūsī”. (2012). *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. In P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel and W.P. Heinrichs (Eds.) (2nd ed). Retrieved November 25, 2021, from http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1001.Bradley, F. R.. (2016). *Forging Islamic power and place: The legacy of Shaykh Daud bin Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Bradley, F. R.. (2016). *Forging Islamic power and place: The legacy of Shaykh Daud bin Abd Allah al-Fatani in Mecca and Southeast Asia*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Daud Sheikh Abdullah al-Fathani. (2011). *Al-Durr al-Thamin (Permata yang indah) Menyatakan segala i'tiqad pada orang yang mu'minin*. (Noraine Abu, Trans.). Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn Bhd.
- Hurgronje, C.Snouck. (1970). Mekka: in the latter part of the 19th century: daily life, customs and learning of the Moslims of the East-Indian-archipelago. (J. H. Monahan. E.J. Brill., Trans.).

- Jones, R. (1990). [Review of the book *The oldest known Malay manuscript: A 16th century Malay translation of the 'Aqā'id of al-Nasafī* by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas]. *Indonesia Circle*, 53, 65–67.
- Kraus, W. (1992). Short note: The oldest known Malay manuscript? *Indonesia Circle*, 57, 38-39.
- Matheson, V., Hooker, M. B.. (1988). Jawi literature in Patani: The maintenance of an Islamic tradition. *Journal of the Malaysian branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 61(1), (254), 1–86.
- Muhammad Zain ibn al-Faqih Jalaluddin. (2020). *Bidayah al-Hidayah: Syarah Matan Ummul Barahin dengan Bahasa Melayu*, (Noraine Abu, Trans.) Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn Bhd.
- Muhammad Zainuddin Muhammad Badawi al-Sumbawi. (2003). *Sirajul Huda pada menyatakan aqidah ahli al-Taqwa* (Noraine Abu, Trans.). Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn. Bhd.
- Olson, C. (2020). Beyond the Aviccenian turn: The creeds of Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Sanusi (d.895/1490), *Studia Islamica*, 115, 101-140.
- Proudfoot, I. (2006). *Old Muslim calendars of Southeast Asia*. Handbook of Oriental studies. Brill.
- Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas. (1988). *The oldest known Malay manuscript: A 16th century Malay translation of the 'Aqa'id of al-Nasafī*. University Malaya.
- Wan Mohd Shaghir Abdullah. (1999). *Penyebaran Islam, dan silsilah, ulama sejagat, dunia Melayu*. Persatuan Pengkaji Khazanah Klasik Nusantara & Khazanah Fathaniyah. 1-17.
- Wan Mohd. Shaghir Abdullah. (2000). *Wawasan pemikiran Islam ulama Asia Tenggara*. Khazanah Fathaniyah. 1–7.
- Zain al-Abidin bin Muhammad al-Fatani. (2014). *Aqidatun Najin Fi Ilmi Usul Al-Din (The Successful creed in the knowledge of the principles of religion)*. (Noraine Abu, Trans.). Al-Hidayah House of Publishers Sdn Bhd,