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## **AL-MUSNAD OF AHMAD IBN HANBAL AND THE REFUTATION OF MU'TAZILAH IDEOLOGY: A Study of Hadith as Intellectual Resistance.**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the work of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, as an instrument of intellectual and theological resistance to Mu'tazilite rationalism during the *mihnah* of the third Hijri century. By situating the work within its historical and socio-political context, the study employs qualitative analysis of hadiths in *al-Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal that address God's knowledge, predestination (*qadar*), divine justice (*al-'adl*), and the ontological status of the Qur'an. The findings demonstrate that

Ahmad ibn Hanbal's codification of hadith was not merely preservative in nature, but rather constituted a deliberate epistemological response aimed at reaffirming the primacy of revelation (*naql*) over speculative reason (*'aql*) as promoted by the Mu'tazilah. By positioning the Prophetic tradition as the supreme authority, Ahmad ibn Hanbal challenged core Mu'tazilite doctrines, such as the denial of the eternality of God's attributes and the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an, while simultaneously constructing a coherent Sunni theological framework grounded in submission to the absolute will of God. Moreover, Ahmad ibn Hanbal's steadfastness in the face of political pressure and persecution conferred moral authority upon the hadiths he transmitted and reflects a strong dimension of living hadith. The contribution of this study lies in its argument that *al-Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal functions not only as a scholarly corpus, but also as a socio-religious manifesto that significantly contributed to the consolidation of Sunnite theology.

**Keywords:** Mu'tazilah, *al-Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *mihnah*, Sunni theology.

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji karya Ahmad bin Hanbal yang berjudul *al-Musnad* sebagai instrumen perlawanan intelektual dan teologis terhadap rasionalisme Mu'tazilah pada masa *mihnah* abad ketiga Hijriah. Dengan menempatkan karya tersebut dalam konteks historis serta sosio-politik zamannya, penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif terhadap hadis-hadis pada *al-Musnad* Ahmad bin Hanbal yang berkaitan dengan ilmu Allah, takdir (*qadar*), keadilan Ilahi (*al-'adl*), dan status ontologis Al-Qur'an. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kodifikasi hadis yang dilakukan oleh Ahmad bin Hanbal tidak semata-mata bersifat preservatif, melainkan merupakan respons epistemologis yang disengaja untuk menegaskan kembali primasi wahyu (*naql*) atas rasio spekulatif (*'aql*) yang dikedepankan oleh Mu'tazilah. Dengan menempatkan tradisi kenabian sebagai otoritas utama, Ahmad bin Hanbal menantang doktrin-doktrin pokok Mu'tazilah, seperti penolakan terhadap keabadian sifat-sifat Allah dan paham kemakhlukan Al-Qur'an, sekaligus membangun kerangka teologi Sunni yang koheren dan berakar pada ketundukan terhadap kehendak Allah yang absolut. Selain itu, keteguhan Ahmad bin Hanbal

dalam menghadapi tekanan dan penganiayaan politik memberikan otoritas moral pada hadis-hadis yang diriwayatkannya, sekaligus mencerminkan dimensi *living hadis* yang kuat. Kontribusi penelitian ini terletak pada argumentasi bahwa *al-Musnad* Ahmad bin Hanbal tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai korpus keilmuan, tetapi juga sebagai manifesto sosio-keagamaan yang berkontribusi signifikan terhadap penguatan konsolidasi teologi Sunni.

**Kata kunci:** Mu'tazilah, *al-Musnad* Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *mihnah*, Teologi Sunni.

## Introduction

The historicity of Islamic thought has always undergone diverse developments in thinking patterns. The contributions of these developments have given rise to many new ideologies or schools of thought that have been recorded throughout the history of Islamic civilisation. The emergence of these various schools of thought was influenced by various factors such as power, defence of ways of thinking, fanaticism of figures, and so on (Fachruli Isra Rukmana et al., 2023). This emergence began during the era of great turmoil that occurred when Uthman *ibn* Affan was assassinated and Ali *ibn* Abi Talib was appointed as caliph, causing Muslims to split into three major groups, namely the Shia, the Khawarij and the Sunni (Rahmat Hidayat, 2025)

This emergence continued until it gave rise to newer schools of thought such as Mu'tazilah, Ahmadiyah, Salafiyah, Wahabiyah, Asy'ariyah and many more. Some schools of thought continue to develop and flourish in the contemporary era, while others have ceased to evolve. One of the schools of thought that has ceased to spread is Mu'tazilah, pioneered by Wasil *ibn* Atha'. This school of thought positions reason as dominant in determining law, determining destiny and the prerogative of Allah, and subjugating the Qur'an. The ideology of the Qur'an as a created being gave rise to a historical event known as the *mihnah* (Vidia Alfisyahri Ramadhani et al., 2024).

The Mu'tazilah gained privilege during the Abbasid Dynasty, allowing Wasil and his followers to dominate thought at that time (Fenti Febriani, 2022). This advantage of the Mu'tazilah led many scholars, especially in the field of hadith, to fall into disgrace, such as the famous hadith scholar Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal, owner of *Al-Musnad*, who had to

languish in prison as a result of the ideological thinking expressed by the Mu'tazilah (Adh-Dhahabi, 1985). Imam Ahmad's journey in undergoing this *mihnah* punishment took place during the reign of several Abbasid caliphs. However, his life in prison did not prevent Imam Ahmad from writing his work in the field of hadith, which resulted in the publication of the *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* book

Based on Imam Ahmad's connection with Mu'tazilah ideology, which was wrapped up in the *mihnah* incident, he attracted the attention of a contemporary thinker and professor of hadith at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, Muhammad Abu Zahw, who linked Ahmad *ibn Hanbal's* monumental work in rejecting and responding to Mu'tazilah's ideas. This is revealed in his book *Al-Hadith wa al-Muhaddithun*, where Abu Zahw argues that in *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* there are many hadiths related to divinity, predestination, and the virtues of the Qur'an, which is evidence that Imam Ahmad frequently mentioned counterarguments against the Mu'tazilah in his book (Muhammad Abu Zahw, 2010).

The research conducted by the author is based on his curiosity about the motives of the Mu'tazilah group in spreading such ideology, which left a mark on Islamic history, especially in the study of hadith itself. The role of hadith scholars in answering this question deserves appreciation from Muslims, especially for hadith scholars in this millennial era. Abu Zahw underlines the positive role of hadith scholars in responding to and contributing to the well-known Mu'tazilah thought, which was expressed by Ahmad *ibn Hanbal* in his book of *Al-Musnad*. The research found by the author is limited to general knowledge related to *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* and Mu'tazilah thought as expressed in different works or research.

## Discussion

### *The History of the Emergence of the Mu'tazilah Sect*

The birth of the Mu'tazilah school of thought is attributed to an event in the second century of the Hijri calendar, around 105-110 AH (Hasan Ibrahim Hasan, 1967, p. 317). This event occurred during a *ta'lim* (teaching) session held under the guidance of Imam Hasan al-Bashri, who was widely known as a prominent Sufi figure of his time. At

that time, it is said that someone asked about the ruling on a believer who committed a major sin. while Imam Hasan al-Bashri was thinking, suddenly a man named Washil *ibn* Atha' expressed his opinion that an unbeliever who commits a major sin will be placed between heaven and hell, or what is known as *al-Manzilah bain al-Manzilatain* (Mawardi Hatta, 2016).

Washil *ibn* Atha', whose full name is Abu Huzaifah Wasil *ibn* Atha' al-Ghazzal, is the founder of the Mu'tazilah school of thought. He was born in the city of Medina in 80 AH and died in 131 AH in the city of Basrah (Majid Fakhry, 2004). Washil was a person with a strong will, intelligent, diligent and courageous. He travelled extensively to various regions to seek knowledge from people who were considered capable, including Abu Hasyim Abdullah *ibn* Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah in Mecca and Hasan al-Basri in Basra. In his learning process, he was very critical and bold in expressing his opinions and rejecting other opinions if he felt they were not in line with his thinking. This can be seen in the incident mentioned earlier regarding believers who commit major sins (Udi Mufardi Mawardi, 2017).

After expressing his opinion, Washil *ibn* Atha' left the assembly, followed by his friends. Imam Hasan al-Bashri said to his congregation, '*T'tazala 'Anna Washil*,' indicating that Washil and his friends had separated themselves from them (Asy-Syahrostanti, 2010). From this incident, the Mu'tazilah sect was formed under the leadership of Washil *ibn* Atha', who was a student of the tabi'in and a prominent Sufi of his time, Imam Hasan al-Bashri. This opinion is commonly known by historians regarding the origins of the Mu'tazilah sect.

As for the origin of the name Mu'tazilah, scholars differ in their opinions. Some scholars say that this name was given to them based on Imam Hasan al-Bashri's activities in his teachings after Washil *ibn* Atha' left, using the word *T'tazala*, which means to separate, leading to the *isim fa'il*, *Mu'tazilan* (those who separate themselves) (Ishak Hasibuan, 2021). The opinion that the name Mu'tazilah was given from outside the group is the opinion of the majority and is widely known. Another opinion states that the name Mu'tazilah was taken from Washil *ibn* Atha's own explanation of the perpetrator of a major sin, namely *Manzilah bain al-Manzilatain* (Ibn Taimiyyah, 1961).

The Mu'tazilah school continued to develop under the leadership of Washil *ibn* Atho' and other prominent figures such as Abu Huzail Muhammad *ibn* Huzail *ibn* Ubaidillah *ibn* Makhul al-Allaf, Ibrahim *ibn* Sayyar *ibn* Hani an-Nazham and Abu Ali Muhammad *ibn* Ali al-Jubbai, who was famously known as al-Jubbai because he was born in a small town called Jubba'. These four figures were the Mu'tazilah figures in the city of Basra (Ali Musthafa al-Ghurabiy, 1969). The Mu'tazilah figures scattered throughout the city of Baghdad included Bisyr *ibn* al-Mu'tamir, Abu al-Husain al-Khayyat, Jarullah Abu al-Qasim Muhammad *ibn* Umar, and Abu al-Hasan Abdul Jabbar *ibn* Ahmad *ibn* Abdullah al-Hamazani al-Asadi (Ali Musthafa al-Ghurabiy, 1969).

Joesoef Sou'yb (1982) in his book *Peranan Aliran Iktizal (The Role of the Iktizal School)* reveals that the Mu'tazilah figures in Basrah and Baghdad had very significant and striking differences, namely that the figures in Basrah were more focused on religion and scholarship without being tied to power. This was in stark contrast to the Mu'tazilah figures in Baghdad, who used political opportunities and held many positions as a means of seeking support and protection. The Baghdad figures also committed many acts of violence against people who did not agree with their ideology, which again was in stark contrast to the situation in Basra, which allowed freedom of thought and waited for the people to become aware without coercion (Joesoef Sou'yb, 1982).

The Mu'tazilah school of thought has five basic teachings or main principles called *Ushul al-Khamsah* namely; 1) *Tawhid*, they refer to their school of thought as the experts of tawhid, and this principle is not unique to the Mu'tazilah. 2) *al-Adl*, this principle means that God is just from a human perspective, meaning that God is just when He acts kindly, does what is best, and does not break His promises to humans. 3) *Al-Wa'd wal Wa'id*, meaning that God will reward those who do good and punish those who do evil. 4) *Al-Manzilah bain al-Manzilatain*, meaning that believers who commit major sins are not judged as infidels, but they are also not judged as believers. 5) *Amr Ma'ruf Nahi Munkar*, which is the command to do good and forbid evil and bad deeds (Ahmad Hanafi, 2002).

In addition to the principles held by the Mu'tazilah, this school of thought also issued many fatwas and ideas that were contrary to those of many groups, including among the scholars of hadith. As a school of thought that highly values the role of reason,

allowing it to operate freely without limits, the Mu'tazilah conveyed their ideology regarding the actions of servants, stating that these actions are purely the result of the servants' own work, without any interference from God. This ideology alone has led to rejection from the majority of scholars, who believe that God's role in the actions of servants cannot be denied.

Another opinion put forward by Mu'tazilah is regarding the nature of Allah, which ultimately leads to divisions that cause harm, especially for hadith scholars. The Mu'tazilah stated that all forms of attributes attached to the essence of Allah are something new, just as the Qur'an is also new and falls into the category of creation (Fatima Abdul Aziz al-Ablani, 2023). Initially, specifically before the third century AH, the Mu'tazilah was a sect or school of thought that was not taken seriously, and they were even very concerned about being crushed by power and politics because of their weakness and minority status until the beginning of the third century Hijri, precisely during the reign of Caliph al-Makmun, who gave ample space for the development of Mu'tazilah until it became the official school of thought at that time (Muhammad Abu Zahw, 2017).

Al-Makmun was a caliph who was very fond of knowledge, and his interest in various subjects led him to study the understanding between the hadith scholars and the kalam scholars (Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, 1981). Due to his power, he was certainly very authoritative in initiating or holding various activities, until he finally held a meeting between theologians and hadith scholars to compare their understandings. The result of this gathering was that al-Makmun tended to agree with some of the Mu'tazilah's understandings, namely regarding the creation of the Qur'an. From that moment on, the feud between the theologians and the hadith scholars intensified, until in 218 AH al-Makmun began to think of using his power to force the hadith scholars to follow his thinking, and this event became the gateway to the *mihnah* (Abu Zahw).

The *Mihnah* has the meaning of *al-baliyah* or *al-ikhtiyar*, which is a test, trial or disaster (Ibn Manzur, 1990). When linked to events that occurred during the Abbasid Dynasty, the *mihnah* is interpreted as a test, suffering or trial endured by *muhaddisin*, *fuqaha'*, *qadhi* and the community based on *khuluq al-Qur'an*. This event lasted for approximately fifteen years, beginning during the reign of al-Makmun and ending at the

end of the reign of al-Wasiq (Ahmad Fathan Aniq, 2023). Behind all that happened was the Mu'tazilah sect, which was the executor of this event. Under the leadership of al-Mu'tasim and at the beginning of al-Wasiq's reign, with the appointment of Ahmad *ibn* Abi Daud, who was from the Mu'tazilah school of thought, as prime minister, this event became increasingly turbulent and did not hesitate to kill scholars who disagreed with the creation of the Qur'an (Fenti Febriani, 2022).

During this turbulent period, many *muhaddisin* were affected. One of the most famous figures who faced a great trial was Imam Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal, who insisted on not agreeing with the Mu'tazilah doctrine at that time regarding the creation of the Qur'an. This rejection resulted in Imam Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal being beaten and thrown into prison. However, he was spared from death because al-Mu'tasim was concerned that the rise of the supporters of this school of thought could threaten the stability and security of the state. Therefore, Imam Ahmad was not killed and remained in prison for approximately 28 months (Muhammad Aidil).

In the book *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, specifically in the introduction, there is an explanation of the doctrine of *khalq al-Qur'an* taught by the Mu'tazilah. Initially, Imam Ahmad was ordered by al-Makmun to become the leader in the implementation of the doctrine of *khalq al-Qur'an*. However, Imam Ahmad insisted on not complying with this request and instead rejected this opinion, even though the tyrannical government placed great emphasis on the role and privileges enjoyed by Imam Ahmad, who was also one of the Imams of the *madzhab* (Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal, 2001).

Imam Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal's steadfastness in defending his argument against affirming the creation of the Qur'an was also based on his view of the welfare of the ummah. This stance was considered the safest because it aimed to protect the general beliefs of the community from slipping (Muhammad Fahmi, 2023). On the other hand, this is also a form of protecting the sanctity of the Qur'an from doctrines that demean it, when in fact the Qur'an is the noble and protected word of Allah (Abdullah *ibn* Muhammad *ibn* Sa'd, 2021). These scholars followed the path of the *salafussalih*, who preferred to refrain and save many people from contamination by complex and unclear matters.

The explanation of the emergence of Mu'tazilah and their principles and doctrines has attracted the attention of many thinkers, historians, *muhaddisin*, *fuqaha'*, and even the general public towards this sect. Therefore, it cannot be denied that objections have arisen against Mu'tazilah ideology, and this is something that is known to arise from diversity in the midst of scientific polemics.

### *Examining Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal as a Response to Mu'tazilah Doctrines*

The Mu'tazilah ideology is not something unfamiliar to study. Its ideology has attracted much criticism from Islamic scholars, who almost unanimously reject the Mu'tazilah ideology. As explained in general in the previous subsection, Mu'tazilah has five well-known principles known as *usul al-khamsah* (Abu Hasan al-Asy'ari, 1950). In fact, not all of the five principles of Mu'tazilah are considered to be deviant from the teachings of Sharia, for example, the point about *tawhid* (Muhammad Aziz Mahmud, 2023). The Mu'tazilah's teachings on *tawhid* are no different from those of other Islamic schools of thought, in that the Mu'tazilah believe that *tawhid* is the absolute oneness of Allah and the attributes of Allah that are inherent in His essence.

However, the Mu'tazilah's understanding or beliefs that have been sharply criticised and considered to be teachings that deviate from the Sharia are found to be more dominant in the data and reality. In the discussion of Allah having eternal knowledge, for example, the Mu'tazilah believe that it is impossible for something to be eternal or prior because this would be equivalent to His essence (Rusdiyanto and Umi Hafsa, 2023). A qadi named Abdul Jabbar added that "if Allah had knowledge, then Allah would be measurable in terms of the extent of His knowledge, just as humans can be measured in terms of their level of knowledge. If Allah had knowledge, then surely that knowledge would disappear because nothing is eternal except His essence. If Allah possessed knowledge, He would need bodily organs as a place to store knowledge, just as humans need bodily organs such as the heart and brain to store knowledge." As a result, the majority of the Mu'tazilah sect believe that Allah knows things through His eternal essence without the intermediary of knowledge (Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar, 1996).

This opinion has been criticised by Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Sunnite), who argue that Allah's knowledge is eternal. Why is this so? Because if Allah's knowledge were not eternal, then Allah would not have known anything at first and would have created knowledge, just as humans are born ignorant and know nothing, then learn and only then acquire knowledge. This, of course, gives rise to the view that Allah has shortcomings and is similar to His creatures, '*Mumatsalatu lil hawaditsi*' (Abu Ja'far at-Thahawi, 1997). This comment by the Ahlussunnah is considered to represent the many opinions expressed towards the Mu'tazilah ideology, which is deemed deviant in its explanation of the nature of Allah.

The second ideology, Mu'tazilah, states that Allah's provisions only include good things based on human reason. The Mu'tazilah believe that Allah is not permitted to bring about evil upon His creatures because if Allah were to do so, it would be tantamount to Allah contradicting His attributes of mercy and compassion (Abdul Karim asy-Syahrastani, 2010). In addition, Allah is also considered to have an obligation to send prophets and messengers as reminders to humans of Allah's prohibitions and commands and the rewards they will receive on the Day of Judgement. Meanwhile, all evil deeds committed by humans are purely the actions of those humans and there is no divine intervention (Analiansyah, 2023).

Abdul Jabbar further adds to his argument in support of this ideology by stating that Allah desires good things because He Himself forbids all sinful acts. How could Allah be angry and punish people who commit immoral acts when He Himself wills for these immoral acts to be realised? How could Allah send His messengers to call on humans to stay away from these immoral acts when Allah Himself deliberately brings them about? (Al-Qadhi Abdul Jabbar, 1996). If read and understood at a glance, this will certainly cause confusion and raise concerns, especially for the general public, where logically this is a reasonable opinion, but indirectly it will hurt and damage the perfect nature of Allah.

In order to refute this opinion, many counterarguments have emerged that good and bad destiny come from Allah and that the actions of creatures cannot be separated from Allah's will (Muhammad Ikhsan Lubis, 2022). If there were deeds of creatures that were not willed by Him, then Allah would have a weak nature because He would be unable to prevent sinful deeds that He did not will. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish

between His pleasure and His will. Sunnite gives an example that there are things that are approved and willed by Allah to happen, such as the faith of Abu Bakar, and there are things that are not approved by Allah but are willed by Allah to happen, such as the disbelief of Abu Jahal (Muhammad Ikhsan, 2020).

The third ideology held by the Mu'tazilah that has sparked much controversy is their assertion that people who are wicked and disobedient to Allah do not belong to the group of believers, nor do they belong to the group of wicked people, a term which is known as '*manzilah bain al-manzilatain*'. They argue that wicked and sinful people cannot be called believers because only good people who avoid sin are worthy of being called believers (Asy-Syahrastani, 2010). On the other hand, wicked and sinful people are also not from the group of disbelievers because they still believe in Allah and recite the shahada. (Asy-Syahrastani). The Mu'tazilah take evidence as the basis for this opinion based on the verse:

بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ.

*Yes, whoever earns evil and his sin has encompassed him – those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally.” (Q.S. Al-Baqarah:81)*

The basis of the verse taken by the Mu'tazilah was criticised by exegetes as being inconsistent with the true interpretation, because what this verse refers to is the sin of disbelief, not merely a grave sin. (Muhammad Thahir Ibn Asyur, 1997)

The final ideological confusion held by the Mu'tazilah that will be discussed in this study is the creation of the Qur'an. This opinion began to emerge in the 8th century CE when Ja'd *ibn* Dirham stated that the Qur'an was a creation and not the word of Allah (Al-Baghdadi, 1977). The ideas expressed by Ja'd *ibn* Dirham led to his death and were continued by Jahm *ibn* Sofwan, who also suffered the same fate (Ibn Kathir, 1988). This opinion was then revived by the Mu'tazilah during the Abbasid dynasty, specifically when al-Ma'mun was in power. Ja'd's argument was the same as that of the Mu'tazilah, namely that the Qur'an is composed of sounds and letters, and that sounds and letters are something new. If the Qur'an is presented as something *qadim*, then it will give rise to something that rivals or resembles Allah, as argued in the first point.

Upon closer examination, the debate between the Mu'tazilah and the Sunnis regarding the status of the eternity and creation of the Qur'an stems from the difference in the philosophy used. The Mu'tazilah here use Platonic philosophy, which states that form and including nature is an abstract object that is not bound by space and time (M. Muhyidin & Nashihin, 2020). Form can only be known through the mind and not through sensory experience, so it does not change. Thus, form in Platonic philosophy is an entity. On the other hand, Sunnis use Aristotelian philosophy in viewing nature and form. In Aristotelian philosophy, form does not exist independently, but is attached to a substance or essence. There is no essence or substance without form including nature.

It's simple. In Platonic philosophy, when we mention paper, paper has a substance that essentially exists in the world of ideas. Everyone understands paper if they look to the world of ideas. Paper has its own essence or substance. Form is not included in the essence of paper. Confusing? Yes, of course, the idea of paper or any object in Platonic philosophy is abstract and therefore somewhat confusing. In Aristotelian philosophy, however, when we mention paper, our minds generally refer to thin, white sheets with a square shape that serve as a medium for writing or drawing. The white color and square shape in Aristotelian philosophy are inherent to paper. It is impossible for us to imagine paper without colour and shape. Such is the theological debate between the Mu'tazilah and Sunnis about the nature of Allah and the Qur'an, which is based on different philosophical ideas.

This study discussing the Mu'tazilah has also received comments from prominent academics. One example of rejection of Mu'tazilah thought was expressed by Prof. Abu Zahw, a professor of hadith at the world-renowned Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. One of the dominant ideas in the book is Abu Zahw's response to history in addressing various issues from the past to the present. For example, this research focuses on the Mu'tazilah as a sect that caused hostility within the Islamic government and whose ideology attacked the *muhaddisin* at that time. Abu Zahw also states that one of the hadith books that contains many hadiths that counter the ambiguous Mu'tazilah ideology is the *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, whose hadiths will be explained in the following discussion.

## *Discussion of the Hadiths in Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal that Refute Mu'tazilah Ideology*

When discussing Imam Ahmad and the Mu'tazilah, one cannot ignore the *mihnah* incident, in which the ideology dominated by reason without revelation was fully supported by the rulers of the time. The truth and freedom of expression that were persecuted caused all those who opposed it, including the scholars, to feel its cruelty. Imam Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal, one of the imams of the madhhab and a *muhaddith*, was among the victims. His body was shackled, but his spirit remained steadfast. Implicitly, he narrated several hadiths that opposed the Mu'tazilah ideology in his *Al-Musnad*.

*Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, one of the scholarly works in the field of hadith written by Imam Ahmad *ibn* Hanbal, is considered one of the books that contributed to responding to the ideology put forward by the Mu'tazilah. As proof of this statement or opinion, the results of an analysis of it will be presented by citing relevant hadiths. This discussion will focus on the book *al-Fath ar-Rabbaniy li Tartib Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal asy-Syaibani* by Imam Ahmad ibn Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad albana as-Sa'ati. This book is a form of *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, organised by theme to make it easier to find the desired hadiths.

Based on the Mu'tazilah ideology of *Ushul al-Khamsah* and the creation of the Qur'an with all its ambiguities, it is only fitting that we, who adhere to the ideology of Sunnite, present our ideology as a counter to theirs, supplemented with several hadiths from *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* as strong arguments, as follows:

### *1. The Concept of Tauhid*

This concept of tawhid, as explained in the previous sub-chapter, focuses more on the knowledge of Allah, whether it is eternal or not. Sunnite argues that the knowledge of Allah is eternal because knowledge here is categorised as an attribute inherent in His eternal essence. God's knowledge is vast and comprehensive of all His creations. How could a creator not know what He has created? This is implied in the following hadith:

٤٧٦٦ - حَدَّثَنَا وَكَيْعٌ، حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ، عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: مَفَاتِيحُ الْغَيْبِ خَمْسٌ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا اللَّهُ {إِنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ السَّاعَةِ

وَيُنزِلُ الْغَيْثَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْأَرْحَامِ وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ مَّاذَا تَكْسِبُ غَدًا وَمَا تَدْرِي نَفْسٌ بِأَيِّ أَرْضٍ  
تَمُوتُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ { [لقمان: ٣٤].

Waki' has narrated to me, Sufyan has narrated to me from Abdilllah ibn Dinar from Ibn Umar, who said: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: "The keys to the unseen are five. No one knows them except Allah: (Indeed, Allah has knowledge of the Hour, sends down rain, and knows what is in the wombs. No one can know for certain what they will do tomorrow, nor where on earth they will die (Luqman, 31;34).” (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Jilid 8, 2001).

The hadith, which implicitly quotes one of the verses in Surah Luqman above, explains how vast Allah's knowledge is, such that He knows even things that have not yet happened (the unseen). If He already knows about the future, then it is impossible that He does not know everything before the creation of this universe. It is certain that His knowledge is eternal.

## 2. The Concept of al-Adl

This concept explains God's justice in the context of His will in determining human actions, whether good or bad. God can determine whether human actions are good or bad because that is His will. This is different from His approval. It may be that God determines an action but does not approve of it.

In the book al-Fath ar-Rabbani, there is a chapter or discussion related to *Bab sifatihī 'azza wa jalla wa tanzihihī 'an kullī naqshin*, which means a chapter that discusses the attributes of Allah the Almighty and that Allah is a being who is free from all imperfections (As-Sa'ati, 2015). If we return to the Mu'tazilah school of thought, which states that Allah is a being who is considered just if He only wills what is good, this statement makes us realise that Allah is not always good and has the same possibility of making mistakes. The following hadith states that Allah has the attribute of *qudrah*, so He has the right to determine His will without coercion or demands from any party:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ، حَدَّثَنَا حَيْوَةُ، وَابْنُ لُيَعَةَ، قَالَا: أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو هَانِيءٍ الْخَوْلَانِيُّ، أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ أَبَا عَبْدِ  
الرَّحْمَنِ الْجُبَلِيِّ، يَقُولُ: سَمِعْتُ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ عَمْرٍو، يَقُولُ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ  
يَقُولُ: " قَدَّرَ اللَّهُ الْمَقَادِيرَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَخْلُقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِخَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ.

*Abu Abdur Rahman narrated to me, Haywah and Ibn Lahi' ah narrated to me, both of them said: Abu Hani' al-Khaulany informed us that he heard Aba Abd ar-Rahman al-Hubaly say: I heard Abdullah ibn Amr say: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) say: "Allah decreed or willed His decrees before He created the heavens and the earth for fifty thousand years" (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 2001).*

If we analyse the first hadith mentioned, it means that Allah is a being who is completely free to do as He pleases; He creates whatever He wants, and this is Allah's prerogative. Allah created or predestined destiny itself long before He created the layered heavens and the earth over a period of fifty thousand years (Nawawi, 1996). Several other hadiths written in *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* relate to the issue of destiny:

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ، عَنْ مُجَالِدٍ، قَالَ: حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو الْوَدَّاءِ، عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي الْعَزْلِ، قَالَ: " اصْنَعُوا مَا بَدَأَ لَكُمْ، فَإِنَّ قَدَرَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا كَانَ.

*Yahya ibn Sa'id told us, from Mujalid, who said: Abu al-Waddak told me, from Abi Sa'id, from the Prophet, peace be upon him, in the time of 'azali, He said: 'Do as you please or as you need, for if Allah wills it, it will happen (Ahmad ibn Hanbal vol.17, 2001).*

The hadiths that have been briefly presented are a small part of the many hadiths found in *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* regarding the discussion of destiny, which is very different from the perspective captured by the Mu'tazilah sect. He elaborates on destiny and God's absolute power without any objection from anyone. As a sect or group that upholds the principle of Qadariyah and believes that God is not absolute in His will, they do not accept arguments that affirm creation and the principle of God and reject the absolute nature of God.

### 3. *The Qur'an is the Word of God*

The Qur'an is a manifestation of the eternal nature of Allah's speech. It is a guide for all of humanity. Of course, we must agree on a definition of what the Qur'an is. The Qur'an referred to here is not the manifestation of a series of *Hijaiyah* letters and the sounds of their recitation, but rather the essence of the Qur'an itself as a revelation from Allah conveyed by the Prophet Muhammad SAW, as if He Himself were giving us guidance through His speech.

Ahmad ibn Abd ar-Rahman ibn Muhammad al Banna as-Sa'ati in *Fathur Rabbani* provides a separate chapter discussing the uniqueness of the Qur'an. This is because there are so many hadiths contained in *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* that discuss the virtues and uniqueness of the Qur'an. Several hadiths will be explained as follows:

٧٠٤ - حَدَّثَنَا يَعْقُوبُ، حَدَّثَنَا أَبِي، عَنِ ابْنِ إِسْحَاقَ قَالَ: وَذَكَرَ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ كَعْبٍ الْقُرْظِيُّ، عَنِ الْحَارِثِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ الْأَعْوَرِ، قَالَ: قُلْتُ: لَأَتَيْنَ أَمِيرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ فَلَأَسْأَلَنَّهُ عَمَّا سَمِعْتُ الْعَشِيَّةَ. قَالَ: فَجِئْتُهُ بَعْدَ الْعِشَاءِ فَدَخَلْتُ عَلَيْهِ، فَذَكَرَ الْحَدِيثَ، قَالَ: ثُمَّ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: أَتَانِي جِبْرِيلُ، فَقَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ، إِنَّ أُمَّتَكَ مُخْتَلِفَةٌ بَعْدَكَ. قَالَ: فَقُلْتُ لَهُ: فَأَيْنَ الْمَخْرَجُ يَا جِبْرِيلُ؟ قَالَ: فَقَالَ: كِتَابُ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى، بِهِ يَقْصِمُ اللَّهُ كُلَّ جَبَّارٍ، مَنْ اعْتَصَمَ بِهِ نَجَا، وَمَنْ تَرَكَهُ هَلَكَ - مَرَّتَيْنِ - قَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ، وَلَيْسَ بِالْهَزْلِ، لَا تَخْتَلِفُهُ الْأَلْسُنُ، وَلَا تَفْئِ أَعَاجِيبُهُ، فِيهِ نَبَأُ مَا كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ، وَفَصْلٌ مَا بَيْنَكُمْ، وَخَبْرٌ مَا هُوَ كَائِنٌ بَعْدَكُمْ.

*From Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, he said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, say: "Jibril, peace be upon him, came to me and said: 'O Muhammad, indeed your ummah will differ (or have diverse understandings) after you.' I asked Jibril, "Then what is the solution, O Jibril?" Jibril replied, 'The Book of Allah, with which Allah will destroy every tyrant or stubborn person. Whoever holds fast to it will be saved, and whoever abandons it will perish' (Jibril repeated this twice). (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Volume 2, 2001).*

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: إِنِّي تَارِكٌ فِيكُمْ الثَّقَلَيْنِ، أَحَدُهُمَا أَكْبَرُ مِنَ الْآخَرِ: كِتَابُ اللَّهِ حَبْلٌ مَمْدُودٌ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ، وَعِزَّتِي أَهْلُ بَيْتِي، وَإِهْمَا لَنْ يَفْتَرِقَا حَتَّى يَرِدَا عَلَيَّ الْحَوْضِ.

*From Abu Said, who said: The Messenger of Allah, may peace and blessings be upon him, said: "Verily, I leave among you two weighty matters: the Book of Allah, which is a rope stretching from the heavens to the earth, and my family, who are my household. And verily, these two will never be separated until they come to me at a pond." (Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Volume 17, 2001).*

These two hadiths explain the importance and high status of the Qur'an. The Prophet explained that nothing can be used as a guide for life except the Qur'an. Even the Angel Jibril said in the first hadith that the Qur'an is the solution to all divisions and

diversity among the followers of the Prophet Muhammad after his death. The Qur'an is a unifying force, not the opposite. The label that the Qur'an is a created being has caused great conflict among Muslims. This is because some argue that this description has no consequences, while others consider it a demeaning assessment of the Qur'an that is not in accordance with its function and nature.

Upon deeper analysis, the Mu'tazilah sect's characterisation of the Qur'an as a created being cannot be justified. The Qur'an is a guide and foundation that serves as a reference in all aspects of life, soothes the heart, and is a form of worship for those who read it. How can the foundation of a creature's life be a creature? Wouldn't this lead to contempt and a low characterisation of the Qur'an, even though it is the word of Allah? In the chapter on the specificity of the Qur'an classified by as-Sa'ati, he further divides it into several sub-chapters, including the virtues or merits of the Qur'an, etiquette when reading the Qur'an, the descent of tranquillity and angels when reading the Qur'an, what comes when reading the Qur'an in a *tartil* manner, the Prophet's recitation, and others.

Such are some of the ideologies of the Sunnite along with the *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* hadiths that answer the confusion of Mu'tazilah ideology. Most of their ideologies stem from their rejection of the attributes of Allah that are inherent in His Essence, thus giving rise to extreme ideologies as described above. The above discussion can be summarised in the following table:

No	Mu'tazilah	Sunnite
1	The knowledge of Allah is not eternal because knowledge for them is not an attribute, but rather knowledge (object)	The knowledge of Allah is eternal because knowledge for them is one of the attributes that must exist and is inherent in His essence (predicate)
2	Allah only wills good deeds, not evil ones. Evil deeds are purely the will of humans	Allah has complete control over all the deeds of His servants. In fact, He has already determined them before creating everything
3	The Qur'an is a creature because it is a collection of Hijaiyyah letters that produce sound when read, in the sense	The Qur'an is clear evidence of the nature of Allah's words themselves. The Qur'an is not merely something to be

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that the Qur'an is only the result of Allah's words (object).	read, but also a guide, as if Allah were directing us through His words (Predicate)
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Table 1: comparative between Mu'tazilah and Sunnite

In this study, it is deemed unnecessary to conduct *takhrij al-hadith* as is generally done in hadith research. This is based on the fact that *Al-Musnad of Ahmad* is a book that appeared earlier than other well-known hadith books classified as kutubut tis'ah. Furthermore, the focus or output of this study is not an analysis of the quality of the hadith, but rather the important contribution made by Ahmad ibn Hanbal as a response to the Mu'tazilah, considering that Imam Ahmad was one of those who experienced injustice firsthand, as explained in the previous discussion.

### *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal as an Instrument of Intellectual Resistance*

After tracing the historical background of the emergence of the Mu'tazilah and identifying thematic hadiths in *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* related to theological issues, further analysis must be directed toward a deeper understanding of the position of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal within the intellectual dynamics of the third century Hijri. His codification of hadith cannot be understood merely as an effort to preserve transmitted reports, but rather as a form of intellectual resistance against the hegemony of Mu'tazilite rationalism, which at that time enjoyed political legitimacy under state authority.

Methodologically, the structure of *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* reflects highly conscious and strategic choices. Hadiths concerning predestination (*qadar*), the attributes of God, and the virtues of the Qur'an are positioned as a counter-authority to the Mu'tazilite theological framework that relies on dialectical *kalām* and speculative rationality influenced by Greek philosophy. While the Mu'tazilah elevated reason as the supreme arbiter of theological truth, Imam Ahmad asserted the supremacy of transmission (*riwāyah*) as the authoritative source of Islamic doctrine. From Abu Zahw's perspective, the hadiths contained in the *Al-Musnad* function as a "theological fortress" that protects the Muslim community from ideological penetration that would relegate revelation to a subordinate position. By presenting hadiths concerning *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (the keys of the unseen), Imam Ahmad implicitly affirms the inherent limitations of

human reason in the face of God's absolute knowledge, thereby directly challenging the Mu'tazilite claim regarding the sovereignty of reason as the primary instrument of theological knowledge.

On the theological level, *Al-Musnad of Ahmad* may also be read as an attempt to deconstruct the Mu'tazilite *Uṣūl al-Khamsah* through a textual approach. The most pronounced tension appears in the concept of *al-'adl* (divine justice). The Mu'tazilah argued that God is "obliged" to act justly in order to be considered just, a view that presupposes the existence of a moral standard external to God's own will. In contrast, hadiths concerning the determination of destiny, such as the report of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr regarding the inscription of destiny fifty thousand years before the creation of the heavens and the earth offer a perspective that affirms the absolute sovereignty of the divine will. For Imam Ahmad, divine justice is not measured by human moral rationality, but by God's absolute power and wisdom (*qudrah*), such that the relationship between divine will and human action is understood within a framework of submission rather than rational contract.

Similarly, in the issue of *kalāmullāh*, Imam Ahmad's rejection of the doctrine of the createdness of the Qur'an (*khalq al-Qur'ān*) was not merely theological but also ideological. The compilation of hadiths affirming the Qur'an as *kalāmullāh* and not a created entity constituted an effort to construct a collective identity for Ahl al-Sunnah amid the political pressures of the *mihnah*. Within this framework, the Qur'an is positioned as an attribute inherent to the Divine Essence, not as a new entity separate from God. This approach reflects a unique combination of scriptural consistency and philosophical awareness, without falling into excessive rational speculation.

The socio-intellectual implications of Imam Ahmad's stance become even more apparent when *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* is read in light of his personal experiences during imprisonment. At this point, hadith functions not only as a normative text but also as a lived practice (Living Hadith). Imam Ahmad's steadfastness in the face of physical torture endowed the hadiths he transmitted with moral and symbolic legitimacy. His suffering reinforces the narrative that *Al-Musnad of Ahmad ibn Hanbal* is not merely a hadith encyclopedia, but a politico-religious manifesto that challenged state authority and official ideology. By continuing to transmit hadiths that contradicted

the doctrines of the ruling power from the reign of al-Ma'mūn to that of al-Wāthiq, Imam Ahmad succeeded in building grassroots resistance within the Muslim community, which ultimately contributed to the end of the *mihnah* during the reign of al-Mutawakkil.

In synthesis, the conflict between Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the Mu'tazilah may be understood as a prototype of the enduring tension between revelation and reason in the history of Islamic thought. Abu Zahw's view linking the *Al-Musnad* to the rejection of Mu'tazilite theological ambiguity suggests that intellectual differences in Islam have not always been resolved through conceptual synthesis, but rather through the strengthening of each party's methodological foundations. Imam Ahmad chose the path of reinforcing *isnād* and *matn* as epistemological foundations in order to ensure that Islamic identity remains grounded in the originality of the prophetic message, rather than in philosophical speculation that is transient and subject to change.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the codification of hadith in *al-Musnad* of Ahmad ibn Hanbal functions not only as an effort to preserve the Prophetic tradition but also as a deliberate form of intellectual and theological resistance to Mu'tazilite rationalism during the period of the *mihnah* (inquisition). By prioritizing transmission-based knowledge (*riwāyah*) over speculative reason, and by presenting hadiths concerning God's knowledge, predestination, divine justice, and the uncreatedness of the Qur'an, Ahmad ibn Hanbal constructed a coherent Sunni epistemology grounded in revelation and submission to the absolute will of God. His perseverance in the face of political pressure and persecution further reinforced the role of hadith as an authoritative source of revelation, endowing it with strong legitimizing power. Accordingly, *al-Musnad* may be understood as both a scholarly and socio-religious manifesto that contributed significantly to the consolidation of Sunnite and reflects the enduring tension between reason and revelation in the history of Islamic thought.

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