

Substance and Things

Dualism and Unity in the Early Islamic Cultural Field

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as a thesis for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies

In **January 2012**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to sample a number of disparate texts from the early Islamic cultural field to explore the shared grounds or themes that bind them together. The focus of the sampled texts and their analysis is the different relations between God and the real things of this world.

The method that is applied in the selection of the texts of this research relies on Pierre Bourdieu's approach to the study of cultural production. It assumes a relational and dynamic intellectual field which creates interlinked differences and similarities. This is the reason for sampling texts which are assumed to be reasonably marginal to the main cultural establishment.

The *kalām* of the early stage, exemplified by the texts of the Zaydī al-Qāsim al-Rassī and the eastern Ibādīs, is found to emphasise the radical separation between the creator and the created. The development of this relation, which is explored through an intertextual reading of Qur'ānic exegesis, bridges the fissure, between creator and created, through the process of re-interpreting the terms of creation. The act of creation itself becomes an act of transformation, and the objects of creation become eternal 'non-existent things' that acquire the quality of existence. In the philosophical works of Jābir Ibn Ḥayyān, the things of this world are also reduced to transformations within the one substance that encompasses the intelligible and the material world.

The results of this research show that there is a great degree of diffusion of ideas in this early stage of Islamic culture, from an assumed centre to the margins, and vice versa. The general tendencies in the texts considered reflect, on the one hand, a critique of multiplicity of principles, particularly dualism, and an emphasis on God's unity, through different interpretations of *tawḥīd*. On the other hand, the sought unity itself established God's radical transcendence from the real world, thus leading to another form of dualism dividing the world and the absolute other. The process of opposition to dualism seems to have eventually produced two forms of affirming and defining unity. Both forms define the existent things in terms of substance (*jawhar*), however, the *kalām* model expresses it in atomistic terms whilst the alchemical model of Jābir expresses it in terms of a hylomorphic model. One of these redefines the meanings of the existent and the non-existent things in term of subsistence, and the other, develops the idea of a single substance with different gradation in being.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Sajjad Rizvi for all his support, advice and directions throughout the last few years. I also wish to thank Professor Peter Adamson and Professor Ian Netton for their valuable suggestions and recommendations. I would also like to thank Adam Green, for helping me with the proof reading process, and Estelle Rosenfeld for her great support and help in finalising this work. Thank you also to Mu'assasat Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' al-'Āmma for providing me with some manuscripts and to the British Library, SOAS library, UCL library and Warburg library for allowing me to use their materials. Finally, I would like to thank my parents and my brother for their patience and unconditional support.

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Introduction

Before approaching the specific question of this research, we were interested in the question of whether or not the notion of a culture ought to change the way we read and interpret texts produced within a specific field of cultural production. This interest was triggered by Gutas' work on Islamic culture, which clearly shows a strong relation between the intellectual production and the context of this production.¹ It demonstrates the presence of a strong tie between an emerging community's practical needs and its cultural production in the various intellectual fields. Also, the notion of culture, in Gutas' work, forces a new way of looking at the question of translation prior to its organisation into a specific movement, and it challenges the nature of the development of the early Islamic intellectual field.² This strongly influenced our idea that a text produced within a particular field of cultural production ought to be read differently from a text assumed to be outside such a field.

The search for how to approach a text produced within a particular field led us to the works of Fritz Ringer and Pierre Bourdieu. According to their approach, the idea of cultural production and the way to study it, necessitate going beyond the category of an individual author and the particular idea, to what we may call a field of relations. This means that individual works may be better understood, or differently understood, through other works that form part of the field of cultural production. Due to the importance of the question of how to approach a text, we decided to include in the appendix a presentation of Bourdieu's approach, along with a critique of some of the major alternatives in the study of the history of ideas.

¹ Gutas (1998).

² Gutas (1998) & Saliba (2007).

The actual subject matter of this research emerged from an interest in the question of being and the nature of the existent as it is constructed in the Islamic cultural field. One of the earliest concepts that influenced the progression of this research was that of ‘thingness’, which we had come across in Wisnovsky’s article on the subject.³ The interest was primarily due to the fact that it was a term that linked, in some schools, between two ways of being, being in the mind of the creator and being in the concrete reality.

The question of ‘substance and things’ is the question of the nature of what exists in the real world. This is not simply an interest in the physics of the natural world, since the focus in this research is primarily on the origin of the existing things. In most cases, this appears as an investigation of the states of being that precede the things’ becoming existent and subject to generation and corruption. All of the texts used here assume that the transitions between the different states of being are due to the acts of an agent, or more specifically, God. However, in the last section of our work, nature and humans are also considered active players in changing these states despite acknowledging God as the ultimate principle.

Finally, the ideas of unity and dualism, which appear in the title of this research, are in many ways the outcome of the process of combining a method of sampling texts from the different parts of the cultural field and the investigation of the question of the nature of substance and things. Unity of the principle, or *tawḥīd*, underlies all the texts that we have sampled. They all show and reflect a creative process that attempts to confirm this unity and to find different meanings of this unity through

³ Wisnovsky (2000).

a process of reinterpretation. What complements the process of defining unity is the parallel process of denying multiplicity of principles. This is most evident through the polemics against dualism that are clearly discussed in the first and the last chapters. However, the process of defining *tawhīd* and the anti-dualist polemics show that it is difficult to sustain the belief in the unity of the principle. The reason for the difficulty in maintaining and defending this idea seems to be caused by the creation of a new dualism that separates a world of pure light from a world of mixture. We believe that the arguments that were used against the dualists became the ground of the challenge to the new dualism caused by the principle of *tanzīh*, or God's absolute transcendence from the rest of the world. One may suggest that it is the struggle with the other that forced the continuous processes of introducing, defining and redefining the concepts of: things, substance and unity.

I. Theoretical and methodological grounds

One of the other reasons for pursuing a comparative study of different schools of thought in early Islamic history sprang from a challenging idea proposed by Katz. In his work on mysticism, Katz emphasised the importance of context in the study of any mystical experience, and the denial of a universal singular experience that is shared by different religious communities.⁴ This clearly disputes the perspective on the mystical experience of the divine but does not necessarily challenge the experience itself. The importance of Katz's view is that any experience, no matter how similar it is to others, even when classified under a particular unifying concept,

⁴ For Katz's constructivism, see Katz (1978), pp. 22-74. For some of the critiques see Smith (1987), and King, S. (1988). For their discussion, see Katz, Smith & King (1988).

cannot be understood but in the context in which it occurred.⁵ Whilst not totally convinced of the complete separation of these human experiences, we began to pay closer attention to the discourse of influences in the studies of Islamic mysticism as well as the other intellectual fields.

It is possible that the discourse of influence can be taken to reflect some kind of grounding to Islamic thought in the pre-existing cultures of the regions that were taken over by the Islamic empire or were in close contact with it. However, the discourse of influence as well as the emphasis on the dichotomous relation between Sufism and the rational mode of thinking, which was also highlighted by the different schools of the time, may emphasise the old notion of Islamic culture as merely the preserver of old ideas. The diverse schools become in this case mere isolated pockets or reservoirs of knowledge whose role is that of collecting and reproducing ancient wisdoms, be it Greek, Christian, Zoroastrian, Hindu, or any other.

What is emphasised in this study is the relational nature that exists between the established schools, whether it is viewed from the point of similarities in modes of thinking or simply from the perspective of common ideas between coexisting schools. This by no means excludes the influences of other traditions, ancient or contemporaneous, what it does do however is to treat them as other members of this relational coexistence. A methodological approach such as this will, we hope, emphasise the notion of culture in its relational and dialectical processes between the similar and the different.

⁵ The context of the Sufi experience becomes apparent in our chapter on the Qur'ānic commentaries.

In order to deal with the theoretical basis for the Islamic relational cultural field, we explore in the appendix section of this thesis some of the main theoretical approaches to the history of ideas that are critiqued by Pierre Bourdieu through his notions of 'field' and 'habitus'. This will help us understand the reasons for assuming a relational approach in our study of the Islamic cultural production. Since a critical examination of the development and the content of Bourdieu's approach is not directly relevant to the analysis of the individual sections of this research, we briefly explore in the next section the directly relevant idea of 'sampling texts' proposed by the historian Fritz Ringer who relies on Bourdieu's work for the extraction of this methodology.

I.1 Ringer and sampling

The purpose of this research is not to find a preconscious element that created and shaped the intellectual field in the Islamic world, between the third and fifth century (A.H.). Rather, the exposition made in the appendix, particularly in Foucault's and Bourdieu's approach, emphasises the relational basis of intellectual works. Texts from this period will not be read as closed texts internally self-sufficient and products of a unique subject, nor will they be read as mere accumulative reproductions of past texts. Historical texts, which belonged to the Greeks, Zoroastrians or Hindus are assumed, in this research, to be part of the potentialities specific to each of the positions occupied by the intellectuals of this period.

If a relational ground is assumed to be the generative mechanism that leads intellectuals to produce their works, then it is possible -and that is before one arrives to the common, theoretically constructed and projected laws that regulated a particular intellectual field- to discern this ground in any network of texts from this period. Thus, it is necessary, as Fritz Ringer suggests and recommends, to “sample” texts belonging to a particular community of intellectuals in order to understand the relational nature of these works as well as the works themselves. To reconstruct this relational nature of cultural production, Ringer writes:

[W]e must learn to understand a cluster of texts as a whole or as a set of relationships, rather than as a sum of individual statements. One way to do this is to “sample” the literature produced in a certain environment over a specific period of time.⁶

He also recommends taking the ‘outstanding’ intellectual figures of the period under consideration to be “guides” to their times since they were more attuned to their environment than other participants in the field of cultural production, and because “they make explicit what in most of their contemporaries remains implicit.”⁷ There is, however, another view regarding the nature of intellectuals chosen for a particular period of study. Lovejoy proposes, in his methodological introduction, to choose the ‘minor’ writers or intellectuals of a particular era as they are more attuned to the more general and prevalent background specific to an age. The more ‘outstanding’ intellectuals are seen to be, on the one hand, representatives of lasting

⁶ Ringer (1990), p. 275.

⁷ Ibid., p. 278. Martin Jay follows this line with “They help, in other words, to form the prejudices of our own habitus.” Jay (1990), p. 316.

past ideas, and on the other, creators of ideas that are more lasting in time, or we may say more reflective of the human condition.⁸

As it would be practically impossible to survey all fields of knowledge with the various specialisations and the different areas of concerns, Ringer suggests that “almost any considered tactic of selection is better than no tactic at all.”⁹ Therefore, we propose to concentrate on a specific concept or idea that had been of great concern to the different schools of thought during the selected period, or in Bourdieu’s and Ringer’s terminologies this would be “sampling” from the different “positions” of the intellectual field of that period. The idea, which is to be the focus of this research and which has to be excavated by assuming a relational intellectual field in the background, is God’s act of creation and the nature of the created. Texts dealing with the subject of creation and existence are to be sampled from different schools of thought, particularly those that appeared to have strenuous relations during this period, by this we mean the philosophers, the theologians and the Sufis.

Before proceeding with the sampling work, one should not expect to find a shared and common view amongst those who are taken under consideration since, as is shown in the appendix, an intellectual field is a field unifying different forces struggling to maintain and transform different power capitals. It must be remembered that the habitus and the field,¹⁰ through their dialectical relation, order and regulate the different struggles and create a “consensus in the dissensus.”¹¹

⁸ Lovejoy (2001), pp. 20-21.

⁹ Ringer (1990), p. 276.

¹⁰ See the appendix for the meaning of these terms.

¹¹ Vandenberghe (1999), p. 52.

We may also keep in mind Jay's remark that the complexity of a text may not always be resolved into the relation of field and habitus, he writes:

[P]recisely because texts can be seen as the site of contesting impulses, they may well be understood as emerging out of several competing or overlapping fields rather than merely instantiating one unified habitus.¹²

We ought to be careful not to force the diverse contexts, which coexist within the same space and time, into a unity. In some cases, it would be more appropriate to attribute this unity to the contextualising agent, the researcher, than to the real object of study who is in a state of flux.

II. Research organisation and structure

As the theoretical ground of our research allows for the possibility of sampling texts from different parts of a cultural field, we had to decide on the intellectual fields we ought to sample from. The intention was to sample from as many fields as possible, and as distant from each other as possible. The practicality of this method, however, proved to be the primary restrictive element in the selection. The initial aim was to search in the philosophical field, the theological, the scientific, the literary and the linguistic, the Qur'ānic commentaries, the field of magic and astrology, and finally of the field of mysticism. Not only is the above list suggestive of a difficult task but also, the realisation that each one of these fields encompasses numerous competing divisions -which exist with varied and changing intensities within the different communities- renders the task impossible.

¹² Jay (1990) p. 316.

Before narrowing our options, we decided to include in this research schools or figures that are neither completely ignored in the field of Islamic studies nor central to it. Thus with regard to the theological choices we decided to focus on the Zaydī and the Ibādī schools, whilst naturally keeping the Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī schools in the background of our analysis. Within each of these ‘secondary’ fields, we chose some prominent figures to be, as Ringer describes them: ‘our guides to the period’.

With al-Rassī, whom we chose for his early contribution to the theological field, we find arguments against naturalism, dualism and Christianity. These are arguments for the existence of an agent and the singular nature associated with him. The arguments focus on the idea of the oneness of God and His absolute difference from his created things, *tanzīh* (de-anthropomorphism). This chapter also reflects the general intellectual background against which the main Islamic theological concerns had emerged.

In the chapter on Ibādī theology, we encounter some of the same basic grounds of arguments but we expand to the other concerns of the theological schools that are related to our topic. In this case, we study a previously ignored source for the study of atoms (*al-jawhar al-fard*) in *kalām*. In this chapter we study the fundamental nature of the existent things, but we also introduce the question of the nature of the non-existent (is it a thing or not a thing?). The second important discussion in this chapter is regarding the names and attributes associated with God and the question of His unity. Again, this chapter is related to the idea of the oneness of the agent but, this time, we find beginnings of a diminution in the gap between Him and the world.

We also decided to study the field of Qur'ānic commentary for two reasons; primarily the centrality of the book within the community under consideration, for no system of belief was accepted as Islamic if it contradicted the core and binding text of the community. This, we believe, necessitated the development of the hermeneutic field and the commentaries from which we have sampled our texts. Second to this important reason, is the fact that under this unifying text we find in its understanding, by the community, the different shades of the different branches of knowledge, and for that matter, of the different sub-communities. Under this rubric, we find the general scholar commentator, the Sufi, the theologian and the historian. This particular field is the ideal field where all other fields must meet, and therefore, must interact and struggle with each other. In some sense, it is the battle field which must be crossed, which unifies and differentiates the moment one steps into its grounds.

In the chapter on Qur'ānic commentary we explore different texts related to the fundamental questions encountered in the other two just mentioned. The emphasis in this part is, however, on the idea of the pre-existent things. How they appear in the understanding of the community, and how they are transformed in the language of the Sufis. Our inclusion of the Sufi texts in this section is to attempt to locate some of the key Sufi experiential states of being within the field of Qur'ānic commentaries and the questions of this research. We also develop in this chapter a key idea that emerges in the first two chapters, this is the concept of subsistence (*thubūt*) which, expands the notion of being to include the existent as well as the

non-existent. In this section, we also encounter the themes of multiplicity, division and finitude, which define the subsistent things.

Our last choice was the Jābirian corpus which has ignited a number of studies that are primarily concerned with its authorship. Two things about this corpus are of great interest to us. Firstly, the absence of the unifying author, as it is not known whether there are one or many authors. The second thing of importance is the fact that this corpus contains the scientific element, the philosophical and the mystical (as well as elements of magic and astrology, which shall not be considered in this research).

In this last chapter, the largest section of this research, we explore the different manifestations of the term and the idea of substance (*jawhar*), as it appears in the works of Jabir Ibn Ḥayyān. The clear struggle to identify the meaning and the nature of substance reveals in this section the struggling nature of a mind (or minds) to relate the One of the earlier chapters with the multiplicity of existent things.

Within each chapter, we attempt to uncover a particular idea as it develops within the bounds of an author and a text, and only when these restrictions are exhausted do we move to another text or author. In the chapter on Zaydī theology, we remain with one author (al-Qāsim al-Rassī) and explore different texts separately, as each one deals with our area of concern from a different perspective. In the chapter on Ibādī theology, we start with a particular author who presents us with different ideas that seek to be elaborated and explored with complementary ideas. In this

case, we expand to other authors and texts within the same community. In the chapter on *tafsīr*, we present different interrelated ideas from different authors. The separation into different authorship is eventually collapsed as the integration of ideas and their development becomes dominant. Finally, in the chapter on Jābir's philosophy, we follow the same method, which, in this case, becomes more like al-Rasī's chapter. Each one of his texts is studied separately in order to develop specific ideas and once that is achieved, the separation is collapsed as the ideas become interrelated, either by complementing or contradicting each other. Attempted in this method is to maintain a developing process through unification and opposition from a unit-idea to a unit-author to a unit-school and finally to a unit field.

Chapter One:

Al-Qāsim al-Rassī

Introduction

In this first chapter, we introduce the theological side of the ideas of creation, and the nature of what there is. To do this, the works attributed to one of the earliest Islamic theologians who dealt with this matter, is explored and investigated. The Zaydī collection of work considered to belong to the imām al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm al-Rassī (d. 246/860) provides us with a useful resource in tracing the development of the *kalām* field, and more specifically of the question of creation within this field. Madelung's work on the imām challenges the authenticity of some of the works attributed to this theologian, based on external transmission, style and content but also due to the fact that these works reflect a great Mu'tazilī influence.¹ Nonetheless, these inauthentic texts are still presumed by Madelung to either belong to his sons or to members of his school, which, for us, means that these works were still composed within a generation of al-Rassī's time. Abrahamov, on the other hand, defends the authenticity of these works, based on the similarity of the arguments found in the authentic and the spurious works.² The inclusion of such texts in al-Rassī's corpus, however, leads Abrahamov to affirm the Mu'tazila's great influence on this theologian. Regardless of the two sides of the argument, Madelung's position does not change or challenge our approach to the texts in this research. The methodological ground of this research has pushed the boundaries of our interest to go beyond the individual author,³ so the fact that some texts might not have been written by the same author, but by a number of authors who were

¹ Madelung (1965); (1989); (1991); (1992).

² Abrahamov (1986); (1990).

³ See the appendix.

working from within the same school and within a very close period, is acceptable and sufficient. The methodological arguments, discussed in the appendix, permit considering the work explored below to have been produced by the same field, which in our opinion could not have been immune from the Mu'tazilī influence.⁴

⁴ The debate on the Mu'tazilī influence appears to be on the degree of this influence. In Madelung's case this is minimal and in Abrahamov's it reaches comparison with other Mu'tazila who differed in opinions amongst themselves. Abrahamov eventually considers al-Rassī to be a Mu'tazilī, on the ground that the Mu'tazilī al-Khayyāt classifies a Mu'tazilī as anyone who believes in the five principles, but more specifically three of them: God's unity, His justice and His fulfilling the promise and threat, and these al-Rassī is shown to have upheld. See Abrahamov (1990), pp. 52-55. On the other hand, it is not clear how Madelung's emphasis on the lack of doctrinal unity amongst the Zaydiyya, at the time of al-Rassī, serves as an argument against influence (Madelung (1989), p. 41), and it is not clear why concealing the belief that the Qur'ān is created at one stage (Ibid., p. 45) and expressly stating this at a later stage (ibid., p. 47), serves as an example of inauthenticity. Madelung's position is summarised by: "Al-Qāsim cannot be considered as essentially influenced by Mu'tazilī school doctrine and as attempting to introduce it among the Zaydiyya. He agreed with the Mu'tazila on several of their basic principles." (Ibid., p. 46). The theoretical basis of this research distances our concerns from this debate, which on one side isolates and limits al-Rassī, only to find him influenced by Christian theology, which "does not mean that al-Qāsim did not firmly remain a Muslim and a Zaydī." (Madelung (1992), p. 268). Both cases (Abrahamov's and Madelung's) appear to be based on the premise that influence by a school means to an extent belonging to a school, rather than simply belonging to the same intellectual field. Al-Rassī is an intellectual in his own right, who naturally exerts an influence on the field itself to which he belongs, something which appears to be ignored in both sides of the argument. This is odd considering the degree of sophistication in al-Rassī's arguments in the 'authentic' and 'spurious' works (Reynolds in his study of 'Abd al-Jabbār's critique of the Christians suggests that the arguments in al-Rassī's 'authentic work', *al-Radd 'alā al-naṣārā* are more philosophical in nature than 'Abd al-Jabbār's and al-Jahiz's, Reynolds (2004), p. 149). If Madelung emphasises the lack of doctrinal unity amongst the Zaydiyya of that time (Madelung (1989), p. 41) then it is worth mentioning that the contact, if not the relation between the Zaydiyya and the Mu'tazila, goes back to the origins of these movements. In al-Shahrastānī and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār we find an indication of this relation that takes us back to the period of their constitution. Al-Shahrastānī exaggerates this relation to the extent of stating that Zayd b. 'Alī (d. 122/739) was a student of Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (d. 131/748) despite his disapproving views on 'Alī's wars. This also seems to be the reason for the disagreements between Zayd and his Brother al-Bāqir Muḥammad b. 'Alī. He then adds to this that all of Zayd's followers were Mu'tazila (Al-Shahrastānī, abī al-Faḥ, *Al-Milal wal-niḥal*, (1981), pp. 66-67, henceforth *Milal*). In *Faḍl al-i'tizāl wa ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* of 'Abd al-Jabbār one finds another link between Zayd and Wāṣil, this appears as his crude language with Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (sixth Shi'a imām d. 148/765) following their meeting with Waṣil in which Ja'far asked Wāṣil to repent from his defamation of the imāms. Zayd appears to have said to Ja'far: "only your envy towards us has stopped you from following him." The 'us', in this sentence appears to refer to Wāṣil and his group which include Zayd b. 'Alī ('Abd al-Jabbār, *Faḍl al-i'tizāl wa ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, (1986), p. 239). This event is also reproduced along with the report that Zayd only disagreed with the Mu'tazila on the question of *al-manzila bayn al-manzilatayn* (the intermediate position) in Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* (1961), pp. 33, 34. In an M.A. study on the influence of Mu'tazilī thought on al-Khawārij and al-Zaydiyya, 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Ḥifzī divides the Zaydī relations with the Mu'tazila into few stages, the first of which he describes as an inclination towards the Mu'tazila for the historical support the Zaydiyya had received during the time of Zayd bin 'Alī. This inclination has, according to him, increased after the establishment of the Baghdādī Mu'tazilī branch at the hand of Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir who comes from al-Kūfa, where there was a number of growing

Abrahamov, in his extensive introduction to *kitāb* (henceforth *k.*) *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* and in his paper, dealt with the question of the authenticity of the works of al-Rassī and the question of the proofs of God’s existence, which he considers to be variations from the ‘Argument from Design’. We decided to return to some of the same works and more because we feel that, his discussion of the proofs does not give enough space for some of the important arguments to unfold and develop. It is important to see how the ideas themselves appear more developed in some places than others and how they serve as foundations for other arguments, which still point in the same direction, namely, proving the unity of the creator or *tawḥīd*.

What is also of great importance is that these epistles reflect the context that necessitated the development of the increasingly more sophisticated arguments of *kalām*. The first work considered in this chapter is set as a debate between al-Rassī and a naturalist whom he supposedly met during his stay in Egypt between 199/815 and 211/826. This debate reflects the reasoning that a theologian of this period

Shī‘a movements, and the members of this branch were named according to al-Khayyāṭ ‘Shī‘ī Mu‘tazila’. This idea is also mentioned in Madelung (1965), pp. 41, 42 and 211, and in Madelung (1989), p. 43. ‘Abd al-Laṭīf starts his second phase of the Zaydī Mu‘tazilī relation with al-Qāsim who starts to formulate ideas in accord with the Mu‘tazila yet without adopting all their ideas, this was towards the end of his life when he settled in al-Rass. For the other stages and the nature of the relations between the two movements see Al-Ḥifzī (2000), pp. 401-459, (this is a useful research yet slightly polemical in tone).

All this brings us to al-Nāṭiq bil Ḥaḡ’s testimony (d. 424/1032). He reports this story regarding an encounter between al-Rassī and the Mu‘tazilī Ja‘far b. Ḥarb:

وحدثني أبو العباس الحسيني رحمه الله قال سمعت أبا بكر محمد بن إبراهيم المقانعي، يذكر عن أبي القاسم عبد الله بن أحمد بن محمود، عن مشائخه أن جعفر بن حرب دخل على القاسم بن إبراهيم عليه السلام فجراه في دقائق الكلام، فلما خرج من عنده قال لأصحابه: أين كنا عن هذا الرجل، فوالله ما رأيت مثله!؛

Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abdallāh is the famous Baghdādī Mu‘tazilī Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī known as al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931). If this is a genuine report then this is not only evidence of an encounter, but of possible influence or impression in the opposite direction, as we noted earlier. Finally, we consider the work of *Munāẓara ma‘a mulḥid* to be on the same level of sophistication as the responses against the Christians and Ibn al-Muqaffa’ which are considered authentic by Madelung (al-Nāṭiq bil Ḥaḡ also includes these three in his list of al-Rassī’s works. See Al-Nāṭiq bil Ḥaḡ, Yaḡya al-Hārūnī, *Al-Ifāda fī tārikh al-‘imma al-sāda*, (1996)). Despite our lack of interest in the question of authenticity we think the above are good reasons for believing that all the works considered and discussed in this chapter are al-Rassī’s.

would have had to use in his arguments against those who found no need for the existence of a creator, and, found nature to be self sufficient in providing the natural causes for the existence of this world. Al-Rassī is then presented in his discussion of the beliefs of the Christians. What is particularly striking in this section is the discussion of the origins of the Christian belief in the trinity, which appears to serve as an argument in itself against such belief. Following this, we present the work of al-Rassī in which he presents a critique of Ibn al-Muqaffa' and the dualist principles of the Manicheans (Mānawiyya). By simply looking at these three sections and their subjects alone, one can see the direction of the arguments in general. All three works are set to prove the existence of a creator through the denial of His multiplicity and the proof of His oneness.

What is important to remember throughout this chapter is that the arguments here presented are an attempt at understanding the nature of the created, and from it, to derive an understanding of the creator. Al-Rassī emphasises the idea that any knowledge of God is rational (*'aqliyya*) and that it depends on an affirmation and assertion of God's existence, and a negation of any similitude between Him and any other; this is the intended meaning of *tawḥīd*. Through this negative knowledge, al-Rassī asserts a radical and absolute difference between God and all things that are categorised as other. One must negate in thought any similitude between God's self (*dhāt*) and all His created beings in every respect and in every meaning. The realisation of such a unification of God, that is, in the rational realisation of the uniqueness of His being as one, ought to prevent one from imagining any other thing with God, similar in nature, father or son, as is the case with the Christians, or

opposite, like darkness in the case of the dualists. Any comparison of form, attribute or any quality, leads to false knowledge, *shirk* and the annulment of *tawhīd*.⁵

To know God for al-Rassī is thus to know His absolute [ontological] difference with all that is defined and limited by perception and intelligibility, since no sense-perception can capture His qualities, and no intellectual measure can encompass, confine and bound His being in measure and comparison. All measures, boundaries and definitions are said of all that is other, the things that are the subject of our inquiry. The created beings that are defined and limited, come into being at a beginning and cease to be at an end since their existence is bound and limited by time.⁶

Due to the importance of the arguments explored throughout this section, and due to the fact that most of the works have not properly been presented in the English language,⁷ we decided to make this chapter an attempt to present and understand al-Rassī's arguments themselves.⁸

⁵ See al-Rassī, *Uṣūl al-ʿAdl wal Tawhīd*, (2001).

⁶ Al-Rassī, *Kitāb al-ʿAdl wal Tawhīd*, (2001), pp. 583, 584.

⁷ With the exception of *k. al-Mustarshid*, which is in Abrahamov (1996). (Henceforth *Mustarshid*)

⁸ This is the reason for choosing to include all the important quotations in the footnotes as this would allow us more space to try to develop an understanding of the ideas themselves as they are developed in the texts. Also, with regard to the presentation of al-Rassī's arguments in each of the epistle, we will follow the order in which they appear in the original work.

I. *Response to a naturalist*⁹

In this epistle, which is based on an encounter with a naturalist or *mulhid*,¹⁰ one finds an interesting early debate between a Muslim scholar and an unknown naturalist who appears to be grounded in a philosophical tradition, or at least comfortable with challenging al-Rassī with philosophical arguments. Since we also find a reference to a similar encounter with the Shīī imām Ja‘far al Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), we may assume that these references to Egyptian naturalists is either a reference to true individuals influenced by the philosophical school of Alexandria, or that they are fictional characters created to symbolise this school. Such encounters, true or not, become symbolic defeats of the philosophical mind at the hand of the wise imām.¹¹

In the first section of this text, the naturalist demands a proof for the existence (*inniya*) of the creator.¹² Hence, the interrogator starts his challenge with

⁹ Al-Rassī, *Munāzara Ma‘a Mulhid*, (2001). (Henceforth *Munāzara*). For Abrahamov’s discussion on this work see Abrahamov (1986), pp. 281-284.

¹⁰ “Mulhid” in the original title is a term which derives from the Qur’ānic use which means deviate. It appears to be primarily applied in the sense of deviating from or leaving a group. With the Umawiyyīn it was applied to those who desert the community and rebel against the ‘legitimate’ rulers. It is applied to the Khawārij, but also by the Khawārij to denote the Umawī rulers. In *Kalām*, it came to mean: heretic, deviator in religious beliefs, materialist, sceptic and atheist. Al-Ash‘arī also seems to apply it to the Mu‘aṭṭila (who deny God’s attributes), Zanādiqa, and thanawiyya. Mulhid, in this epistle, is according to Madelung “a religious sceptic inclining to atheism.” See Madelung’s entry in *EF* under the entry “Mulhid” for the development of this term.

¹¹ In al-Kulaynī’s (d. 329/ 940) *‘k. al-Tawhīd’* in *Uṣūl al-Kāfī* we hear of a *Zindīq* (also some form of *mulhid* in this case) from Egypt, whose name is given as ‘Abd al-Malik Abū ‘Abdallah. He, however, sought Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq in Makka and Madīna. The arguments in the discussion are much simpler in nature, and here too the *zindīq* converts to Islam. What is also interesting is that following this account, we also have an argument for the existence of God that involves ibn al-Muqaffā‘. In this account, however, he is merely a character who is in the company of the ‘zindīq’ ‘Abdel-Karīm ibn abī al-‘Awjā’, and he highly praises Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq. See, Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, (1990), pp. 129-131. Ibn abī al-‘Awjā’ also appears to have been the source of another of Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq’s argument from design for the existence of God in *Tawhīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, see Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-Anwār*, (1983), v. 3, pp. 57-151.

¹² *Munāzara*, pp. 294-297. The term *inniya* is defined by the linguist al-Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād (d. 385/995) as the affirmation (*thubūt*) of the thing’s being (*kawn*) and existence (*wujūd*), see al-Ṣāhib b. ‘Abbād,

requesting the evidence for God's being and existence. Al-Rassī's argument, which is based on Q.22:5-7¹³ starts with the idea of created beings, particularly the chain of states of being that leads to the existing human being (from dust to semen to a dry lump of blood). These various states (*aḥwāl*) of being are considered to either be created (*muḥdatha*) or eternal past (*qadīma*), and no category is affirmed to exist between these two.¹⁴ The proof of God's *inniya* is considered to be dependent on the created states of being for a number of reasons, amongst which:

- a) Created things must rationally be linked to a creator in the same way that a written book suggests in the mind of the reader the existence of a writer. This argument is based on the idea that for every act there must be an agent, or that for every effect there must be a cause.
- b) What is created is that which was not a being (*lam yakun*) then was made into a being (*fā-kuwwina*). The transition from one state (more specifically non-existence) to another (existence) according to al-Rassī is either:
 - i) Through another, a maker and a creator or is:

Al-Muḥīṭ fil-Luḡha, (1994), v.10, p. 424. This is the earliest definition we've come across for this term. See Frank (2005b), and for its use by the Kindī circle, Adamson (2002).

¹³ Q.22:5-7: *O mankind! if ye are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then lo! We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make (it) clean for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then (give you growth) that ye attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dieth (young), and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knoweth naught. And thou (Muhammad) seest the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it doth thrill and swell and Put forth every lovely kind (of growth). 6. That is because Allah, He is the Truth. Lo! He quickeneth the dead, and lo! He is Able to do all things; 7. And because the Hour will come, there is no doubt thereof; and because Allah will raise those who are in the graves.*

¹⁴ In this thesis we use eternal past for *qadīm*.

- ii) Internally caused. In which case this would be according to one of two premises:
- 1) It was a non-existent and it created itself. This is not a possibility according to al-Rassī, as a non-existent cannot produce existence.
 - 2) Alternatively, it was an existent and it bestowed existence upon itself. This is impossible, as this would mean an already existing thing bestowing existence upon itself. Al-Rassī argues that its own existence makes it dispense with the need to give itself existence a second time.¹⁵

As the last condition does not obtain, al-Rassī concludes that there must therefore be a creator for that which is created, which is other than itself and is eternal, since if created it would have to be itself the subject to this same argument.¹⁶

To be in a position to use the above argument, al-Rassī proceeds to show and prove that there are in the real world actual transitions or movements from one state of being to another, as these are observed to come to be at one moment and cease to be at different time.¹⁷ If, on the other hand, these states of being were not created but eternal, this would contradict the observed chain of successive progression of the states that occur at a specific time to a specific self, as is demonstrated by the

¹⁵ See Aristūṭālīs, *Al-Ṭabīʿa*, v. 1, p. 19, (1984). (This is the translation of Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (d. 298 or 299/ 910 or 911). (Henceforth, *al-Ṭabīʿa*).

¹⁶ *Munāẓara*, pp. 294-295.

¹⁷ We also find a similar version of this idea of changing states in al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 132, however, in this case Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq list changes from one state to its opposite, and challenges ibn Abī al-ʿAwjaʿ to create himself.

case of the human being who takes different states of being (*turāb, nuṭfa, 'alqa...*) at different times.¹⁸ Al-Rassī's argument against such belief is that had these states, whilst being distinguished from each other, been eternal past at the same time then this would lead to the affirmation of the identity, or oneness, of these states (*turba, nuṭfa, 'alqa...*). This is because all these states would simultaneously happen to the same thing from eternity past, which means they do not follow each other sequentially.¹⁹ The eternal nature of the different states that apply to a single self implies that these states do not become one after the other, they rather happen to the same thing simultaneously from eternity past. One thing in this case becomes simultaneously *turāb, nuṭfa, 'alqa, laḥman...* Since this is impossible for al-Rassī, it can only confirm the first hand observation of the fact that states of being follow each other in time, which means they come to be at a certain time and cease to be at another. Thus, what comes to be must originate from an originator as previously mentioned.²⁰

It is important to point out at this stage of our presentation that this argument, which is based on showing the changes of states of a particular existent thing, shows in fact the coming to be and corruption of these states and the impossibility

¹⁸ For a similar argument see Al-Ash'arī, Abū al-Ḥasan, *Kitāb al-luma' fī al-radd 'alā ahl al-zaygh wal bida'*, (1955), pp. 17-19.

¹⁹ We may also have a reference to this idea in al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 133, where Ja'far argues:

نقضت قولك لأنك تزعم أن الأشياء من الأول سواء فكيف قدمت و أخرت.

²⁰ *Munāzara*, p. 295.

وإن كانت الأحوال قديمة فذلك يستحيل، لأنها نراها تحدث شيئا بعد شيء في حين واحد، في نفس واحدة، فلو كانت كلها مع اختلافها في أنفسها وأوقاتها قديمة، لكانت الترايبية نطفة مضغعة دما علقة عظما لحما إنسانا، في حالة واحدة، إذ القديم هو الذي لم يكن، ولم يزل وجوده، وإذا لم يزل وجود هذه الأحوال، كان على ما ذكرت وقلت، من كونه ترابا مضغعة لحما عظما إنسانا، في حالة واحدة، إذ الأحوال لم يسبق بعضها بعضا، لأنها قديمة، ولأن كل واحد منها في باب القَدَم سواء، فإذا استحال وجود هذه الأحوال معا في حين واحد، في حالة واحدة، وثبت أن الترايبية سابقة للنطفية، والنطفية سابقة للحال، التي بعدها، صح الحدوث، وانتفى عنها القَدَم، وإذا صح الحدوث فقد قلنا بديا: إن المحدث متعلق في العقل بمحدثه.

of their association with eternity.²¹ Wolfson, in his exposition of the different arguments for the creation of the world, informs us that, based on his consultations of these arguments, he had failed to find any use of Philoponus' argument from finitude in the *kalām* discourse. This is unlike his second argument, the impossibility of an infinite by succession, which is extensively used by the *mutakallimūn*. Wolfson justification for this absence is that this is an argument for the finitude or corruptibility of the things of the world and not an argument for the created nature of the world.²² Although al-Rassī's argument is not the whole of the argument from finitude, it may nonetheless be considered an argument for what appears as the second of Philoponus' supporting argument for the generation and finiteness of the power of the universe. This argument is:

The nature of matter is such that matter cannot retain any form indefinitely. Therefore nothing composed of matter and form can be indestructible.²³

The logical question that follows the above argument, which is presented by the challenging naturalist, is that the eternity of the mentioned states is not the sole possibility in the above condition. The states that can be categorised as originating in time can be attributed to a single eternal body (substance, *'ayn*), which does not originate in time and is the ground for the originating states. This is a question regarding the possible existence of eternal past entities/substances that are bodies

²¹ Abrahamov briefly mentions this argument in the middle of his exposition of al-Rassī's argument for the creation of the world from change (as it appears in al-Dalīl al-Ṣaghīr). He assumes that its inclusion shows how the argument from changing states proves the creation of the world. Abrahamov (1986), p. 277.

²² Wolfson (1976), pp. 410, 411.

²³ Davidson (1969), pp. 357-391. (p. 362, see also, pp. 364,365)

which, in terms of their being, stand in opposition to the originating states.²⁴ This is essentially the argument that it is possible to have individual states (or accidents) that are created in time, but their succession “would be continued perpetually without an interval and without a temporal beginning.”²⁵

Al-Rassī’s simple response to this argument is experiential in nature. He says that he has never witnessed these states to be detached or unbound from the body and that it is not possible for them to exist in such a fragmented way. This only leads to the same previous conclusion that the body, as well as the states that are attached to it, are originated in time, since he has already proved the origination of the states which cannot be without a body to which they are attached. One notices at this stage that this discussion of essential bodies and states resembles or is a reflection of the discussion of substance and accidents that will be presented in the second chapter.

To further his argument, al-Rassī declares that had the *‘ayn* been eternal and the states originated then this would mean that the *‘ayn* is eternally the ground for these states, that these states eternally take place in the *‘ayn*. This, for him, is a contradiction for this statement combines eternity with origination in one affirmative statement, that is, in the idea of eternally originating states. Since things are either eternal or originated, they cannot be eternally originating, or an

²⁴ *Munāẓara*, p. 296.

وما أنكرت أن تكون الأحوال حديثة، وأن العين - التي هي الجسم - قديمة.

We note here that al-Rassī chooses “*‘ayn*” to mean body, however, “*‘ayn*” appears to be the term ibn al-Muqaffa’ chooses as a translation for the term substance, see Ibn al-Muqaffa’ ‘*Qatūgūrīūs*’, in *Al-Mantiq*, (1978), p. 9.

²⁵ Quote from the later Christian Ibn Suwār in Wolfson (1976), pp. 395, 396 (see also this section on the ‘Argument from the Createdness of the Accidents of the Component Parts of the World’, pp. 392-410).

eternal and originating thing simultaneously. Also, in affirming that the *'ayn* is eternally the subject of the originating states, one affirms the eternal origination of the states which would lead to the problem that it (*al-'ayn*) is not existent prior to origination.²⁶ In other words, the eternal *'ayn* is not prior to the eternally originating states. Looking at this from another angle, the fact that *al-'ayn* is eternally attached to originating states, makes these states eternal attributes of this *'ayn*. If this attribute of being eternally attached to states is affirmed, then this would render the eternal attribute an originating thing since it is an attribute of origination. Putting this problem in these two different ways will lead to affirming the eternity of the originated and the origination of the eternal, which asserts the identity of opposites.²⁷

The above discussion is based on the idea that states happen to the body from without, in the sense of inhering in substance, which is why al-Rassī is forced next to face the question of an alternative view of the source of these states. At the end of this particular discussion he faces the question of why would the states not be

²⁶ Although this is not the same as al-Kindī's argument for the finiteness of the universe, there is some similarity with the idea that the body of this universe and motion do not precede one another leads to affirming this finiteness (consider motion to be a form of change of state). See, Davidson (1969), pp. 371-373.

²⁷ *Munāẓara*, p. 296.

من قِيلَ أنها - أعني العين - إذا كانت قديمة وكانت الأحوال محدثة، فهي لم تزل تحدث فيها الأحوال، وإذا قلت لم تزل تحدث فيها ناقضت، لأن قولك: لم تزل خلاف قولك: تحدث. والكلام إذا اجتمع فيه إثبات شيء ونفيه في حال واحد استحال. وذلك أنها إذا لم تزل تحدث فيها، فقد أثبتتها قديمة لم تزل تحدث فيها، وإذا كان هذا هكذا فهي لم تسبق الحدث، فقد صار الحدث قديماً، لأنه صفة الجسم الذي هو قديم، وإذا كانت صفته استحال أن تكون صفة القديم الذي لا يخلو منها ولا يزول عنها محدثة، وهذا محال بين الإحالة، لأن فيه تنبیت المحدث قديماً، والقديم محدثاً.

In al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 133, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq is also reported to have said:

و لو كان قديماً ما زال و لا حال لأن الذي يزول و يحول يجوز أن يوجد و يبطل فيكون بوجوده بعد عدمه دخول في الحدث و في كونه في الأزل دخوله في العدم و لن تجتمع صفة الأزل و العدم و الحدوث و القدم في شيء واحد.

caused by the *ʾayn* itself (presumably whilst still thinking of these states as eternally originating)?²⁸

The response to this question is similar to the above argument. If it is not possible for something eternal past not to precede its attributes, then it is also not possible for an agent not to precede her acts (effects) since the agent must necessarily be before her act, in other terms, the cause must necessarily be before its effect. Following this, the *ʾayn* that is considered in this argument to be eternal before all the things that were not and then came to be, and as the cause of their being, must precede their origination since their being is the effect of its act. If the causing *ʾayn* precedes its effects, then the acts would have to be qualified as originating in time, as their being is dependent on the *ʾayn*. If the states are related to the acts of an eternal agent, then the states cannot be eternal past and concomitant with this same acting agent.²⁹

I.1 The Principle of existence

The naturalist follows the above discussion by taking the argument away from the particular substance and its states, or the particular example of the human being and his different states. He intends in this process to generalise the argument

This may be the ground of Maimonides' summary of the *mutakallimūn*'s fourth argument, Maimonides (1956), p. 135.

²⁸ Davidson tells us that "As a premise, it was common procedure to demonstrate the *kalām* doctrine of accidents, that is, the doctrine that none of the characteristics of a physical object flow from, or are dependent upon an inner essence, but rather all are assigned from without to the identical inert atoms which serve as the material base of each object." Davidson (1969), p. 370.

²⁹ *Munāẓara*, pp. 296, 297.

قال القاسم عليه السلام: بمثل ما أنكرت زيادتك الأولى، لأنه لا فرق بين أن تكون هي الفاعلة، وهي لم تسبق فعلها، أو تكون هي قديمة وهي لم تسبق صفاتها، لأن الفاعل سابق لفعله متقدم له، وكذلك القديم الذي لم يزل، سابق للذي لم يكن، لأن في إثبات الفعل له إثبات حدث فعله، وإذا لم يسبق فعله فقد جمعت بينهما في حال واحد، وثبتت للشيء الواحد القديم والحدث في حالة واحدة، وهذا محال بين الإحالة.

without necessarily contradicting the particular concrete evidence used by al-Rassī. He states that he believes that the being of everything derives from other things, and that all things have eternally become existent from other things and that their principle (الشيء الذي هو الاصل) is that which is eternal past.

Al-Rassī's argument against this idea, which affirms the existence of an eternal past thing from which all things are created, is:

This thing, which one might consider to be the principle of all things, either:

- a) Contains in itself states, forms (*hay'āt*) and attributes similar to the way the existents do, or:
- b) It does not contain states, forms and attributes.

If condition (a) obtains then one judges this principle thing to be originated in time in the same manner that one judges the derivatives to have originated in time, since it contains within itself originating things, that is: forms, colours, shapes and attributes. In this case, one must question again the origin of these originating things.³⁰

Al-Rassī then considers the premise that forms might be considered to be themselves eternal past, in which case one must first consider this:

³⁰ Ibid., p. 297.

- i) If the form was eternal past then it would have to have been in the thing that is formed, the thing that allows this form to appear in reality, or
- ii) The form was in the element (*unṣur*) of the thing that is formed, what is called matter (*huyūla*).

If premise (i) is true, that is, if the form resides in the formed from eternity past, then the argument must be false, since it is possible to find this thing that is formed (the thing in the outside world) with a contrary form.³¹ On the other hand, if premise (ii) obtains, if the form resides in matter then it must have had to move from this matter to the thing formed. However, the movement of form is denied, as it is not permitted for the accidents (*arāq*) to move from one thing to another. The argument against such movement of forms is strictly experiential: forms are things that can be seen and witnessed, and it has not been the case that one has witnessed such movement. On the other hand, the only thing that has been noticed regarding these forms is that they become apparent to the witnessing eye when they remain or reside in something.³²

One of the other things that should be considered, according to al-Rassī, is that if the states are transferred or moved from that which is considered to be the origin to what is qualified as a derivative then this movement presumes the existence of a

³¹ This is an argument for the coming to be of one and the perishing of the other, yet in Aristotle's *physics* we read regarding the physicist (*al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 34):

وقوم قالو ان الاضداد موجودة في الواحد، ومنه تنتفض فتخرج، على قول أنكسمندرس.

The opposites in this quote are the elements of the mixture.

³² *Munāẓara*, p. 298.

telos (*ghāya*) and an end (*nihāya*) for this movement.³³ In such case, the *telos* and the end would render that which the states move from an originated thing.³⁴ What one understands from this argument is that for al-Rassī things that have a *telos* and an end are originated (*muḥdatha*). The meaning of (*nihāya*) is not very clear from the context of the debate, since it could either mean the purpose and aim or the final and last. We could, however, take the word 'end' to literally mean an end of existence, hence the states become non-existent. The end of existence of a thing marks the final moment of its existence, it renders its existence limited from at least one side of the time line. However, being limited in the future sense also indicates, according to this logic (which is not argued for), being limited in the past sense by the moment of origination.

This idea of limit is also mentioned in another part of this epistle where al-Rassī argues that if two objects are imagined in the mind, and if one joins them together, an increase in their boundaries is noted, whilst if separated a decrease in these boundaries is noted. This increase and decrease in boundaries is indicative for al-Rassī of the limitedness of the thing under consideration, hence of the existence of ends in the physical sense of boundaries but also of time.³⁵ If a thing is limited by

³³ Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. al-Samḥ (d. 418/1027) in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* states (*al-Ṭabī'a*, p. 2):

وقوله: "مبادئ" - قد يراد به الغاية، لان اسم المبدأ يقع على الغاية.

In al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 145, imām Ali is reported to have said:

كيف يكون له قبل هو قبل القبل بلا غاية و لا منتهى غاية و لا غاية إليها انقطعت الغايات عنده هو غاية كل غاية .

³⁴ *Munāẓara*, p. 298.

وفيه خلة أخرى وهي: أنها لو كانت في الأصل، ثم انتقلت عنه إلى فرعها، فقد جعلت لانتقالها غاية ونهاية، وإذا جعلت لها غاية ونهاية فقد صح حدث الذي انتقلت عنه هذه الأحوال.

³⁵ *Ibid.*,

أنك إذا جعلت الأشياء في وهمك شبيئين، إذا أفردت كل واحد من صاحبه نقص، وانتهى إلى حد ما وقل، وإذا جمعت كل واحد إلى صاحبه زاد، وانتهى إلى حد ما وكثر، أفليس إذا انتهى في حال، وزاد فكثر أو نقص فقل، فالنقص والزيادة يخبران بالنهاية عنه؟! وإذا ثبت فيه النهاية، ثبت فيه الحدوث!!

time then it is an originated thing. The simple rule appears to be that any form of limit in existence (space/time) indicates origination.

In either case, we do not have a justification in this argument for why this would render the origin itself an originated thing. We may only justify this reasoning by assuming that the argument is based on the idea that, that which has within it things that come to an end, must itself have an end. Al-Rassī concludes that the argument of the eternal movement of states would fall short of justifying the eternity of the original thing in the manner that eternally originating has been shown to lack a viable proof.³⁶

I.2 Theory of latency

Kumūn, the Arabic term for Latency, simply means hidden. The theory of latency, mostly known in association with the famous Muʿtazilī al-Nazzām (d. 221/836), is simply the idea that some things exist in some other things before they become manifest. The general examples given of this *Kumūn* are the oil that is hidden in the olive, the ointment in the sesame and the fire in the stone. According to Wolfson, the theory is developed as a response to the idea of God’s continuous creation of the world, as God created everything that exists in six days. Within the things that were created, all the future things that will become, come to exist from these initial

This idea clearly compares with Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq’s argument against ibn Abī al-ʿAwjāʾ ‘al-Zindīq’ (al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 133):

إن الأشياء لو دامت على صغرها لكان في الوهم أنه متى ضم شيء إلى مثله كان أكبر، و في جواز التغيير عليه خروجه من القدم، كما أن في تغييره دخوله في الحدث .

³⁶ The ground of the argument could be Abū ʿAlī al-Ḥasan b. al-Samḥ principle (*al-Ṭabīʿa*, p. 19):

سلب المبدأ وسلب النهاية واحد، وإنما يختلف بالنسبة.

created things in which they existed in a state of *kumūn*, and in accord with their nature.³⁷ When created, God combines opposing elements together without any destruction occurring to them. Van Ess describes this as a state of balanced equilibrium between opposite components and “[o]nly when this equilibrium of “hidden” contradictory ingredients is disturbed by external influence does disintegration ensue.”³⁸ This disruption occurs when one of the hidden elements encounters a similar external element (correspondent) which increases its power and proportion in the object of which it is a part. The corruption and degeneration of things becomes, according to this theory, a disruption of the balance between the opposing hidden parts of objects.³⁹

³⁷ Wolfson suggests that the source of the idea is “Aristotle’s view that nature is inherent in things as the source of their transition from potentiality to actuality.” Wolfson (1976), p. 502. He also says that it was used by al-Nazzām whose “primary interest was in ridding his coreligionists of what he considered their erroneous belief in continuous creation...” and that God created within things a nature “which causes those things to be changed into other things or to give rise out of themselves to other things.” (Ibid., p. 498) This nature is “the inner cause of processes of transition from potentialities to actualities.” (Ibid., p. 502). Van Ess suggests certain affinities between certain Muslims and those they describe as *aṣḥāb al-ṭabā’i*’ who believe that things once created with their own nature become independent of external interference (“Kumūn” in *EF*). He also believes that the possible origins of this idea are thought to be Indian, Stoic or from the dualists’ traditions.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ From comparing al-Nazzām’s text, as it appears in al-Jāḥiẓ’s *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, with the Jābirian texts, studied in the last chapter of this thesis, it becomes apparent that there is a strong connection between the two. The basic reason for this connection are the following points: a) Al-Nazzām breaks objects into different composing parts and Jābir breaks them down to different degrees of composition, the most basic of which are the four natures: heat, cold, moistness and dryness, b) The ground of both system is a theory of balance between the founding elements, c) Jabir’s theory relies on dominating and manifest (*zāhira*) natures and hidden (*bāṭina*) natures, and similar ideas appear in the discussion of latency *kumūn*, d) Both systems defend different modes of change in terms of composition, combination, mixture and transformation. The two theories are not only similar but they also stand in opposition to each other, a) Jābir denies the theory of latency which he attributes to the Manicheans, b) Jābir’s theory is essentially based on basic elements whilst al-Nazzām is of composite parts and bodies, c) Jābir affirms the accidents and al-Nazzām denies them. This comparison is beyond the scope of our research but it deserves further investigation since al-Jāḥiẓ allocates a special section for al-Nazzām’s arguments against the ‘believers in accidents’ (*aṣḥāb al-a’rāḍ*) who appear to be the same as the believers in the four natures (Jābir or the alchemist). This makes al-Nazzām’s theory of *kumūn* also an anti-accidents theory in the sense that it denies the constitution of things from heat, cold, dryness and moistness. See Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, (1966), v. 5, pp. 5-23, 81-86.

This is the base of the argument in the next section of the epistle. The next challenging question facing al-Rassī is that of the latency of forms in things. The naturalist asks why is it not possible for the forms of a date or that of a tree not to be latent in the seed, and that it becomes manifest when encountering a correspondent (*mā shākalahā*)?⁴⁰

The first and basic response given to this question is that from observing the different parts constituting the seed one would not find any of the things claimed to be latent in it. This is a simple response to a simplified view of what latency is, in the sense that it assumes latent forms to be identifiable parts that become manifest under given conditions. This understanding of *kumūn* as particular parts becoming manifest at a future time, as things that are not witnessed prior to their conditional appearance, leads al-Rassī to wonder why is it not possible for the manifest human being not to have been latent in animals (pigs, donkeys and dogs). If such things were true, al-Rassī states that this would render the human being human in appearance yet a hidden (*bāṭin*) animal (dog, donkey or pig).⁴¹

Al-Rassī argues for the same idea from the perspective of lack of similitude. If there is a correspondence between the seed, the fruit and the tree, without there being any similitude in form then it must be permitted to argue in such manner regarding the human being and the other animals, that is, the lack of similitude in forms does

⁴⁰ *Munāẓara*, p. 299.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 299, 300.

لو جاز هذا لجاز أن يكون الإنسان كامنة فيه صورة الخنزير، والحمار، والكلب، وإذا كان ذلك كذلك، كان الإنسان إنسانا في الظاهر، كلبا، حمارا، خنزيرا، فيلا، في الباطن !! فإن قلت ذلك، لحقت بأصحاب سوفسطاء . فإن شئت تكلمنا فيه. على أنه قد ظهر من حمقهم لأهل العقول ما يزعمهم عن القول بمقالتهم.

not prevent correspondence between different things.⁴² The argument from latency leads al-Rassī to state that if such a concept is admitted then even when all human parts are separated they will be an animal (dog) in nature, potential and matter. This theory of latency would simply lead to the assumption that no human part can cease to be a latent part of any animal.⁴³

Al-Rassī also argues that if the form of a date was originally in the principle, that is, in the seed, then before becoming observable in the date itself it should have appeared in the seed. This would also mean that the principle itself would have been a date, which means that the origin itself would have been the end form (the date). This is considered impossible, since this means that our priority would have been to consider this origin to be a date, and this would have had to be a known thing amongst us. In addition, this would lead to the possibility of some thing having two forms simultaneously, which in this particular case would be the form of a seed and the form of a date.⁴⁴

The naturalist argues that the seed is a date in material potentiality (*quwwa hayuliyya*),⁴⁵ so that when it moves or when it changes, it changes into the tree then it changes into the fruit or the date, after which it returns to its principle state then it becomes a seed inside the fruit.⁴⁶ What is interesting, in this cyclical view of change and transformation in nature, is that the return is not to the state of a seed

⁴² Ibid., p. 300.

لو كان بين التمرة والنخلة والنواة مشاكلة مع اختلاف الصورة، لجاز أن يكون بين الإنسان والكلب مشاكلة!!

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 300, 301.

⁴⁵ See Wolfson (1976), pp. 509, 510 for the use of the term hiding (*kumūn*) and appearing as terms equivalent to Aristotle's "potentiality" and "actuality" and Plato's "intelligible" and "sensible".

⁴⁶ *Munāẓara*, p. 301.

but rather to the same original thing previously argued for, the principle of all things. This principle seems to be a constant element of the cycle to which all things return before going through the exact same transformations all over again.⁴⁷ One notices that the naturalist does not follow a cycle that leads back to the principle, only to start another cycle of a different being. This is a clear indication that the principle itself contains that which demarcates a particular cycle from any other. This principle itself contains the specific determinations that are to follow particular histories in their coming to be and changing from one state of being to another, which we presume is in accordance with the nature of a thing.

⁴⁷ In Aristotle's *Physics* we read regarding Empedocles and Anaxagoras (*al-Ṭabī'a*, pp. 34, 35):

وكذلك ايضا الذين قالوا ان الموجودات واحد وكثير مثل أنبادقليس وأنكساغورس، فإن هذين أيضا إنما ينسبان خروج سائر الاشياء الى انه نفض يكون من الخليط. والذي يختلفن فيه أن ذاك يرى أن لهذه دورا، وهذا يجعل الشيء مرة واحدة.

It is worth mentioning that in Wolfson's discussion of the subject, he emphasises, in agreement with Harovitz, the influence of the 'naturalists' on al-Nazzām, which he derives from al-Shahrastānī (Wolfson (1976), p. 507). These naturalists, Wolfson tells us, refer to those who deny the existence of incorporeal things, like the Stoics (Ibid., p. 507). Later in this discussion both Wolfson and Horovitz assume the naturalists to be the Stoics, and derive the idea of the influence of the Stoics on al-Nazzām (Ibid., pp. 508, 513). Abarahamov also indicates that al-Rassī's critique is intended to be against the Stoics (Abrahamov (1986), p. 284). However, in the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *Physics*, the pre-Socratic physicists (including Anaxagoras) are called الطبعيين or the 'naturalists' (*al-Ṭabī'a*, p. 33).

In the commentary of Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan b. al-Samḥ on the *Physics*, he also adds more information about these philosophers (*al-Ṭabī'a*, p. 35):

أما كثير فمن قيل المادة، واما واحد فمن قبل ان الفاعل الذي يميزها هو واحد وهو العقل...، اما أنكساغورس... يقول: إن الأشياء كلها موجودة في المادة، وإنما تظهر وتكمن فنحس في كل شيء ما هو الأغلب عليه.

In Wolfson's discussion of *Kumūn*, he discusses a quote in al-Shahrastānī's *Milal* of Porphyry on the teaching of Anaxagoras. Al-Shahrastānī adds to this quote that Anaxagoras was the first to have taught that things are hidden (*kāmina*) and then appear. In Wolfson (1976), pp. 508-509, we read: "The characterization of it as a theory of "hiding-and-appearing" was thus given to it by Shahrastānī himself because of its similarity to the theory of Nazzām, which was widely known among Muslims." The commentary of Abū 'Alī, just quoted, suggests that the source of this idea is earlier and it seems to have originated amongst the philosophers commenting on Aristotle. The idea of the hidden is noted in the text of the *Physics* itself although without the use of the word *kumūn* as we read (*al-Ṭabī'a*, p. 36):

أن التكون إنما هو من أشياء قائمة موجودة في أنفسها، وبصغر حجمها يكون التكون من أشياء غير محسوسة عندنا. ولذلك يقولون إن كل شيء مختلط لأنهم كانوا يرون أن كل شيء يتكون من شيء.

It is worth mentioning that this is not the oldest Arabic translation, as Badawī tells us (Ibid., p. 9). The oldest translation appears to be that of Salām al Abrash, from the second part of the second century (A.H.). This would mean that this idea was already in circulation and the expression غير محسوسة عندنا or imperceptible could have been the source of the idea of *kumūn*.

In his response, al-Rassī points out that the belief of his opponent could lead to different formulations of what the principle could signify or mean. If the naturalist is an eternalist (*yaqūl bi-l-dahr*) who believes in the eternal existence of nature, then nature itself is the principle. In such a case the naturalist, according to al-Rassī, would be assumed to be saying that the origin, here nature, is a date in material potentiality (*quwwa huyuliyya*). On the other hand, if he is considered to be a dualist (*thānawī*) then the principles would be light and darkness, and these would be this date in potentiality.⁴⁸ The argument is that whatever the opponent's belief regarding the principle of things, this principle is what would be considered a date in potentiality. Further to this, since it is permissible, according to the naturalist, to move from one form to another, the pure (*al-baḥt*) principle is all the possible forms, that is, a seed, a date, a peach or an aubergine, etc.⁴⁹

I.3 Generation and Corruption

In considering the question of generation (*kawn*) and corruption (*fasād*), the naturalist questions al-Rassī about his opinion regarding the argument that the cause (*illa*) of the being and of the corruption of things is the movement of spheres and the motion of stars,⁵⁰ or even the combination of the two natures, that of light and darkness.⁵¹

⁴⁸ This could be seen as a reflection of the origins of this idea. See Van Ess, *Kumūn*.

⁴⁹ *Munāẓara*, p. 301. Continuing the previous quote from Aristotle's *Physics* (*al-Ṭabī'a*, p. 35):

والذي يختلفان فيه أن ذلك (انبادقليس) يرى أن الاجزاء المتشابهة والأضداد غير متناهية، وهذا (أنكساغورس) انما يرى ذلك في التي تسمى الاسطفسات الأربع فقط.

⁵⁰ We find the idea of influence of the stars and spheres on generation and corruption in the work of the alchemists, as will be discussed in the final chapter. As an example we find this in ps-Plato, *Kitāb al-Rawābī*, (1977), pp. 155, 154, 170-173. See also Hämeen-Antilla (2006), p. 110: "The Sun is the life of

In his response, al-Rassī emphasises the idea that according to the opponent's belief, if the cause of generation of a thing exists then that which is caused must remain. He elaborates his challenge through the example of a child. If the cause of the being of a child is still effective then there should not be a case of death (corruption) to this being. The existence of the cause should maintain the existence of the being that is caused.⁵² The only solution to this problem, of a continuous existence of what is known to be corruptible, is the existence of another cause which could affect corruption. However, this cause must come into existence at the time of corruption since the thing was existent before it was generated, and this would mean that the cause of corruption must be an originated thing. The reason for this argument is that, had the cause of the corruption been eternal, along with the cause of generation, then the existent thing would be in a state of corruption when it is also in a state of existence since the cause of existence is also present. If the causes of existence and non-existence are eternally existent then the being of the caused

both worlds and also the origin of everything that is generated in the lower world [...] in the supernal world there is neither generation nor corruption, although everything that does happen there is also due to the actions of the Sun, even though the Sethians would deny this [...] People disagree as to any causality affecting the supernal world. According to Yanbūshād, causality is also found in the supernal world, but others disagreed violently with him.” And “the Sun is also eternal (*sarmadī*), perpetual (*dā'im*) as well as that which gives life to All, or the universe (*muḥyī l-kull*), and provides life (*al-mumidd bil-ḥayāt*) [...] It is also the agent and organizer of All (*fā'il al-kull wa-mudabbiruhu*).” And on p. 111: “The origin (*aṣl*) of all movement is the movement of the spheres, the two Luminous Ones.”

⁵¹ *Munāẓara*, p. 303.

⁵² In Ibn Ḥazm's reproduction of the second argument of the eternalists we read (Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī, Abū Aḥmad. *Al-Faṣl fī al-mīlāl wal-ahwā' wal-niḥāl*, (1996), v. 1, p. 48):

وقالوا أيضا: لا يخلو محدث الأجسام -الجواهر والأعراض، وهي كل ما في العالم- إن كان العالم محدثا من أن يكون أحدثه لأنه، أو إحدته لعله، فإن كان لأنه، فالعالم لم يزل لأن محدثه لم يزل إذ هو علة خلفه فالعلة لا تفارق المعلول، وما لم يفارق من لم يزل فهو أيضا لم يزل، إذ هو مثله بلا شك، فالعالم لم يزل. وإن كان أحدثه لعله، فتلك العلة لا تخلو من أحد وجهين، إما أن تكون لم تزل، وإما أن تكون محدثة. فإن كانت لم تزل فمعلولها لم يزل، فالعالم لم يزل.

thing must be both simultaneously; in a state of generation (existence) and in a state of corruption (non-existence).⁵³

Faced with the charge that God the creator, as the cause of the being and corruption of all existents, must Himself face the same challenge, al-Rassī declares that God is not said to be, according to his belief, the cause of the generation and corruption of things. What is actually the case, according to him, is that God is not the cause of generation, but He is the One who has generated (*kawwana*) the thing and corrupted it without any compulsion (*iḍṭirār*). What is indicated in this statement is that the cause, according to al-Rassī, necessitates its effect. If the cause exists, the effect must necessarily be or, one could say the cause cannot be without its effect. This is why al-Rassī denies and rejects the idea that God is a cause, in the sense that what He causes (His creation) are necessary effects, God, instead, freely wills his creation.

This argument is further developed in al-Rassī's idea that God is not the cause of His acts since these acts differ in states and change in attributes (*muntaqilat al-ṣifāt*). He argues that it is not possible to consider God as the cause of things since He is the eternal, He remains as he is in Himself from eternity and as such His attributes remain the same and unchanged.⁵⁴ The effects of such an unchanging eternal God must as such necessarily remain in their state of existence thus implying the eternal existence of the effects, of things. The changing nature of the existents and the

⁵³ *Munāẓara*, p. 303.

⁵⁴ Frank traces the source of this idea to St. Athanasius who emphasises the distinguishing idea of volition in God's act, he writes: "[...] he distinguishes from what is produced by the very nature [...] or by the essential being [...] of the cause and so by necessity of its being. He insists that the agent [...] unlike the natural cause, is essentially different from the act he produces, a thesis that becomes common doctrine for the main schools of the *kalām*." Frank (1979), p. 85.

permanent unchanging state of God imply that God is neither the cause of another nor the effect of another.⁵⁵

As a final argument for the existence of God, we find in the last part of the epistle al-Rassī's version of the argument from design. He first argues for the existence of the time of revivification of the dead after the vanishing of the living beings. This will be so because God is wise and has created life for a purpose.⁵⁶ The argument that God is wise is used in this section as another proof for the created nature of the world. Al-Rassī argues that had God not been wise then there would be no justification in the claim that this well ordered world is the creation of a wise agent, since it would become possible that this ordered world is accidentally so and that the ordering is not due to an act of an agent. If the world is accidentally ordered and not necessarily so, the existence of an ordering God is removed, and what is now known to be existent could have been so from eternity.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 304.

وذلك أنا لا نزع أن الله علة كون الأشياء وفسادها، بل نزع: إن الله تعالى هو الذي كون الشيء، وأفسده من غير ما اضطرار. والدليل على أن الله عز وجل ليس بعلة فعله ذلك؛ أن أفعاله مختلفة الأحوال، منتقلة الصفات. فلو كان هو العلة لما زال شيء عن صفته، لأنه عز ذكره قديم، والقديم لو كان علة شيء، لم يزل معلوله، كما لم يزل هو في ذاته، وزوال الأشياء عن صفاتها يدل على أن الله عز وجل ليس بعلة ولا معلول.

This argument is also used by al-Rassī in *k. al-Mustarshid* with regard to the planets being the causes of generation and corruption as we shall see later in this chapter.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp 315-316.

⁵⁷ Abrahamov (1996), p. 74.

II. *Response to the Christians*⁵⁸

In the response to the Christians, al-Rassī negates any attribution of change and termination to God or any transformation, motion, transition or annihilation. He denies that God can be a principle of anything or a part of a thing since all things disintegrate and each part of the whole follows suit. God is not divided into many things, so that an increase or a decrease in number follows from His oneness nor is He made into a singular whole made from many parts, as this would lead things other than Him to be similar or different in parts. If God was a principle to all those

⁵⁸Al-Rassī. *Al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā*, (2000), p. 17. (Henceforth, *Naṣārā*). This work is possibly the first extant anti-Christian polemic dated by Madelung to about (210/825) but it is by no means the earliest (Bishr b. al-Mu'tamīr, the founder of Baghdādī school and 'Isā al-Murdār (d. 840) both wrote refutations of Theodore Abū Qurra and Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 840) wrote a refutation of a certain 'Ammār the Christian, Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 806) and 'Alī Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. 850) also have epistles with the same title). See Thomas (1992), pp. 32-33 and Griffith (2006), p. 285. Madelung believes that Al-Rassī developed his theology during his stay in Egypt between 199/815 and 212/826 when he was in his twenties (and thirties) as a result of his debates with the Christians and naturalists. This, we are told, probably took place in al-Fuṣṭāṭ at the age of the caliph al-Ma'mūn as it was a centre for debates amongst the different communities. Madelung also believes that al-Rassī was not interested in the inter-Islamic debate and affirms that there were "no well known Mu'tazilite theologians in Egypt at this time." Interestingly, Madelung's insistence at distancing al-Rassī from the Mu'tazila also appears in his search for other contemporaneous theology: "If contemporary Mu'tazilite theology thus did not have a formative influence on al-Qāsim's thought, in what context is it to be located?" We find this to be a logical answer to the question of how did someone who came from Medina, and without prior knowledge of theology produced intellectual works of such sophistication as *al-Radd 'alā al-Naṣārā* and *al-Radd 'alā Ibn al-Muqaffā*? It seems that al-Qāsim had no position in the intellectual field prior to this paper, which is why Madelung has decided that his theological views were "formed in active study of the views of religious opponents, in debating their views and reading their books." See Madelung (1991), p. 36. For some reason, however, this seems to exclude the written works of the Mu'tazila who were not in Egypt, or for that matter, any of the Mutakallimūn who must have taken parts in the debates that he mentions. The idea that one is influenced by 'the other' in a debate is greatly defended in this thesis, however, we do not believe that this is sufficient and, al-Rassī must occupy a position within the intellectual field that has been developed over time by other theologians, including the Muslims. Apart from the evident sophistication in the arguments of al-Rassī's epistles, which are studied in this chapter, Madelung's own exploration of his theological development in a Christian field should dismiss the need to transmit the beliefs of later anti-Mu'tazilī Zaydīyya who "stressed the simplicity of the teaching of the ancient Zadī authorities, their keeping aloof from discussion of the *daqīq al-kalām*, the subtle, non-essential points which took up broad space in Mu'tazilite *kalām* works." We presume that al-Rassī is considered such an ancient authority as this quote is preceded by "Later Zaydīs, to be sure, did not generally see al-Qāsim as favouring Mu'tazilite theological thought." (ibid., p. 35). Also, Madelung dismissal of al-Madīna as a place of Mu'tazilī influence needs further investigation since we find in Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila* a list of more than twenty people who appear to have lived in the 2nd century Medīna and who have been considered 'qadariyya'. See Al-Balkhī, Abū al-Qāsim. *Bāb dhikr al-Mu'tazila min maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn li abī al-Qāsim al-Balkhī*, (1986), pp. 75-82.

that would derive from Him, they would acquire similitude with this principle since the principle of generation would be similar to that which is generated. All that is produced as a derivative from a principle follows this origin in successive productions, in the same way that the human beings reproduce from one generation to another, with the sons and daughters manifesting the same similar act of production. All that is a possible in the producing principle, which causes the thing to be and exist, will also be a possible in the descendents; this is witnessed in the case of the living beings, the trees and the animals.⁵⁹

This introduction to the idea of generation and production, as it is understood by al-Rassī, serves as a critique of the Christian notion of Christ being the son of God. Christ, as that which was a possible and became a real produced entity, takes away something from the principle (or the father in this case) like the offspring from the parents, thus leading to some change occurring to the principle, or God. Al-Rassī categorically denies that God can hold such possibles that are produced from Him, in the manner that a son or a daughter is a possible in her parents. In addition, things that are produced from other things are similar to those things, and the originating thing acts as a border or a limit to the existence of that which is produced, which in turn reduces the principle to a finite entity. Any limit to something is a mark of finitude, which is for him a denial of lordship and Godhood, since it identifies a cessation and finitude to God's eternity and a challenge to His

⁵⁹ The critique is based, according to Thomas, on three types of relations, the first between parents and offspring, the second, two creators hinder each other's activities, finally to take a son means the coming to be of the son and his createdness. The arguments in this epistle are, like other works of this kind, based on the nature of the relation between the father and the son, see Thomas (1992), pp. 33, 34. These preoccupations in turn reflect the Caliph al-Mahdī's in his debate with Timothy, they focus on the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, which challenges the being of God in Himself and the relation between the eternal and the begotten in time, see Thomas (2002), pp. 16, 17.

oneness. God's oneness is challenged by the fact that in producing a son, who has similar qualities to the father, God ceases to be 'one' since the son is the same in his essence, or in himself, to what the father is. If the two are the same in their essence, which according to al-Rassī is lordship, then this would lead to a contradiction in identification, since that which is Lord is defined by being unique and one. This oneness is challenged, not only by the similarity between offspring and parents in the accidents that are originated in time, but more importantly, by the shared essence and nature.⁶⁰ This is why al-Rassī declares that God cannot be said to be the principle of something and that He is neither son nor father.⁶¹

In the section on the origin of the Christian beliefs,⁶² we learn that the source of the idea of God's fatherhood to Christ originates in the ancient beliefs (or myths) that God had created and formed from Himself, and from nothing other, the seven stars.⁶³ When completing their formation, from Himself and through Himself, He

⁶⁰ Maybe suggesting that essence and nature are not originated.

⁶¹ *Naṣārā*, pp. 17-18.

إذ في أن يكون شيء له ولدا، وأن يكون شيء أصلا محتدا، إبطال الإلهية والربوبية، و زوال الأزلية والوحدانية، وإذ لا يكون واحدا من كان له ولد أبدا، ولا يكون أزليا من كان والدا أو أبا ، لأن الابن ليس لأبيه برب، وكذلك الرب فليس لمربوب بأب. إذ كان الابن في الذات هو مثله، فكلاهما من الربوبية قاص مبتعد، إذ ليس منهما من هو بها متفرد متوحد، لأن الربوبية لا تمكن أبدا إلا لواحد ليس بأصل لشيء، ولا ولد ولا والد.

⁶² Regarding these beliefs, and who were the Christians targeted by al-Rassi, we read in Thomas (2002), p. 39: “[...] he distinguishes between the teachings of the Melkites (whom he calls al-Rūm) that the Son took from Mary a nature and so the Messiah was two natures, *ṭabīʿa*, in one hypostasis, *uqnūm*, of the Jacobites that the divine and human became one when the Son became a body from Mary, *tajassada bihi*, and of the Nestorians that the Son became a body which was perfect and complete in nature and hypostases, and so the Messiah was two natures and hypostases.”

⁶³ In our preparation for the Ibādī chapter, we came across a relevant passage in the collected works of the Ibādī community by the fifth/sixth century qāḍī and faqīh Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī: ثم يقال لعبدة الأوثان النجوم السبعة والاثني عشر الزاعمين بأن الشمس والقمر، والخمسة الأتجم السبعة والاثني عشر ملائكة، وزعموا أن السبعة تلي التدبير العلم [العالم] كله.

فيقال لهم: ما علمكم بذلك، ومن أين استدلتتم على ما تدعون انتونا عليه ببرهان.

ثم يقال لهم: أخبرونا عن هذه السبعة التي سموها الفعه لعله -الفعلة- هل فيها تفاضل؟

Al-Kindī, *Bayān al-Sharʿ*, (1984), v. 2, p. 316. This quotation, which is part of a larger refutation of dualists, pagans and naturalists, is not attributed to anyone. However, al-Kindī frequently quotes scholars from the third and fourth century.

Despite the problematic editing of this very important work, we still find in this passage the important reference to the seven stars, the angels, and to the causal power of these stars. What is

affirmed their Lordship and Godhead, He said to them “you are the Gods of Godhead.”⁶⁴ According to al-Rassī, those who held these beliefs assumed that it is through them, and from them, that all the originated things came to be.⁶⁵ The existence of the originated things and their subsistence was through these stars, and their formation derives from them, thus suggesting that these stars were not only the cause of their coming to be but also the ground and origin from which these things came to be. They are said, according to al-Rassī, to be the intermediate cause or *illa* between God and the things.⁶⁶ He, however, also says that God is the maker of these stars and of the others, and that it is through Him that all living things cease to exist. In this ancient belief, God was believed to be the sole deity, the

absent, however, is the important idea that these stars are intermediaries between God and the world of generation and corruption.

Also, in *al-Ihlījiyya*, and in Ja'afar al-Ṣādiq's debate with the denier of God's existence, there is a discussion of the stars influence on the birth of human beings and on the idea of being self caused. See Al-Majlisī, v. 3, pp. 171-174.

⁶⁴ "انتن الهة الالهية"

⁶⁵ Parallel to this notion, and at approximately the same time, Aḥmad Ibn Ḥā'it̄ (in Zuhdī Jār Allah and Thomas David, but also Ḥābiṭ in different editions of texts but mostly Khābiṭ) (d. 232/846) and al-Faḍl al-Ḥadathī (d. 257/870) were discussing the existence of two lords and creators, one is eternal and the other is created. God creates the intellect (al-Baghadādī) or the first Intellect as well as the active Intellect (al-Shahrestānī) from which the forms of the existents emanate. This Intellect is what they identify as the Word and Christ who would judge people on the day of judgement, it is what becomes manifest, contrary to God. The similarity with the seven gods is in the creative act of the first created thing which causes the rest of creation. This is an intermediary state that separates the One from the multiplicity of the created world. It is interesting to find this form of *tanzīh* discussed in *kalām* circles prior to the similar Ismā'īlī form of *tanzīh* (briefly mentioned in chapter four). See Thomas (1992), pp. 5-8 ; Jār Allah, (1990), pp. 150-152 ; Al-Baghdādī, 'Abd al-Qāhir, *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, (1982), pp. 260-261 and *Milal*, pp. 27-28.

⁶⁶ In al-Shahrestānī's *Milal*, pp. 126, 127, we read regarding the Sabians:

الروحانيات هم الأسباب المتوسطون في الاختراع، والإيجاد، وتصريف الأمور من حال إلى حال، وتوجيه المخلوقات من مبدأ إلى كمال، يستمدون القوة من الحضرة القدسية، ويفيضون الفيض على الموجودات السفلية، فمنها مدبرات الكواكب السبعة السيارة في أفلاكها، وهي هياكلها، فلكل روحاني هيكل. ولكل هيكل فلك، ونسبة الروحاني إلى ذلك الهيكل الذي اختص به، نسبة الروح إلى الجسد، فهو ربه ومدبره ومديره. وكانوا يسمون الهياكل أربابا، وربما يسمونها آباء، والعناصر أمهات.

See also *Milal*, pp. 136, 137

Regarding the people of Ḥarrān, he writes (Ibid., p. 149):

قالوا: إن الصانع المعبود واحد وكثير. أما واحد ففي الذات، والأول، والأصل، والأزل. وأما كثير فلأنه [يتكثر] بالأشخاص في رأي العين، وهي المدبرات السبعة، والأشخاص الأرضية الخيرة، العاملة، الفاضلة، فإنه يظهر بها، ويتشخص بأشخاصها، ولا تبتل وحدته في ذاته. وقالوا: هو أبداع الفلك وجميع ما فيه من الأجرام والكواكب، جعلها مدبرات هذا العالم، وهم الآباء. والعناصر أمهات. والمركيبات مواليد.

God of the gods who has no similitude with these stars and who is eternal without a beginning and end. His creation of the beings that have a limited existence is through these star gods, for He has empowered them to act to bring things into being.⁶⁷

Al-Rassī finds in this belief a comparable precedent to the Christian belief in the relation between the father and the son. God, according to his view of the Christian belief, is seen to create things through His son and that He preserves (*ḥifẓ*) and directs (*dabbara*) them through His holy spirit. The power that is entrusted to the son, that of creation, is said to be different from the power of the holy spirit, which is the power to preserve and direct.⁶⁸

The argument for why there is no possibility for the existence of such divisions in the Godhead, or for denying the multiplicity of this Godhead, is essentially based on the ground of the necessity of the existence of a creator. The created things of the world are used as the clear proof of an origination into being through the power of an all mighty creator, God. Any multiplicity in the Godhead, similar to any multiplicity of gods, will cause a struggle between the different members of the

In Al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-bad' wal-tārīkh*, (1899), v. 1, p. 171 we also read:

وقالت الحرانِيَّة الملائكة النجوم وهي المدبِّرات للعالم وهو أحدث الباطنيَّة فزعمت ائها سبعة واثنا عشرة.

⁶⁷ *Naṣārā*, p. 22.

قول كان يقول به في الأوائل الروم والقيبط وأهل الجاهلية من كان يقول في النجوم السبعة بتثبيت الربوبية لها، والإلهية، وكانوا يزعمون أن النجوم السبعة ملائكة لله ناطقة، وأنها آلهة مع الله لما تم بها كونه، خالقة، وأن الله سبحانه صنعهم منه صنعاً، ولم يبتدعهم لا من شيء بدعا فلما أكملهم، تبارك وتعالى، وتم تمامهم، كُنَّ كلهم، به وعنه، قال لهم: أنتن آلهة الإلهية، بكنَّ عقد كل معقود، وحل كل محلول، وزعموا أن بهن وعنه كانت من الحيوان المئات جعله كل مجعول، بهن كان وجوده وقوامه، ومنهن كان صنعه وتمامه، وأنهن علة، واسطة بين الله وبين الأشياء، وأن الله الصانع لهم ولغيرهم، به ماتت الأحياء، وكان الله لا شريك له، إله الإلهة العلي، الذي لا يمثلونه بشيء، والأول القديم الذي لم يزل، تبارك وتعالى، من غير أول ولا بدء، وأنه هو المبتدئ الصانع للنجوم السبعة، المتعالي عن مشابهة كل مصنوع كان أو يكون وكل صنعة.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Godhead.⁶⁹ If any of the three divisions is said to be all powerful, the domain of this power will extend to the others in the tripartite division of God, thus resulting in the reduction of the powers of each division. If such a power is not existent, then this will present a limitation in the power that is ultimately uniquely associated with the one Godhead. Any limitation in the Godhead's power is a mark of Its finitude which is contrary to the definition of a God who is eternally and infinitely powerful.⁷⁰

The things that are other than God are described as things: that do not partake in His eternity and power; who have clearly been created; whose parts are evidence of their state of origination; who are weak and governed; who have bodies with borders; who are numbered and are imaginable (*mutawahham*).⁷¹ The idea of borders, limits, enumeration and quantification whether physical or intelligible, as well as all the other qualifications and attributions that are associated with what is other than God, are all references to the distinguished nature of the individual thing. In all the things that are similar or different, physically or intelligibly, whether they are living things (*ḥayawān*) or inanimate (*mayyit*) things, it is the differentiation and the distinction of each individual thing that makes it a created being and renders it a sign for the divine act of creation. This individuality or distinction, even if grouped under species or any other categorisation based on similarity, is the mark of that which has borders, limits and finitude. A finite and limited thing must have a beginning and end, in other words a limitation on its being and existence, which renders it essentially different from God.

⁶⁹ See also, al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 136, for Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's argument with a dualist.

⁷⁰ *Naṣārā*, pp. 23-24.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Al-Rassī comments on Q.2:116 “And they say: Allah hath taken unto Himself a Son,” by stating that he who takes something (*muttakhidh*) is the one who originates and makes something, thus, the one who is taken in this verse, Christ, has originated in time and was made by God.⁷² However, if the son and the father have been considered similar in nature and in essence then both must be co-eternal. The challenge this time is not only from the impossibility of having them both eternally existent, but also from the Qur’ānic statement that the Christians believe that God has made, and therefore, caused Christ to originate in time, which is similar to the old belief in God’s making the star gods from Himself. According to al-Rassī, Christ cannot be both, eternal in nature like God the father and at the same time an originated thing made by this same father.⁷³

In the section regarding the agreed doctrines of the Christians we learn that the three - the father, the son and the holy spirit- are three separate persons (*ashkhās*) which in reality agree on the same nature that is the ground of their unity.⁷⁴ The father is not begotten which means not generated, the son is generated, whilst the holy spirit is neither father nor begotten (generated). Again, all these different individuals are considered co-eternal, thus none precede the other and none of these exceeds the other in godhood, as they are of the same nature and essence.⁷⁵

The Christians give the example of the sun to explain this oneness in nature and

⁷² Ibid., p. 27.

والتخذ عند كل أحد، فهو المستحدث المصطنع، وما أتخذ [فاصطنع]، فهو يقينا المحدث المبتدع. والوالد، كما بينا في صدر هذا الكتاب، كالمولود في مالهما، بالذات والطبيعة، من الخاصية والحدود، فجعلوا الإله البديع كالمبدوع...

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 27-29.

⁷⁴ David Thomas translates *ashkhās* as individual beings, see Thomas (1992), p. 34, whilst Madelung chooses the word person. He also says that the term *shakhṣ*, which is used for the separate hypostases, is less frequently used by the Christians of this period who instead prefer *uqnūm*, which is also mentioned by al-Rassī, Madelung (1991), p. 43.

⁷⁵ *Naṣārā*, p. 33.

essence and difference in persons or individuals. The sun is one in nature and essence yet manifests three distinguished qualities which differ in states and attributes. Also according to al-Rassī, the Christians consider the sun itself to be like the father, its heat is like the holy spirit whilst its light is like the son.⁷⁶ With the representation of three manifest qualities of the sun, one has a real a model of the idea of three distinguished persons that are one thing in nature and essence.⁷⁷

The other model for multiplicity with one nature, known to al-Rassī, is that of the human being, who is considered one in nature and essence yet also has many different and distinguished qualities. The human being is one in her humanness yet is a number of things at the same time. The human being has a self, a body, a life as well as thoughts. These things belong to one human being yet the body is not the self, and life is not thoughts. The general idea that al-Rassī is presenting as the

⁷⁶ On Jacob of Edessa's comparison between God and the sun, we read: "The sun is thus great, perceptible, simple, enlightening, the giver of heat and life in the same way that God is also the great, primary and omnipotent luminary, simple, enlightening, and life-giving." Wilks (2008), p. 230.

⁷⁷ *Naṣārā*, p. 34.

فمن ذلك، زعموا، أن الشمس في عينها كالأب، و[ضوءها] فيها كالابن، وحرها فيها كالروح، ثم هي بعد، وإن كانت لها هذه العدة، فشمس لا يشك فيها أحد، واحدة، لأن الشمس إن فارقتها [ضوءها] لم تُدع شمسا، وكذلك إن فارقتها حرها لم تُدع أيضا شمسا، وإنما تسمى الشمس شمسا وتُدعى، إذا كان هذا كله فيها مجتمعا.

David Thomas takes this as an indication of al-Qāsim's well established knowledge of the Christian faith and of the traditional metaphors among Christians, see Thomas (1992), pp. 34. He also mentions that despite this knowledge, the arguments against the Christians are usually set from within the internal resources, as they are presented within Islam, which are primarily concerned with God's unity and distinctiveness and the authenticity of the Bible. This is most clearly demonstrated by al-Jubbā'ī's reduction of the arguments against the Christian hypostases to arguments against divine attributes and God's unity or *tawḥīd*. See Thomas (1992), pp. 39-40 ; (2002), pp. 17-18. For a fuller study of the late critiques of al-Nashī' al-Akbar, al-Māturīdī, al-Bāqillānī and al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jbbār, see Thomas (2008). Interestingly, this could have also influenced the language of the responses presented by the Christian apologetics which also used Islamic references, see Griffith (2006), pp. 288-309, where a Christian monk uses hypostases as the names and attributes of God, and quotes the Qur'an in his arguments.

argument of the Christians, is that the oneness in nature and essence is not necessarily oneness in qualities and attributions.⁷⁸

In response to the above claims, al-Rassī argues that these terms, which have been invented by the Christians, cannot be shown to be true by any empirical evidence or by any syllogism. He questions if the names ‘the father’, ‘the son’ and ‘holy spirit’ refer to an essence (*jawhar*), a self (*dhāt*) or a nature (*ṭabīʿa*), or if these refer to distinct persons or hypostasis. He suggests that these are accidental and originated names, since if the father begot a son then these names are not of essential natures nor names of persons but rather of accidental and originating things that became manifest following the origination of the son.⁷⁹

Al-Rassī follows this reasoning with a discussion of the meanings of the different classes of names. He describes the names of nature as the names that refer to what the things are in themselves, their essence or what they are by nature. A name that refers to the nature of a thing is not due to a causal act and does not accept variation in degrees, it is a fixed name that refers to something specific and defined, it refers neither to an individual person nor to an act, it is the name of the thing itself, its essence. The name of the nature of the thing refers to or signifies the thing itself and not its species,⁸⁰ and as examples of such names of natures or essences (*dhāt* or *jawhar*) he gives: earth and heaven; fire and water. In the case of the names of persons, this merely refers to individual persons (or proper names) like Mūsā and

⁷⁸ *Naṣārā*, p. 34.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁸⁰ This seems to be a direct response to Abū Qura’s use of names of nature as names of species. See Abī Qurra, T. *Mayāmir Thāwadūrus abī Qurra Asqaf Ḥarran*, 1905, p. 33. Madelung notes that “the resemblances to Theodore Abū Qurra’s Arabic treatises are most common, yet nowhere close enough to prove a direct dependence,” Madelung (1991), p. 43

Ibrāhīm, Dāwūd and ʿĪsā. These names of persons do not refer to the nature of individuals or to what they are in their essence. They also do not include the names fatherhood and son-hood, which are presumably of the third type of names. This last set of names refers to accidents that originate in time and are, therefore, associated with originating things.⁸¹

⁸¹ *Naṣārā*, pp. 40, 41.

والطبيعية فإنما تسمى بطبائعها وذاتها وبما يكمل ذلك كله لها، من اجتماعها، لأننا بالأسماء المتعلقة، بالعلة المشتقة من الأفعال المعتملة أعرف، لأن اسم الطبيعة غير اسم القنوم، واسم القنوم غير اسم الفعل المعلوم، واسم الطبيعة ثابت، لا اختلاف فيه ولا تفاوت، إنما هو اسم لها محدود موقف لا ينصرف فيها، ولا يختلف، فلا يدل على قنوم ولا فعل مفعول، ولكنه اسم الشيء نفسه، يدل عليه، لا على جنسه، كالأرض والسماء والنار والماء، وأشبه ذلك من الأسماء، التي تدل على أعيان الأشياء، فهذه هي أسماء الذات والطبائع، لا أسماء الأنانيم والصنائع. فأما أسماء القنومية، التي ليست بطبيعية ولا عرضية، فمثل إبراهيم وموسى وداود وعيسى، وليس في الأسماء الطبيعية، ولا في الأسماء الشخصية القنومية، أبوة ولا بنوة، ولا أفعال ولا قوة، إنما هي أسماء تدل على الأعيان، كالانسانية تدل على الإنسان، فيما بيننا، والحمد لله، من تحديدها الذي حددنا في الأسماء، حجة لا يدفعها في التسمي، عندهم، إلا من كان من أهل الجهل والعمى، لأن الأسماء عندهم للأشياء ثلاثة أسماء.

1- اسم (و) جوهر: كالأرض والسماء.

2- واسم قنوم: كفلان المعلوم.

3- واسم ثالث من عرض وحدث: سمي به كل [عارض] محدث .

III. *Response to Ibn al-Muqaffa' al-zindīq*⁸²

In 'response to Ibn al-Muqaffa' al-Rassī includes a section in which he argues against some of the dualists' beliefs.⁸³ Amongst these is the belief that all the things of the world are in reality two things, or more accurately a combination and admixture of two things. According to this belief system, all things are different combinations of light and darkness, or in other terms, things are mixtures of these two things. The dualists believe that the two principles, light and darkness, were eternally existent before their combination into the different things of the world. Al-Rassī argues that there is no experiential evidence, or rational reasoning, that may support the idea that the principles of all things were initially eternal and

⁸² Al-Rassī, *Al-Radd 'alā al-Zindīq ibn al-Muqaffa' al-La'īn*, (2001). (Henceforth, *Zindīq*). The term *zindīq* appears to have a number of different associations but it is more narrowly applied to the Manicheans. According to de Blois the other associations are with heretic, renegade and unbeliever, it is basically used synonymously with *mulhid*. The original use of this word in association with Manicheans predates the Islamic period since it is found in use in middle Persian to refer to the same group. De Blois also mentions the Syria use of *zaddikē* as a designation of the Manichean 'elect' who are the full members of the Manichean community. See de Blois' "Zindīq" in *EP*. Regarding Ibn al-Muqaffa', de Blois believes that his Manichaeism is not conclusive, but that references to his belief in the mixture of light and darkness does suggest a Manichean dualism rather than Zoroastrian or other dualism. He also deduces from the fact that Ibn al-Muqaffa' rejects the idea of a war between the two principles, that he was not a member of the Manichean church but he "shared some of the theoretical premises of Manichaeism." (ibid.) With regard to Ibn al-Muqaffa' and his work that is quoted in this epistle, Gabrieli believes that it is authentic and reflects "the Manichean faith which several of the friends of Ibn al-Muqaffa' had adopted and of which the writer himself was suspected of." What is more important is that Gabrieli finds, in some parts of this epistle, a "striking analogy with certain passages" of his famous work *Kalīla wa Dimna*. For more on Ibn al-Muqaffa' see Garieli's entry "Ibnal-Muqaffa'" in *EP*. See also Monnot's "Thanawiyya" in *EP*. For more information on the nature of the anti-Manichean polemics and the influence of the latter on ethical *kalām*, more specifically free will, see Stroumsa & Stroumsa (1988). Finally, some arguments in this epistle bear some similarities with pagan and Christian arguments as they appear in Lieu (1986).

⁸³ Madelung in agreement with Nyberg finds the source of the arguments to be Christian in origin (Abū Qurra's attack on Mani for example). Again, however, Madelung writes: "None of the earlier and contemporary Mu'tazilite refutations of the dualists and Manicheans are extant for comparison. It is evident, however, that they can hardly have been at the base of al-Qāsim's argumentation." This, he bases on the essentiality of goodness in al-Qasim's argument as is the case in Christian theology, see Madelung (1991), p. 41.

separate and that they became combined and mixed at another time of their existence.⁸⁴

Al-Rassī's arguments against the dualists are primarily based on the idea that it is absolutely impossible for any opposites to be combined into anything. In such combinations, one of the opposites must annul the other since the opposite of a thing is its corrupting element. All cases of oppositions necessitate separation, since any combination of opposites necessitates the annulment of the opposite things. Alternatively, such combination would lead both opposing elements to change from what is known of them, or what characterises them. In the combination of snow and fire for example, both things are transformed, they change into something else, into water. This idea also applies in the case of mixing two different colours that combine to create a third colour.⁸⁵

Al-Rassī categorically denies any possible combination of opposites on the grounds that they would mutually annul each other, or at least one of the two in combination. Interestingly, however, he presents us with examples of mutual annulment where a third kind, which is neither of the opposites, emerges from the corruption of both opposing elements. One cannot fail to notice that the possibility

⁸⁴ *Zindīq*, pp. 322, 323.

ثم قال تحكماً، واقتضى زعماً، أن الأشياء كلها من النور والظلمة مزاج، وأنه لم يكن بينهما فيما خلا من دهرهما امتزاج، سفهاً من القول وتعيثاً، ومجانةً في السفه وخبثاً، فثبت بينهما شبه الاستواء، وحكمٌ عليهما حكمُ السواء، في حالين يجمعانها عنده معاً، وفعالين يتساويان فيهما جميعاً، فقال في أولهما لم يمتزجا، ثم قال في آخرهما امتزجا، فجمعهما - عنده في الامتزاج وخلافه - الحالان، واشتراكهما فيما كان من إساءة وإحسان، وليس في أنهما هما الأصلان، دليل واضح به يثبتان،

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 326.

إن الضد لا يجمع أبداً ضدّاً، إلا أفناه فكان له عند المجامعة مفسداً، ولا تكون المضادة من الشئيين واقعة، إلا لم تجمعها بعد تضادها جامعة، إلا مع بطلان موجود أعيانها، أو تبدُّلها باجتماعها عن معهود شأنهما، كبطلان الثلج والنار عند اعتلاجهما، أو كتبدل اللونين أو الطعمين في امتزاجهما فكيف يصح لما زعموا من الأصلين الاجتماع؟! أو يوجد منهما بعد المزاج إضرار أو انتفاع؟! وهما لا يكونان إلا متناقضين، أو مزاجاً فيكونا متغيرين، كتغير الممتزجات عند مزاجها إلى فعالٍ واحدٍ، يجده منها بدرك الحواس أو بعضها كل واحدٍ.

of generation from opposites is what al-Rassī intends to reject in his critique of the belief of the dualists/Manicheans. He questions how they could defend the combination of their two principles to produce something different when they ought to repel each other. He seems to challenge the belief in the combination of opposites yet at the same time admitting that such opposites may combine to generate something new. This leads us to understand his argument against the dualists to be primarily against a combination that preserves both constitutive opposing elements, since his combination annuls the constitutive elements and generates a third element. In fact, al-Rassī shows that combination is possible, but it means the annulment of the dualist principles in the process of generating the myriad things of this world.

In al-Rassī's treatment of Ibn al-Muqaffa's beliefs, we are informed that he too believed in the dual light and darkness, and that all things are mixtures and combinations, this, for our author, is simply ignorance and gnosis.⁸⁶ One of the points that are criticised by al-Rassī is that Ibn al-Muqaffa takes light to have a variation in degree or gradation - *tafāḍul*- where one part of light is better than another. This leads to the problem of having one part of light better than another part, which would render the one original light numerous rather than just one. The argument relies on the idea that if one thing is better than another then there are two things being considered in the comparison and not just one. One part being more lacking in certain aspects than the other, and one is seen to be higher whilst the other lower (in virtue, if we consider the use of *faḍl* as having a moral

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 330.

زعم ابن المقفع اللعين عماية وفرطاً، أنه لا يرى من الأشياء كلها إلا مزاجاً مختلطاً. كذلك زعم النور والظلمة، اللذان هما عنده الجهل والحكمة.

connotation). This idea of various degrees and grades of light is also applied to the darkness principle. In talking about darkness, the language changes from variation in goodness to variation in evilness (*sharr*), or from gradation of positive attributions to gradations in negative attributions. Interestingly, al-Rassī also argues that a negative or evil part is less evil than the whole (made of the different parts), and that if the evilness of the part is less than that of the whole then there is also evilness in light itself. The supporting argument used for this judgement is that deficiency (*qilla*) itself is evil. Thus, any gradation in light that causes the existence of different parts, some of which are attributed with a certain deficiency in comparison with others, would lead to the idea that the deficient light elements possess some evilness. Following this argument, al-Rassī reproaches Ibn al- Muqaffa⁸⁷ for rendering the good light evil and the evil darkness good since they both accept different degrees of the other opposing element,⁸⁷ so that darkness becomes evil and good, harmful and beneficial, and light becomes beneficial and harmful.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ A similar issue will arise later on in the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonism with regard to the relationship between the spiritual world (light) and the corporeal world (darkness). In al-Sajistānī's defence of al-Nasafī against al-Rāzī we read:

(الرازي) ... ولا نقول ان الطبيعة والهيولى الظلمانية متولدة من الثاني، كتولد الثاني من الاول، لان ذلك عالم الشرف والفضيلة، وهذا العالم الظلمة والكدورة...
(السجستاني)... ان هذا القول غلط، لانه لو كان ذلك العالم نورانيا لا ظلمة فيه، وهذا العالم ظلمانيا لا نور فيه، لم يقع بين هذا العالم وذلك العالم صلة.

Al-Kirmānī, *kitāb al-riyāḍ*, (1950), p. 111.

⁸⁸ *Zindīq*, pp. 336, 337.

زعم - أن من الأمور محموداً، وأن منها مذموماً. فقال منها ولم يقل كلها، وسقط عنه بعضها وفضلها، وإذا كان لأبيها كان بعض وكل، كان لكلها يقيناً على بعضها فضل، وإذا ثبت بين النور التفاضل، ثبت لبعضه على بعض فضائل، وإذا كان النور فاضلاً ومفضولاً، فقد عاد النور بعد أصل أصولاً، إذ الفاضل والمفضول اثنان، والفضل والنقص منهما شيطان، والفاضل فخير حالا، والمفضول أسفل سفالاً، فكل جزأين من أجزائه، فهما خير من جزو، وكل عضو من أعضائه، فهو في الشر كعضو، وهما إذا اجتمعا، خير منهما إذا انقطعا، فمرة فيهما خير عند الاجتماع، ومرة فغيرهما خير منهما عند الانقطاع.
وكذلك أيضاً فقد يدخل عليهم في الظلمة وتفاضلها، ما يصيرهم إلى أن شر البعض منهما أقل من شر كلها، إذ شر كلها أكثر من شر بعضها، وإذا الشر من أقلها ليس هو أكثر من شر كلها، فالنور في نفسه واسمه شر ضرراً، ونافع شراً، وذلك أنه يقال والقلة عنده شر فيعود نوره ضراً، و يقصر عن قدر مبلغ كماله والتقصير عنده ضرر فيعود ضراً، والظلمة فخير عندهم وشر، ونفع وضر، إذ قليها مقصر في الشر، عن مبلغ كثيرها في مواقعها من الضر، وبعضها كذلك مع كلها، فرعها فيه ليس كأصلها.

After quoting Ibn al-Muqaffa's question, regarding whether or not God was alone without having any other beings with Him, al-Rassī responds in the affirmative. He explains that in stating that God is one, he affirms that He has no equal (*nadd*) nor opposite, since if He had such other things this would negate what is known of Him, that is, His being one thing. He also argues that if God was made of different parts (or pieces- *ashtāt*) He would have been many, and had He been many then all these parts would have been equal to each other.⁸⁹

The other argument he uses as a proof of the oneness of God is that of the final 'cause'.⁹⁰ Al-Rassī states that behind every end there is an end "وراء كل غاية غاية" until one reaches the end that is beyond all ends behind which there is no other end or finality. If one is to find another end or finality then one has not reached the ultimate end, what he describes as: "the end of ends that one perceives through the intellect."⁹¹ In this argument, we are given the task of looking for the 'one thing' that is the end of all things, which means the task is that of searching for a predefined thing that is supposed to be the aim. In this argument the opponent is set the task of intellectually searching for the 'one end', and if one reaches more than one then the search has not reached its final aim, hence one must continue the search until one thing and only one thing is reached. If the ground of this argument sets 'the one' as the aim of the intellectual search without which the conclusion would be mistaken, then there is no justification in accepting this as a proof of the fact that God is one.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 340.

⁹⁰ God was seen earlier not to be a cause, which is why there is no use of cause or *illa* in this argument.

⁹¹ Ibid.

أو ليس معلوماً معروفاً أن من وراء كل غاية غاية، حتى ينتهي المنتهي الذي ليس من وراءه غاية ولا نهاية، وأنه إن كان مع غاية غاية، أو بعد نهاية عند أحد نهاية، فلم تُصِرْ بعد إلى غاية الغايات، ولم ينته عقله إلى نهاية النهايات، وأنه يصير بالعظمة عند النظر من عظيم إلى عظيم، حتى يَفْقَهَ النظر على غاية ليس وراءها مزيد في تعظيم.

In other words, al-Rassī begins his reasoning by setting the premise that God is one and then seeks through this premise to prove that He is one, thus leading to a circularity in the argument, since he sets the conclusion as a condition in his argument.

In another section of the same text, we find a different approach to the one just stated. Here al-Rassī gives a more detailed proof of the one God starting from the things that have been created, and here again, it is the origination of things that is used as the proof of the originator. The beginning of the argument is that all things that stand in existence have limits. The existence of such limits suggests, for al-Rassī, the existence of the act of limiting which in turn refers to the existence of an acting agent who limits things and is not Himself restricted and delimited. The affects of the existing things, what is sensed of all things existent, is also a sign of an affecting agent. Al-Rassī also uses the idea that all existing forms are indicators of a forming agent, and that the instincts, which the beings have, cannot exist without one who instils them in these beings. Further to these examples, we are then introduced to the idea of combination of things. Presumably, he intends to show that the idea that things are combinations of different things is a sign of a combining agent. Interestingly, al-Rassī here also uses the example of books indicating the existence of a writing agent as he did in his dialogue with the naturalist.⁹² The agent who causes all affects, instils all instincts, forms all formations, combines all combined things and who delimits all limited things is God. Once an agent has been shown to be acting in the above cases, al-Rassī states

⁹² In Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's argument with the dualist we find the same idea (al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 136):
وجود الأفاعيل دلت على أن صانعا صنعها أ لا ترى أنك إذا نظرت إلى بناء مشيد مبني علمت أن له بانبا و إن كنت لم تر الباني و لم تشاهده قال فما هو قال شيء بخلاف الأشياء ارجع بقولي إلى إثبات معنى و أنه شيء بحقيقة الشينية

that there must be a radical dissimilarity between the affecting agent and the affected things; that the one who forms and shapes things cannot be equal in any shape or form to what is formed. If there is no real and radical difference between the forming agent and the formed, the affected and the limited, then this agent Himself will have the limitations and weakness of the things His acts shaped, formed, limited and affected.⁹³

The fundamental reasoning in the above argument is that limits and borders, shapes and forms, combinations and all the other things mentioned, are signs and references of what is subjugated, what is weak and subject to the will of an acting agent. The space between the object and the acting subject is the space that separates two very different things or, two modes of being. In one, the first, we find absolute power to act, and the will to orient this power in this or that act of formation and creation. On the other side of this space exists the effect and the residue of the act itself, the finalised object of the act of delimiting, forming and shaping. The ground of the argument is simply the radical and absolute dissimilarity and difference between the absolute maker and His made things.⁹⁴

⁹³ *Zindīq*, p. 369.

ففيه لمن نظر وأنصف، وعدل في النظر فلم يحف، دليل على حدوث الأشياء مبين، وشاهد ثابت - لا يدفع - مكين، إذ الأشياء كلها محدودة، والآثار في قائمها موجودة، ومعلوم بأن التحديد إذا وجد لا يكون إلا من محدّد غير محدود، ولا أثر إذا غوين إلا من مؤثّر موجود، ولا تصوير مصوّر إلا من مصوّر، ولا فطرة مفضور إلا من مفتطر، كما لا يكون كتاب وجد إلا من كاتب، ولا تركيب إذا كان إلا من مركّب، ولا فعل ما كان إلا لفاعل، ولا مقال قيل إلا من قائل، فأنه تعالى مؤثّر كل مؤثّر، والفاطر جل ثناؤه لكل مفتطر، لا ينكره إلا مناكر، ولا يابى الاقرار به إلا مكابر، والمناكر فغير منكر، والمكابر فغير مستنكر

⁹⁴ Abrahamov affirms that al-Qāsim considers God's absolute difference from creation as God's only quality, and this, he points out, is not a Mu'tazilī idea. Al-Rassī according to him "does not distinguish between God's essential attributes (*ṣifāt dhātīyya*) and His attributes of action (*ṣifāt fi'liyya*)." Abrahamov (1990), p. 21. We also learn in the next page that al-Rassī admits other qualities to God but he does not distinguish between them. Most of these other qualities, however, "can at least partially qualify man", but the only one that applies to Him is His difference from all. When considering God we are told, al-Rassī asserts that: "His quality glory be to Him, is only He." (ibid., pp. 22-23). Madelung on the other hand writes: "Al-Qāsim's concept of divine attributes is, in spite of his

Ibn al- Muqaffa' is quoted to have said that: "they (the Muslims) claim that God created with His hands all things from an existing thing." In his reply, al-Rassī questions when have they ever claimed that "God has disseminated (*baththa*) 'all' (*jamī*) His creations and made visible (*arā*) what He had created with His hands." The response that follows asserts that God did not create 'all' things in this manner, and that it is only Adam who was uniquely intended by this speech. It was only Adam, of 'all' the things created, who was fashioned in this way, for his creation was a primary creation, unlike the other creations who are generated from other things "ككون بعض الاشياء من بعض". All the successive human beings followed one another, and are from one another, since God is said to have created them through reproduction. The other created things that followed Adam's creation are different and not primary, in the sense that they are created from other existing things. This stands in opposition to Adam's creation, which is not from parents and is without a prior model.

If one takes this response to be an attempt at refuting Ibn al-Muqaffa's claim, then this refutation is solely of the fact that God has created all His creations from an existing model. This refutation is not of the idea that creation is from a thing, since it affirms that God has created Adam from a thing (earth) and that the successive creations and generations were of the same things through reproduction from other things. This text therefore affirms that the 'primary' creation was from a thing and it is said to be primary because it was not preceded by a model. The other

initial insistence on the absolute dissimilarity of God and creation, structurally the same." In the case of power for example, the power that is witnessed in the created world indicates the existence of one who "owns all power". This owner of all power differs from the created powerful in that the latter is "partial and mixed with impotence (*dhull*)." Madelung (1991), p. 39. This idea of mixture in the created world in opposition to the purity of the principle also appears in the arguments against the dualist.

creation interestingly is also here said to be from something but differs in the fact that it is from an already existing model (*mithā*), it is not a primary creation of something new that has no *mithā*.

According to this section, creation is always from something, it is called primary if the thing it is created from does not bear the model of what is in the process of becoming, it is a formless thing that is formed according to God's will. If it is not a primary creation then creation is from some-thing already existing and already bearing the model of what becomes through God's will. The seed of what is to become existing is already in an existing thing that is also its model, which is what renders this creation unlike the primary creation.

The first creation, which we have considered to be from a thing, is transformative and productive according to an idea in the mind of the creator, whilst the second is reformative and re-productive from an already existing thing that incorporates the idea and the material from which the new thing becomes. As a primary creation, Adam becomes the symbol of the unique primary creations. He is made from the material that precedes any limitation, and therefore any definition, and he is not modelled according to anything existing. Existing as an idea, and not as something real, is what firstly makes Adam's creation primary. He is also primary in that he is the first limited and defined thing, the first model from which all of his kind will

derive their form and material. This primary creation holds the material and the form of all the subsequent generation that flows from him.⁹⁵

Continuing his arguments against the Muslims, Ibn al-Muqaffa' states that, according to them, God took it upon Himself and with His own already existing hands to create His creations. He criticises them for believing that God is said to have commanded what is already an existing thing to come to existence, since Q.2:117: "be, and it is" can only be said to something existing. Al-Rassī's response is that these commanding words have not truly been pronounced by God, since God is only predicating and affirming in this statement something about His power and ability to create. In the act of creation there are no real hands that belong to God with which He acts and forms the existing things directly. Al-Rassī affirms that the means of God's acts are the means of power, that there is no medium, hands or other helping means, that God uses to achieve His acts.⁹⁶

If we join together these two sections which question the nature of creation, we find that al-Rassī confirms that the evidence, based on the existing things of this world, indicates the existence of an acting agent who creates His primary creations from things that are neither formed nor defined. This Agent has no prior model for His primary creations and He does not proceed to create them through any medium

⁹⁵ *Zindīq*, p. 372.

ومتى ويله زعمنا له أن جميع ما بَثَّ من خلقه وأرى، مما ولي خلقه بيده تعالى؟! إنما قيل ذلك في آدم خاصة دون غيره من الأشياء، إذ تولى سبحانه صنعه بالابتداء، ولم يكن ككون بعض الأشياء من بعض، ولم يتقدمه في خلقه نظير من أهل الأرض. فأما نظراًوه الذين كانوا يعدُّ من أولاده، فإنما خلقهم سبحانه بالتنازل من بعده، لا على طريق خلقته من الابتداء، ولا بمثل مُبتدئه من الأشياء، خلقاً عن غير والذين وكذاه، ومبتدعاً لا على مثال ابتداه .

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

وأنه سبحانه نطق أو تكلم، إنما ذلك للإخبار، عن القوة منه والاقْتدار، وأنه لا يفعل ما فعل بمباشرة، وأن سبيلَ فعله كله سبيلُ قدرة، لا يعان بكفين، ولا يستعان بمعين.

that is external to Him, and which comes into contact with the formless and undefined things. Contact with the formless would indicate that God, with His formed hands (as an example of what could be a medium of contact), would have limitation associated with Him, before He Himself causes His creations to have the quality of finitude.

To deny this direct formative contact, one may assume –contrary to al-Rassī’s belief– that things had already possessed forms, thus negating the agent’s need to have the means to have contact with what is to be formed. This, however, would lead to more problems than it would solve, as it would affirm other existents with God. The solution for al-Rassī is that there is no means of direct contact in the first place (with or without a primary formless thing). There are no limiting means associated with God that could limit His being, therefore His creation is through an ‘unlimited’ power.⁹⁷

Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ is then shown to argue that it is not possible to have created or generated anything from nothing, simply because one cannot imagine such a case. Since that which is not intelligible is impossible, he concludes that creation *ex-nihilo* is impossible. Al-Rassī’s response to this argument is that this reasoning presumes the eternal existence of all things and that there is nothing which might be said to have precedence (*taqdima*) over another. This in turn would be an affirmation that all things are eternal. If this argument is affirmed and acknowledged to be true then, al-Rassī argues, this would lead the person who holds this to be true to also believe that all these eternal things are not from a thing, and

⁹⁷ Not stated in this section.

that they are original appearances (*awwalu badyin*). However, if these things are original appearances then they must be so in comparison to what comes afterward, which means they must be succeeded by something. From this al-Rassī questions which of the two possibilities is more plausible, that things originate from nothing or that things have no known beginning and no imaginable end.⁹⁸

Al-Rassī follows his question of what is more plausible, creation from nothing or eternally existing things, by arguing that if the reply is that things have no beginning or end then the simple fact that this is intelligible, necessarily implies that these are limited things. For him, all that is intelligible or is the subject of understanding (*muḥāṭ*) is necessarily limited and is a finite thing, for the mind does not encompass (*aḥāṭ*) that which is infinite, which has no bordering limits (*muḥīṭ*) or any form of finitude.⁹⁹

Ibn al-Muqaffa's defence against such an argument is that it is impossible to intelligibly contain or encompass the eternal principle, in the manner of containing it in a finite thought that limits it. What is intended by the intelligibility of the infinite is simply the idea that it is eternal in the past as well as in the future لم يزل ولن يزال. This means that what is contained and limited in ones thought is not the principle itself as it is in itself, what is rather limited and contained in the idea of the eternal is simply its eternal nature. For al-Rassī, Ibn al-Muqaffa' is forced in this

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 372, 373.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 373.

فإن قال شيء لا أول له ولانهاية، أولى بالتوهم منه ولأية.
 قيل: فلا يكون هو أولاً إلا وهو متوهم، وإذا أجزت في معنى لم يزل التوهم، ثبتت به حينئذ الإحاطة، ولا يحاط إلا بماله نهاية محيطة،
 والنهاية أقطار، والقطر تحديد واقطار .

case to acknowledge that neither the eternal principle is known in itself nor is the act of creation from nothing. One does not have an actual knowledge of the actual mode of being of the principle, in the same way that one does not have an actual knowledge of what is creation *ex-nihilo*. Al-Rassī then proceeds to question why it would not be possible to accept the challenged alternative opinion that things do originate from nothing. He reasons that in both cases Ibn al-Muqaffa' must be committed to the idea that he has an intelligibility of the conception of eternity and origination but not of what they really are, thus what is denied of one must also be denied of the other. This leaves al-Rassī with his argument that the finitude of the objects of the real worlds, as well as the finitude of the ideas that are associated with these objects, necessarily point to the finiteness of the existents of the world and of the world itself, which in turn necessarily points to their origination and creation in time.¹⁰⁰

IV. *Kitāb al-Mustarshid*¹⁰¹

In *Kitāb al-Mustarshid* al-Rassī includes a section whereby he discusses the question of whether or not God is a thing.¹⁰² In his introduction he includes terms formed with the letters ش and ء, which are part of the word *shay'* (شيء). He states that to God all things are to measure, that He created (*ansha'a*) that which He has created (*limā ansha'ahu*) so that He made it into (*shayya'ahu*) a thing (*shay'an*) in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

فإن قلت: ليس نتوهمه على هذا لأن هذا قد استحال، ولكننا نتوهم أنه لم يزل ولن يزال.
 قيل: فأنت تريد تتوهم أنك تدرك وتعلم!! فلم أنكرت المحدث وإن لم تعلم له كيفية في الوهم؟! وقد ثبت معنى لم يزل غير متوهم،
 فقد يلزمك أن يكونا جميعا عندك في التعجب مشتبهين، فإن قلت: فإني أنفي يا هذا هذين من الوجهين، فالمسألة عليك في نفسك لازمة،
 والأشياء بعد قائمة!!

¹⁰¹ Abrahamov (1996). (Henceforth, *Mustarshid*)

¹⁰² For comparison with the older Shī'a tradition see al-Kulaynī, v. 1, pp. 137-140.

the way He desired it (*kama shā'a*), and He made it with limits and borders. The things He created were fashioned according to two modes, one of which was origination from nothing (*lā min shay*), whilst the other was transmission from one thing to another and transformation from one state to another and from one nature to another. This last case is demonstrated by the transformation of the human being from one state to another, as was described in the previous discussion of the changes of states (*nuṭfa, alqa* and human body).¹⁰³

In this section one finds one of the earliest discussions of the meanings of the word *shay'*, and more importantly of the term *shay'iyya* or thingness. To begin with, al-Rassī introduces the word *ma'nā*, one of the terms that have had different uses and significances within the *kalām* tradition, particularly within the Mu'tazilī school.¹⁰⁴ He defines it in terms of a thing. He states that a *ma'nā*,¹⁰⁵ or that which is signified,¹⁰⁶ is simply a thing (*shay*), since the thing, or what is signified, is what God brings forth from non-existence to existence.¹⁰⁷ Thus, according to al-Rassī, the signified (*al-ma'nā*) and the thing (*al-shay*) do not add a particular meaning in this attribution (*ṣifa*) to that which they denote.¹⁰⁸ This means that the attribution that something is a *shay'* or *ma'nā* does not in fact add any meaning beyond the denoting

¹⁰³ *Mustarshid*, p. 74. This is a similar statement to the one previously encountered regarding the transformation of the human being starting with dust. The use of the same example and the term *ḥāl* could suggest the same source of argument (or author).

¹⁰⁴ See Frank (1967), pp. 248-259.

¹⁰⁵ Translated by Abrahamov as "substance" (*Mustarshid*, p. 77).

¹⁰⁶ The relation between *shay'* and *ma'nā* is also expressed by Ja'far al Ṣādiq (al-Kulaynī, v. 1, pp. 136, 138):

قال فما هو قال شيء بخلاف الأشياء ارجع بقولي إلى إثبات معنى و أنه شيء بحقيقة الشئئية.

As to the term *ma'nā* and the way it is used in this context (ibid., p. 142):

...معنى يدل عليه بهذه الاسماء

¹⁰⁷ *Mustarshid*, p. 76.

وان الله تبارك وتعالى وسم المعاني بأن قال هي شيء لإخراجه لها من العدم لا انه وصفها بهذه الصفة بمعنى. ولا فرق بينها وبين شيء اذا قال لها انها اشياء.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

لا أنه وصفها بهذه الصفة بمعنى.

of existence, thus, this attribution cannot be said to differentiate or distinguish between two different things. God Has informed us that He has created all things, so that all the things that are other than Himself are created things, and all creations are things.¹⁰⁹ All the created things are different from each other, and the differences are in colour, nature or in action! However, all these various things, all these originated things are similar in their thingness (*shay'yya*) despite their different attributes.¹¹⁰ Every created thing is said to be a *shay'* because this word affirms (*yuthbit*) the existence (*wujūd*) of the thing and negates its non-existence.¹¹¹

From this introduction al-Rassī moves to the proof that God is also said to be a thing. For this reason he sites Q.28:88 “Everything will perish save His countenance.” This verse is considered a declaration by God that He is a thing that is unlike all the other perishable things, in the way that He himself, the eternal one, is not, and that He himself is the One who makes them perish. All the created things of the world are different from the One thing that is eternal in that they are all, in this particular case, the objects of His will and subject to His power to make them perish.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

فكل شيء سواه هو خلقُ شيء وكلُ خلق شيء.

¹¹⁰ This epistle is probably the earliest extant record which shows the use of the term *shay'yya*. For the importance of this term on the development of Ibn Sīna's philosophy see Wisnovsky (2000). The earliest use of *shy'yya* is probably by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as he is reported to have used it in al-Kulaynī, v. 1, p. 136.

¹¹¹ *Mustarshid*, p. 76.

وإنما سميت الأشياء بأن قيل لهذا شيء وهذا شيء لإثبات الأشياء بأنها موجودة وأنها ليست بعدم.

¹¹² Ibid.

The other Qur'anic proof that is cited is Q.6:19: "What thing is of most weight in testimony? Say: Allah." In this verse, God is stated to be a thing that is unlike all other things.¹¹³

These two verses are, according to al-Rassī, proofs given to any Jahmī¹¹⁴ who might question God's thingness or simply deny that God is a thing. He states that God is a thing that has no similitude with any other thing since His thingness is not created whilst all other things are made into a thing (*mushayya'a*).¹¹⁵ The human being, as a thing made by God (*mushayya*), is not considered to be the same or similar (*tushbihu*) to God because of a participation in thingness, and this is so because one is a thing and the other is a thing maker. The word *shay'*, as previously stated, is applicable to all the signified (*ma'āni*) and is affirmed (*thābit*) of all the existent things that are *mushayya'a*, now or in the future, without any additional attribution, since this word adds no particular meaning that could cause similitude (accord) or variance (disaccord) between things. Al-Rassī lists a number of things that have nothing in common apart from their thingness, the human being and the devil are things, but they have nothing in common, an elephant and an ant (*dharra*) have nothing in common and finally Adam, the first human being, and God have nothing in common despite participating in thingness.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Strong predestinarians who bare some close similarity to the Mu'tazila in their denying the distinctness of God's attributes and in believing in the creation of the Qur'ān. See Watt's "Djahmiyya" in *EF*.

¹¹⁵ *Mustarshid*, p. 78.

الله شيء لا يُشَبَّه بالأشياء. الأشياء مشبَّاهٌ وهو سبحانه شيء لا مُشَبَّاهٌ.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

In discussing some of the objections to this idea, al-Rassī notes that *al-dharra* and Adam can both be said to be *makhlūq* or created, thus having something in common which can be considered to be the similar quality that applies to both. This issue necessitates a distinction between the two words *khalq* and *shay'*. To the term *khalq* (creation) a contrary exists, and this contrary is *khāliq* (creator). When using these two variants one cannot say that the creator is created, yet one can still say that the creator is a thing, and naturally that the created is a thing. On the other hand, nothing exists that is a contrary of *shay'* which is not itself a *shay'*. *Shay'* here appears to be the most general term that applies to all the existent things without qualifying them by anything that could have a contrary. This leads al-Rassī to affirm that there is no *shay'* that is simply an existent, and as to the non-existent (*lā mawjūd*), it cannot be considered to be a contrary or not a contrary to *shay'*. It is interesting to see Al-Rassī apply this term to the existents but completely disassociate it from the non-existent. The non-existent appears to be neither *shay'* nor *lā shay'*.¹¹⁷

Apart from affirming the existence (*ithbāt al wujūd*) of the thing that is called *shay'*, one includes no comparable element that may lead to having similitude with other things. The labelling with the word *shay'* is not related to the thing itself, it is not an intrinsic quality in itself, since it originates from the person who calls the thing *shay'*. It is the person who makes the thing a *shay'* (*yushayyi'uhu*) through the statement itself and not because of something pertaining to the thing itself. Again, one adds no meaning to the thing labelled as *shay'* apart from affirming its

¹¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 78, 80. This is the beginning of the Mu'tazilī relation between *shay'* and non-existence which is further developed in the next two chapters.

existence. To this lack of additional meaning attributed to the thing labelled as *shay'*, al-Rassī adds that this leads to the fact that the word brings no judgment upon the thing said to be a *shay'*. This word adds no praise or defamation to what is called by it. To say that God is a thing and that a pig is a thing is neither a praise of the first nor a defamation of the latter. One must predicate something of the subject after saying that it is a thing, otherwise no information of the specific *shay'* is given.¹¹⁸

To the supposition that no-thing is the contrary of thing, al-Rassī argues that the contrary of a thing must be a thing, and it is not permissible to have a thing that is a contrary to no-thing since the no-thing cannot have a contrary. It is not permissible to declare that a no-thing is in accordance (*itiffāq*) or in discordance (*ikhtilāf*) with something, since this no-thing is a non-existent that is not intelligible (*wahm*).¹¹⁹

According to al-Rassī, the reason for labelling two things as things without having any similitude between them is that a *shay'* is always used to affirm (*thabbat*) the thing's existence and negate (*nafy*) the qualification of non-existence or any ellipsis (suspended qualification, *ta'tīl*)¹²⁰ from it. On the other hand, the negation of thingness, in the phrase *lā shay'* (no-thing), indicates the negation of any affirmative quality (*ithbāt*) that could belong to something, in other terms, *lā shay'* is simply a negation of any existence.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

¹²⁰ Missing in Abrahamov's translation (Ibid., p. 81).

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 80.

Using the word thing or the expression no-thing are over again said to indicate no similitude or lack of similitude between things. According to al-Rassī, only with those things that are opposites or similar can one talk of similitude or the lack of it, which is why using the qualification of no-thing entails no affirmation of accord or disaccord. He affirms again that the negation of thingness *lā shay'* is a clear indication of non-existence so that the no-thing is that which has no being whatsoever.¹²² The no-thing is also that whose 'what it is' (*mā huwa*) is not intelligible, so that one cannot talk of its similitude with something other. *Al-shay'* is further defined as affirmation (*ithbāt*), existence (*wujūd*) and intelligible (*mawhūm*).¹²³

The development of al-Rassī's ideas in this section suggests either a struggle with the concept of *shay'iyya*, or an attempt at formulating a definition of this concept that avoids the Mu'tazilī affirmation that the non-existent is a thing. In some sense, al-Rassī disassociates *shay'* from non-existence by stating that it neither is nor is not different from it. He does not see them to be part of the same genre to be able to compare them, yet at the same time, he associates a *shay'* with existence. In the process of this development, we are told that the non-existent is what is not intelligible. This means that in his use of non-existence he is referring to pure non-existence, and that he affirms the intelligible to be a *shay'*. The application of this term to the existent and the intelligible is the reason for developing our own use of

فإن قالوا: لم أجزت أن تقول شيء وشيء وهما لا يشتهبان؟ قيل: من قيل أني تثبتهما ونفيت عنهما العدم/ وأخرجتهما من التعطيل. فإن قال: لم قلت لا شيء؟ قلت: لنفي لاثباته. وقلت: لا شيء لإخراجه من الوجود. وليس قولي هذا شيء ولا شيء تشبيه ولا غير تشبيه. وقول القائل هذا شيء وهذا شيء لا يجب به تشبيه لأن التشبيه لا يجوز إلا على ضد أو مثل.

¹²² Ibid.

لا شيء عدم العدم ليس بوجود ولا هو موهوم ما هو.

¹²³ Ibid.

والشيء اثبات وجود وموهوم.

the term 'being' in the next chapters, where it becomes a concept that accepts a wider range of ontological application covering the realms of concrete existence and intelligible existence.

Conclusion

Al-Rassī's arguments and responses to the different positions of his time allow us to have access to a wide range of ideas related to the *kalām* field. Many of these ideas, which appear to be his own, are presumed to have been due to Mu'tazilī influences. However, what is more important for us is that we come to see the arguments and the views of the opponents with whom there were clear influential interactions. We assume that the *kalām* field would not have developed its sophisticated arguments through the simple act of choosing to be influenced by this or that system of thought. From al-Rassī's epistles we find that it is rather the immediate challenge posed by existing questions and oppositions that generated the demand for answers deriving from what was then the expanding limits of the Islamic intellectual field. The ideas of the other, of the opponents in these arguments and debates, are not simply the challenges that one must respond to, but are also what becomes part of the moving or developing field of thought itself. No dialogue would have been possible without there being a common ground or some shared language that allows this communication to happen. This means that any influence that one might notice in the above presentation is not simply from something past but is also from something present and living, as well as continuous with the past.

In the dialogue with the naturalist, one finds an example of the level of arguments to which a *mutakallim* would have been exposed. This particular encounter reflects the existence of a field where ideas are transmitted through direct contact with living persons and is not necessarily restricted by a particular availability in translation of this or that text. Following its translation into Arabic, Aristotle's

Physics could be traced as a source of influence of some of the pre-Socratic ideas, but this greatly limits the living nature of these same ideas amongst people who are not necessarily restricted by the limitation of translation. Translations could be considered a source that acts in the expansion of fields and the inclusion of more participators within each old and new field, but this does not mean that it is the only source for the expansion. One may attempt to trace the influence on al-Rassī to the Muʿtazila who are in turn influenced by this or that tradition, this, however, would ignore the existence of actual dialogues and communications with the living other, in all its shades and colours, which must exert its own concrete influence.

In this dialogue with the naturalist, we come across arguments regarding the principle of things, the generation and corruption of things, the theory of latency and the relation between the cause and its effect. One may assume that this dialogue might not have taken place and that this is simply a reformulation of some of the Muʿtazilī ideas set in terms of a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor. One might also imagine that the debate had taken place and that al-Rassī was not sufficiently equipped to handle the debate at the time of the encounter and that his followers, who became acquainted with the challenges of the naturalist, had found some answers to the challenges that their master failed to provide. Equally, this could also be imagined to be the model context that had led to the development of some Muʿtazilī ideas themselves. By all this we mean that it is such encounters and challenges that have played a great part in introducing ideas into Islamic theology, and not only the Greek texts, which further helped to shape and develop these arguments and ideas.

The argument with the naturalist presents us with an encounter that forces the question of the relation between the changing states of the world and substances that are either the source of such states or the substrate in which they inhere. In the details of this discussion, we find arguments and ideas that reflect some of the questions related to the more developed theory of atoms and the accidents, which either inhere in the atom or are caused by the atom.¹²⁴ With al-Rassī, the arguments are set in terms of states that may not exist without bodies, and states that do not move from one body to another. More importantly, the concerns regarding the eternity of what is other than God, brings to the field concerns regarding the idea of the possibility of eternal successive changes to states. In turn, this relates to the relation between atoms and accidents, which we discuss in the next section. It is worth noting that in al-Rassī's text, one finds no mention of atoms and accidents, as all the arguments are set in terms of the larger scale body and states or *'ayn* and *aḥwāl*.

The question of latency, which is strongly tied to the Mu'tazila, but more specifically to al-Nazzām, appears in the discussion with a naturalist who challenges al-Rassī

¹²⁴ Abrahamov suggests that in *Al-Dalīl al-Ṣaghīr* (considered definitely spurious by Madelung's review) al-Rassī's use of the expression "that which is not body" maybe taken to mean atoms of which the body is composed, Abrahamov (1986), p. 278. This is an odd suggestion considering that he himself discusses al-Rassī's division of the existents into only two things, body (*jīsm*) and that which is not body (*ghayr jīsm*), the relation of which appears to be between body and form (ibid., p. 277). This same idea is repeated in Abrahamov (1990), p. 8, note 48, however, this time we read *lā jīsm* instead of *ghayr jīsm*. This shift in the identification of what is other than body with the atom appears to be motivated by his interest in relating al-Qāsim to the Mu'tazila, despite confirming that he has failed to find the Mu'tazilī *jawhar* in the latter's work except in *k. al-Mustarshid*. Also, it seems that the manuscript of *al-Dalīl al-Ṣaghīr* that Abrahamov has relied on in this paper is different from the one that has been published in al-Rassī, *Al-Dalīl al-Ṣaghīr*, (2001).

In referring to *jawhar*, we find the following in *Mustarshid*, p. 56:

وتوهم ان الله عز وجل نفسا كنفس الانسان وانها جزء الجسم وانها جوهر يقيم الاعراض.

Abrahamov translates (ibid., p. 57) the term *jawhar* by "substrate", however, since this term is associated with *juz'* or part as well as with the soul, this could be an early association between souls and atoms and therefore a reference to Democritus' atoms (see chapter on Jābir and the relation between *habā'*, *jawhar* and Democritus' atoms in *De anima*).

with the possibility that what already exists can be the source of transformations and changes from one state to another. Related to the same question, and in the debate itself, we come across the idea that things are already present in the principle before going through a particular cycle of changes in the world, and more importantly, that in the return to the principle they return to the same distinguished thing which undergoes the same cycle continuously. This is the idea that the principle of all things holds the distinguished things as they are in themselves before their coming to be in the forms of the material objects of this world. This, in some ways, resembles the discussion of ideas in the mind of God that will be discussed in the chapter on the Qur'ānic commentaries.

The above epistles not only reflect the encounters with the naturalists (or eternalist) but also with the dualists and the Christians. The first interesting argument against the Christians is set in the form of establishing the sources of the Christian belief in the trinity. This criticism is achieved through demonstrating that the Christian belief is nothing more than a variation of an other belief, which is itself acknowledged to be false by the monotheist systems of beliefs. In this critique, al-Rassī demonstrates knowledge of other religious systems from the region, which we assume to be similar to that of the Ḥarrānian star worshipers who reflect in their own ways some of the native and ancient Babylonian beliefs. This argument, based on the idea of stars as intermediaries between the sole God and the rest of His creations, could also be the same argument used in the discussion with the naturalist regarding the stars being the source of the generation and corruption in the material world. The Greek element, in the form of the Neoplatonic system, could be the alternative reference in this dialogue, but we favour the idea that it is the

mixture of native and Neoplatonic systems that are the source of the challenge in this particular context.

The dualist, who holds the belief that the principles of all things are two things, light and darkness, faces some of the same arguments encountered in 'the response to a naturalist'. However, the most important challenge comes from the idea of gradation in each of the principles, and the fact that these two have to mix and combine, which for al-Rassī necessarily causes their annihilation. Within this discussion, however, we are introduced to the idea that out of the combination and mixture of two opposites, a third kind is generated that is neither of the other two. This will also become relevant in the chapter on Jābir.

One of the interesting ideas that emerges from *k. al-Mustarshid*, but more importantly in 'response to the dualists', is the idea that there are two types of creations. The first is origination from nothing and the other is the transformation of things from one state to another. The first reflects the creation of Adam, which is considered original because it is not modelled on anything, and the nothing from which he is created appears to be something that is not defined and is different from Adam. The other creation, on the other hand, which is more of a transformative creation, is what is related to Adam's offspring, who are of the same material as him and modelled upon him, hence they do not originate from nothing but are instead reproduced from him. It is interesting to find this distinction in the idea of creation and, more importantly, to consider both of these to be from something, one is unformed and the other formed and defined.

There is a great emphasis in the above texts on the idea of observing the world and basing one's judgement upon what is witnessed in the real sensed world (this is the ground of Jābir's work that is to be discussed in the fourth chapter). For al-Rassī, this serves as the source for developing the rules that govern one's knowledge of the world and its relations, but more importantly, these are the rules that help to arrive at the nature of the one God who does not share anything with the originated world. This is what leads to the discussion of the nature of the cause and its effect that is necessarily linked to it. This for al-Rassī is the reason for denying that God is the cause of all things and his emphasis of the concept of the creator God who makes things exist (*mukawwin*). This also appears to be the reason, which is denied by al-Rassī, for considering the existence of the seven star gods, which are the causes that act in the world of generation and corruption. The seven gods do help in distancing God from His creation, but this is not the absolute distance that al-Rassī seeks in his emphasis on a radical difference between the created and the creator (*tanzih*).

One of the important ideas that is to be developed in the next two chapters is the question of thingness, or what is a thing. We have found in this chapter that, being a 'thing' is not a quality that adds any knowledge about a particular thing, other than the fact that the thing exists. To call something a thing is therefore simply affirming its existence. Thus, saying that God is a thing and that something from this world is also a thing simply means that both things are affirmed to be existent and this, in itself, should not lead to any further comparison between the two. The key word used in this text, which is not necessarily very significant in its present context, is *thubūt* or affirmation. In time this term gains more significance, as will become

apparent in the next chapter, but more so in the third. Of particular interest is the development of the association of *thubūt*, *shay'* and *wujūd* with what is thought (*al-mawhūm* in al-Rassī's case), or what we shall refer to as the known. These concepts become the source of more divisions in the *kalām* philosophy as new arguments lead to the development of more ontological categories.

Chapter Two:

Ibāḍī Theology

Introduction

Ibādī *kalām* is a field that has received some attention in recent years, the most important of which is in relation to possibly the earliest extant dogmatic work, that of the Epistle of Sālim Ibn Dhakwān.¹ The other important and larger studies have been primarily concerned with the western side of the Ibādī community. More attention has been given to the Ibādīs of North Africa but this does not mean that enough attention has been given to this community in general.² The essential work in this area is Ennami's doctoral thesis *Studies in Ibādism* which also explores the early development of Ibādī thought in Baṣra before the division of the community. The early theological development of the North African community may be found in the excellent study of Cuperly's *Introduction à l'étude de l'ibādisme et de sa théologie*.³ A more recent study of this community, which takes over from where Cuperly stopped, is Faraḥāt al-Ju'bīrī's *Al-Bu'd al-Ḥaḍārī lil 'Aqīda al-Ibāḍiyya*.⁴ With regard to the eastern branch of the Ibādī community there is very little work that might be mentioned. *Kalām* is briefly discussed in Wilkinson's study *Ibādism: Origins and Early development in Oman*, as a background for the historical development of this community.⁵ On the other hand, Ersilia Francesca's work has been primarily concerned with the formation of the Ibādī community through the development of the religious law.⁶ For this reason, we decided to explore some of

¹ See Crone & Zimmermann (2001) and Cook (1981). See Also Crone (1998) ; Madelung's edition of the *kitāb al-Najāt*, a Zaydī text by imām Aḥmad al-Nāṣir Yaḥya (d. 322/934) (son of al-Hādī ila al-Ḥaḡ (d. 298/911)) which is a refutation of the *qadarī* work (composed about 179/795) of the Ibādī 'Abd Allāh b. Yazīd, Madelung (1985b) ; Madelung (1985a) ; Al-Salmi (2001).

² Ennami (1971) ; Cuperly (1984).

³ Cuperly (2003).

⁴ Al-Ju'bīrī (2004).

⁵ Wilkinson (2010).

⁶ See for example: Francesca (1999) ; (2003) ; (2005).

the central questions relevant to the theme of this research within the cultural production of this particular community. Wilfred Madelung and Abdulrahman al-Salimi have just published three works by the Ibāḍī Abū al-Mundhir Bashīr b. Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb (d. ca. 290/908) in *Early Ibādī Literature*. These works are of great importance in the field of *kalām* and will shed more light on its development. Unfortunately, the publication of this work has come about in the last stage of our research, which means that we have had time to only consult few sections that bear direct relevance to our own corrections and translation of a text in our section on atomism.⁷

The primary work that is the focus of this investigation is the work of Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Bisyawī/ al-Bisyānī (alive in 363/973). Through this scholar, we briefly examine the nature of human and later divine knowledge. Between these two sections, we investigate the general concept of creation, as it appears in the standard proofs we have encountered in the previous chapter. These proofs, however, develop in our study into an investigation of the most fundamental component of *kalām* ontology, the atom. Since we were unable to find any work that relates directly to the question of the indivisible part in al-Bisyawī's texts, we decided to use the commentary of Abū Bakr al-Kindī al-Nazwānī (d. 6th c./12th c.) (*al-Jawhar al-Muqtaṣar*) on the text of Shaykh Bashīr b. Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb. Madelung's recent publication, referred to earlier, is the edition of the complete text of *Kitāb al-Muḥāraba* from which our chosen text derives. Shaykh Bashīr lived during the period of our interest and his short text is relevant to the question of creation, as it

⁷ Madelung & Salimi (2011).

relates to the founding elements of this world, the atoms and the accidents. This text and its commentary have been largely neglected in the field of Islamic studies and we hope that our contribution in this chapter would highlight its importance in the history of the development of *kalām* atomism.

Part of this chapter is also related to the question of what is a thing. This is a move from what we had encountered in the first chapter, the question of God's thingness, to the application of this word to other things, particularly to what God knows, or the knowns in general.⁸ This is the primary reason for including a section on the question of knowledge, which in turn is related to the question of God's names and attributes.

The aim in this section is to see how an intellectual field, which has been almost totally ignored thus far, may be helpful in understanding the central questions of this research, and more specifically, the next chapter on Qur'ānic commentaries.

The chapter begins with an exploration of the nature of knowledge and the role rationality plays in proving the existence of a creator. From the distinction made between the creator and the created, we move to a correction and translation of Shaykh Bashīr's text on atoms and accidents. Due to the significance of this short

⁸ In this thesis we have chosen to translate the term *ma'lūmāt* as 'knowns' instead of the alternative translation of 'knowable'. This, we feel, gives a different sense to the term which is closer to what is intended in the Arabic use, particularly when referring to God's knowledge. Roshdi Rashed also uses the term 'knowns' as a translation of Ibn al-Haytham's *ma'lūmāt* in *Mathematics*, see Rashed (2008), p. 179. The definition of these knowns is:

"According to Ibn al-Haytham, a notion is said to be "known" when it remains invariable and admits no change, whether or not it is thought by a knowing subject. The "knowns" refer to the invariable properties, independent of the knowledge that we have of them, and remain unchanged even though the other elements of the mathematical object vary. The aim of the analyst, according to Ibn al-Haytham, is precisely to lead to these invariable properties. Once these fixed elements have been reached, his task ends, and the synthesis can then start."

text, we have included a commentary on many of its obscure parts with the help of a 6th century (A.H.) commentary. Following this, we reintroduce the question of God's thingness encountered in the first chapter, with the aim to show an expansion in the meaning of the term 'thing'. Finally, the last section of this chapter explores one side of the discussion on the nature of God's names and attributes, which has been seen as an attempt at introducing an ontology that evades the rule of the excluded middle.

I. Human knowledge

In Ibādī literature, we find great emphasis on the idea of knowing God the creator. To know God, is considered the first duty the human being has been ordained with and commanded to do. This is clearly similar to the Mu‘tazila’s great emphasis on knowledge and its importance on establishing the relationship between God and the world. Al-Bisyawī states in his *Jāmi‘* that the first thing that God has ordained his servant to do is to know Him.⁹ This knowing involves knowing that God is the creator and the sustainer; primary, however, is the idea that God is the creator. The knowledge concerning the role and part that God plays in this existence may only be arrived at through the intellect, which al-Bisyawī considers the best of God’s blessings.¹⁰ From an ethical point of view, the intellect is also highly regarded, because it is through it that God has made the good good and the evil evil. It is also because of it that one is said to deserve blame and appraisal since it is an intelligent person who is addressed in God’s commands.¹¹ Since the ethical point is not our concern in this research, we move to the other reason for why the intellect is so highly regarded. This is its activity of knowing, and more specifically of knowing God the creator. Al-Bisyawī does not state that this knowledge is of what is transmitted to us from past generations, in the sense that it is knowledge of tradition that concerns him; rather, it is God’s existence, which is rationally inferred from the existents of the world, that he highlights. Since, God is not seen, not

⁹ Al-Bisyawī, *Jāmi‘ Abī al-Ḥasan al-Bisyawī*, (1984), v. 1, p. 18:

فأول ذلك المعرفة به.

We also find this idea with al-Jannāwnī in Rubinacci (2007), p. 67:

فإذا تعين على العبد فرض التوحيد، وجب عليه أن يعرف خالقه مع أول البلوغ ولم يسعه جهله طرفة عين.

¹⁰ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 18.

¹¹ Ibid.

witnessed and not sensed, we need the intellect to infer His existence from what is seen, sensed and witnessed.¹²

In *al-Istiqāma* of al-Kadmī (alive in 361/971), we are given more information on the process or the means of acquiring knowledge in general. First of all, the acquisition of knowledge is dependent upon two conditions. The first of these is that the intellect must be healthy and free from defects, which simply means that the person must be adult and sane. The second of these conditions, which al-Kadmī takes some time to discuss, is the necessity of an instrument through which the intellect gains its knowledge. We are then informed that there are two types of knowledge that the intellect may receive. The first of these is the instinctive (or innate) created knowledge (علم غريزة مخلوقة), which is “the light of the intellect through which it comprehends the knowable.”¹³ The second type of knowledge is the acquired knowledge of matter (علم المادة من المكتسبات) or the material, since it is what is acquired through an instrument of the senses, sight and hearing are mentioned, but also thought and vision.¹⁴ Acquired knowledge is, according to al-Kadmī, acquired by the instinctive knowledge since, for him, these two are different. The element of being the other appears to be the attractive factor between the two types of knowledge, it is what renders one the acquirer (*al-muktasib*) and the other the acquired (*al-muktasab*), al-Kadmī writes:

¹² Ibid.

وقلت : ما أول ما افترض الله على عباده المكلفين ؟

قال : فأول ذلك المعرفة به ، أنه لهم خالق ورازق ، على وجه الفكرة والنظر والاعتبار . إلا أن الله تعالى ليس بمشاهد ولا مرئي ولا محسوس ، ولكن بالشواهد يستدل عليه الإنسان من خلق نفسه ، وخلق غيره ، وخلق السموات والأرض وما بينهما ، يعلم أن لها خالق لا يشبهها ولا تشبهه ، وهو الله الواحد القهار

Al-Janāwnī also states (Rubinacci (2007), p. 67):

اعلم أنه لا سبيل أوضح لمعرفة الخالق من معرفة الموجودات، والتمييز بين جملة المعلومات.

¹³ Al-Kadmī, Abī Saʿīd, *Al-Istiqāma*, (1985), v. 2, p. 207.

¹⁴ Ibid., no instrument of thought and vision are mentioned.

ولا بد للعلوم المكتسبات من بلوغ إلى العلم الذي هو غريزة مخلوق، لأنه غيره، فلما أن كان غيره لم يكن بد من اكتسابه له، ولما أن صح أنه مكتسب لمكتسب لم يجز إلا أن تكون المكتسبات غير المكتسبات، ولما أن كان كذلك صح أن المكتسبات محتاجات إلى ما اكتسبن له، غير مستغنيات بأنفسهن عن المكتسبات.¹⁵

It is necessary for the acquired knowledge to attain the knowledge that is a created instinct for it is its other. Since it is its other, it is inevitable to acquire it, and since it is true that it is an acquirer of an acquired it is not permissible but that the acquirers be other than the acquired. As this case applies, it is true that the acquirers are in need for that which they acquire and they cannot dispense, in themselves, with the acquired.

There appears to be an interesting shift in the language used to describe the two types of knowledge. They are first of all labelled as knowledge or *‘ulūm* (plural of *‘ilm*), yet they are soon put on two sides of an opposing relationship. The instinctive knowledge is given the active role of acquiring, and the knowledge of matter, the passive role of being acquired. This, however, explains the definition of the instinctive knowledge, which was first said to be the light through which the intellect comprehends or perceives the knowns. This instinctive knowledge does not only appear to be the *a-priori* knowledge with which we are endowed and through which we perceive the concrete world around us, but it is also that which attracts the knowns that are transmitted to it from the outside world through the instrument previously referred to. The act of acquiring (*kasb*) becomes the tie that necessarily binds the two opposing types of knowledge. It is a necessary binding act for neither of the two can be without the other, since if that which the instinctive knowledge is attracted to ceases to be, it would remain without an act or judgement.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The other emphasis that we find in this section of *al-Istiḳāma* is on the idea that the intellect is in need of an instrument, an external matter that allows the perception of the external world. Perception, is achieved through the instruments of sight, hearing, touch, sense, as well as thought (*khāṭir*). The external instrument facilitates, according to al-Kadmī, the transfer of the acquired to the acquiring element since the acquired is too weak to attain the instinctive knowledge without a helping and facilitating element.¹⁷

This division between the two types of knowledge establishes the nature of the human beings' acquisition of knowledge in general. More importantly, it emphasises that the intellect does not know the acquired knowledge instinctively and that it is not related to moral judgements. Also, this intellect may not be

On a similar note, but with a different approach and terminology, we find regarding the topic of *ilm darūrī* and *ilm kasbī* as well as their relation to ethics, the following entry in al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, (1950), v.2, pp. 154-155:

واختلف الناس في البلوغ:

- 1- فقال قائلون: لا يكون البلوغ إلا بكمال العقل، ووصفوا العقل فقالوا: منه علم الاضطرار الذي يفرق الإنسان به بين نفسه وبين الحمار وبين السماء وبين الأرض وما أشبه ذلك ومنه القوة على اكتساب العلم. وزعموا أن العقل الحس نسميه عقلاً بمعنى أنه معقول وهذا قول أبي الهذيل.
- 2- وقال قائلون: البلوغ هو تكامل العقل والعقل عندهم هو العلم وإنما سمي عقلاً لأن الإنسان يمنع نفسه به عما لا يمنع المجنون نفسه عنه وأن ذلك مأخوذ من عقال البعير وإنما سمي عقاله عقلاً لأنه يمنع به. وزعم صاحب هذا القول أن هذه العلوم كثيرة منها اضطرار وأنه قد يمكن أن يدركه الإنسان قبل تكامل العقل فيه بامتحان الأشياء واختبارها والنظر فيها وفي بعض ما هو داخل في جملة العقل كنحو تفكير الإنسان إذا شاهد الفيل أنه لا يدخل في خرق إبرة بحضرته فنظر في ذلك وفكر فيه حتى علم أنه يستحيل دخوله في خرق إبرة وإن لم يكن بحضرته فإذا تكاملت هذه العلوم في الإنسان كان بالغاً ومن لم يمتحن الأشياء فجاز أن يكمل الله - سبحانه - له العقل ويخلقه فيه ضرورة فيكون بالغاً كامل العقل مأموراً مكلفاً. ومنع صاحب هذا القول أن تكون القوة على اكتساب العلم عقلاً غير أنه وإن لم تكن عنده عقلاً فليس بجائز أن يكلف الإنسان حتى يتكامل عقله ويكون مع تكامل عقله قوياً على اكتساب العلم بالله.
- وزعم صاحب هذا القول أنه لا يجب على الإنسان التكليف ولا يكون كامل العقل ولا يكون بالغاً إلا وهو مضطر إلى العلم بحسن النظر وأن التكليف لا يلزمه حتى يخطر بباله أنك لا تأمن إن لم تنتظر أن يكون للأشياء صانع يعاقبك بترك النظر أو ما يقوم مقام هذا الخاطر من قول ملك أو رسول أو ما أشبه ذلك فحينئذ يلزمه التكليف ويجب عليه النظر والقائل بهذا القول محمد بن عبد الوهاب الجبائي.
- 3- وقال قائلون: لا يكون الإنسان بالغاً كاملاً داخلاً في حد التكليف إلا مع الخاطر والتنبيه وأنه لا بد في العلوم التي في الإنسان والقوة التي فيه على اكتساب العلوم من خاطر وتنبيه وإن لم يكن مضطراً إلى العلم بحسن النظر وهذا قول بعض البغداديين.

We also find in al-Baghdādī, p. 111, this criticism of Abū al-Hudhayl:

الفضيحة الثامنة من فضائحه. إنما لما وقف على اختلاف الناس في المعارف هل هي ضرورية أم اكتسابية ترك قول من زعم أنها كلها ضرورية وقول من زعم أنها كلها كسبية وقول من قال ان المعلوم منها بالحواس والبدائية ضرورية وما علم منها بالاستدلال اكتسابية واختار لنفسه قولاً خارجاً عن أقوال السلف فقال المعارف ضربان أحدهما باضطرار وهو معرفة الله عز وجل ومعرفة الدليل الداعي إلى معرفته وما بعدها من العلوم الواقعة عن الحواس أو القياس فهو علم اختيار واكتساب.

¹⁷ Al-Kadmī, v. 2, p. 208.

commanded to know the acquired knowledge without the material instruments and mechanisms through which it may know. Knowledge is established to be not of the mind itself but of something other than itself, outside itself. The intellect is not commanded to know itself but to know what may be known through the instrument of the senses.¹⁸

II. The created and the creator

The command to know God is the command to know God's created beings, since knowing what exists leads to knowledge of the One who gave things their existence. Knowledge of the external world, which we may arrive at through the external senses, causes the acquisition of the knowledge of things that exist in the heavens and the earth and all the beings within, including human beings. Al-Bisyawī considers this to be comprehended and analysed by the light of the instinctive knowledge.

It is from this analysis and comprehension that al-Bisyawī infers the existence of the creator.¹⁹ The general line of reasoning that leads to the creator, in al-Bisyawī's analysis, is that if one looks into one's self and the created things of the world one would know that these are originated things, and it is necessary for the originated to have an originator. This is so because all that is originated may only be imagined to be the outcome of the act of origination that belongs to an acting agent. We also find in this reasoning the familiar argument from design that "if one sees a building (*binā*) one would know that it has a builder, and if one sees a book one would know that it

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 18.

has a writer... one may not see an effect without there being a cause.”²⁰ This is also related to the principle of inferring a judgment on what is absent from what is witnessed, or الاستدلال بالشاهد على الغائب. This process involves induction as well as deduction, as is shown by the examples given by Al-Bisyawī. He informs us that from the fire that is observed, one judges that all fires are judged to be so, or from the known fires it may be induced that all fires have the same characteristics. The other example that he gives is that all animals reproduce; hence, one judges an animal that is absent from sight to have the characteristic of reproduction.²¹ This is the reverse process of the above since one starts from a particular class of things and applies it to particulars that are absent from observation. From both mechanisms, the inductive that results in the creation of classes, and the deductive that moves from classes to particulars, one is able to make judgments on that which is absent from observation, or from the senses in general. This is what leads to the judgment that this particular book must have a writer since all books are so created. More generally, this leads to the central idea that for every effect there must necessarily be a cause.

For Al-Bisyawī, the proof that these things are actually created is that one finds one’s self complete and perfected, and one did not reach this state by oneself,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

. فإذا شاهد هذا العبد من نفسه ، ومن العالم ، ونظر من وجه النظر ، علم أنه محدث ، ولا بد للمحدث من محدث أحدثه ، ومدبر دبره ، وهو الله الواحد القهار ، لأنه لا يتصور في وهمه أنه يكون محدثاً إلا من محدث أحدثه ، كما أنه لو رأى بناء علم أنه له بانيه ، ولو رأى كتاباً علم أن له كاتباً ، وأشبه هذه الأشياء ، لا يرى أثراً إلا وأن له مؤثراً ، دل على أن له خالقاً ، ولا بد من اعتقاد هذا من النظر والتفكير.

We also find this with al-Janāwnī (Rubinacci (2007), p. 67.):

فإذا ثبت واستقر في فهمك وعقلك أن هذه الأشياء المذكورة محدثة مصنوعة مخلوقة بدليل الحدث والحاجة والعجز ، وعلمت أن لها محدثاً أحدثها ، وخالقاً خلقها ، لأن الصنعة دالة على صانعها ومحدثها ، قال الله تعالى: { أفي الله شك فاطر السموات والأرض } ، وقيل لأعرابي: ما الدليل على أن لهذا العالم صانعا ؟ فقال: إن البعرة تدل على البعير ، وأثر القدم يدل على المثير ، فهيكلك علوي بهذه اللطافة ، ومركز سفلي بهذه الكثافة ، أما يدلان على الصانع الخبير .

²¹ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 21.

without there being an agent that moved one from one state of being to another, from the state of being a sperm to *'alaq* or clot to the *mudgha* or little lump, etc. People are not responsible for this transition from one state to the other, and this for al-Bisyawī means that there is an external agent that causes this transition from one state of being to the next. This is what al-Bisyawī considers to be the proof that the existents of this world are created and that they come to be through the act of an agent.²²

We clearly notice in this proof that the sequential process of changing states does not go as far back as an initial state of being directly linked to the first cause. This proof is based on the simple idea that there are various stages in the existence of individual existents and that the transition from one stage or state to another may not be achieved by the existent itself. The transitions and the change from one state to the other must be, according to this proof, due to the external element, the acting agent that causes this transition.²³

It is clear that this proof only leads, if correct, to the conclusion that there is an agent that changes the states of being of the existents, it does not in itself show that this agent brings these beings into existence. This argument does not establish a creator to the world. To solve this problem al-Bisyawī needs to indicate that the coming to existence of a thing is one of the states of being of this thing and as such it is caused by this same agent who changes states.

وأما ما ذكرت : أنه إذا كانت الأشياء محدثة فما الدليل على أن لها محدثا ؟

²² Ibid., this argument is similar to al-Rassī's argument in the previous chapter.

²³ See on this idea Davidson (1968), pp. 299-314.

قيل له : الدليل على ذلك ، أنها لا تخلو من أن تكون أحدثت نفسها في حال وجودها أو في حال عدمها ، فإن كانت أحدثت نفسها في حال وجودها فمحال إيجاد الموجود، وإن كانت أحدثت نفسها وهي معدومة فمحال أن يوجد المعدوم شيئاً. فدل أنها محدثة، وكالبناء لا يكون إلا من بان، والكتاب لا يكون إلا من كاتب، فذلك²⁴ كل صنعة²⁵ لا تكون إلا من صانع . فدل ذلك أن الأشياء محدثة مخلوقة مصنوعة.²⁶

As to what you have mentioned: that if the things (of this world) are created then what is the evidence that they have a creator?

One would reply: the evidence is that they (the created things) have necessarily either created themselves in the state of their existence or in the state of their non-existence. If they had created themselves in their state of existence then (we would argue that) it is impossible to create the already existent, and if they created themselves when they were non-existent then (we would argue that) it is impossible that the non-existent would create a thing. This proves that they were created, and as with a building that may not be without a builder, and a book that may not be without a writer since all made things may not be without a maker. This proves that the things (of this world) are originated, created and made.

This argument is not simply for the existence of a creator but is also for the idea that the things of this world are created. The premise of the argument itself sets the conclusion since it restricts the solutions to two options which are then necessarily denied. Al-Bisyawī restricts the prior conditions of what is in existence to either ‘it was in existence, and it caused itself to exist’ or ‘it was a non-existent and it caused itself to exist’. The second proposition is the easiest to deny since what has no existence does not have the power to cause, or more specifically to cause itself to exist. Existence must simply be prior to any act. In the case of the first proposition, that an existent thing causes itself to exist, the denial comes from the fact that what

²⁴ Suggest adding: أن

²⁵ Suggest: صنعة

²⁶ Ibid., p. 23. The same argument is found in ‘Abd al-Kāfī, *Ārā’ al-Khawārij al-kalāmiyya: al-Mūjaz li-Abī ‘Ammar ‘Abd al-Kāfī al-Ibādī*, (1978), pp. 265-266:

لا تخلو هذه الأشياء بعدما ثبت حدوثها وثبت أن لها محدثاً أحدثها، وأنها غير مستغنية عن ذلك من وجهين لا ثالث لها: إما أن تكون أحدثت نفسها، أو أن تكون أحدثها غيرها، ويبطل أن تكون أحدثت نفسها من قبل؛ لأنها لا تخلو في حال حدوثها من أن تكون معدومة أو موجودة، فإن كانت معدومة فالمعدوم لا يحدث شيئاً؛ نفسه ولا غيره، فإن تكن موجودة فما حاجتها إلى أن توجد نفسها وهي موجودة بعد؟ فلما فسد هذان الوجهان ثبت أن لها محدثاً أحدثها، وهو غيرها موجود قبل إيجادها لها، ذلكم الله رب العالمين.

is in existence needs not cause itself to be what it already is, simply, an existent thing. The statement “فمحال إيجاد الموجود” means the impossibility of giving existence to what is already existent.

The argument may be restructured differently as: for a thing A existing at time T, it either was non-existent or existent at a prior time T-1. If A is existent at T-1, then A giving existence to itself at T is superfluous. If A is non-existent at T-1, then A causing existence at T is impossible since it is non-existent. We notice that both of these cases are based on the denial of the causal effect of A (of existence) on itself. The argument proceeds to the conclusion that there must be an existing thing B that gives existence to A at T. For al-Bisyawī B is eternally existent. However, all that is needed in the above case is for B to be existent at T-1 for A to be existent at T. This argument is insufficient in terms of providing further information on the nature of the creator, it only confirms that B caused A, and the cause is set in terms of changing A from being non-existent at T-1 to existent at T or creation from non-existence. What is lacking from this argument is showing that the existent B itself, at T is not the result of a transformation of existents that might go from past infinity to future infinity through B. In such a case, the change for A from not-A to A would not be because of an eternal thing but because of B, where B is not eternal but an existent in a chain of existents.

III. The foundation of the material world

III.1 Composition and separation

Al-Bisyawī presents another approach to prove that the existents of the world are created, and this time it is done by reference to the nature of the existents themselves, which makes them what they are. He writes:

فإننا وجدنا العالم أجساما وجواهر وأعراضا لا تنفك من الاجتماع والافتراق، وهما محدثان، كانا بعد أن لم يكونا، مما لم ينفك من المحدث محدث، ولا يتوهم الجسم خالدا²⁷ منه.²⁸

Thus we have found the world to be bodies, substances and accidents that never cease being combined and separated. These two are originated since they became after they were not. That which is not detached from the originated is originated and the body may not be imagined without them.

One of the familiar *kalām* arguments that we find in this text is the idea that all the existents are substances and accidents, and in this particular quotation, we have bodies, substances and accidents. However, al-Bisyawī's intentions in this statement are initially not very clear, since two different readings of the text are possible. One reading may suggest that the two things that are said to be originated might be the 'combination' and 'separation', but it is also possible to understand the sentence to refer to the substances and accidents as originated. Hence, the concluding remark might be stating that it is impossible to think of bodies without combination and separation, which are originated, or alternatively we may read the text as: it is impossible to think of bodies without substances and accidents that are originated.

²⁷ خاليا.

²⁸ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 22.

The following sentence redirects the argument from the idea that the existents are substances and accidents, which are created, to focus more on combination and separation. Al-Bisyawī writes:

وقد صح وثبت أن الاجتماع والافتراق معنيان بهما اجتمع المجتمع، وافترق المفترق، وهما مجتمعان بجامع جمعهما ومفرق فرقهما فدل بذلك على حدثهما²⁹

And it has been proved and affirmed that combination and separation refer to the combination of the combined and the separation of the separated. These are combined through a combiner that has combined them, and a separator who has separated them, and this indicates their origination.

The essential idea in this proof is the existence of an act and an agent that determines this act. Combination and separation are considered originated, not because they come to be at a particular time, but because they are the subjects of the act of an agent. Combination is the effect of the act of combining and separation is the effect of the act of separation. By composition, we understand al-Bisyawī means composition of parts, like head and limbs in a human body, or qualities like smells and colours. Separation, on the other hand, would mean the disintegration of a body or the separation of its parts and qualities. From the existence of the act, al-Bisyawī infers the existence of the agent, the combiner and the separator, and from this, he concludes that these are produced by an agent who causes their origination. This line of reasoning is essentially similar to the argument of change of states that require an agent who changes the states of being of the existents.

²⁹ Ibid.

Al-Bisyawī returns to the idea of origination and the time of coming to be to explain why he says that this proves that these existents are originated. He writes:

ومع أن المحدث هو كل ما لم يكن فكان، فما لم ينفك الجسم قط مما لم يكن فهو على الذي دل على حدثه، بعد إذ لم يكن فكان.³⁰

Since the originated is all that was not and then became, then as long as the body does not cease to be attached to what was not, this would indicate its origination, as it was not and then it became.

The argument for the origination of the bodies of this world follows from the argument that bodies are necessarily either in a state of combination or in a state of separation. Since these two states have been proven in the previous argument to have been originated, it follows that bodies do not cease to be attached to originated things. Originated things are defined as those things that were not existent at a point in time and then became existent. This leads to the idea that bodies, in their necessary relation to combination and separation, are attached to what was not existent and this, al-Bisyawī concludes, means that bodies are originated in time for they come to be in either combination or in separation.

ولما دل الدليل – بالإجماع –³¹ أن الأعراض محدثة ، لم تنفك من الجواهر، دل على أن الجواهر والأجسام محدثة لما لم ينفك منها.³²

And since the evidence proves –according to the consensus– that the accidents are originated, and that they do not cease to be attached to substances, this would prove that the substances and the bodies are originated since they do not cease to be attached to them.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ An alternative reading would be: بالاجتماع

³² Ibid.

With this statement, al-Bisyawī leaves the argument from combination and separation, or the more general changing of states argument, and returns to the idea of accidents. This would be the general argument that is used in *kalām* when referring to accidents and their relation to substances. However, al-Bisyawī offers no explanation or elaboration of this particular reasoning. He merely states that there is a consensus and agreement amongst the scholars -presumably those who use this argument- that accidents are originated things and because what is necessarily attached to originated things must, necessarily, be itself originated.³³ This is the same as the previous argument, and it leads to the same conclusion, the substances and the bodies of this world are originated things. Left out, from this idea, is the argument for the origination of the accidents, which in itself is dependent on the idea of the changing of states.

III.2 Atoms and accidents

In this section, we will present and translate a section of an argument for the origination of the world that is found in *al-Jawhar al-Muqtaṣar*,³⁴ and *Bayān al-Shar*.³⁵ This is a text attributed to the third century Abū-l-Mundhir Bashīr b. Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb (d. ca. 195-205/810-820) who is the grandson of Abū Ṣufyān Maḥbūb b. Ruḥayl (d. 195-205/810-820), the last leader of the Baṣran Ibādī

³³ Al-Ash'arī (*Maqālāt*, v. 2, pp. 10-12) discusses the agreement and disagreement on this issue. He informs us that the followers of Abū-l-Ḥasan al-Ṣāliḥī allowed the existence of substance without accidents, that “God may strip the substances from the accidents, and that He may create them without accidents.” (Ibid, p. 10) The rest of the Mu'tazila mentioned in the list seem to have agreed that a substance may not exist without accidents.

³⁴ Al-Nazwānī, *Al-Jawhar al-Muqtaṣar*, (1983) (pp. 35, 36. J below). The intended meaning of *muqtaṣar* is according to Kāshif derived from *qaṣura* which implies limit, hence the translation of the title would be ‘the limited substance’ which is a reference to the indivisible part or *al-juz' alladhī lā yatajazza'*.

³⁵ Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Kindī, *Bayān al-Shar*, (1984). (v. 2, pp. 38, 39. B below).

community.³⁶ As it is a very dense text that contains a number of important ideas, we will use the commentary of Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Kindī al-Nazwānī (lived in 5th-6th century/ 11th-12th century) *al-Jawhar al-Muqtaṣar* (also known as *al-kitāb al-Jawharī*) to shine some light on some of the most important concepts.³⁷

³⁶ We mentioned in the introduction that Madelung and Salimi have just published the entire text of *k. al-Muḥāraba* from which the next quotation is taken from, see *‘Early Ibāḍī Literature’*. As this text has become available just before the completion of this thesis, we have made some corrections to our initial version of this text based on the newly available publication. We use M&S to refer to the newly published text of *al-Muḥāraba*.

³⁷ For a good and concise introduction to the general themes discussed in this section see Sabra (2006). And for more details: Pines (1997); Dhanani (1993). Pines and Dhananī have a good discussion of possible sources of Islamic atomism, but see also a more recent study which links atomism with the mediaeval tradition, due the Mu‘tazilī interest in the question of pain, Langermann (2009). Unlike Langermann who seeks to find sources of influence in anti atomic sources, Van Ess has surprisingly argued that the translated works of Aristotle could not have played part in the formation of Arabic atomism for two main reasons, one is Aristotle’s anti atomic views, as he refutes their views in the *Physics*, and the second is that the translation movement was in Baghdād when the theory was being developed in Baṣra! See Van Ess (2002).

III.2.i The text

Arabic

قال الشيخ بشير بن محمد بن محبوب رحمهم الله في صدر كتابه "المحاربة"³⁸، وبعد، هذا بيان في حدوث العالم وأجزائه³⁹ بتعاور الحوادث له ولها فيه، واحتياطه⁴⁰ وأجزائه⁴¹ لها ووجوده بها غير منفكة منه ولا منفك منها، فهو⁴² أجزاءه⁴³ وأجزاؤه⁴⁴ هو⁴⁵ بها، تفرقا مرة له وتالياً أخرى يحلها،⁴⁶ فالحال يضمنها⁴⁷ والوقت يجري⁴⁸ عليها، والأماكن محلها ومنها⁴⁹ لها تجاوراً فيها⁵⁰ بأعراضها وعلى غير التداخل⁵¹ منها بها⁵². فإذا ارتفع التأليف عنها ثبت الجزء الذي لا يتجرأ منها، وسقط العدد منه والعرضان المتضادان عنه لأنهما يتنافيان الكون فيه لشغل⁵³ أحدهما له⁵⁴، ولا فضل⁵⁵ فيه عنه. ولا يقوم في وهم⁵⁶ ولا عقل أن يكون المدخول فيه داخلاً في الداخل في⁵⁷ الجزء⁵⁸ احتماله أن يزداد⁵⁹ إليه مثله إلى⁶⁰ أن يتجسم⁶¹ بحدوث الأقدار الثلاثة له، والله عالم⁶² يعدد أجزاء الخلق كلها وقادر على تفريق ما جمع منها حتى لا يبقى اجتماع فيها، وكذلك جمع⁶³ متفرقها، وفي ذلك إثبات الجزء⁶⁴ الذي لا يتجزأ منها، وصحة النهاية فيها، ومن كل طرف منها⁶⁵، وما يلاقى الأجسام من نواحيها وجهاتها، من أية⁶⁶ شئت⁶⁷ ابتدأت عدداً منها،

³⁸ Only in J.

³⁹ in B. اجرائه

⁴⁰ in M&S. احتماله and in B أحساله

⁴¹ in B. أجزائه

⁴² in M&S. هو

⁴³ in M&S. و أجزاءه

⁴⁴ in B. فجزى حراؤه وأجزاؤه

⁴⁵ in M&S. توجد

⁴⁶ in M&S. وتفرقها مرة وتجمعها أخرى

⁴⁷ in M&S. يضمنها in B and تضمنها

⁴⁸ in B. يجري in B. يجري in J and

⁴⁹ in M&S. منتهى in M&S. منتهى in J and

⁵⁰ in B. ألافها

⁵¹ in M&S. تداخل

⁵² in M&S. وفيها

⁵³ in B. يشغل

⁵⁴ in M&S. به in M&S. Missing in B and

⁵⁵ in M&S. فصل

⁵⁶ in J. ولا تقوم في فهم

⁵⁷ in B. Missing

⁵⁸ in B. الجزاء

⁵⁹ in B. يراى

⁶⁰ in M&S. اد in M&S. Missing in J and

⁶¹ in B. ينحسم

⁶² in J. اعلم

⁶³ in B. جميع

⁶⁴ in M&S. للجزاء

⁶⁵ in M&S. منها منتهى

⁶⁶ Possibly انه

⁶⁷ in B. سبب

والى أية شئت⁶⁸ انتهيت⁶⁹ به أمداً اليه⁷⁰ فيها وأية أقيمت في وهمك قام⁷¹ محدوداً⁷² وأية صورت في خلدك⁷³ تصور⁷⁴ بهيئة⁷⁵ عيانك له مشاهداً⁷⁶ منها.

وأيضاً⁷⁷ ففيما⁷⁸ ظهر⁷⁹ للعيان من تناهى الجسم من وجوه الستة⁸⁰ إلى الجهات المتناهية إليها من الهواء⁸¹ أعدادها ما يصح به تناهى⁸² عدد أجزائه، لاستحالة إحاطة الهواء⁸³ بما لا نهاية له⁸⁴ فيه⁸⁵ لأن ما لا نهاية له لا يتوهم له نهاية من جهة فحكم ما أدركنا من نهاية الخلق الملاقية لنا حكم ما غاب عنا من الخلق⁸⁶ في النهاية⁸⁷ والتجزئة⁸⁸، وأن العدد يبتدأ به من حد النهاية فيه من واحد إلى ما بعده من الأجزاء، ولما كان للعدد أول يبتدأ به⁸⁹ كان له آخر إليه ينتهي، فالمحدث⁹⁰ بارز الصفحة، مكتشف القناع من كل جهة، والحمد لله على ما وفق له.

Translation

Al-Shaykh Bashīr b Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb -may God have mercy on them- said in the opening of his book 'al-Muḥāraba': Next, this is a demonstration of the origination of the world and its parts through the alternation of the accidents upon it, and the changing of its states and its parts because of them, and because of its existence through them without them ceasing to be attached to it and without it ceasing to be attached to them for it is its parts and it is through its parts. Sometimes separation and at other times combination inhere in them since different states belong to it, time flows upon them and space is their position. There exists between them a contiguity through their accidents and there is no interpenetration between the one and the other.

⁶⁸ in B. سبب

⁶⁹ in B. انتهت

In B. إليها

in B. مقام

in B. محدود

in B. جلدك

in B. يصور

in B. بهيئة

in B. شاهداً

Missing in J.

in M&S. فيما

in B. بظهر

in J. الشبه

in B. الهوى

Missing in B.

in B. الهوى

Missing in M&S.

Missing in J.

in B. عنا من الخلق

in M&S. النهاية به

in B. التحرية

Missing in B.

in J and M&S. في الحدوث

Once the combination is removed from them, the existence of the indivisible part (the atom) is affirmed. This may not be counted, and may not hold two opposing accidents, because they negate each other's being in it since only one of them occupies it and there is no preference between the one and the other.

No mind may comprehend or affirm that the recipient of a thing may enter into the received thing, since the proof of the origination of the part (atom) is its support of an other part of a similar kind until it forms a body through the coming to be of the three dimensions pertaining to it. God knows the entire number of parts of the created world and He has the power to separate what He has combined from amongst them until no combination remains in them, and so does He have the power to combine what is separated, and in this there is the affirmation of the indivisible part (atom), and the reality of its limit and every one of its borders, and what meets the bodies from its regions and sides.[This is the reason one starts counting from it and the reason one ends in its limit. And that one has established in the imagination a limited position and formed in the mind the image of a shape that might be seen in reality.]⁹¹

Also, the apparent limitation of the body from its six faces and its limiting sides with air affirm the limited number of parts as it is impossible for the air to surround what is infinite since what has no limit may not be imagined to have one limit from one side. Consequently, the judgment on the limits of what we come to perceive from what we encounter is the same judgment on the created things that are not in our perception, with respect to limitation and partitioning. As for counting, it begins from the limited end of one to what follows from the other parts. Since counting has a first with which it begins, it also has a last with which it ends for the originated has a clear surface with no veil on any side. Praise be to God for his guidance (to success).

⁹¹ This is the proposed translation of an unclear passage.

III.2.ii Commentary

In what follows, we will try to comment on the text of Shaykh Bashīr, and to help with the understanding of this fairly dense and in parts corrupt text we will use *al-Jawhar al-muqtaṣar*. We shall only extract from this book the comments that fall within our chosen text or those that confirm our own understanding of the text.

The originated substances

The beginning of the text informs us that what is to follow is a presentation that will clarify the nature of the world, which means the created and the concrete world. This world, that Shaykh Bashīr is concerned with, is not the world of events and or thoughts since his concerns are primarily with the material objects of this world which he calls its parts or what he refers to in the text as *ajzā'uhu*, which refers to *ajzā'u al-'ālam*. The main concern is stated right at the beginning of the text, it is simply to show that this world and all its parts are originated, that is, they have come to be at a particular time after being non-existent. Some of the descriptions or definitions of the word '*muḥdath*' or 'originated' that are found in *al-Jawhar al-muqtaṣar* are:

- a) That whose existence has a beginning (ما لوجوده اول).
- b) The existent subsequent to not-being (الموجود بعد ان لم يكن).
- c) What becomes subsequent to not-being (الكائن بعد ان لم يكن).

d) What was not in being then became (ما لم يكن ثم كان).⁹²

The choice of proof that is taken in the first few lines is expressed in simple terms. He states that what shows this origination, and the coming to existence after non-existence, is the alternation of what we chose to translate as the accidents. The actual expression is "تعاور الحوادث" where the term *ḥawādith* may be translated as the originated or the accidents. Our choice of term was based on what we consider to be the intention of the author as well as al-Nazwānī's comment that *ḥawādith* is the plural of *ḥādith* which is what comes to be in substances, the accidents (or *al-ʿarḍ*).⁹³ Hence, the proof of the origination of the world relies on the alternations of the accidents that come to be in this world and in the parts of this world. This in turn would lead to the idea that what is intended by *juzʿ*, or part of the world, is substance (atom) or *jawhar*. There are, however, a number of different meanings to what *jawhar* might mean in the Islamic tradition and particularly the difference in meaning between the *kalām* and the philosophical schools as will be shown in what follows. Al-Nazwānī's confirms Shaykh Bashīr's intention that *jawhar* is the indivisible part (الجزء الذي لا يتجزأ) or the atom.⁹⁴ This may also be confirmed by the text itself where this particular expression is used in a subsequent part. The argument for the origination of the world simply becomes the same argument that was encountered earlier with al-Bisyawī, which is based on the idea of the alteration of the states of the world through the alteration or the alternations of the accidents that come to be in the atoms or the un-divided parts of this world. This may be the

⁹² Al-Nazwānī, p. 39.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 44.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 42.

case, because the world does not cease to be its own parts, and its parts, the atoms, do not cease to be attached to the accidents, which are originated.

The accidents

Shaykh Bashīr then moves on to discussing some of these accidents that come to be and inhere in substances (atoms). The first of these is separation and combination and it is to them that the changing states of a substance are attributed. Al-Nazwānī states that these two accidents are specific to two or more atoms, since combination is the joining that occurs between two or more atoms as they are the minimal parts that may not be further divided.⁹⁵

The second pair of accidents that are associated with the atoms are the time that flows through them, or upon them, and space, which is simply the position and location of the atom. Al-Nazwānī does not mention this pair, however, he mentions motion and rest as accidents that are applied to one or more atoms, since the atom is identified by a space occupying quality or *taḥayyuz*. Thus, motion is the transfer from one spatial position to another spatial position. Rest is simply the continuous occupation (*labth*) of the same spatial position.⁹⁶ What is missing from this explanation is that the occupation of two positions or the same position, in motion and rest, must occur over different instances of time, and this is how space and time as a pair enter into the definitions of these interlinked accidents.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 49-50. See also *Maqālāt*, v. 2, pp. 5, 11, and pp. 13-14 where it is stated according to Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Jubbā'ī that it is 'possible' to have contact (*mumāssa*) in a single atom. See Also Sabra (2006), pp. 209-210, 222, 223.

⁹⁶ Al-Nazwānī, p. 49.

Composition: contiguity and interpenetration

The section ends with the idea that individual atoms acquire, through their accidents, the quality of contiguity of atoms, without having any interpenetration between them. Each atom remains one undivided whole that is contiguous with another atom. What is referred to as *ta'liḥ*, or composition, is the act of joining into a contiguous relation, where one atom becomes adjacent to another without any interpenetration. Al-Nazwānī justifies the impossibility of interpenetration with the idea that it is impossible for that which is penetrated to penetrate the penetrator, or more generally, it is impossible for the acting agent to be the effect of its act and for the effect to act its agent.⁹⁷ As to the meaning of interpenetration, al-Nazwānī informs us that al-Nazzām and Hishām b. al-Ḥakam believed in interpenetration, which for them meant that two bodies might occupy the same position. To understand how this might be, al-Nazwānī gives the example of an apple that has a particular colour and a particular width and length as well as a particular taste and smell, all these accidents occupy the same space that the apple on the whole occupies. Al-Nazwānī does not offer a counter argument to this particular example as he considers it clearly invalid. He, however, justifies the impossibility of interpenetration with this reasoning:

- a) If two bodies interpenetrate, then necessarily they either occupy a space that is bigger than one of them, or they don't.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

- b) If one denies the need for a larger space then they will deny the increase in the mass (volume) of one of the two bodies. This is clearly denied since it is known that when two bodies are with each other they are bigger, and the bigger needs more space than the smaller.

- c) If one affirms that they need a larger space then they would have said the truth and would have acknowledged the idea of contiguity or *mujāwara* and that the two need two positions. In addition, when one body penetrates another body what is penetrated occupies more space, as when one puts a body in water.⁹⁸

The difference between this argument and the one before is that this argument relies on (b) which is based on an empirical observational ground whilst the other relies on a logical premise. The empirical ground is the observation that two bodies that combine with each other are bigger than each separately. We might argue, however, that this is not entirely the case if one only relies on space occupation, as the larger body might be hollow. As to the logical argument, it assumes the distinction between, on the one hand, the acting body and, on the other hand, the body that is acted upon. This is set in a language that reflects the relation of cause and effect, which are two separate things.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

Atoms

In the next section of our text, the author confirms the terminology and the assumption made at the beginning of the commentary. What he intends to talk about in this work is the indivisible part, the atom. To reach this elementary and foundational part of the world, Shaykh Bashīr informs us that the composition that exists between the different parts must be lifted, so that it is in the annihilation of this composition that one affirms the existence of the atom, as it is the simplest element or part from which things are composed. Al-Nazwānī explains that the bodies of the world, that are composed of adjacent contiguous parts (and not interpenetrated parts), are reduced to separate partitioned elements once God lifts the composition (or what Dhanani calls the accident of adhesion). Every one of these similar elements may not be further reduced and divided into a smaller more fundamental part.⁹⁹ Once we reach the atom, we may not find further parts, divisions or compositions.¹⁰⁰

To reach the level of the atoms, al-Nazwānī clarifies, one must distinguish between the composition and the composing parts, as one would have to distinguish between separation and the separated parts. He states:

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 43:

ووجدت عن القاضي أبي زكريا يحيى بن سعيد في جوابه إلى الخليل ابن شاذان (ت.472هـ) أن الجواهر ليست أجناساً مختلفة، بل كلها منماتلة في أنفسها وإنما تختلف أحوالها التي لا ترجع إلى ذواتها ، وسبب الاختلاف يكون راجعاً إلى ما يحل فيها من لأعراض فإذا اختص بعضها بالسكون ببعض الأعراض كانت ساكنة ، فإذا اختص ببعض آخر وصفت بأنها مجتمعة ، فإذا وصفت بشيء آخر وصفت بأنها متفرقة . وكذلك الأسماء تختلف عليها باختلاف ما يختص به من الألوان .

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.54.

Composition is the accident that inheres in a substance whilst the composing parts are the substances in which inheres the accident, and every one of them is different from the other.¹⁰¹

The act of composing is the act of joining two or more atoms one to the other, and this means that the negation of this joining, of this accident, does not negate the substances themselves. In the negation of the composition of the substances separation takes place, as would be the case in the negation of grouping and the resulting division. What is important is that the grouping and the composition occur at the level of atoms or a group of atoms, and the negation of this composition may not occur to the atoms themselves since they may not incur further divisions. For al-Nazwānī, this act of further separation or division leads to the annihilation of the atom itself, and this is why he emphasises the difference between the composition and the composed or the separation and the separated. The affirmation of the existence of the atoms results from reaching the end point or the limit of separation. It is the result that one arrives to once all the accidents of composition are negated and lifted from a group of atoms, and what remains is the atoms which do not possess these accidents themselves, and therefore are not composed of further parts. This is also found in the text of Shaykh Bashīr where he states that, "this may not be counted," or "وسقط العدد منه". Al-Nazwānī clarifies that this does not mean that one may not count the one atom; rather, it means that this one atom itself may not have further parts that may be enumerated.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Ibid. Regarding the difference between the accidents we find in the same book (Ibid., p. 45): قال القاضي أبو زكريا يحيى بن سعيد في جوابه إلى الخليل بن شاذان أن الأعراض ليست بجنس واحد، بل هي أجناس كثيرة ففيها المتماثل وفيها المختلف وفيها المتضاد وهكذا وجدت في كتاب "الأكلة" وغيره، ووجدت أن جميع الأعراض متغايرة.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 59.

Once we are at the level of the singular atom, Shaykh Bashīr informs us that it is not possible to have two opposing accidents simultaneously occupying the same atom, since they both have equal right to the same inherence in this atom. We may understand this to apply to all cases of opposing accidents being denied simultaneous inherence in the same atom, or we may accept al-Nazwānī's comment that the two accidents that are referred to here, as opposites, are the accidents of combination and separation.¹⁰³ In this case, however, we would have to question how may the two accidents, which are said to be equally able to inhere in the individual atom, be accidents that in reality apply to at least two atoms. How can combination or separation inhere in a single atom when in fact they are accidents that apply to two and more atoms? That is, combination is of two or more atoms and separation is of at least two atoms.

Bodies

In the next part of the text, Shaykh Bashīr informs us of the impossibility of reasoning that a recipient of a thing may enter (دخل) that which it receives. In the translation of this passage, we avoided using the translation 'penetrate' for the word دخل, as this may bring to mind the idea of interpenetration which was previously denied. Had this been chosen the beginning of the sentence would be admitting penetration and the end would be denying that the recipient is penetrated. As we do not see the logic of this reasoning, we understand this sentence to mean that it is inconceivable to think that the recipient of a thing, which enters into its construction, itself enters into the construction of this same

¹⁰³ Ibid.

thing that is part of it (included in its definition). In other terms, for two things A and B: if B is a part of A, then A is not a part of B. This may be taken as Shaykh Bashīr's denial of the idea of interpenetration which was earlier denied by al-Nazwānī in the form of: if A is the cause of B then B is not the cause of A, or the effect may not be the cause of its own cause. What confirms that this sentence is set to establish the denial of interpenetration is that the remaining part of this section discusses the construction of bodies and the way atoms may relate to each other.

Atoms do not permit interpenetration, they rather relate to other atoms through contiguity or through being added to another atom. A body is the combination of atoms that permits the coming to be of the three dimensions.¹⁰⁴ In joining another

¹⁰⁴ Regarding the number of atoms that make up the three dimensional body we find in Al-Nazwānī the following quote from al-Balkhī's *Maqālāt* (Ibid., pp. 72-74), which has parallels in al-Ash'arī's version (*Maqālāt*, v. 2, pp. 4-7):

ومن كتاب ((المقالات)) عن البلخي ، اختلف الناس في الجسم كيف وهم أربعة أصناف ؟
القول الأول : فقال أبو الهذيل ، ثلاث جهات وهي ستة أجزاء إذا اجتمعت قبلت الأعراض فصارت جسماً من قبل أن الجسم لن ينفك من
الطول والعمق ، والجهات ، يمنة ويسرة ، وأعلى وأسفل ، وقدام وخلف ولن تكون تلك إلا ستة أجزاء .

...
القول الثاني : وقال معمر الجسم ثمانية أجزاء إذا اجتمعت قبلت الأعراض ، لأن الجسم لن ينفك من أن يكون طويلاً عريضاً عميقاً ، ولا
بد من يمنة ويسرة وأعلى وأسفل ، فإذا كانت أربعة أجزاء لم يكن لها عمق حتى تطبق على أربعة أجزاء فيصير طويلاً عريضاً عميقاً
وأنه لا يتجزأ .

...
القول الثالث : وقال النظام وهشام ومن نفى الجزء ، أن الجسم طويل عريض عميق وأنه لا يتجزأ .

...
القول الرابع : وقالت المرجئة : الجزء جسم ولا يتجزأ ، وأن اللون والطعم والرائحة والطول والعرض والحرارة واللين والخشونة
ابعضه ، وهي أعراض . فإذا جمعها الله صارت جسماً ، وكل جسم فهذا حكمه .

The number of parts required to form a body is also important in the discussion regarding the shape of the simplest body and on whether or not the atoms do have a shape. Dhanani's discussion of the subject is found in Dhanani (1993), pp. 113-117. In this he points us to Ibn Mattawayh's description of the atom as resembling the square, so that six of these squares may form the first simple body, the cube. He also discusses in this section the Ash'arī's denial that the atom has a shape and that this may also be the position of the Baghdadī Mu'tazila. In the Ash'arī al-Juwaynī's (d. 478/1085) *al-Shāmil* (pp 158-159) we read:

الجوهر الفرد لا شكل له، ولكن اختلف الاصوليون في تشبيهه ببعض الاشكال تقريبا. فقال بعضهم هو اشبه بالمدور. وقال آخرون هو
اشبه بالمربع، وشبهه آخرون بالمثلث. وأشار القاضي في بعض كتبه الى اختيار شبهه بالمرجع: من حيث ينظم من الجواهر خط
مستطيل، والمدور لا يتأتى فيه ذلك الا بخلل وفرج.

Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, (1969). On the other hand, al-Rāzī informs us regarding this subject that the Mu'tazila affirmed that the atom has a shape but have disagreed upon what it is. He writes:

atom, the accident of combination comes to inhere, not in the new combination but, according to al-Nazwānī, in the atom itself. This body in possession of three dimensionality is the sum total of a specific number of similar atoms. Following this, Shaykh Bashīr informs us that God knows the number of the world's parts. This presumably is based on the idea that the bodies of the world may be counted, and the parts of bodies may be counted in like manner, since each one of these bodies has a limited knowable (to God) number of atoms.

Not only does God have the power to count the atoms but He also has the power to combine and separate these atoms so that we may relate the act of combining and separating to Him. It is because of the fact that this act is related to an agent, that we infer the existence of God and the created nature of this world. We find this in al-Nazwānī's text who, in turn, quotes al-Bisyawī's text regarding the existence of the two accidents, combination and separation, which we discussed previously.¹⁰⁵

The idea that God knows the number of parts of this world, and more specifically, the number of indivisible parts, demonstrates for Shaykh Bashīr the existence of these atoms after undergoing the process of separation. Reaching the level of the individual atoms reveals the limited and finite nature of such elements and the existence of bordering surfaces at the point where an atom may be in position of

إن الجوهـر الفرد، هل له شكل ام لا؟ فاباه "الاشعري" واما اكثر المعتزلة فقد أثبتوا له شكلا. ثم اختلفوا. فمنهم من قال: [إنه اشبهه بالمثلث. والاكثرون قالوا: إنه اشبهه بالمربع. والحق: انهم شبهوه بالمكعب. لانهم أثبتوا له جوانب ستة. وزعموا: انه يمكن ان تحصل به جواهر ستة، من جوانب ستة. وعلى هذا التقدير، فانه يجب [ان يكون] شكله: بالمكعب.
Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-āliya min al-ilm al-ilāhī*, (1987), v. 6, p. 21. See also on the question of the shape of the atom, Al-Āmadī, *Sayf al-Dīn, Abkār al-afkār fī usūl al-dīn*, (2004), v. 3, pp. 74-75, and Ibn Ḥazm's critique of atomism in general and the square and spherical shapes in particular in Ibn Ḥazm, v. 5, pp. 234-235.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Nazwānī, p. 66.

contiguity with another atom. The borders and the limits of atoms define their limitedness and finitude, which in turn allows for the beginning of counting. The form of such limited and finite element may not be found and sensed by us in the real world, and this is why we are told that this atom may only be the subject of our imagination and that it may not exist in this concrete world as a simple element bare of any accident.¹⁰⁶

Finitude

The argument for the finitude and the limited nature of bodies and atoms comes in the last section of our text. Shaykh Bashīr argues that the bodies that we come to know in the real sensible world are known to have six faces or sides (top, bottom, right, left, front and back sides). Each one of these faces is a limit of a body that comes to contact with air. Following this, we are told that air may not surround or come into contact with a body that is infinite in size. If the text had left the argument at this we would think that air is seen to only come into contact with a limited object either because contact between air and a surface marks a limit or air itself is considered to be limited. Since the premise that air is limited is not taken for

¹⁰⁶ In this respect we find in al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt* the following statement regarding Abū-l-Hudhayl (*Maqālāt*, v. 2, p. 11):

وأحال قائلو هذا القول أن يعري الله الجوهر من الأعراض والقائل بهذا القول أبو الهذيل وكان يقول أن الإدراك يحل في القلب لا في العين وهو علم الاضطراب.

and few pages later (p. 14) we read:

واجاز ابو الهذيل على الجزء الذى لا يتجزأ الحركة والسكون والانفراد وان يماس ستة امثاله بنفسه وان يجمع غيره ويفارق غيره وان يفرد الله فتراه العيون ويخلق فينا رؤية له وادراكا له ولم يجز عليه اللون والطعم والرائحة والحياة والقدرة والعلم وقال لا يجوز ذلك الا للجسم واجاز عليه من الاعراض ما وصفنا وكان الجبائى يثبت الجزء الذى لا يتجزأ ويقول انه يلقي بنفسه ستة امثاله ويجيز عليه الحركة والسكون واللون والكون والمماسة والطعم والرائحة اذا كان منفردا وينكر ان يحله طول او تأليف وهو منفرد او يحله علم او قدرة او حياة وهو منفرد.

The seeing in this case is possible for Abū-l-Hudhayl, it is, however, a conditional seeing that depends on God's creation of a different type of seeing. This idea is further developed by Ibn Mattawayh to the notion that the proof of the existence of the atoms is dependent on sense perception, despite his acknowledgement of the conditionality of this perception, see Dhanani (1993), pp. 141-145.

granted by Shaykh Bashīr, we must find the argument for the limitedness in contact between two surfaces in general. This is exactly the premise that the text argues from. For our Shaykh, the idea of contact of two surfaces reflects the finitude of each one of the two surfaces that come into contact. Since air is known to come into contact with at least one of the surfaces of a body then there must at least be one limit and barrier between air and the body. The central reasoning that follows the establishment of at least one limit to air or the body, is that nothing is known or said to be limited from one side and infinite from another. If a thing has at least one limit then it must be a limited object, which means it is limited from all sides. Thus, in this argument, Shaykh Bashīr establishes the limitedness of air as well as the body itself, or all bodies that are found in this world.

From establishing that all the bodies of the world are limited from all their sides as they are, at least, known to be limited from at least one of their six sides, Shaykh Bashīr moves to the idea that a finite body must necessarily be composed of a finite number of parts. The simple reasoning that is given in this final case is that what is seen and witnessed, in the real sensible clear and unmasked world of bodies, must necessarily apply to the unseen world of the minute parts of the bodies themselves. We assume that the argument that is absent from the text is as follows:

- a) The body is limited from its six sides, there is an end to its extension.
- b) The parts of the body on the surface of each side must be at least limited from one of their sides.

- c) In the sensible world of bodies, limit from one side indicates finitude and limits from all sides. It is not possible to have an end from one side and an infinite limitless extension everywhere else.
- d) All the parts on the surface of a body, sensed or not, are limited.
- e) All parts of the body, sensed or not, on the surface or inside are limited.
- f) These parts may be counted and are known to God.

If these are parts that may be counted then this counting must begin from one of these parts that may not be further divided, and ends with a part of a similar kind, an atom.

We must point out that for the above argument to succeed, one needs to establish two fundamental points:

- a) The argument for the adjacency of parts and the impossibility of interpenetration needs to be established prior to the establishment of the finitude of these parts. First, one must establish finitude from one side before using the argument that finitude from one side of a body means its finitude from all sides. Shaykh Bashīr argues that the contact with air from at least one side establishes finitude from this side. This, however, may not be considered a proof prior to proving that contact between bodies means adjacency and contiguity only. If interpenetration is possible between

bodies, the idea of a surface of contact and a limit would be absent as there would be no boundary that marks one of the interpenetrating bodies from the other. This in turn would annul the argument for limits between the surfaces in contact, as there would be no such surfaces. We notice that the argument for adjacency in this text was set up whilst affirming the existence of the atoms prior to the argument from one limit, which in turn is the basis for the argument for the finitude of the atom itself. Contiguity and lack of interpenetration are thus the founding principles, from the physical sensed reality, that justify the nature of the most fundamental component of this reality.

- b) There must be an end to divisibility in the unseen world, since the argument only proves that bodies are externally finite. The finitude of bodies does not necessarily show that this leads to finitude of the number of components. The idea of limited divisibility is referred to in the idea of the knowable parts of bodies, which means a limited number and an end of parts. An argument for the limited number requires an argument for the end of divisibility of parts, and a mention of this idea is absent in the text. The probable reasoning is that the external finitude of a body reflects finitude of the body in its entirety, from the external surface, in the sensible dimensions, to the level of the smallest minimal parts. Finitude encompasses the entire body

and this leads to finitude in the number of parts, and an end to divisibility follows from this.¹⁰⁷

The idea of limits and finitude of the most fundamental component in the world, along with the idea that this permits counting, emphasises in a different reading the idea of the limited number of created things of the world. This, in turn, emphasises the limitedness and finitude of the world, which stands in opposition to God's infinite nature. This is why reading the argument from the reverse point of view, from the point of the need to establish a discrete limited and finite object, plays a fundamental part in establishing the limited and finite whole which incorporates all the discrete individual elements.

The argument from the existence of atoms encompasses a number of ideas that are separately used to prove the createdness of the world. The most important of these are the change of states, finitude and particularisation, combination and separation (or generation and corruption) and origination. All of these arguments in their separate structure helped in establishing the createdness of the world and the existence of the creator, however, they also set and define the nature of the things that are considered to be existent.

In the same sense that the arguments set against the dualists become arguments against any multiplicity, the arguments for the nature of the most fundamental constituents of the existents become arguments for the nature of the existents themselves. In what follows, we will simplify and restructure the above reasoning in

¹⁰⁷ For arguments for the existence of atoms, see Pines (1997) pp. 13-19 ; Dhanani (1993), pp. 152-166.

a way that helps us see the sequence in the reasoning behind the use of atoms in the origination arguments.

One might assume that the whole argument relies fundamentally on the nature of the atom itself. This assumption might be true, however, this is not a straightforward as it appears. The fundamental ground of the argument starts with al-Bisyawī's statement that "the evidence proves –according to consensus- that the accidents are originated." What is fundamental in the whole structure is the nature of the accidents. Accidents are denied independent existence and are said to be things that inhere in substances, which are more fundamental things that 'may' have independent existence. The origination of accidents and their variation from one thing to another and their existence at one time and annihilation at another, played a large part in the argument from particularisation: why would a thing have this and not that particular accident? It plays a part in the change of states argument, since a thing would have this particular accident at this particular time and then it would have another different set of accidents. It plays a part in the idea that a thing has accidents that are combined in this particular way, and are then separated to have combination in a different way. Accidents in their changing nature are an essential tool that reflects a coming to be followed by the important idea of cessation from being, hence limit and creation and origination.¹⁰⁸

Al-Bisyawī states that what is permanently attached to the originated is originated.

This argument could face the challenge that the substance, in which the accidents

¹⁰⁸ Frank writes: "The accidents, on the other hand, constitute the formal reality of beings: the defined and specific content of their being. By their inherence in the substrate (*maḥall*) of atoms, they determine the being of the composite in its being what it is. They form in the strictest sense, the thing as it exists, complete and perfect in the totality of its perfections." Frank (2005a), p. 87.

inhere, could continuously be the subject of this inherence without it ever being in a position at any time when it is without an accident, hence it would be eternally existent. The idea of not ceasing to be attached to things that come to be and cease to be is not sufficient to show that this same thing comes and ceases to be. If a substance S does not cease to be attached to accidents this means it could be attached to A1 and A2 at time T1, and then to A2 and A3 at T2 so that at any one time it would have some accidents from a previous time and some new accidents.¹⁰⁹

What is avoided in al-Bisyawī's statement from above is the reliance of a thing (a principle element) for its existence on something that is ontologically less basic and is known to come to be and cease to exist. Essential to the idea of atoms and their relation to accidents, particularly the accidents of combination and separation, is the nature of interdependence between accidents and atoms. It was established by the consensus that the accidents rely on a substance to exist, however, in the theory of atoms, the atoms themselves rely on the accident of combination to exist in the real concrete world. The separate atom is only a subject of the imagination, it is a thing that may not exist in separation in the real world since its existence is inferred from the composite nature of bodies. An atom only exists in a body that is made from six or more atoms, depending on the theory that one follows. In this case, atoms are necessarily attached, not to accidents in general but to, at least, the accident of combination, since it cannot exist concretely without it.

¹⁰⁹ This is also one of Ibn Rushd's arguments against this reasoning, see Ibn Rushd, *Manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla*, (1964), p. 142.

The theory of atoms is of great importance because it establishes this essential interdependence of accidents and atoms at the moment of coming to be. What we have in this theory, is not the case of an atom that does not cease to be attached to an accident, it is rather a case of an atom that may not exist without an originated accident, so that the atom “cannot be said in any way to have any higher degree of being or greater ontological substantiality than the “accidents.””¹¹⁰

In Ibn Rushd’s critique of some of the theologians’ principles, in his book of *Manāhij al-adilla*, we find a challenge that could explain one of the reasons for the important question of the thingness of the non-existent. We have come to conclude from the above presentation on atoms that there is an essential relationship between atoms and their accidents, that an atom cannot exist in the concrete world without an accident. Ibn Rushd asks: what is the thing that accepts or carries the accident of origination (*ḥudūth*)?¹¹¹ If an atom already exists, then there is no need for the accident of origination to inhere in it, and if it does not exist, then there is no substrate in which the accident of origination can inhere. The strong tie between accident and atom prevents separate existence, yet at the same time, an accident requires a thing, a substrate in which it may inhere.¹¹² The accident of origination must inhere in something for this thing to become an originated atom, and this something, which is to become a substrate, may neither be already originated nor non-existent. Ibn Rushd suggests that this is why the Mu‘tazila have resorted to the

¹¹⁰ Frank (1966), p. 44.

¹¹¹ We have not come across this use in the consulted literature. Instead of the accident of origination the Mu‘tazila use the accident of becoming or *kawn*. In Frank (1966), p, 16, we read: “The initial coming-to-be of a thing is “its made to be or its being created after its not being,” God’s “initiation of its existence after its non-existence, for the first time.” See Also Dhanani (1993), pp.145-148, for the different uses of this term.

¹¹² Ibn Rushd (1964), p. 149.

idea of an intermediate state between existence and non-existence, and this is why they believe that there is some form of an essence (ذاتاً ما) in non-existence.¹¹³ This is a reference to the Baṣran Mu'tazilī belief that the atom or *al-Jawhar* is an atom in the state of non-existence, primarily because it is an atom in-itself (لذاته) and not because of an agent causing it to be the way it is. The debate within this school, however, appears to be primarily on the question of whether or not this atom possesses the accident of *taḥayyuz* (spatial occupancy) in its state of non-existence. On the other hand, the Baghdādī school refused to associate the non-existent with *al-jawhar* and restricted themselves to only associating it with the terms 'thing' (*shay*), 'possible' (*maqdūr*) 'known' (*ma'lūm*), and also 'subsistent' or (*muthbat*).¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ This is the view of the late Mu'tazila according to Abū Rashīd al-Naysābūrī, *Al-Masā'il fī al-khilāf bayn al-Baṣriyyīn wal Baghdādīyyīn*, (1979), pp. 37-38. He writes:

اعلم ان الذي ذهب اليه الشيخان أبو علي وأبو هاشم ان الجوهر يكون جوهرًا في حال عدمه. وقد قال بذلك الشيخ عبد الله، وربما يجري في كلامه ما يقتضي ظاهره ان صفة التحيز تكون حاصلة للمعدوم...

و ذهب شيخنا أبو القاسم الى ان المعدوم لا يوصف بأنه جوهر، ولا بأنه عرض. وامتنع من ان يجري عليه اسم غير قولنا "شيء" وقولنا "مقدور" و "معلوم" و "مخبر عنه" وربما يصفه بأنه "مثبت"...

This, however, does not correspond to what we find in al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt*. In this collection we find a different view associated with al-Jubbāī who appears according to his student to be associating knowledge with the 'thing' and the atom, that there is a knowledge of them and not that they are some entities prior to their existence. They are known and named things prior to their existence and they are things that may be spoken of (*Maqālāt*, v. 1, p. 222):

وقال "محمد بن عبد الوهاب الجبائي": أقول: أن الله سبحانه لم يزل عالماً بالأشياء والجواهر والأعراض، وكان يقول: أن الأشياء تعلم أشياء قبل كونها، وتسمى أشياء قبل كونها، وأن الجواهر تسمى جواهر قبل كونها... وكذلك الجوهر إنما سمي جوهرًا لنفسه وما سمي به الشيء لأنه يمكن أن يذكر ويخبر عنه فهو مسمى بذلك قبل كونه كالقول شيء فإن أهل اللغة سموا بالقول شيء كل ما أمكنهم أن يذكره ويخبروا عنه...

And (Ibid., v. 2, p. 8).

وقال قائلون: الجوهر ما اذا وجد كان حاملاً للأعراض. وزعم صاحب هذا القول ان الجواهر جواهر بأنفسها، وانها تعلم جواهر قبل ان تكون. والقائل بهذا القول هو "الجبائي".

And (Ibid., v. 2, pp. 183, 184)

وكان "الجبائي" يقول: إن الله لم يزل عالماً قادراً على الأشياء قبل كونها بنفسه، وأن الأشياء خطأ أن يقال أشياء قبل كونها؛ لأن كونها هو هي، وكان ينكر أن يقال أشياء قبل أنفسها، ولكنها تعلم أشياء قبل كونها، وتسمى أشياء قبل كونها، وكذلك الجواهر عنده تسمى جواهر قبل كونها...

On the other hand 'Abbād b. Sulaymān has a more positive association with 'things', atoms and accident before their creation (Ibid., v. 1, p. 220):

وكان يقول: المعلومات معلومات الله قبل كونها، وإن المقدورات مقدورات قبل كونها، وأن الأشياء أشياء قبل أن تكون، وكذلك الجواهر جواهر قبل أن تكون، وكذلك الأعراض أعراض قبل أن تكون، والأفعال أفعال قبل أن تكون، ويحيل أن تكون الأجسام أجساماً قبل كونها والمخلوقات مخلوقات قبل أن تكون والمفعولات مفعولات قبل أن تكون...

(See also Ibid., v. 2, p. 165).

This way the accident of origination can inhere in a thing that has a state of being between absolute non-existence and existence in order to make it an existent being. Origination in this case becomes a transformation from one state of being to another that is more real and concrete. There is no evidence to suggest that the Ibādīs went as far as considering the atom to be an atom in its state of non-existence. We know, however, that they have applied the terms, ‘known’ and ‘possible’ to things that do not exist as well as the term ‘thing’. This is explored in the next section, and as far as the term ‘subsistence’ is concerned, we have allocated a section for it in the next chapter.

IV. God’s thingness

Some of the earliest themes of *kalām*, which are discussed in al-Bisyawī’s text, are the things that are associated with God, that which may be known about Him or said about Him. The first thing that is questioned regarding God is the idea of His uniqueness which in the Quran is expressed as "ليس كمثلہ شيء" ¹¹⁵ or “Naught is as His likeness.” The challenge is simply why is God said to be one when in fact He is not seen or imagined to be like anything that is known. Al-Bisyawī’s answer to this

It is also the Baghdādīs who appear to have the more positive association with these elements, and who appear to speak of them as entities and not as objects of knowledge (Ibid., v. 1, p. 222):

وقال قائلون من البغداديين: نقول أن المعلومات معلومات قبل كونها، وكذلك المقدورات مقدورات قبل كونها، وكذلك الأشياء أشياء قبل كونها، ومنعوا أن يقال: أعراض.

(Also in Ibid., v. 2, pp. 170, 171).

¹¹⁵ Q. 42:11

particular question amounts to the simple response that this is the case because in this there is a denial of the dualists' and the Christians' beliefs.¹¹⁶

What is important for us in this section is the question of the meaning of the statement associating God with the word 'thing' or شيء as stated in the verse above. To the question of the affirmation that God is a thing, al-Bisyawī writes:

وسأل فقال : أنتثبتون أن الله شيء ؟
قبل له : نعم نثبتته شيئا ليس كمثلته شيء ، في كتابه أنه ليس كمثلته شيء ، وكل من سماه شيئا فقد
أثبتته شيئا ، إذ لا موجود إلا شيء ، ولا معلوم إلا بشيء ولا حي ولا عالم ولا قادر إلا بشيء ،
فلما كان تعالى حيا قادرا ، عالما سميعا بصيرا ، كان شيئا ، ليس كمثلته شيء من الأشياء مما
خلق ، وعلا علوا كبيرا.¹¹⁷

And [if] he inquires: do you affirm that God is a thing?

One replies: yes, we affirm that He is a thing and no thing is as His likeness. In His book, it is affirmed that no thing is as His likeness, and he who names Him a thing has affirmed that He is a thing since there is no existent that is not a thing, and no known that is not a thing and no living, no knowing and no powerful that is not a thing. Since the exalted is living and powerful, knowing hearing and seeing, He is a thing, and no thing from what He has created is as His likeness, He is the most exalted.

The initial part of the affirmation is that God is a thing that is unlike the rest of things. God's thingness is affirmed but is also disassociated from all the other things of the world. The sentence simultaneously brings God near His created things and then completely distances Him from these things. The idea that God is a thing seems to have forced itself into the discourse that attempts to disassociate God from any thing from this world. The problem is evidently the affirmation of God's thingness that is found in the Qur'ān itself, which in some sense has forced the process of

¹¹⁶ Al-Bisyawī, p. 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

conceptualising of the word ‘thing’. In the idea that God is a thing, in the affirmation of His thingness, we notice the association of the word thing with affirmation or *ithbāt*. These two words had become interlinked in the early *kalām* discourse and had allowed for the development of the ideas of thingness and the subsistence of the non-existent amongst the Mu‘tazila and the Sufis, as will be explored in the next chapter.¹¹⁸

In this quotation, al-Bisyawī associates all the actual existents of this world with the word thing. If we stop at this, we would get the idea that a thing is simply the existent of this world; this, however, is not the case in this text. Al-Bisyawī moves to the inclusion of other things that are, in his opinion, eligible for the labelling of a thing. He includes in this, things that are said to be powerful, living and knowing. These, however, are obviously attributes of an existing thing; hence, this may not be considered to be an additional inclusion of what is different from the category of the existent. The attributes that are listed belong to an existent, hence, whatever possesses these attributes is a thing. What would have been different in this case would have been considering the attributes themselves as things, since this would have broadened the nature of the discussion.¹¹⁹ However, al-Bisyawī still broadens the field of application of the word thing since he includes knowledge or the knowns under the category of ‘thing’. It is not only the one who knows that is a

¹¹⁸ Amongst the earliest of such association, between God’s thingness and the idea that things are things before their creation, is found in al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt*, (v. 2, p. 181).

وقال قائلون معنى ان الله شيء هو اثباته وقد ذهب الى هذا قوم زعموا ان الاشياء اشياء قبل وجودها وانها مثبتة اشياء قبل وجودها وهذا القول مناقضة لأنه لا فرق بين ان تكون ثابتة وبين ان تكون موجودة وهذا قول ابى الحسين الخياط.

¹¹⁹ See note 134.

thing but what is known is also a thing.¹²⁰ The idea that it is the knower and the known that are things broadens the field of application of the word thing beyond the mere existents of this concrete world.¹²¹ Expanding this reasoning leads to the idea that all existents are things but not all things are existent, and if not all things are existent then some non-existents are things.¹²²

In al-Kindī's *Bayān al-Shar'* we find the following passage that confirms this particular idea:

ومما يوجد أنه عن أبي الحسن علي بن محمد:¹²³ وسألته عن المعدوم، هل يقع عليه اسم شيء؟ قال: المعدوم على ضربين: يكون ولا يكون، فما لا يكون فلا حظ للنظر فيه، ولا أعلم أنه يقع عليه شيء من الأسماء. وأما ما يكون فإنه ينقسم على قسمين: معاد ومبتدأ.¹²⁴

We find related to Abū al-Ḥasan 'Ali b. Muḥammad: and I asked him regarding the non-existent, does the name thing apply to it?

He said: the non-existent is of two kinds: what becomes and what does not become. As to what does not become, there is no thinking about it and I do not know that a name applies to it. As to what becomes, it is divided into two parts: returning and originating.

¹²⁰ In al-Kāfī's *Mūjāz* we find this argument for why we may say that God is a thing unlike other things and not a body unlike other bodies. Here we find that the word thing is applied to what is existent and imagined, (p. 405):

ومما تسألنا عنه المشبهة قولهم: لم جعلتموه شيئاً لا كالأشياء، وحيث لا كالأحياء، وأبيتم أن يكون جسماً لا كالأجسام؟ قلنا: إن تأويل قولنا شيء مخالف لتأويل قولنا جسم، فإذا قلنا: شيء فذلك اسم لكل موجود وموهم، وجسم إنما يراد به التجزي والتسديس، فإذا قلنا: إن الله جسم ليس كالأجسام فكأننا قلنا هو، وإن كان مسدساً ذا أجزاء فلا خالق إلا هو، ولو قلنا: هو جسم لا كالأجسام، ونريد ذلك؛ لكننا قلنا إنه مسدس متجزئ، وليس بمسدس ولا متجزئ، وليس لهذا القول وجه غير هذين الوجهين... وقلنا شيء اسم لكل موجود وموهم، وقلنا لا كالأشياء: أردنا أن صفاته بخلاف صفات الأشياء، وليس في قولنا شيء بخلاف الأشياء ما يخرج من أن يكون شيئاً...

¹²¹ For studies on the question of thingness and its relation to the non-existent see: Frank (1980) ; (2000) ; Klein-Franke (1994); Wisnovsky (2000).

¹²² On the non-existent we find in al-Mufīd, *Awā'il al-Maqālāt*, (1993), p. 98:

وأقول: إن المعدوم هو المنفي العين الخارج عن صفة الموجود، وأقول إنه لا جسم ولا جوهر ولا عرض ولا شيء على الحقيقة، وإن سميت به من هذه الأسماء فإنما تسميه به مجازاً، وهذا مذهب جماعة من بغدادية المعتزلة وأصحاب المخلوق. والبلخي يزعم أنه شيء ولا يسميه بجسم ولا جوهر ولا عرض، والجبائي وابنه يزعمان أن المعدوم شيء وجوهر وعرض، والخباط يزعم إنه شيء وعرض وجسم.

¹²³ This is the same as Al-Bisyawī.

¹²⁴ Al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 137 and the remainder of the quote:

فما وقعت عليه اللغة منها وصفا فلا قياس فيه، وما كان اللغة فحديث كانت كان الاسم لها صحيحاً بصحة التمييز، وهما عرض وجوهر، لا ينفك أحدهما من صاحبه، ومحال وجوده إلا به، فهما مع العيان مشاهدان في الأوهام، موجودان، ودليان صادقان، وشاهدان على أنفسهما أنهما محدثان فيما جعله.

The question, set at the beginning of this text, asks whether or not the word thing applies to the non-existent, assuming that it already applies to the existent of this world. Al-Bisyawī's response begins with a distinction between two types of non-existents: that which becomes and that which does not. This means that the non-existent is in one sense an absolute negation of the coming to be at any time. It is what has no possibility of being and is not known to have or not this possibility, since there is no knowledge of it whatsoever. The absence of this knowledge negates the question of the possibility of existence from this type of non-existents, it is not denied in the sense that this possibility may become real, but rather in the sense of the total and absolute absence of any knowledge regarding anything to do with these non-existents. The other type of non-existent is what becomes, which means there is no question of possibility in this statement either. This particular non-existent is, according to al-Bisyawī, either returning to non-existence from existence *'ā'id*, or is to come to existence from its state of non-existence, *mubtada'*. What is excluded from both of these non-existents is what is possible but is denied existence in the real world. This does not seem to concern al-Bisyawī in his response. There is no part in this answer that directly affirms, or denies, that the non-existent is a thing. However, the division of the non-existents into two parts, one is that which nothing may be related to and known about, whilst the other is what becomes existent and ceases to be, suggests that the answer is yes, the non-existent that becomes is a thing.

If we return to al-Bisyawī's *Jāmi'*, we find in the section that discusses the visibility of the creator the following relevant argument:

الفرق بين الرؤية والعلم بين، وذلك أنه لا شيء إلا وهو يعلم، وليس لا شيء إلا وهو [لا]¹²⁵ يرى، إلا أن الأشياء كلها مع اختلافها معلومة، وليس كلها مرئية، لأن المرئيات أجناس مخصوصة بأعيانها، وليس المعلومات كذلك، وقد علم المعدوم والموجود، ولا يجوز أن يرى المعدوم والموجود، وأعلم الشيء، بيني وبينه ساتر ولا أراه، وأعلم ما كان أمس، وليس أرى ما كان أمس، وفرق كثير بين الرؤية والعلم.¹²⁶

The difference between vision and knowledge is clear since there is nothing that is not known, and it is not the case that there is nothing that is not seen. However, all things, despite their differences, are known and not all are seen, since the visible are classes associated with their substances, and the knowns are not so related. It is the case that the non-existent and the existent are known, and it is not permissible to see the non-existent and the existent. I may know the thing veiled from me and I do not see it. I know what occurred yesterday, and I may not see what occurred yesterday, and there is much difference between vision and knowledge.

In this quotation, which distinguishes between the objects of sight and the objects of knowledge, we come across the idea that all things are known or may be so, but not all the objects of sight may be said to be within sight. The difference between the knowns and their external associations, distances knowledge from external hindrances. In the case of knowledge, all the objects of knowledge are available to the knower. On the other hand, all the things that might be subject to sight might not always be available to vision, as the simple example above suggests, a hindering obstacle might prevent such vision. One may, however, equally challenge this argument with the same reasoning, since it is possible to argue that the example of the presence of an object that obscures the seeing of an object could be applied in a similar way to the act of knowing. A particular known may prevent another known from being present to knowledge, since it is possible to assume that there can only be one known available to the knower at any particular time.

¹²⁵ Wrong addition to the text.

¹²⁶ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 58.

Regardless of this particular challenge to the argument, we are interested in the statement that knowledge is of the non-existent and the existent when vision may not be said to be so. I may know an event that took place yesterday, which was existent and is presently non-existent, but I may not see this event now when I was able to see it yesterday. Again, what is important is that the non-existent and the existent are considered to be objects of knowledge.¹²⁷

V. Names and attributes

The question of the thingness of the non-existent or its subsistence (*thubūt*) is also part of a larger theological debate regarding the nature of God's names and attributes. This is evident from the questions and answers that are found in *Jāmi'*, al-Bisyawī regarding these ideas.

وسأل عن قول من قال : إن أسماء الله وصفاته لا هي هو ولا هي غيره ؟ وكذلك قول من قال : علمه لا يقال هو ولا غيره ؟
 قيل له : أفنقولون ؛ لا هو موجود ولا هو معدوم ولا مجهول ولا معلوم ولا مدرك ولا غير مدرك ، فإن قالوا كذلك خرجوا من المعقول ، فهذا ما يفسد قولهم ، وكذلك قول من يقول : لا يقال علم الله شيء ، ولا يقال لا شيء ، ولا قديم ولا محدث ؟

يقال لهم : ما الفرق بينكم وبين من قال : لا يقال علم الله شيء ، ولا يقال لا شيء ، لأن هذا إثباتا للشيء ونفيه¹²⁸ ، فلا يجوز ، ولو جاز أن يقال علم الله شيء لا شيء ولا قديم ولا حادث ولا مجهول ولا معلوم ولا موجود ولا معدوم ، كان في هذا إثبات النفي ، ونفي الإثبات ، ومن وصف الله بهذا فقد وصفه بالنفي والإبطال.

¹²⁷ On this idea we find in al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 116:

ومن بعض الآثار: اعلم أن الله تعالى لم يزل يعلم الأشياء، إذ وهي عدم لم تكن ولم يزل عالما بها في حال كونها، ولم يزل عالما بها بعد كونها، ولم يزل عالما بها في حال فنائها، ولم يزل عالما بها بعد فنائها في الأخرى.

Also in a Shīrī source (Al-Mufīd, pp. 54-55) we find:

إن الله تعالى عالم بكل ما يكون قبل كونه، وإنه لا حادث إلا وقد علمه قبل حدوثه، ولا معلوم وممكن أن يكون معلوما إلا وهو عالم بحقيقته، وإنه سبحانه لا يخفى عليه شيء في الأرض ولا في السماء، وبهذا قضت دلائل العقول والكتاب المسطور والأخبار المتواترة عن آل الرسول - صلى الله عليه وآله - وهو مذهب جميع الإمامية، ولسنا نعرف ما حكاه المعتزلة عن هشام بن الحكم في خلافه. وعندنا أنه تخرص منهم عليه وغلط ممن قلدتهم فيه فحكاه من الشيعة عنه، ولم نجد له كتابا مصنفا ولا مجلسا ثابتا وكلامه في أصول الإمامة ومسائل الامتحان يدل على ضد ما حكاه الخصوم عنه. ومعنا فيما ذهبنا إليه في هذا الباب جميع المنتسبين إلى التوحيد سوى الجهم بن صفوان من المجبرة وهشام بن عمرو الفوطي من المعتزلة فإنهما كانا يزعمان أن العلم لا يتعلق بالمعدوم ولا يقع إلا على موجود، وأن الله تعالى لو علم الأشياء قبل كونها لما حسن منه الامتحان.

¹²⁸ in original. نفسه

قيل لهم : ما الفرق بينكم وبين من قال : علم الله هو هو ، لا هو غيره ؟
فإن قالوا : إذا قلنا هو هو أثبتناه علما ، وإذا قلنا هو غيره أثبتنا عنده غيره ، فاستحال الكلام.
قيل لهم : و [لا¹²⁹] هو الله إثبات غيره في قولكم ، ولا غيره إثبات أنه هو فهل من فرق ، ولا
يجدون إلى ذلك سبيلا.

فإن قال: انتم قد قلتم ان الله¹³⁰ علما؟

قيل : إنما أطلقنا ذلك ، على ما أطلقه الله في كتابه ، وأطلقه المسلمون في كلامهم ورجعنا في
قولنا والله أعلم إلى أنه العالم ، ولم ينكر ذلك ، إنما أنكرنا على من أثبت الله¹³¹ علما ، ثم ادعى
فيه على ما وصفنا ، والذي أطلقنا موجود في لغة العرب ؛ حيث قالوا : وجه الأمر ، وعين
اليقين ومثله في لغة العرب كثير . وقال الله تبارك وتعالى: "كل شيء هالك إلا وجهه"¹³² ، ولم
يرجعوا بذلك إلى معنى هو غيره ، وإنما قالوا : كل شيء هالك إلا هو

وكذلك إن قالوا : إذا قلنا علم الله شيء كان في إثبات شيء ، وإثبات شينين قديمين ، وإذا قلنا لا
شيء كان نفيا للعلم ؟
قيل لهم : فما الفرق بينكم وبين من قال : لا معدوم ولا موجود ولا معلوم ولا مجهول ولا شيء
ولا لا شيء ، وهل من فرق إذا أثبتوا على ذلك تجاهلوا ؟
وكذلك من قال علم الله غيره ، جعل الله عالما بعلم هو غيره .
وقال : قد مضى الجواب فيما تقدم عليه ، ومن جعل علم الله محدثا أثبت أنه لم يكن يعلم ثم علم ،
وتعالى الله عن هذه الصفة علوا كبيرا ، بل هو الله العالم الذي لم يزل عالما بما يكون...¹³³

And he was questioned regarding those who say: the names of God and His attributes are neither Him nor are they other than Him? And also, the saying of those who say: His knowledge is not said to be Him nor other than Him?

[He replied] One would reply: would you say, he is neither existent nor non-existent, neither unknown nor known and neither perceived nor unperceived? If they affirm this they would depart from reason as this would corrupt their statement and so would be the statement of those who say: God's knowledge is neither said to be a thing nor not a thing and neither eternal nor originated.

One says to them: what is the difference between you and those who say: one may not say that God's knowledge is a thing nor may say a no-thing as this would be an affirmation of a thing and its negation, and this is not permissible. If it were permissible to say that God's knowledge is a thing that is a no-thing, not eternal and not originated,

¹²⁹ Missing in original.

¹³⁰ Suggest to read as الله to conform with the more common phrase, and for the grammatical structure to work. This common expression is confirmed by al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt*, v. 1, pp. 224-225: واختلف الذين قالوا: لم يزل الله عالما قادرا حيا من المعتزلة فيه، اهو عالم قادر حى بنفسه ام بعلم وقدره وحياة؟ وما معنى القول عالم قادر حى؟ فقال اكثر المعتزلة والخوارج وكثير من المرجئة وبعض الزيدية: ان الله عالم قادر حى بنفسه، لا بعلم وقدره وحياة، واطلقوا ان الله علما بمعنى انه عالم، وله قدرة بمعنى انه قادر، ولم يطلقوا ذلك على الحياة ولم يقولوا: له حياة...

¹³¹ Suggest to read الله

¹³² Q. 28:88.

¹³³ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, pp. 82-85.

not unknown and not known, not existent and not non-existent then this would be an affirmation of negation and a negation of an affirmation and he who attributes God as such would be attributing Him with negation and nullification.

One would say to them: what is the difference between you and those who say: God's knowledge is Him, it is not other than Him?

If they say: if we say it is Him we would affirm Him to be knowledge, and if we say it is other than Him we would affirm some other with Him, which is impossible.

One would say to them: and not God is an affirmation of an other to Him, in your words, and not an other to Him is an affirmation that it is Him, so is there a difference? And they would not find a way to answer.

If they say: you have said that God has knowledge.

One would say: we have pronounced this in accordance with what God has pronounced in His book and what the Muslims have pronounced in their speech. We have referred in our saying, and God knows best, to the fact that He is the knower, and this has not been denied, what we have rather rejected is those who affirm that He has knowledge then criticise our description. What we say exists in the language of the Arabs as they say: 'the face of the matter' and 'the eye of certainty' and so are many other sayings in the language of the Arabs. God the exalted and the blessed says: "everything will perish save His face," and they did not refer by this to an entity other than Him, since they say all things will perish save Him.

Also, if they say: if we say God's knowledge is a thing, this would be affirming a thing, and affirming two eternal things, and if we say not a thing, this would be a negation of knowledge.

One would say to them: so what is the difference between you and those who say: not a non-existent and not existent, not known and not unknown and not a thing and not a no-thing. Also, is there a difference? If they affirm this, they would be pretending ignorance.

And so do those who say God's knowledge is other than Him, they would make God a knower through a knowledge that is other than Him.

And he said: we had previously answered this question, and he who considers God's knowledge originated would affirm that He did not

know then came to know. The exalted God is above this attribute, for He is the knowing God who is eternally knowing of what would become.

The beginning of the text sets the questions regarding the relation of God's names and His attribute of knowing to God Himself, whether they are the same or not. Al-Bisyawī is asked about his opinion regarding those who deny both, the affirmation that the names and the attributes are God Himself, and the negation of this identity or congruity.¹³⁴

In the first response to this question, al-Bisyawī asks if these people, who deny any affirmation of God's nature, would accept all the possible negations that he lists in pairs of opposites, so that God is not existent and not not existent; not known and not not known and finally not perceived and not not perceived. For him denying the association of both sides of the pairs of opposites renders the discussion illogical, since presumably one side must be applicable to the subject of the discussion, namely God. If such a discussion regarding the nature of God is illogical and thus impossible, then so would be the case with regard to God's knowledge; we may not argue that this knowledge is neither a thing nor not a thing, not originated and not eternal.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Al-Mufīd in his *Awā'il al-Maqālāt* writes (pp. 52-53):

وأحدث رجل من أهل البصرة يعرف بالأشعري قولا خالف فيه ألفاظ جميع الموحدين ومعانيهم فيما وصفناه، وزعم أن الله - عز وجل - صفات قديمة وأنه لم يزل بمعان لا هي هو ولا غيره من أجلها كان مستحقا للوصف بأنه عالم حي قادر سميع بصير متكلم مرید، وزعم أن الله - عز وجل - وجهها قديما وسمعا قديما وبصرا قديما ويدين قديمين، وأن هذه كلها أزلية قدماء، وهذا قول لم يسبقه إليه أحد من منتحلي التوحيد فضلا عن أهل الإسلام.

However, we do find in an Ibādī source Al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 55, Also al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 56, as will be seen in the next note, that this statement goes back to a period prior to al-Ash'arī, that is back to Hishām ibn al-Hakam, Ibn Kullāb and Hishām b. Jarīr al-Zaydī.

¹³⁵ This appears to be a reference to Abū Hāshim's *ahwāl*, since he believes, similar to the believers in *al-ahwāl*, that an attribute (*ḥāl*) is neither an existent, a non-existent nor a thing, Al-Shahrastānī, *kitāb nihāyat al-iqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, (1934), p. 133; and al-Āmidī informs us that Abū Hāshim

The ground of the denial of this language is the law of the excluded middle.¹³⁶ Whatever proposition one might say about God or His knowledge, it is either true or false, and in a case of a pair of opposite propositions being stated regarding God, then if one is true the other must not be true. It is not possible for both pairs of propositions to be true or to be false, and there is no middle ground that is between the true and the false. In al-Bisyawī's text, this idea is presented through the language of affirmation and negation. He simply finds that with regard to a proposition about a thing (and God is a thing) it is impossible to accept as true the affirmation and the negation of a proposition *لأن هذا إثباتا للشيء ونفيه ، فلا يجوز*. We may rephrase this in this way: for a thing T it is impossible to state that T is P and T is not-P. However, we notice that al-Bisyawī's argument is set in terms of negation of a negative proposition and the negation of this negation, so that his examples are set in the form of: it is impossible to state that T is not P and T is not not-P. In this reasoning, to state that a thing is not created and that it is not not created (or not eternal) is a contradictory statement, for a thing must be one of these two opposites, either a created thing or an eternal thing, and so would be the case of knowledge, it is either originated in time or eternal. In the case of created beings,

hesitated to say that the states are things whilst the Ash'ariyya think that they are not to be described as a thing or not a thing, Al-Āmadī, *Abkār al-afkār fī 'uṣūl al-dīn*, al-Mahdi, (2004), p. 410. This is however also associated with some Ash'arīs (early al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī). We read in Ibn Ḥazm, v. 5, p. 165:

قال أبو محمد وأما الأحوال التي ادعتها الأشعرية فإنهم قالوا إن ها هنا أحوالا ليست حقا ولا باطلا ولا هي مخلوقة ولا غير مخلوقة ولا هي موجودة ولا معدومة ولا هي معلومة ولا هي مجهولة ولا هي أشياء ولا هي لا أشياء.

¹³⁶ In al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāyat al-Iqdām* we find this line regarding the relation between *al-ḥāl* and the excluded middle (p. 135):

فإن إثبات الحال التي لا توصف بالوجود والعدم وتوصف بالثبوت دون الوجود حسم باب الحد والاستدلال فإن غاية الناظر أن يأتي في نظره بتقسيم دائر بين النفي والإثبات فينفي أحدهما حتى يتعين الثاني ومثبت الحال قد أتى بواسطة بين الوجود والعدم فلم يفد التقسيم والإبطال علماً ولا يتضمن النظر حصول معرفة أصلاً.

This is also mentioned in his *Milal* as a critique of *al-aḥwāl* (*Milal*, p. 40). Al-Rāzī has a special section in his *Muḥaṣṣal* to deny this category, which he attributes to Abū Hāshim, and the Ash'arī theologians, al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī. Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wal muta'akhhirīn mina'l 'ulamā' wal ḥukamā' wal mutakallimīn*, (1978), pp. 60-64.

knowledge is originated (not eternal) and in the case of the eternal God it is either eternal or originated, both cases may not be denied simultaneously. Hence, to affirm that it is created is to deny that it is eternal. Expressed differently, negating that it is eternal is to affirm that the opposite is true, that it is created, and negating its opposite cannot also be true, that is negating that it is created. We can neither affirm two states of opposites nor negate two states of opposites. Thus, one concludes from this section that denying both opposites is an illogical proposition and one may not apply it to statements about God's attributes and names. We may simply not use the expression 'they are neither Him nor not Him', *لا هي هو ولا هي غيره*.¹³⁷

In the section that follows, we come to understand the opposition's reason for choosing the formula of denying the application of the opposite terms to God. With

¹³⁷ If al-Mufīd appears to attribute the neither Him nor other than Him to al-Ash'arī in a previous note, the latter appears to attribute this formulation to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (*Maqālāt*, v. 1, pp. 107-108):

والفرقة السادسة من الرافضة أصحاب هشام بن الحكم يزعمون أنه محال أن يكون الله لم يزل عالماً بالأشياء بنفسه وأنه إنما يعلم الأشياء بعد أن لم يكن بها عالماً وأنه يعلمها بعلم وأن العلم صفة له ليست هي هو ولا غيره ولا بعضه فيجوز أن يقال العلم محدث أو قديم لأنه صفة والصفة لا توصف.

Hishām appears to apply this formula with the attributes as it appears in (*Maqālāt*, v. 1, p. 121):

أصحاب هشام بن الحكم يزعمون أن خلق الشيء صفة للشيء لا هو الشيء ولا هو غيره لأنه صفة للشيء والصفة لا توصف وكذلك زعموا أن البقاء صفة للباقي لا هي هو ولا غيره وكذلك الفناء صفة للفاني لا هي هو ولا هي غيره.

This idea is also attributed to some Zaydiyya who appear to affirm that an attribute is a thing (*Maqālāt*, v. 1, p. 138):

فالفرقة الأولى منهم أصحاب سليمان بن جرير الزيدي. يزعمون أن البارئ عالم بعلم لا هو هو ولا غيره، وأن علمه شيء، قادر بقدره لا هي هو ولا غيره، وأن قدرته شيء، وكذلك قولهم في سائر صفات النفس، كالحياة والسمع والبصر، وسائر صفات الذات، ولا يقولون أن الصفات أشياء...

It is not clear why al-Ash'arī denies that the attributes are things when he is affirming them to be so in the preceding lines. The other person who seems to have used this formula is Ibn Kullāb. Al-Ash'arī informs us (*Maqālāt*, v. 1, p. 229):

وكان يقول: أن الله عالم أن له علماً، ومعنى أنه قادر أن له قدرة، ومعنى أنه حي أن له حياة، وكذلك القول في سائر أسمائه وصفاته. وكان يقول: إن أسماء الله وصفاته لذاته، لا هي الله ولا هي غيره، وأنها قائمة بالله، ولا يجوز أن تقوم بالصفات صفات. وكان يقول: أن وجه الله لا هو الله ولا هو غيره، وهو صفة له، وكذلك يده وعينه وبصره صفات له، لا هي هو ولا غيره، وأن ذاته هي هو، ونفسه هي هو، وأنه موجود لا بوجود، وشيء لا بمعنى له كان شيئاً.

According to Ibn Fūrak al-Ash'arī himself used this formulation (Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, 2005, p. 38):

ولا يقال لصفاته هي هو، ولا غيره.

This version which uses *لا يقال* is very similar to Ibādī Muḥammad B. Maḥbūb's as will be discussed.

regard to knowledge, if one states that God's knowledge is Him then this would be stating and affirming that God is knowledge, that this is what His self is. On the other hand if one is to affirm that God's knowledge is other than Him then it must be some other thing, other than this self, and this would be affirming a thing with God. Al-Bisyawī's reply to this is that if one negates both of the above statements the result would be the same, so that instead of 'this knowledge is Him' we say 'this knowledge is not Him', and instead of 'this knowledge is other than Him', we say 'this knowledge is not other than Him', we would be using negative statements to affirm the previous statements, either God is knowledge or there is an other thing with God that is knowledge. One may notice that this argument is not really a counter argument to the opponent's view since the conclusion of both phrasings is the same, God is knowledge or there is a thing with God that is knowledge, hence, the reason for rejecting any commitment to either propositions is not invalidated by al-Bisyawī's argument.

Leaving the above discussion aside whilst still arguing from the perspective of the thingness of what is other than God, we summarise al-Bisyawī's argument which is set against the 'neither Him nor not Him' expression as follows:

- a) Propositions in the form of 'neither him nor not him' are denied and the affirmation of the rule of the excluded middle is affirmed.
- b) Knowledge is God or knowledge is other than God.
- c) If knowledge is a thing other than God:

i) Knowledge is eternal or created.

ii) God knew what would become from eternity.

Therefore Knowledge is not created, it is eternal.

Therefore God's knowledge is an eternal existent thing other than Him. This is impossible.

d) Knowledge is God.

We notice that the above argument is missing the independent question of whether or not knowledge is a thing. What is emphasised is rather the question of the independent existence of this thing from God and its created or eternal nature. In (c) knowledge is shown to be eternal and not created which is an argument that al-Bisyawī agrees with since his denial is only of the eternal real otherness to God of this knowledge.¹³⁸ We may also point out at this stage that the mere otherness of this knowledge suggests its thingness, which might not be in itself a problem for al-Bisyawī since as we have noticed he considers the knowns to be things. The thingness of knowledge is an implicit part of the arguments in (c). If knowledge is created it would not be a challenge to God's eternal unity, but since this knowledge is argued to be eternal it causes the difficulty of multiple eternal things or entities, and this is why it is denied by al-Bisyawī.

In one part of this text, those who affirm the ‘neither Him nor not Him’ expression, who might be the followers of Abū Hāshim (al-Bahshamiyya), reason as follows: accepting that an attribute is not Him leads to the affirmation that there is a thing with God. The problem would essentially be the idea that God’s knowledge is a thing and that is co-eternal with Him. Denying that this knowledge is a thing would be considered, according to them, a denial of God’s knowledge, since the denial of the thingness of this knowledge would be a denial of its existence, thus, God would be considered to not have knowledge and therefore not to be knowing.

It was shown in the section on God’s thingness that the non-existent is a thing according to al-Bisyawī in the same way that it is for the Bahshamiyya. The argument for the creation of this category was simply set in relation to the knowns or the objects of God’s knowledge. The thingness of the knowns is an affirmation of their having a certain degree of being that is not existence but subsistence, or *thubūt*. If knowledge is essentially related to its objects or the knowns, we question why it is not possible to consider God’s knowledge itself to be a thing that is other than Him, without it being an existent thing, in the same way that the knowns are affirmed to be things.¹³⁹ According to the believer in the thingness of the non-existent, the Bahshamiyya and the Ibāḍīyya, the thingness of the knowns does not challenge God’s unity since this does not deny the fact that there are no other eternal existents with God. What there is, however, is other subsistents that are

¹³⁹ The earliest statement regarding the non-existence of the knowns is possibly that of al-Jāhīz in his *Bayān* where he writes:

المعاني القائمة في صدور الناس المتصورة في أذهانهم، والمتخلجة في نفوسهم، والمتصلة بخواطرهم، والحادثة عن فكرهم، مستورة خفية، وبعيدة وحشبية، ومحجوبة مكنونة، وموجودة في معنى معدومة.

Note that he states they exist as non-existents. Al-Jāhīz, Abū ‘Uthmān, *Al-Bayān wal Tabyyīn*, 1998. v. 1, p. 75.

affirmed to be things. We know from other sources that the Bahshamiyya do in fact affirm the subsistence of the attributes in the same way that they affirm the subsistence of the non-existent. Therefore, if the above argument is supposed to be that of the Bahshamiyya, we do not see how affirming the thingness of God's knowledge would lead to the affirmation of co-eternal existents with God, since this knowledge is an other subsistent thing and not an existent thing.¹⁴⁰

Since the foundation of al-Bisyawī's argument is the affirmation of one of two opposite propositions (the excluded middle ground), he is committed in the end to the idea that God is knowledge, *الله علم*, and the denial of the idea that God has a knowledge other than Him through which he knows, *عالم بعلم هو غيره*. The denial of this phrasing is also found in an earlier part of *al-Jāmi'* where al-Bisyawī affirms that:

إن الله¹⁴¹ علما ، يعني أنه العالم بالأشياء ، ولا نقول له علم هو غيره ، به علم الأشياء.¹⁴²

God has knowledge, meaning that He is the knower of things, and we do not say He has a knowledge that is other than Himself, through which He knows things.

This brings us back to the logical argument we have set up above. The concluding part (d) suggests that knowledge is God *الله العلم هو الله* this, however, is not a statement

¹⁴⁰ The association of the term *thubūt* or subsistence with the states (attributes) is found in al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāyat al-Iqdām* (pp. 136, 137). We have not noticed this association in Frank's article on the subject, however, he introduces a substitute term for *al-ahwāl*'s being, and this is the term *تجدد* or what he translates as becoming, Frank (2005a), p. 93. Also, Rescher's states that in Abū Hāshim's school "states and relationships- and the qualities of things generally- were thought to correspond to a status intermediate between that of an existent and of a nonexistent." He also informs us that he "taught that there are four kinds of things: existents (entities), nonexistent (non-entities), states, and relationships." Rescher (1966), p. 70. Strictly speaking however, this is not very accurate, states are neither existent nor nonexistent but they are not things, (see note 134). See also note 135.

¹⁴¹ *الله* . Suggest

¹⁴² Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 36.

we find in al-Bisyawī's work.¹⁴³ His only affirmative statement is that God has knowledge **له علم** not that he is knowledge. This means that the conclusion of the argument as it is presented in the main text above only follows what we had summarised up to the point of denying existents other than God. Which is clearly stated in other parts of the work as:

your saying that His attributes are other than Him and that He is eternally with an other is wrong, since you claimed that God is eternal, and He is hearing, knowing, most merciful and compassionate, and all His attributes, and you claimed that they are other than Him, therefore you have made others with Him that are eternal.¹⁴⁴

The denial that is persistent throughout the arguments is that of the existence of an entity or a thing that one may refer to as existing with God from eternity. This is considered a radical challenge to God's unity, which relies on Him being the sole eternal existent. What is missing, however, from this argument and its conclusion is the affirmation that knowledge is God. The affirmation in the text is rather an affirmation of the idea that to God belongs **له** eternal knowledge, and the denial is

¹⁴³ It is however found in Al-'Uṭabī, *Kitāb al-Ḍiyā'*, (1995), v. 2, p. 141:

والعلم هو الله لان مالم يزل ينبغي ان يكون هو الله.

This would be the closest statement to the ideas of Abū al-Hudhayl. In *Maqālāt*, v. 2, p. 157 we read:

فقال شيخهم أبو الهذيل العلاف: إن علم الباري سبحانه هو هو، وكذلك قدرته وسمعه وبصره وحكمته، وكذلك كان قوله في سائر صفات ذاته، وكان يزعم أنه إذا زعم أن الباري عالم فقد ثبت علماً هو الله، ونفى عن الله جهلاً، ودل على معلوم كان أو يكون. وإذا قال أن الباري قادر فقد ثبت قدرة هي الله، ونفى عن الله عجزاً، ودل على مقدور يكون أو لا يكون، وكذلك كان قوله في سائر صفات الذات على هذا الترتيب.

وكان إذا قيل له: حدثنا عن علم الله سبحانه الذي هو الله، أتزعم أنه قدرته؟ أبا ذلك، فإذا قيل له: فهو غير قدرته؟ أنكر ذلك، وهذا نظير ما أنكره من قول مخالفيه: إن علم الله لا يقال هو الله ولا يقال غيره.

وكان إذا قيل له: إذا قلت إن علم الله هو الله فقل أن الله تعالى علم، ناقض ولم يقل أنه علم مع قوله أن علم الله هو الله.

In al-Ash'arī's opinion this view derives from Aristotle. We read (*Maqālāt*, v. 2, p.158):

وهذا أخذهُ أبو الهذيل عن أرسطاطاليس وذلك أن أرسطاطاليس قال في بعض كتبه أن الباري علم كله قدرة كله حياة كله سمع كله بصر كله فحسن اللفظ عند نفسه وقال: علمه هو هو وقدرته هي هو.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Bisyawī, v. 1, p. 71:

ففي قولك خطأ أن صفاته غيره أنه لم يزل ومعه غيره ، لأنك زعمت أن الله لم يزل ، وهو السميع العليم الرحمن الرحيم ، وجميع صفاته، وزعمت أنها غيره ، فجعلت معه غيره. وقد أجمع أهل الصلاة أن الله واحد لم يزل ، وما سواه محدث مخلوق ، فافهموا ما وصفنا ، وبالله التوفيق.

of the otherness of that through which He knows and which implies the existence of another eternal entity with God.¹⁴⁵

The aim of setting a section of the text to criticise the expression ‘neither Him nor not Him’ should lead to an affirmation of one of the opposites, and since otherness is denied, al-Bisyawī’s argument should have led to the conclusion that the attributes are Him. This is precisely what is absent from the text. Affirming that He has an attribute *له صفة* seems to evade the commitment to either side of the statement. So we may ask ourselves, is al-Bisyawī himself committed to this view despite setting out an argument to deny it?

¹⁴⁵ In another part of the text we find this paragraph (Ibid., p. 78):

فإن قال : أتقولون إنه هو الصفات ؟

قيل له : إن كنت تعني أن الصفات كلام الناس ، الله والرحمن والقادر والعالم والمتكلم والسميع والبصير ، فكرم الناس وألفاظهم بذلك محدثة.

وإن أردت أن الأسماء أنه اسم أو صفة فتعالى الله ، ولكن صفاته له ، كما قال - تعالى { والله الأسماء الحسنی فادعوه بها } والموصوف بهذه الصفات لم يزل هو الله ؛ الرحمن الرحيم العالم القادر الحي الخالق البارئ السميع البصير المتكلم الملك الجبار الغني ، فهذه صفة لم تزل له ، وأسماءه له ، لأن الله - سبحانه - لم يزل هو العالم الرحمن الرحيم ، ليس معه شيء غيره ، بل هو الله الواحد القهار.

Also in *Kitāb al-Ḍiyā'*, we find a distinction in the idea of God’s being knowing. He denies that it could be through a knowledge that is other than him and he says that it is the simple indication that He is knowing. (Al-‘Uṭabī, (1995), v. 2, p. 139)

قولنا: إنَّ الله تعالى عالم، وإنَّ له علمًا بمعنى أنَّه العالم بالأشياء، لا أنَّ له علمًا هو غيرهُ به عِلْمُ الأشياء. وقولنا: إنَّ له تعالى علمًا كما قال عزَّ وجلَّ في كتابه "أنزله يعلمه"، أي: أنزله وهو العالم به. ونقول: إنَّ له قدرة بمعنى أنَّه القادر، لا أنَّ له قدرة هي غيره.

We also find a distinction being made between knowing through (or of) Himself and knowing through a knowledge (Ibid.):

فإن قال قائل: ما أنكرتم أن يكون عالما بعلم إذ لم نشاهد عالما إلا بعلم؟ قيل له: ولم نشاهد عالما إلا وقد كان قبل ذلك غير عالم، فيجب أن لا نقضي بالشاهد على الغائب. فإن قال: فما أنكرت أن يكون ما تقولونه: إنَّه عالم بنفسه لا معنى له؛ لأنَّه لا يخلو من أن يكون عالما بنفسه أو عالما بعلم، فإن كان عالما بعلم فهو ما نقوله، وإن كان عالما بنفسه وجب أن يكون نفسه علمًا، فلمَّا استحال أن يكون نفسه علمًا وجب أن يكون عالما بعلم، قيل له: إنَّ العالم إنَّما كان عالما بوجود علمه، وقولنا: عالم بنفسه إثباتٌ للذات. الذي أنكرتنا أنه غيره إمَّا أن يكون قديما أو محدثًا، فإن كان قديما وجب أن يكونا قديمين في الأزل، وإن كان محدثًا وجب أن يكون القديم قد كان غير عالم بما علم، فلمَّا فسد هذان الوجهان صحَّ ما نقوله: إنَّه عالم نفسه.

In al-Janāwnī’s *‘aqīda* we also read (Rubinacci (2007), p. 74):

فقد اتفق الموحدون على أن الله تعالى لم يزل عالما بما كان وما يكون، وما لم يكن أن لو كان كيف كان يكون، علم ذلك بنفسه لا بعلم متجدد حاصل في ذاته بالحلول والانتقال

These themes may also be found in al-Mufīd in his *Awā’il al- Maqālāt* where he writes (p. 52):

إن الله - عز وجل اسمه - حي لنفسه لا بحياة ، وأنه قادر لنفسه و عالم لنفسه لا بمعنى كما ذهب إليه المشبهة من أصحاب الصفات ولا الأحوال المختلفة كما أبدعه أبو هاشم الجبائي وفارق به سائر أهل التوحيد وارتكب أشنع من مقال أهل الصفات، وهذا مذهب الإمامية كافة والمعتزلة إلا من سميناه وأكثر المرجئة وجمهور الزيدية وجماعة من أصحاب الحديث والمحكمة.

There is a definite unease with this particular expression, which seems to have been accepted in a slightly different form by some of the early Ibāḍiyya. In al-Kindī's *Bayān* we find few references to this expression. In one of these, he writes that he has found in some Muslim texts that the attributes are of God's essence and that that they "may not be said are other than Him, and they are not Him nor is He other than them."¹⁴⁶ He follows this by a more specific reference to the early Ibāḍī Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb (d. 260/873), where he writes:

قال عمر بن سعيد بن محرز: إن أبا عبد الله محمد بن محبوب ألقى عليه هذا الكلام بنفسه، قال: لا يقال: إن أسماء الله محدثة، ولكنها لم تنزل له، ولا يقال: إنها هي هو ولا غيره، ولا شيء منه لأنه غير محدود ولا متبعض.¹⁴⁷

‘Umar b. Sa‘īd b. Muḥriz said that Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb had himself dictated to him this saying. He said: it is not said that God's names are originated, they are rather eternally His. Also, it is neither said that they are themselves Him nor other than Him, and not some thing from Him for He is not limited and has no parts.

So, instead of merely stating that the attributes are ‘neither Him nor other than Him’ the expression used is “it is not said”,¹⁴⁸ hence a negation of the fact that the attributes are Him or other than Him. He affirms, at the end of the above quotation, that the attributes are not a thing from Him. He is also reported to have said “and His names and attributes are from His essence and it is not said that they are Him nor He is other than them.”¹⁴⁹ Amalgamating the two quotations together leads to the combined statement that the attributes are neither God nor other than Him, they

¹⁴⁶ Al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 53 :

من منثورة من كتاب المسلمين، وأسماء الله وصفاته عز وجل من ذاته، فالصفات الذاتية قديمة ولا يجوز أن يقال: هي غيره، ولا هي هو، ولا هو غيرها، ولا يتبعض منه لم يزل موصوفا بها.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ The ‘not said’ expression indicates the innovation of new ideas and the struggle to integrate with common beliefs.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

وقال أبو عبد الله: إن أسماء الله وصفاته من ذاته، ولا يقال هي هو، ولا هو غيرها.

are instead from His essence من ذاته and not a thing from Him, that is, not a part of Him.

The attributes do not belong to God in the sense of being a part of Him, they are not a thing that is attached to Him like the accident of knowledge that is attached to the originated knower, and which leads to her being knowing. If knowledge was a thing, like the accident of knowledge associated with the originated, we would have to question whether or not it is a created thing or an eternal thing, and thus will emerge all the problems previously discussed. If knowledge was a thing that is part of God, the expression used would have been, God knows through/by a knowing or يعلم به يعلم, which is why it is avoided by the Ibādīs. The expression that is used by those who deny the existence of a thing (accident) through which God knows is 'has a knowing' or علم له as it affirms the existence of a knowing without affirming an entity through which the knowing is achieved. The 'has a knowing' of al-Bisyawī may be considered to be an addition to Muḥammad b. Maḥbūb's 'attributes are from His essence', as it is possible to assume that, what these two statements amount to is that God has a knowing (له علم) which is from His essence. God's knowing comes or derives from His essence and is not something attached to Him through which He knows.

If we now return to the expression 'neither Him nor other than Him' we may come to understand it as a denial of Abū al-Hudhayl's 'it is Him' or 'هي هو' as it will lead to two main problems. First of all, equating an attribute with God reduces God to the attribute which then leads to the second problem, having all attributes reduced to being one thing without any distinction between them. Our Ibādī scholars are

instead affirming that an attribute is from God's essence *من نفسه* and not His essence, and in this case the different attributes deriving from the essence could maintain their identity, and this would avoid reducing God to being His attributes. The second part of the denial is a denial of God having accidents, parts or things that are either co-eternal with Him or originated in Him. The shift away from the 'neither Him nor other than Him' in al Bisyawī's case could be related to the fact that many of those who used this expression also add that He is knowing by a knowing *بعلم*, as is the case of Hishām Ibn al-Ḥakam, al-Ash'arī and some Zaydiyya. One of the exceptions to this tendency of combining 'neither Him nor other than Him expression' with 'through a knowing' or 'by a knowing' is Ibn Kullāb (d. 241/855),¹⁵⁰ who combines this expression with 'has a knowing' *له علم*, and affirms that this is of His essence.¹⁵¹

It is interesting to mention briefly two alternative formulations found amongst the Ibādīs of North Africa, which are similar to Abū-l-Ḥudhayl's expression. 'Abd al-Kāfi states in one version that "they (the attributes) are God, they are not a thing that is other than Him,"¹⁵² *هي الله، ليست شيئا غيره* His other version:

It is affirmed that God's knowing is Him and His power is Him, by which we mean that God the knowing and the powerful in His essence,

¹⁵⁰ For more information see Van Ess' entry 'Ibn Kullāb', in *EF*.

¹⁵¹ See discussions above particularly, notes: 136, 133 and 134.

¹⁵² Quotation from *al-Mūjaz* found in Cuperly (2003), v. 2, p. 182. We also find a comparison with the other great Ibādī scholar al-Warjlānī who states, against abul-Hudhayl's version (*ibid.*, p. 179):

فإن بعض أصحابنا يطلقون على صفات الله أن تقول: هي هو. فتقول علم الله هو الله لا غيره. والاحسن عندي أن نقول: ليس هناك شيء غير الله.

And against al-Ash'arī's:

فإننا نمتنع من أن نجعل صفات الباري سبحانه معاني لما يتوهم علينا من الغيرية وقد اطلقت اللغة الصفات العلى والاسماء الحسنی.

that there is no thing other than Him and that He did not originate a knowing, a power or any one of His attributes.¹⁵³

This seems to be a more positive statement of the missing conclusion that al-Bisyawī argues for in the above discussion, and which he seems to have avoided stating.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ Ibid., v. 2, p. 182:

إن علم الله هو وإن قدرته هو أردنا أن الله العالم القادر بذاته ليس ثم شيء غيره ولم يستحدث علما ولا قدرة ولا صفة من الصفات .

¹⁵⁴ It is also worth mentioning that one of the other variations amongst contemporary Ibāḍīs is the division of God's attributes into the Eternal's attributes of the essence and those of His created action. Abū Sa'īd is quoted by al-Kindī as affirming this division according to what is eternal and what is created (Al-Kindī (1984), v. 2, p. 54):

قال أبو سعيد: يقال: صفات الذات، وصفات الفعل، وأسماء الذات، وأسماء الفعال، فصفات الذات ما لم تنزل، وصفات الفعل ما تحدث، وأسماء الذات ما لم تنزل، وأسماء الفعال ما تحدث.

On the other hand, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bisyawī rejects this division on the basis that all of these names point to the same signified (Al-Bisyawī, v. 2, p. 73):

فإن قالوا: إن العلم لم يزل، وهذا من أسماء ذاته، والغفور من أسماء فعله، والخالق والرازق هذه من أسماء فعله، وأن هذه الأسماء عندهم إنما أضيفت إليه بفعله، فمن الحجة عليهم أن يقال لهم: أليس الغفور هو العليم .

فإن قالوا: نعم تركوا قولهم .

وإن قالوا: هي اسمان، أحدهما قديم، والآخر محدث، فلا يكون القديم هو المحدث، ولا المحدث هو القديم . وفي هذا القول إن الله هو غير الغفور، وإن الغفور هو غير الله، لأن الغفور عندهم محدث، وهو اسم عندهم غير الله، والله عندهم هو اسم لم يزل، فتفهموا تعلموا أن من قال: إن الله غير الغفور، وإن الله ليس هو الغفور، فقد افترى إثما عظيما .

Conclusion

We began this chapter with the question of knowledge and its centrality to Ibādī thought, where it is considered God's first command to the human being. To know, is to know the creator, and all the implications of such knowledge that dictates the way the knowing being ought to exist. We found two types of knowledge, the instinctive, and more importantly to our concern, the acquired, since it is through this knowledge that one investigates the existents of this reality and arrives at the true knowledge of the creator.

Based on the principle that all made things have a maker, the duty of the rational being becomes an investigation of the true nature of all made things, in order to arrive at the true maker. Through the act of investigating the phenomenal world and through the act of dissecting its elements and of stripping it from all its transient elements, our scholars arrive at the founding elements of the material world, the finite atom. It is precisely this finitude of the most basic element in existence that reflects the nature of all the existents, their finitude. In opposition to the made things that are investigated, stands the only maker of this natural world, who is set to be infinite and responsible for bringing the atoms to existence, for joining them into composites and moving them from one state to another through the different accidents that inhere in them. Although these material elements, the atoms, are not seen, they are still considered real and material for it is in their combination that we see all the material objects that we know. However, it is impossible for these material elements to exist without being in at least a state of being combined with other atoms. The concrete existence is essentially related to

the accidents that ultimately allows for the appearance of the natural objects. This, we noticed, brings the atoms and the accidents to be ontologically co-dependent and of equal reality. This understanding challenges the basic definition of substance and accident, the idea that accidents come to inhere in a substance. Although we did not find amongst our Ibādī scholars a challenge to this idea, we pointed out that this idea brought about the challenge that the atoms must be some things before they come to exist in reality, since in existence these are dependent on accidents for their concrete being. The argument for God's existence from the nature of the material world and its most basic constituent, the atom, forces the question of what is the nature of that which the accidents come to inhere in, what is an atom at the moment just before it receives the accidents? Some Mu'tazilī theologians answered that before coming to be, the atom is an atom, it is not existent but it is affirmed as an atom, or subsists as an atom.

In dealing with the question of God's thingness, we found the application of the word 'thing' in things that do not exist but are affirmed to have a form of being or subsistence. Equally, this idea of thingness, usually associated with the Mu'tazila, also led us to the question of God's attributes and the 'neither Him nor other than Him' expression, which is also a statement associated with the *ḥāl* of Abū Hāshim. The association of some of the early Ibādīs with this statement, regarding the nature of the attributes is, as we have pointed out, an early attempt at breaking the law of the excluded middle and defining a state of being that is between the existent and the non-existent, or, as in the question of things before coming to be, a matter of subsistence (*thubūt*). This mode of being is what is applicable to the thing's

thingness, what it is before it becomes, and what is applicable to God's attributes, or to his states as in the Baṣran Mu'tazilī school.

In the next chapter we continue with the attempt to trace the different meanings that have become associated with the act of creation and the relation of this act with the created, before its coming to be. More specifically, we aim to trace the different meanings associated with creation, existence, non-existence and subsistence as they appear in the sampled texts from the field of Qur'ānic commentaries.

Chapter Three:

Qur'ānic commentaries: thingness and subsistence

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore the different meanings associated with the central book of the religion of Islam, the Qur'ān. The fixed text of this book is not necessarily taken by itself to be the source of the ideas and meanings that are associated with it. The relation is not of necessity but of possibility of meaning. The meanings of this finalised text are what ties and binds it to its environment and context. More specifically, it ties it to the field of Qur'ānic commentaries, which is related to the intellectual field as a whole. The changing meaning of such a text is what reflects the changing nature of the interpreting community, or the variety of meanings that exists simultaneously, reflecting either the changing intellectual field as a whole or the variance within the field itself. This is the main reason for choosing a sample from the community of commentators who may reflect a changing understanding or a variety of positions within the intellectual field.

In creating a meaning that becomes associated with the fixed text, the commentator reflects the particular side of the field he comes from. However, the centrality of the text and its possible resistance to enclosure within the specifics of a field may bring about grounds where different fields may join. In such cases, and as will be noted in the case of al-Qushayrī, the commentator may present meanings that are in agreement with others, generated by an opposing field. In such cases the arguments centre on terms that become symbols of difference in the field rather than of actual difference in meaning.

In dealing with a Qur'ānic commentary, such as the ones in this chapter, we find that the commentator lists his interpretation along with other possible ones which stem from his tradition or ones that he simply agrees with. This, forces the question of the methodological approach to this particular type of text since it is possible to take each interpretation as a separate and isolated understanding of a passage from the Qur'ān. This would be a legitimate approach as these varied understandings originate from different sources and times. In this case, references to them by the commentator are a recording of a set of possible meanings he sees fit to include along with his own understanding.

A sentence, a word or a term, may simply be seen as a signifier pointing to a set of different isolated possible meanings that have accumulated over a period of time. However, following the overall approach of this research, one further sees that these different meanings are not bound together simply by a specific text, al-Qushayrī's commentary for example, and the specific signifier. These possible meanings, having been tied together in a particular field of possibles, must be taken to have a relation amongst themselves. Such an approach, to such a text, follows from the applied force of the signifier and the field created by the commentator in his text, and since a unifying singular meaning is not assigned to this field of possibles, it must be up to the reader to offer justifiable possible meanings.

The different quotations used by a commentator are a record of the different responses to a particular fixed text by different readers. Each one of the comments reflects a meaning that is unique to its author, which may or may not correspond to that of the commentator's. This act creates a pool of possible meanings that the

collecting agent, the commentator, tries to guide or force in a particular direction, that is, the particular meaning that he tries to project on the fixed text. This meaning may either be a finalised meaning that the commentator has achieved, but is in need of a supporting community of established figures, hence his use of quotations from past authorities. Alternatively, he tries to untie and open up whatever meaning he is supposed to represent through this space of possible meanings. This space may also be considered the space of exploration of alternative views or even conflicting views.

This study relies heavily on four commentators, al-Ṭabarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī and al-Ṭūsī. They may be considered representatives of the general commentary school, the Sufi school, the Ash‘arī (and Sufi) school and the Shī‘ī Ithnā‘asharī (Mu‘tazilī) school respectively. Other commentators are, however, also included to expand the field and to explore other meanings generated by our main commentators. Our main theme is divided in this chapter into six sections. The first is an introduction to the general idea of creation which is intended to reflect the main issues explored in the other sections of this chapter. The second explores the idea of non-existence and its association with what was there before the coming to be of the existing sensual world we live in. In the third section, we deal specifically with the question of knowledge, potentials and will as they relate to God. In the fourth section, we discuss the question of hiddenness and its relation to the non-existent. In the fifth section, we deal with the central theme of the covenant between God and the descendents of Adam (*mīthāq*) and its relation to the idea of being in the Sufi tradition. Finally, in the last section we discuss the development of the category of *thubūt*.

I. Creation: The different meanings

I.1 Transformation: Creation from a thing

One may assume that the word creation in a religious context simply means bringing into existence. In the Islamic tradition this is also correctly assumed to mean creation from nothing or creation *ex-nihilo*. In the first set of our considerations in this chapter, we explore the different meanings that are associated with the term creation. This precedes the exploration of the different meanings associated with non-existence. Both parts of these considerations affirm the expression ‘creation *ex-nihilo*’ but redefine the assumed meanings associated with ‘creation’ and with ‘non-existence’.¹

The first meaning of creation, that is explored in our commentaries, is related to the idea of transformation, either from one thing to another or from one state of being to another. To begin with, the exploration of the different associations of creation and transformation is explored through the commentary of al-Qushayrī who is an Ash‘arī theologian and Sufi.

¹ For the different meanings of creation in the Islamic tradition see Arnaldez’s excellent entry in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, “*Khalq*” in *EF*. See also Al-Alousī (1965).

In his commentary on Q. 2:164:

Lo! in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of night and day, and the ships which run upon the sea with that which is of use to men, and the water which Allah sendeth down from the sky, thereby reviving the earth after its death, and dispersing all kinds of beasts therein, and (in) the ordinance of the winds, and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth: are signs (of Allah's sovereignty) for people who have sense.³

Al-Qushayrī points to what is already contained in the verse by stating that all things created by God are signs for those who seek reasoned proofs of the act of creation. He indicates in this section that these created things are formed through substantiation (*'ayyana min al-'adam*) from non-existence. All of these created things, we are told, are taken to be signs and proofs of the unity of God and indicators along the path for those who seek Him. What is asserted in this reasoning is that the multiplicity of beings in this world is a sign of the unity of God because they originate from non-existence. The idea of unity in this context stems from the fact that these created beings are not participators in a state of being before creation, neither in God's being in His essence nor in any other kind of being concomitant with God's being. The fact that these are not part of the divine essence indicates that they are initiated through an act of creation, and this is part of the divine creative agency, which is not limited by and does not pose a threat to God's

² Abul-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin, an Ash'arī theologian and mystic. See Halm, H. "al-Qushayrī." In *EP* and Knysh (2000), pp. 130-132.

³ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-Ishārāt*, 1981-1983, v. 1, pp. 143,144.

تَعَرَّفَ إلى قلوب الطالبين من أصحاب الاستدلال وأرباب العقول بدلالات قدرته ، وأمارات وجوده ، وسمات ربوبيته التي هي أقسام أفعاله . ونبههم على وجود الحكمة ودلالات الوحدانية بما أثبت فيها من براهين تلتف عن العبارة ، ووجود من الدلالات تدقُّ عن الإشارة ، فما من عين من العدم محصورة - من شخص أو ظل ، أو رسم أو أثر ، أو سماء أو فضاء ، أو هواء أو ماء ، أو شمس أو قمر ، أو قطر أو مطر ، أو رمل أو حجر ، أو نجم أو شجر - إلا وهو على الوحدانية دليل ، ولمن يقصد وجوده سبيل.

unity, as it is said to be inexhaustible and limitless. The other part of the argument, which indicates the unity of God, is that these things were created from a state of non-existence. However, there is nothing in this section which indicates the status of this non-existence apart from the fact that it must not have a state of existence. This is considered a threat to God’s unity, due to the fact that it would be an independent parallel existence with God.

In another part of this commentary, we find that the act of creation is approached from a different angle. In response to those who denied God’s ability to resurrect in the hereafter, He reminds them in Q.19:67 that He had already created the human beings after they were nothing (*lā-shay*): “Doth not man remember that We created him before, when he was naught?”⁴ Here, al-Qushayrī tells us that God is using the proof of ‘the first formation’ (*al-nash’a al-’ūlā*) as an argument against the deniers. We are told that this ‘first formation’, which here parallels God’s “*khalaqnāhu min qabl*” in the verse, refers to God’s creation of humankind from semen, an act that is referred to in many verses.⁵ With this first formation from what clearly is a thing, a fluid in this case, al-Qushayrī associates the following terms: *nasha’a*, *khalaqa*, *faṭara*, *ṣawwara* and *akhraja*. Let us not forget that this is an interpretation of God’s statement “We created him before, when he was not a thing.” This indicates that the acts of *khalq* (creation) and *inshā’* (formation) are being applied in the case of the Qur’ān to a non-thing (in Qur’ānic terms) and with the addition of *faṭara* (separate from non-existence), *taṣwīr* (fashioned) and *ikhrāj* (bring forth to existence) in the

⁴ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 374.

أنكروا حديثَ البعثِ غاية الإنكار ، فأقام الحجة عليهم بالنشأة الأولى؛ فقال : إن الذي قدر على خلق في الابتداء وهم نُطفٌ ضعفاء ، وقيلُ كانوا في أصلابِ الآباءِ وأرحامِ الأمهاتِ ففطرهم ، وعلى ما صورهم ، وفي الوقت الذي أراد - عن بطون أمهاتهم أخرجهم .

⁵ Q. 16:4 ; 18:37 ; 22:5 ; 35:11 ; 36:77 ; 40:67 ; 53:45 ; 76:02 ; 80:19.

corresponding interpretation of this verse. It is clear, however, that these are applied to a thing. All of these terms are applied in the interpretative text to a material substance that was in a particular no-form state of existence and is transformed through God's act of creation to a fashioned and formed state of existence. What must be asked at this stage is whether there is a degree of correspondence between the 'thing' and the 'non-thing'. Could the term 'thing' refer to both formed and un-formed substances, while the non-thing merely applies to the un-formed substances?

What must be pointed out regarding this issue is that despite the fact that the Qur'ān has been noted to contain passages, which may be interpreted as suggesting creation from something, and others as indicating creation *ex-nihilo*, al-Qushayrī was very much aware of the debate surrounding this issue, particularly the one regarding *shay'yyat al-ma'dūm* or the thingness of the non-existent. As an Ash'arī, he clearly stood against this belief which represented one of the main controversial beliefs of the rival Mu'tazilī school.⁶ As such, we may assume that someone in his position would be very careful and accurate in his choice of terminology, since these terms have been overloaded over time, particularly the one preceding al-Qushayrī's, with specific significances and meanings. What is evident in the other part of his commentary on this verse is that he is very much aware of the debate, since he states that the fact that God has created humankind from a state in which they were not a thing, indicates the correct belief of those who believe that the non-existent is not a thing.⁷ What he establishes in this passage is that the state of non-

⁶ For al-Qushayrī's statement of his Ash'arī *'aqīda*, see Frank (2005c).

⁷ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 437.

existence, which precedes God's creation of the beings mentioned in the first verse, resembles the state of non-existence of the material ground which the human beings are made from which in turn derives from man and woman.

The link between the two senses of the terms of creation, God's creation of the world from nothing, and God's creation of the different states of the human being, reflect for us processes of generation that are more than linguistically related. It reflects a sense of one thing being modelled on the other and the existence of a relation of imitation and resemblance between God's creative act and the human beings' generative process. A foetus in a womb is considered to be in a state of non-existence before coming to be, before the act of God's creation (*nasha'a, khalaqa, faṭara, ṣawwara* and *akhraja*). This foetus is not merely an idea in the mind of the mother, it is rather a finite and distinguished thing whose being is viewed as one with the mother despite being a different thing. Therefore, one may similarly view the things that come to be created by God to have some form of being before they become subject to God's act of creation, which transforms from one mode of being to another or one thing to another.

L1.ii Al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066-1067)⁸

In al-Ṭūsī's commentary, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, we find a collection of commentaries from the major *tafsīr* traditions. This process of collecting and

قوله : {وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْئًا} فيه دليل على صحة أهل البصائر أنّ المعدوم لم يك شيئاً في حال عدمه .
ويقال أبطل لهم كلّ دعوى حيث ذكّرهم نسيبهم وكونهم من العدم .

⁸ This is Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī Abū Dja'far, a Shī'ī Imāmī scholar. See Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali, "al-Ṭūsī, Muḥammad b.al-Ḥasan", in *EP*.

grouping texts will allow us to come to different meanings extracted through a reading of what is a complex intertextual relation. In the commentary on Q.96 the terms of creations are juxtaposed in a way that demands of the reader an interrogative engagement with the text.⁹ What we find following the Qur'ān's use of the term *khalaqa* is the comment that God had created creations and brought them forth from non-existence to existence. This is so far the standard expression associated with creation. Following this, al-Ṭūsī, in his interpretation, remains within the Qur'ānic text and states that God created the human being from *'alaq* or a clot. He then introduces at this point a linguistic explanation for the meaning of *'alaq* in terms of what kind of material substance it is (a dry lump of blood). We are then introduced to the development and transformation of the material substance in the mother's womb in line with Q.23:13,14:

Then placed him as a drop (of seed) in a safe lodging; Then fashioned (*khalaqna*) We the drop a clot, then fashioned (*khalaqna*) We the clot a little lump.

However, what differs from the Qur'ān is al-Ṭūsī's use of the term *tastahīl*, which could be taken to be self transformation or at least a process of transformation that does not point in itself to a form of interference associated with God's *khalaq*. Interestingly, al-Ṭūsī's commentary on this particular verse substitutes the term *khalaqna* with *yusayyir* (turn into) and *yaj'al* (make) which means in this particular

⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (1988), v. 10, p. 379.

وقوله {الذي خلق} في موضع جر ، نعت ل {ربك} الذي خلق الخلائق وأخرجهم من العدم إلى الوجود . وقوله {خلق الانسان من علق} تخصيص لبعض ما ذكره بقوله {الذي خلق} لانه يشتمل على الانسان وغيره ، وإنما أفرد الانسان بالذكر تشريفا له وتنبها على ما خصه الله به من سائر الحيوان ، وبين أنه مع ذلك خلقه الله من علق ، وهو القطعة الجامدة من الدم ، وإنما قال {علق} وهو جمع علقه لان المراد بالانسان الجمع ، لانه اسم جنس ، وسمي به قطع {العدم} التي تعلق لرطوبتها بما تمر به ، فاذا جفت لا تسمى علقا ، وواحدتها {علقه} مثل شجرة وشجر . وعلق في معنى الجمع ، لان الانسان جمع على طريق الجنس ، والنطفة تستحيل في الرحم علقه ثم مضغة ويسمى ضرب من الدود الاسود العلق ، لانه يعلق على الشفتين لداء يصيبها فيمتص الدم . وفي خلق الانسان من علق دليل على ما يصح أن ينقلب اليه الجوهر .

context that *khalaqa*, in his understanding, points to God's act involving a form of transforming things from one state of being to another.¹⁰ Since the commentary finishes with the idea that:

The creation of the human being from a clot is a demonstration (*dalīl*) of what the essence of a thing can rightly be turned into.¹¹

One might further assume that the transformation of substances from one state of being to another, which is subject to God's action, is ultimately limited by the essence of the thing itself. Although the whole commentary on these verses begins with a mention of the non-existent as a starting point of the whole chain of successive creations, acts of what might be seen as natural transformations through God's action, al-Ṭūsī does not give us an indication of the nature of the relation of the first act to its subsequent ones. If, however, the term *khalq* is to maintain the same meaning in all these forms of creations/transformations then it is possible to assume that the first *khalq* is still a transformation from one thing to another tied together by the essence of the thing undergoing the transformation. This is our own interpretation of the text rather than a clear statement made by al-Ṭūsī, but it is in accordance with the methodological approach we set ourselves in approaching these commentaries.

Another way of looking at the nature of creation is through a particular interpretation of the word *ikhtara'a*. This is another term associated with creation

¹⁰ Ibid., v. 7, p. 354.

وقوله {ثم خلقنا النطفة علقة} فالعلقة القطعة من الدم إذا كانت جامدة، فبين الله تعالى أنه يصير تلك النطفة علقة، ثم يجعل العلقة مضغاً، وهي القطعة من اللحم.

¹¹ Ibid., v. 10, p. 379.

from the non-existent and we find it in this commentary in “اخترع الله الخلق من العدم”¹² God invented them from non-existence. *Ikhtara‘a* could be taken as another word for creation, particularly since it is used in the same context, and because it can be found in another part of the commentary where he states that *khalaqa al-insān* is said to mean *Ikhtara‘a* and *akhraja* from non-existence.¹³ However, we notice that the term *ikhtara‘a* is not used in the Qur’ān and is hardly used by other commentators.

The term is associated with the idea of inventing the Qur’ān, as we can find this, for example, in the work of al Naḥḥās *Ma‘ānī al Qur’ān* where he writes regarding Q.7:203:

وقوله جل وعز {وإذا لم تأتهم بآية قالوا لولا اجتبيتها} قال قتادة: أي جئت بها من عند نفسك. وكذلك هو في اللغة، يقال: اجتبيت الشيء، وارتجلته، واخترعته، واختلفته: إذا جئت به من عند نفسك.¹⁴

There are four terms in this quotation that are given equivalent meanings *ijtabā*, *irtajala*, *ikhtara‘a* and *ikhtalaqa*. It can be seen from this particular quotation that these terms in their particular context, and in their association with the term *irtajala*, are meant to be ascribed to human beings. This would explain why not many have used *ikhtara‘a* as a descriptive term for God’s act of creation, thus making a clear ontological distinction between human and divine agency. Apparent from this quotation is that the meaning of these terms is to cause or bring about something from one’s self, hence the ascription of this verb to an act that stems

¹² Ibid., v. 8, p. 196.

¹³ Ibid., v. 9, p. 463.

¹⁴ Al-Naḥḥās, Abū Ja‘far, *Ma‘ānī al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, (1988), v. 3, p. 121:

from within the self of the prophet as opposed to the idea of inspiration from without, from some-thing outside the self.

If we return to the commentary under consideration, *ikhtara'a* from non-existence could be interpreted to mean creating from within one's self, or God's self, from what is in a state of non-existence, the creation that is outside His self. In this case, whatever is the status of the non-existent, its being is within God's being and not separate from it. If creation is a matter of transformation then it is a transformation of what is in God.

I.2 Life Giving

I.2.1 Al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)¹⁵

Amongst the different meanings ascribed to Q.2:28 “How disbelieve ye in Allah when ye were dead and He gave life to you! Then he will give you death, then life again, and then unto Him ye will return,” -which deals with the idea of revivification in cases other than the one caused in this mortal life- one can find interesting comments introduced as a definition of the term *khalaqa* of creation. Al-Ṭabarī informs us that this term means “the formation of their substantial selves, and their bringing forth from the state of non-existence to the state of existence.”¹⁶ Even if there is no mention of what exactly precedes this particular act of creation, this non-existence, the act itself leads to the creation of what is materially existent, what is sensed by the

¹⁵ A-Ṭabarī, Abū Dja'far Muḥammad b. Djarīr b. Yazīd. See Bosworth, C.E. "Ṭabarī", in *EF*.

¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fi ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, Al-Turkī, (ed.), (2001), v. 1, p. 453:

وقوله { هو } مكني من اسم الله جل ذكره، عائد على اسمه في قوله { كيف تكفرون بالله } ومعنى خلقه ما خلق جل ثناؤه، إنشأه عينه، وإخراجه من حال العدم إلى الوجود.

human being. As the whole discussion in this section revolves around vivification after death, the act of creation is therefore associated with the act of giving life to dead matter, or things. This is particularly clear from the line that follows the above comment, which suggests that the whole discussion in this particular verse revolves around the basic principle that God took the human beings who were semen in the loins of their fathers and made them living beings. The idea of creation emerges from the work of al-Ṭabarī as the bestowal of life to a material substance, or simply a thing. Even if this was created through another act by God, what is important is the fact that these specific terms of creation are being applied in these different contexts to actual things in possession of a certain material lifeless quality. The second important thing is that these lifeless things are repeatedly being labelled as, or associated with, non-existence. The idea of another creation potentially and possibly preceding the creation through the act of life giving should not matter too much at this stage, since we are here primarily concerned with the linguistic use and choices made to include or exclude particular terms. The nature of this actual state of non-existence will be considered in another part of this chapter.

I.3 The problem: Thingness of the non-existent

I.3.i AL-Qushayrī

Before finishing with this section, we should briefly look at how the above discussion leads to the question of the thingness of the non-existent, that which is transformed or given life. In line with the above interpretations regarding the theme of creation, one can find within al-Qushayrī's work a number of references to

the non-existent and thingness, which reflect al-Qushayrī's Ash'arī doctrine. Some of the verses are introduced as direct proofs of the fact that God denies the idea that the non-existent is a thing, while others are seen to mean, in their literal sense, that the non-existent is a thing. He uses both verses Q.19:9 "He said: So (it will be). Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me, even as I created thee before, when thou wast naught," and Q.19:67 "Doth not man remember that We created him before, when he was naught?" as clear indicators of the state of the human beings before their creation.¹⁷ He comments on Q.19:9 "this verse indicates that the non-existent is not a thing, because He [God] negates the idea that the human being was a thing before his creation."¹⁸ While the other comment does not differ so much in its positive indication of the denial of the thingness of the non-existent and he considers it to be a proof of the right belief of the people of insight.¹⁹

Since al-Qushayrī was very much aware of the debates surrounding this issue, as well as the verses quoted as proofs of the thingness of the non-existent, he had to comment on their meaning. As an example, verse Q.22:1 "O mankind! Fear your Lord. Lo! the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing," -which ascribes to something which is not yet existent the quality of *shay*² is interpreted by him as assigning the word *shay*' to a non-existent. However, despite acknowledging that the literal meaning necessitates this interpretation, he considers the term *shay*' of

¹⁷ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 437.

فقال : إن الذي قدر على خَلْق في الابتداء وهم نُطْفُ ضِعْفَاء ، وَقَبْلُ كانوا في أصلابِ الآباءِ وأرحامِ الأمهاتِ ففَطَرَهم ، وعلى ما صَوَّرَهم ، وفي الوقت الذي أراد - عن بطون أمهاتهم أخرجهم .
قوله : { وَلَمْ يَكُ شَيْئاً } فيه دليل على صحة أهل البصائر أن المعدوم لم يك شيئاً في حال عَدَمِهِ .
ويقال أبطل لهم كلَّ دعوى حيث ذكَّرهم نَسَبَهُمْ وَكَوَّنَهُمْ مِنَ العَدَمِ .

¹⁸ Ibid., v. 2, p. 421.

قوله جلّ ذكره : { وَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَلَمْ تَكُ شَيْئاً } .
دلّت الآية على أن المعدوم ليس بشيءٍ ، لأنه نفي أن يكون قبل خَلْقِهِ له كان شيئاً .

¹⁹ See also Al-Ṭūsī, v. 7, p. 109, for a discussion of the same verse.

this verse to go beyond its assigned significance because of what he refers to as *tawassu'* or expanding of sense of a term.²⁰

It is clear from both approaches, the one acting as affirmation and the other as negation, that al-Qushayrī is not going beyond the simple argument that this verse proves this or that, and that the other means so and so, but since this particular meaning cannot be true, it must consequently be *tawassu'*. These commentaries, therefore, do not go beyond the act of stating doctrinal beliefs or stances and in this particular case it attempts to resolve the conflicting doctrinal interpretations through changing the potential significance of the term *shay'* and the significance of the verse. Al-Qushayrī, in his last commentary, allows God to expand the meaning of the term *shay'* to include the non-existent as part of its field of meanings yet he is not willing himself to do so. One can only assume that this is because, as partially indicated before, this term has been overloaded with specific significance over the time, not only with respect to meaning but also in terms of its role as a barrier between different schools. If the particular technical application of this term is thus denied by al-Qushayrī, because its use by specific schools grants it the status of a label indicting the school, then one could potentially see in the denial of the particular use of the term an objection to the school rather than the potential meanings of the term itself. This means that al-Qushayrī could potentially be seen to hold the idea that there is some kind of existence before creation, yet he rejects the use of the word *shay'* in association with *'adam*. This, we believe, is due to the fact

²⁰ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 528.

قوله: { إِنَّ زَلْزَلَةَ السَّاعَةِ شَيْءٌ عَظِيمٌ } وتسمية المعدوم "شيئاً" توسُّعٌ ، بدليل أنه ليس في العدم زلزلة بالاتفاق وإن كان مُطلقُ اللفظ يقتضيه ، وكذلك القول في تسميته "شيئاً" هو توسُّعٌ.

See also Al-Ṭūsī, v. 7, p. 288, for a mention of the same argument by those who believe the non-existent to be a thing.

that this association had become one of the labels associated with a rival school, since *shay'yyat al ma'dūm* had become over the time a strictly Mu'tazilī label.

1.3.ii Al-Ṭūsī

With the Qur'ānic commentaries, it is possible to use the same verse to point in different directions. One of the verses which al-Ṭūsī mentions as a proof used by those who deny that the non-existent is a thing is verse Q.19:9 “He said: So (it will be). Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me, even as I created thee before, when thou wast naught.” Al-Ṭūsī indicates that this verse is used as a proof by the deniers of the thingness of the non-existent “for if the non-existent was a thing, He would not have denied that it was a thing before creation.”²¹ However, and in line with his method of presenting various interpretations, al-Ṭūsī presents us straight away with the interpretation of the believers in *shay'yyat al- ma'dūm* “and he who declares the non-existent is a thing, says: He meant he was not an existent thing.”²² This is a clear addition of the term existent to the rendition of this verse, which in this particular sensitive discussion would indicate a radical change in the meaning ascribed to the verse. Had the discussion been purely linguistic in nature, one might have allowed such an addition without much concern; however, this is a different mechanism that allows for an expansion of meaning. This method of adding terms, which preserves the general linguistic meaning, allows for a radical transformation to theological interpretations, or even to legalistic interpretations of certain verses relevant to disputed issues.

²¹ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 7, p. 109.

²² Ibid., p. 110.

فقال لو كان المعدوم شيئاً لما نفى أن يكون شيئاً قبل ذلك.

ومن قال: المعدوم شيء قال: أراد ولم يكن شيئاً موجوداً.

The arguments in all of the above commentaries are pointing to the idea that this act of creation is origination, not only in the sense of being caused by, but also in the sense of coming forth from the creator. This was apparent from the parallelism with the process of human birth and now from the process of inventing and creating from within, or from the ideas that are found within the self.

II. Addressing the non-existent

II.i Al-Ṭūsī

On his commentary on verse Q.2:117 “The Originator of the heavens and the earth! When He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is,” and in particular on the command ‘Be’, al-Ṭūsī rejects some of the interpretations related to this verse. The one that is of interest to us is the one which finds the command to be addressed to the non-existent. This adopts the specific sense that *al-ma’dūm* is the subject of God’s knowledge “*min ḥaythu huwa li-llāhi ma’lūm.*”²³ The interpretations, rejected here by al-Ṭūsī, allow for the fact that things, as the subjects of God’s knowledge could be addressed, and could be the receivers of God’s commands. The reason that our commentator gives for rejecting this interpretation is the simple fact that it is not right, according him, to command that which is not intelligent/rational (*‘āqil*), distinct and capable of obeying commands. Since the non-existent is considered to be devoid of these attributes, as it is not even a living thing, let alone intelligent, it cannot truly be said to be the object that God commands to exist. As to the actual

²³ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 1, p. 432 (al-Ṭabarī appears to be such an interpreter).

reason for God's command to be, it is said by al-Ṭūsī to be simply an indication of the simple effortless of God's act of creation.²⁴

Again, in addressing the question of God's knowledge, and as pointed out by al-Qushayrī, al-Ṭūsī uses verse Q.22:1 "O mankind! Fear your Lord. Lo! the earthquake of the Hour (of Doom) is a tremendous thing" as one of the sources for the belief in the existence of the *ma'dūm*.²⁵ The simple argument deployed in this particular case is that God refers to a presently non-existing thing which is set to happen in the future -the earthquake- as a thing. This particular case is an example of what is considered an object of an existing knowledge in God, which is labelled by the term 'thing'.

Similarly, and related to the subject of commanding the non-existent, or more generally addressing the non-existent, al-Ṭūsī allows, in the subsequent sections of his commentary, for the principle of addressing future existents, future human beings as objects of God's commands and obligations. In this section, he clearly states that it is permissible to address the non-existent, in the sense that it is known to be a future existent, and the address is thus directed to it, not in its present state of non-existence, but to it when it becomes an intelligent existent being. To make this clearer, he likens this to the act of leaving advice for future human beings that are known to have the potentiality of existing in the future.²⁶ This future existent, presently non-existent, will acquire the qualities mentioned previously

²⁴ Ibid., v. 1, p.432 and v. 5, p. 17.

²⁵ Ibid., v. 7, p. 109 and v. 7, p. 288.

وفي الآية على أن المعدوم يسمى شيئاً ، لأن الله تعالى سمي الزلزلة يوم القيامة شيئاً ، وهي معدومة اليوم .

²⁶ Ibid., v. 6, p. 335 and v. 4, p. 378.

ويجوز خطاب المعدوم بمعنى أن يراد بالخطاب اذا كان المعلوم أنه سيوجد وتتكامل فيه شروط التكليف ، ولا يجوز أن يراد من لا يوجد لأن ذلك عبث لا فائدة فيه .

(distinguished, intelligent...) and thus, it is permissible for an address to be directed to it. Significant in this section, is that he does not simply state the obvious, the possibility of addressing future human beings since he also takes the opportunity to insert the phrase “it is permissible to address the non-existent,”²⁷ (*wa yajūzu khiṭāb al-ma’dūm...*). Al-Ṭūsī continues the promulgation of the idea of the thingness of the non-existent without necessarily adopting the same meaning that is assigned to it by others.

II.ii Al-Ṭabarī

With regard to Q.2:117, al-Ṭabarī explores some of the most important ideas regarding the act of creation following God’s command to be, *kun*. One of these important ideas regards the nature of the things being commanded. The concept of commanding a non-existent proved to be problematic for the earlier generations of commentators, since this made it necessary to acknowledge certain qualities pertaining to the commanded things, as we previously noted. He comments:

God has knowledge of all that is to be before it becomes existent. Thus, things, that were not existent, whilst being (*kā’īna*) subject to His knowledge before existing at a later time, are analogous to those existents. For this reason, it is permissible for Him to say to them “be”, and to command them to come forth from the state of non-existence to the state of existence. This is due to the fact that they are representations to Him and because He has knowledge of them in the state of non-existence.²⁸

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, v. 2, p. 468.

وقالوا: إن الله جل ثناؤه عالم بكل ما هو كائن قبل كونه، فلما كان ذلك كذلك، كانت الأشياء التي لم تكن - وهي كائنة، لعلمه بها قبل كونها- نظائر التي هي موجودة، فجاز أن يقول لها:كوني، ويأمرها بالخروج من حال العدم إلى حال الوجود، لتصوير جميعها له، ولعلمه بها في حال العدم.

This comment transmitted by al-Ṭabarī is ascribed to those who interpret the text from an understanding of its literal meaning, whilst those who believe that it must be understood through *ta'wīl*, understand it as a command to commanded things, thus to dead things that are commanded to be living and living things that are commanded to be dead. It is not clear who are the people who take the literal meaning and who mention the analogous pre-existent things. Al-Ṭūsī has an almost identical list of interpretations and does not ascribe this understanding to the Mu'tazila, he also describes this interpretation as an erroneous one (*fāsida*).²⁹

The idea of an existing analogy and similitude between the things, in their state of being prior to the command to exist, indicates the importance of this state of being. The ambiguity that surrounds it permits or implies a number of interpretations. Al-Ṭabarī points to the idea that these analogous things are representations to God and the subject of His knowledge, or one might say ideas in the 'mind' of God. Whether or not these ideas are models (*mithāl*) of what is to become, or has been an existent -in other terms prototypes according to which things would be made- is not very clear from the above statement. We know, however, that this idea of *mithāl* is denied by the Qur'ānic text itself. The general language of the above statements, however, is indicative of a transition following a command from one state of being to another, rather than something being made according to a particular model, thus, this understanding with these suggestions distances itself from the Platonic model of ideas or, in that respect, from the idea of universals.

²⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 1, pp. 430, 431.

The other significant interpretation quoted by al-Ṭabarī regarding this verse suggests that it is merely an informative statement by God of what it is that would be, either generally or to the angels. Following this, he offers his own understanding of this verse.³⁰ He takes Q.2:117 to indicate the simultaneity of the act of commanding (*amr*) and the act of creation. For him the ordering which is subject to God's will does not precede that which is willed to be existent, and it does not follow it in time. This is a clear attempt to avoid any confirmation or denial of the nature of that which is commanded, alive or dead, existent or non-existent. What is also clear in this interpretation is that the act of willing things to be is also simultaneous with the above commanding and creating acts, thus the willing becomes the commanding and the creating.

III. Knowledge, potentials and will

III.1 Al-Ma'lūmāt

We need to return now to the broader category of knowledge, which is one of God's essential attributes. One of the essential attributes of God is His being a knower. This knowledge encompasses all the knowns that can exist, have existed and will exist. Nothing is said to be hidden from Him,³¹ for what is hidden is only from His creatures that may only have some of His knowledge, if He wills it so.³² God is a

³⁰ Al-Ṭabarī, v. 2, p. 470.

فأمر الله تعالى ذكره للشيء إذا أراد تكوينه موجودا بقوله: {كن}. في حال إرادته جل ثناؤه إياه مكوّنًا ، لا يتقدم وجود الذي أراد إيجاده وتكوينه، إرادته إياه ، ولا أمره بالكون والوجود- ولا يتأخر عنه، فغير جائز أن يكون الشيء مأمورا بالوجود مرادا كذلك إلا وهو موجود، ولا أن يكون موجودا إلا وهو مأمور بالوجود مراد كذلك.

³¹ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 1, p. 489.

³² Ibid., v. 10, p. 42.

knower (*‘ālimun*) of Himself or of what He is as He is in Himself, but He is also a knower of all things, of all *al-ma‘lūmāt* (the knowns).³³

In the Qur’ān, we find few instances where knowledge is described as a future event, where things become known to God in the sense of a future instance, this is mentioned in the verses Q. 2:143 ; 5:94 ; 18:12 and 34:21. Regarding Q.2:143 “And We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed only that We might know him who followeth the messenger, from him who turneth on his heels”, al-Ṭūsī states that the case of God coming to know something does not mean that He acquires some new knowledge that He did not have previously. *Li-na‘lama* or to know of the verse, means, according to al- Ṭūsī, so that We know it to be existent, or know it as a future existent that will be a really existent thing.³⁴ In this particular case of knowledge, the known is of an existent, and God might be said to know the thing as an existent and not as a *maqḍūr* (a possible) as it was prior to its existence, “it is wrong to say that God knows the existence of the known prior to its existence.”³⁵ This does not mean that a new knowledge takes place, that there is a new known added to God’s *ma‘lūmāt*, rather, there is in this case “no origination of knowledge,”³⁶ since God had already known what would or would not take place. No new knowledge is attributed to God, the known prior to its existence is the same as it is after it exists in its relation to God. What changes according to al-Ṭūsī is the name associated with

³³ Ibid., v. 1, p. 489.

وانه لا يخفى عليه شيء، لان ما دل على أنه اعلم هو الدال على أنه لا يخفى عليه شيء، وهو انه عالم لنفسه ويعلم جميع المعلومات.

³⁴ Ibid., v. 2, p. 9.

"النعلم من يتبع الرسول " لا يدل على حدوث العلم، لأنه كان قبل ذلك عالما بان الاتباع سيوجد، أو لا يوجد، فان وجد كان عالما بوجوده وان لم يتجدد له صفة. وإنما يتجدد المعلوم، لان العلم بان الشيء سيوجد علم بوجوده إذا وجد. وإنما يتغير عليه الاسم، ويجري ذلك مجرى تغير الاسم على زمان بعينه، بان يوصف بأنه غد قبل حصوله، فإذا حصل قيل إنه اليوم، فإذا تقضى وصف بأنه أمس، فتغير عليه الاسم والمعلوم لم يتغير.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

the known in terms of the temporal relation suggested by saying something was, is or will be.³⁷ In the case of Q.5:94 “...that Allah may know him who feareth Him in secret..” al-Ṭūsī suggests that one of the meanings offered by the Mu‘tazilī al-Balkhī, though not his preferable one, is that *li-ya‘lama Allāh* here means that God makes the known manifest. This verse concerns God’s prior knowledge of human acts, and al-Balkhī suggests that even though God knows the future acts of His creatures, it is not right for Him to reward or punish human beings based on what is known of them. What is deserved is based on the known that actually takes place and is real, otherwise there would be no Justice in the reward or the punishment under the Mu‘tazilī theological conception of justice.³⁸

In *al-Tibyān*, there are two cases that might suggest a contradiction in the description of the quality of the known, and therefore in God’s knowledge. In one case, we have al-Ṭūsī suggesting that the known is regenerated (renewed) when the known becomes real,³⁹ when it takes place, and in another case we have him declare:

[T]he known after, not being known, does not undergo any change with the new knowledge, because if it is witnessed it would not be witnessed as other than what it was.⁴⁰

The key words, in what appears to be a contradiction, are change (*yataghayyar*) and regeneration or renewal (*yatajaddad*). *Taghayyur* or change, according to al-Ṭūsī, is the rendering of something into its variant so that when it is witnessed it is

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., v. 4, p. 22.

واختار البلخي الوجه الثاني، قال والله تعالى وإن كان عالما بما يفعلونه فيما لم يزل، فإنه لا يجوز أن يثيبهم ولا يعاقبهم على ما يعلم منهم، وإنما يستحقون ذلك إذا علمه واقعا منهم على وجه كلفهم، فإذا لا بد من التكليف والابتلاء.

³⁹ Ibid., v. 2, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid., v. 5, p. 141.

witnessed as a variation from what it was.⁴¹ This is the precise thing that is denied in the case of God's knowledge, no variations from what is known to Him becomes real when the relevant known is given existence. What is witnessed is the same as what is known, hence there is no *taghayyur* in knowledge. As to *yatajaddad*, the more appropriate translation that could be associated with it is regeneration, since what is suggested in this case is not the emerging of something new. What actually takes place is the reappearance of a thing as the same, but, in a different condition and at a different time. It is a becoming again what it is before coming to be.

The problem for al-Ṭūsī is the fact that God cannot state that He knows something as existent before it is made so, thus God uses the future tense to refer to the same known but with the changed condition of its becoming real in a future time. This emphasis on the un-changeability of the known is significant to us.

Al-Qushayrī clearly confirms this point in His *tafsīr* “*al-ma'lūm lā yataghayyar.*”⁴² This conception is needed to protect the unity of God, as has been previously mentioned, for any change that takes place in His knowledge is a change and an alteration in God Himself, and change and alteration are not associated with Him, these are rather the qualities of the created world. To us, the importance of linking or equating the known before and after creation, the link between the knowledge of specific differentiated and distinguished existing things and the knowledge of the same things before they become manifest, suggests that these knowns are also differentiated knowns. This idea is confirmed by al-Ṭūsī in His statement regarding

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 267. Related to this idea is Ibn al-Haytham's notion of the “known” which remains invariable and admits no change, see p. 105, note 8.

Q.65:12 “and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge...means that His knows are differentiated (*mutamayyiza*) to Him.”⁴³

III.2 The Possibles

Al-Maḡdūr

Before discussing the terms and categories associated with the word *al-maḡdūr*, we need to have a general conception of what the word means. The general meaning given to *al-maḡdūr* is being an object of God’s power (or subject to this power). It means that the possessor, or God, holds a quality by which He can will that which is known, or simply the object of His knowledge, to exist or not to exist. Power is a quality (or *ṣifa*) indicating the ability to choose between acting towards something and not acting, with a sole dependence on the will of the agent (in this case God). The power to act is not a necessary quality attached to God’s essence, it is rather a contingent quality dependent on His will. God does not necessarily have to act to make something existent, it is up to God’s *mashī’a* to bring something forth to existence or abstain from such an act.⁴⁴

Al-Khazā’in

One of the terms used in the Qur’ān which is closely related to the idea of *qudra* and *maḡdūr* is the term repositories (*khazā’in*). It appears in Q.63:7 as the repositories of

⁴³ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 10, p. 42.

{وإن الله قد أحاط بكل شيء علما} معناه إن معلوماته متميزة له بمنزلة ما قد أحاط به فلم يفته منه شيء.

⁴⁴ See: Al-Ṭabarī, v. 16, p. 413 ; v. 19, p. 120 ; Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, pp. 117, 459 ; v. 2, pp. 352, 429, 586.

the heavens and the earth; in Q.12:55 as the repositories of the earth; in Q.6:50, Q.11:31, Q.15:21 and Q.52:37 as the repositories of God and finally in Q.17:100 and Q.38:9 as the repositories of God's mercy.

One of the meanings associated with the repositories of the heavens is simply rain and as for the repositories of the earth, the association is generally with plants.⁴⁵ In addition, a similar association exists between the 'repositories of everything' and rain.⁴⁶ We need to take from these simple associations with the rain and plants, that these were things, which were subject to the will and power of God or *maqḍūrāt*, what God commands to be. In these interpretations, we find the repositories to be the material substances that have not yet become real in this world. What appears to be the content of these repositories, is the hidden potential existents that are dependent on God's will to make them appear, or become real to humankind.

Before proceeding with the topic of *maqḍūrāt*, we should also mention another term associated with them directly or through the word *khazā'in*. The word that is frequently mentioned in the Qur'ān is *mulk* and its derivatives *malakūt*. These terms are linked with possession as well as majestic or royal status.

⁴⁵ Al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-samarqandī al musammā Bahr al-'Ulūm*, (1993), v. 1, p. 323. The author is the Ḥanafī theologian Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandī, Naṣr b. Muḥ. b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm, for more information see Schacht, J. "Abu'l-Layth al-Samarqandī, Naṣr b. Muḥ. b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm", in *EF*.

⁴⁶ Al-Māwardī, *Al-Nukat wal 'Uyūn*, (2000), v. 3, p. 155. The author is Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb, a shāfi'ī scholar who was criticised for holding Mu'tazilī views, see Brockelmann, C. "al-Māwardī Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Muḥammad b. Ḥabīb", in *EF*. For similar associations, al-Thalabī, Aḥmad, *al-Kashf wal-Bayān*, (2002), v. 6, p. 281. For this author see Rippin, A. "al-Thalabī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Abū Ishāq al-Nīsābūrī", in *EF*. He was also a student of Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/ 1015) and Al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), M. (see Al-Jahnī, *Al-Kashf wal Bayān 'an Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 2009, p. 28). See also al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, v. 14, p. 40.

Al-Malakūt

In *al-Tibyān*, we are told that *malakūt* refers to the greatness and supremacy of God's reign (*mulk*), which could be understood as God's possessions. In the same section, we are also informed that Mujāhid has said that *malakūt kulli shay'* or what has been translated by Pickthall as the dominion over all things, in Q.23:88, means *khazā'inu kulli shay'* or the repositories of all things.⁴⁷ This quote from Mujāhid is also found in the earlier *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī, where we find another association with *qudra*, not in the sense of equating the two together but in the sense of power over things.⁴⁸ This link with *kazā'in* can notably be found in the *tafsīr* of al-Samarqandī (d. 373-393/983-1003),⁴⁹ and al-Māwardī (d. 450/ 1058)⁵⁰ who follow similar explanations to al-Ṭabarī, and it can also be found in the commentary of al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035).⁵¹ With al-Māwardī, however, we find another explanation for the word *malakūt*, which follows and reflects concrete realities, depending on the context of the expressions. *Malakūt* of the heavens and the earth is not just the *khazā'in*, the hidden awaiting to be made manifest, but it also includes the manifest things. This would then render the power of God not solely over the potential existents, but the existents too.⁵²

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 7, p. 388.

⁴⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, v. 17, p. 100.

إن ملكوت كل شيء، والقدرة على الأشياء كلها لله.

⁴⁹ Al-Samarqandī, v. 2, p. 420 and v. 3, p. 107.

⁵⁰ Al-Māwardī, v. 4, p. 65.

"ملكوت كل شيء فيه وجهان: أحدهما: خزائن كل شيء، قاله مجاهد. الثاني: ملك كل شيء، قاله الضحاك. والملكوت من صفات المبالغة كالجبروت والرهبوت

See also, v. 5, p. 34.

⁵¹ Al-Tha'labī, v. 7, p. 54.

⁵² Al-Māwardī, v. 2, p. 135. Amongst the meanings he quotes: "malakūt of the heavens means the moon, the stars and the sun; malakūt of the earth means the mountains, the trees and the seas." See

In his comment on Q.36:83 “Therefore glory be to Him in Whose hand is the dominion over all things” al-Samarqandī writes:

[T]his means he created every-thing from the resurrection to all other things, and they say the repositories of every-thing, and they say: He has power over all things.⁵³

Here again we see a link made between God’s repositories and *malakūt*, with the distinction of one being a subcategory of the other, that is *khazā’in* being a subcategory of *malakūt*. This basic difference between the two categories is a reasonable distinction where we can understand why all *khazā’in* are God’s *malakūt* but not all *malakūt* are His *khazā’in*. This division is a creation of a category *malakūt* that incorporates all things that are under the power of God, existent and not yet existent or the existent in potentia. It is within this category of *malakūt* that we find the specific subdivision of *khazā’in* the container of the existents in potentia, or what is to be realised through God’s power.

The term potential is not the term that appears in the commentaries; what is used, however, is the word *maqdūr*, which can be translated as the possible and actual by an agent, where the agent in this particular case is God. Al-Ṭūsī makes the link between the *khazā’in* and the *maqdūrāt* (plural of *maqdūr*) in his *Tibyān* by quoting a clear statement linking the two: “the meaning of God’s repositories is His *maqdūrāt* because He can bring whichever one of them into being.”⁵⁴

also Al-Samarqandī, who equates in v. 1, p. 586 between *malakūt* of the heavens and the earth and the created things of the heavens and earth.

⁵³ Al-Samarqandī, v. 3, p. 107.

⁵⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 5, p. 176. Similar statements can be found in v. 6, p. 327; v. 8, p. 546 ; v. 9, p. 415 ; v. 10, p. 15.

Al-Qushayrī has similar statements, one of which is:

His repositories are in reality His *maqḍūrāt* and He has - glory to Him - the power over all that is designed to be originated.⁵⁵

From this we develop the idea that these repositories are the holders of all that can be made to exist, the *maqḍūrāt* that are awaiting the word *kun*. To isolate a section, or a category of things, from the *malakūt*, which in itself is a clear marking of a set of things, all that belongs to God, is clearly giving them a certain quality of thingness. The *kun* here, is not addressed to the pure non-existent, for the repositories are not holders of the pure nothing, since this would defeat the point of creating a term that distinguishes a category within a category. The *maqḍūrāt* of the *khazā'in* are not nothing and are not anything, they are specific things that are not yet real. The link made between the repositories of the heavens and the rain is not a random link, for rain can only come from the heavens, it is the only place where it can be stored. And so it is with the plants, they are stored in the earth and await to be brought forth to reality. God's *khazā'in* are not only in the heavens and in the earth, since in some of these commentaries these are all the things that will become real existents.

The images associated with the repositories emphasise the idea that these are the holders of things and that it is God who rules over and commands them. This imagery goes so far as to include the idea of a key that opens these repositories. The word used for keys in the Qur'an is *maqālīd* and it is found in Q.39:63 and in Q.42:12, where it is also associated with the heavens and the earth in the same way that

⁵⁵ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 266 and similar statements in v. 3, p. 345 and v. 3, p. 477.

khazā'in is, that is “the keys of the heavens and the earth.” Al-Qushayrī, al-Ṭabarī, al-Māwardī, al-Samarqandī and Ibn Qutayba clarify that *maqālīd al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* means *mafātiḥ al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*, that is, the keys of the heavens and the earth as indicated by Pickthall.⁵⁶

In this case, we have an image set by our commentators which describes the relationship between God and the *maqḍūrāt* that are stored in His repositories. God is described as the holder of keys to these repositories, and by using these keys He opens the gates of being, which allows these potentialities to be. God's act of creation is given through the imagery of liberating these *maqḍūrāt* in accordance with the will of God. Creation thus becomes an act of liberating the potentia to become real beings. With this idea in mind, the term *ikhrāj* or bringing forth to existence or *faṭara* as separation, which were earlier seen to be terms depicting the act of creation, become appropriate descriptions of the act of moving out, coming out and being separated from the *khazā'in al-ma'dūmāt*.

The releasing from the repositories as an act of creation,⁵⁷ emphasises the idea that this act permits the transitions from one state of being to another. The *ma'dūm*, in this case, cannot be an absolute no-thing, for the keys that belongs to God alone open the gates of *khazā'in* where specific things are stored, those that become real specific things.

Regarding verse Q.22:64 al-Qushayrī writes:

⁵⁶ Al-Qushayrī, v.3, p. 345; al-Ṭabarī, v. 20, p. 241; al-Samarqandī, v. 3, p. 156; al-Māwardī, v. 5, p. 195 and, Ibn Qutayba, 'Abdu- Allah, *Tafsīr Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, 1978, pp. 384, 391.

⁵⁷ Not that any of our commentators have directly suggested this idea, but as we can see, it is embedded in the descriptions and images that relates the really existent with the *maqḍūr*.

The rule over all possessions belongs to Him, and he has no need for any of them, since He does not become richer with His possessions, rather His possessions become existent through His act of creating them, since for Him the non-existent is a *maqdūr* and the *maqdūr* is the possessed.⁵⁸

In this passage we find a clear link being made between the three concepts under consideration, *al-maqdūr*, *al-ma'dūm* and the possessed (*al-mamlūk*). *Al-mamlūk* is a word that derives from the same root m.l.k, which we considered earlier under *malakūt* and *mulk*. It is that over which one exercises power and reign, or simply what one possess. Thus, *al-mamlūk* is all that enters under the will of God as was noted with *malakūt*, the existent and the non-existent. With the clear association between *mamlūk* and *maqdūr*, we learn that the possessed becomes truly existent through the act of creation. In addition, the *maqdūr* is equated with the *ma'dūm* suggesting that the *mamlūk* at some point was a non-existent, which presumably, is also a reference to its specific state of being in the *khaza'in*.

Al-Qudra

We need to explore at this stage some of the ideas that surround the word *maqdūr*, and to do so one must turn to the word *qudra* or power itself. Al-Qushayrī writes:

[n]o *maqdūr* can resist Him since He is qualified with an eternal power, and His power is (equally) attached to all. Neither difficulty nor ease can be said of His quality. His first creation and the re-creation are equivalent to Him. No benefit returns to Him from this act or any other since His past eternity prevent the effect of origination in Him.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 558.

الملك له ، وهو عن الجميع غنى ، فهو لا يستغنى بملكه ، بل ملكه بصير موجودا بخلقه إياه إذ المعدوم له مقدور والمقدور هو المملوك.

⁵⁹ Ibid., v. 2, p. 352.

What we learn from this is that this power which belongs to God alone, is one of the eternal past attributes associated with Him, it is not some attribute that is created in time or originated in time. The fact that this is an eternal attribute belonging to God, and since the unity of God does not allow for any change in Him, there is no possible or real change in this quality, as any change will cause a change in God. This constant, and consistent power, is to be equally associated with all the *maqdurāt*, and no single *maqdur* requires more or less power than any other in order to be made existent.⁶⁰

In describing the state of *ayyām Allāh* and the state of non-existence,⁶¹ we are told by al-Qushayrī, that in this state, the non-existent is associated with knowledge (God's) and is available to God's power.⁶² This means that *al-ma'dūm* is associated with knowledge *muta'allaq al-'ilm*, or simply the subject of knowledge, and is also the *maqdur* which is the subject of God's power. This is a central link between the three ideas, which, in turn, can also be linked with the *mamlūk* of the repositories.

The *maqdurāt* and the *ma'lūmāt* are said to be infinite, similar to all things associated with the eternal past quality (*al-ṣifa al-qadīma*). It is only when

لا يتعصى عليه مقدر لأنه موصوف بقدره أزلية ، وقدرته عامّة التعلق فلا المشقة تجوز في صفته ولا الرفاهية. فالخلق الأول والإعادة عليه سيان لا من هذا عائد إليه ولا من ذلك ، لأن قدمه يمنع تأثير الحدوث فيه.

⁶⁰ Adamson simplifies the relation between *qudra*, the possible and God's unity by saying that: "[...] creation is the actualization of a possible world, where the possible world is understood as one of many options possible in themselves and external to God Himself. That would, again, compromise *tawhīd*, because the possibilities of things would be co-eternal with God. Rather, Abū al-Hudhayl regarded the possibilities as residing in God's power (*qudra*), rather than as external objects of that power." Adamson (2003), p. 58.

⁶¹ We shall describe this state in the discussion on *al-Mīthāq*.

⁶² Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 240.

something passes to the state of being existent that finitude in number becomes the descriptive quality.⁶³

Al-qudra may be over something specific or may refer to the power to do something specific. This particular act is the act of innovating or originating something, to bring it to existence.⁶⁴ Al-Qushayrī says that the *ma'dūm* is His *maqdūr* (subject of His power), when it comes to existence it remains His *maqdūr* and *mamlūk* and even if it ceases to exist, it does not cease to be His *maqdūr*.⁶⁵ The picture that is drawn for us is of something that journeys from non-existence to existence and back to non-existence, yet throughout this journeying it does not cease to be the object of God's power, this is the only thing that remains a constant quality of the thing's transformation. This relation, of the power over something specific, remains fixed toward that particular thing, despite its transition from one state of being to another.

This particular conception of the idea of *qudra* could be understood within the Ash'arī notion of perpetual creation, where God is permanently and perpetually creating the things that exist in reality. Something is not existent simply because it came to be at some specific time, although there is an initial moment of creation, of coming to be existent. The thing cannot remain existent if God does not create it perpetually from one moment to the next. We have previously mentioned that the idea of *qudra* is about making something existent or omitting such an act. With perpetual creation, God remains perpetually in the same relation of having the

⁶³ Ibid., v. 2, p. 416. Also, refer back to our discussion on the atom, finitude and the ability to count the parts of the world.

⁶⁴ Ibid., v. 2, p. 70.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

power to create or not create, in the same way that He related to the same thing prior to willing to create it.

Al-Qushayrī himself identifies God's specific power as the power of bringing into existence (*j̄ād*).⁶⁶ Al-Ṭabarī describes God's power as the power that no-thing willed by Him is resisted,⁶⁷ so that all that God wills is subject to His power. According to him, God's reign (*malakūt*) and power (*qudra*) is over all things.⁶⁸ Here also, we find this power to be over that which is possible and made actual by an agent (*maqdūr* in the *khazā'in*) and that which has been made actually existent.

Regarding this dominance of God's power over all things, al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021)⁶⁹ states that anyone (or anything) that says 'I' has challenged God's power,⁷⁰ so that no-thing can claim, according to this Sufi belief, a real separation and distancing from the supreme power. This power becomes manifest in the very act of creation, but more specifically, al-Sulamī finds that to be in the act of creating Adam, or the creation of the human being.⁷¹ In another passage, this power is said to be made manifest first of all by making the non-existent existent, which again marks a link between *qudra* and the act of creation, a link that makes both, the power as well as the non-existent itself, manifest.⁷²

⁶⁶ Ibid., v. 1, p. 479; v. 1, p. 607 and, v. 3, p. 77.

⁶⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, v. 17, p. 477.

⁶⁸ Ibid., v. 17, p. 100.

⁶⁹ Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Azdī al-Sulamī al-Naysābūrī, a Sufi hagiographer and Qur'ān commentator. See Knysh (2000) pp. 125-127 and Böwering, G. "al-Sulamī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Azdī al-Sulamī al-Naysābūrī", in *EF*.

⁷⁰ Al-Sulamī, *Tafsīr al-Sulamī wa huwa Ḥaqā'iq al-Tafsīr*, (2001), v. 1, p. 55.

⁷¹ Ibid., v. 1, p. 140.

⁷² Ibid., v. 1, p. 301.

One of the interesting distinctions made between that which is known by God and that which is the subject of God's power, is noted by al-Qushayrī who writes: "from His knowledge, no known is absent (*ya'zūb*) and from His power, nothing that can be imagined to be described as existent, can escape,"⁷³ and the previously mentioned "He has the power over all that is contrived (*marsūm*) to be originated (*ḥudūth*)."⁷⁴ The content of God's knowledge *al-ma'lūmāt*, or the knowns, are not only of the future existent but they also include those things that are impossible to exist. God knows the possible and the impossible existents, however, His power is not over all of the content of His knowledge. That is, not all *ma'lūmāt* are the objects of God's power. According to al-Qushayrī, only those that can potentially be said or imagined to be existent are the objects of this power. Al-Ṭūsī distinguishes between the *ma'lūmāt* and the *maqḍūrat* by stating "*al-maqḍūr* is more specific than *al-ma'lūm*."⁷⁵ According to these distinctions, the known is a more general category than the possible by an agent (*al-maqḍūr*). Hence, when it is stated elsewhere that all things are subject to God's power we should understand this to refer to all the things that could be made existent, excluding all those things that cannot be imagined to exist or known not to be possible existents.

III.3 Al-Irāda

If *al-quḍra* is associated with all possibles (*al-mumkināt*), then *al-irāda*, which is God's will to make something existent, is specifically associated with existence. Al-

⁷³ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 443.

⁷⁴ Ibid., v. 2, p. 266.

⁷⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 10, p. 57.

Qushayrī states that “in reality, *al-irāda* is solely associated with origination (*ḥudūth*).”⁷⁶ This is also confirmed by al-Ṭūsī in his commentary.⁷⁷ The association with origination and existence renders the will of God an act that is time specific, the moment of creation itself. Al-Ṭabarī states:

[T]hat which is willed (*arāda*) to be originated and formed does not come to being prior to His willing it, and not before his commanding it to be formed and existent, and it does not tarry after this will.⁷⁸

So, this will is the same as the commanding pronouncement of *kun* and is the same as the instantaneous origination and bringing to existence.⁷⁹

Regarding verse Q.6:111:

And though We should send down the angels unto them, and the dead should speak unto them, and We should gather against them all things in array, they would not believe unless Allah so willed. Howbeit, most of them are ignorant.

Al-Ṭūsī indicates that God’s will must have originated in time, because of the use of exception in the verse (*illā an yashā’ Allāh*). If this will was eternally past existent then the exception would not have been correct.⁸⁰ *Al-Irāda* cannot be associated

⁷⁶ Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, p. 475.

الإرادة لا تتعلق - في التحقيق - إلا بالحدوث.

⁷⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 6, p. 143.

والإرادة لا تتعلق إلا بحدوث الشيء.

⁷⁸ Al-Ṭabarī, v. 2, p. 470.

⁷⁹ Ibid., v. 2, p. 472.

⁸⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 4, p. 240.

وفي الآية دلالة على ان ارادة الله محدثة ، لان الاستثناء يدل على ذلك لانها لو كانت قديمة لم يجز هذا الاستثناء.

with something past for the will is only for something to happen after the will itself, or at least simultaneously with the act of willing.⁸¹

If the *irāda* is associated with *khalq* then the two cannot be said to mean the same thing, the association is a timely one and may be said to have a causal nature. Al-Ṭūsī says:

Al-Irāda which is a striving for action in a way that is like a cause for it, since the motive behind an act motivates the will for it (*irādatihī*), and through the concurrence of the two (motive and will), the act takes place from a knowing possessor of power.⁸²

The desiring for something to happen is the motivator of the will to act, and this act, may only be achieved by an agent who is attributed with knowledge and power over the realisation of the desired and the willed. The link made between the desire and the will is also made in a statement by al-Ṭūsī where he confirms that “desire (*al-mashīʿa*) is the will.”⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., v. 2, p. 69.

والإرادة تتعلق بالمستقبل.

⁸² Ibid., v. 6, p. 161.

ومنه الإرادة وهي طلب الفعل بما هو كالسبب له ، لان الداعي إلى الفعل داع إلى ارادته ، لان باجتماع الامرين يقع الفعل من عالم قادر.

⁸³ Ibid., v. 2, p. 394; v. 4, p. 514; v. 6, p. 196; v. 10, p. 185 and v. 10, p. 274.

IV. Hiddenness

IV.1 Al-Ṭūsī and the different classes of absence

Al-Ghayb

One of the ontological divisions known in Islamic studies is that between the unperceived (*al-ghayb*) and the perceptible (*al-shahāda*). Al-Ṭūsī's *Tibyān* defines *al-ghayb* as: “the mode of being of a thing (entity) so that it is hidden from the senses”⁸⁴, whilst the perceptible thing which belongs to the world of *al-shahāda*, is defined as: “the actualisation of a thing (entity) so that it becomes manifest to the senses.”⁸⁵ We are reminded that being present to or absent from the senses is only applicable to the human beings and not to God. Also, in other parts of the *Tibyān*, al-Ṭūsī substitutes in his definition the term perception (*idrāk*) for the term sensation (*al-ḥiss*), which renders the division of the two worlds a distinction between what is subject to human perception or sense and what is absent from such perception.

What concerns us is that *al-ghayb*, which is not hidden from God as it is to the human being, is made analogous with *al-ma'dūm*. Al-Ṭūsī quotes from an anonymous source, without a denial of the validity of the statement, that “*al-ghayb* is *al-ma'dūm*...the secret (*al-sirr*).”⁸⁶ Similar to al-Qushayrī's association, God's knowledge of *al-ghayb* and *al-shahāda* becomes “has knowledge of the non-existent

⁸⁴ Ibid., v. 6, pp. 90, 225.

فالغيب كون الشيء بحيث يخفى عن الحس ، يقال غاب يغيب ، فهو غائب .

⁸⁵ Ibid.

والشهادة حصول الشيء بحيث يظهر للحس .

⁸⁶ Ibid.

فالغيب هو المعدوم . وقال الحسن : الغيب السر ، والشهادة العلانية .

and the existent.”⁸⁷ If *al-ghayb*, as subject to God’s knowledge, is what is absent from human senses and perception, then one can deduce from the analogous relation between *al-ghayb* and *al-ma’dūm* that the non-existent is the un-sensed/imperceptible, that which is beyond human consciousness or simply unknown to them. What appears to characterise the non-existent in general, is its hiddenness from humans, and only when this is made manifest (*zahara*) to our senses or become a subject of our consciousness, does it become existent in our knowledge and in reality. Since this argument is not present in *al-Tibyān*, one can assume that al-Ṭūsī might find it difficult to accept it in such a formulation, as he believes that *al-ma’dūm* is not a thing (entity). Still however, we may leave this section with the idea that the hidden as a *ma’dūm* is the un-sensed/imperceptible, which means that it could be a ‘thing’ that is simply not yet subject to our perception, despite al-Ṭūsī’s denying statements of this view.

Al-Khaba’

The idea of the hidden/concealed is a central theme in Sufi discourse and does appear throughout Islamic history with varied importance attached to it, and varied interpretations associated with it. The first significant appearance of this concept that is of concern to us is in the Qur’ān itself in Q.27:25 : “So that they worship not Allah, Who bringeth forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knoweth what ye hide and what ye proclaim.”⁸⁸ The first “hidden” of the heavens and earth in this verse is a translation of the word *al-khaba’*, whilst the “hide” used in this same verse

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ أَلَا يَسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يُخْرِجُ الْخَبَاءَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُخْفُونَ وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ

is a translation of the word *tukhfūna (al-khafā')*. Both of these Arabic words are associated with the idea of the hidden, the concealed, the secret or the veiled. Al-Ṭūsī's exploration of the meaning of these analogous terms reveals another link and association with idea of *al-'adam*.⁸⁹

In this section, the word *al-khaba'* (the hidden) is defined as "that which is confined by another so that it is prevented from being perceived."⁹⁰ Here again, we find that the hiddenness is linked to a lack in perception, but this time, a reason for this lack is given. This reason is not a lack in existence itself, it is rather the existence of something other which acts as an obstruction or concealer. Interestingly, the next section of this interpretation returns to the theme of creation, which is described in relation to the hidden: "what is brought into being, what is brought forth from non-existence to existence is in this category," that is, in the category of the hidden. In this case, God's act of creation and bringing into existence is the act of bringing forth what is hidden (and concealed by another) into existence. If there is doubt that this hidden by another is some-thing, then the next section informs us that the hidden has limitations of some kind, which are not necessarily epistemological. The examples given as a demonstration of what is this hidden are derived from nature, so that "the hidden of the heavens are the rain and winds, and that of the earth are the trees and plants." In these particular examples there is no mention of something being transformed; rather, the impression given is of something being released

⁸⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 8, p. 89.

والخبء هو المخبوء، وهو ما أحاط به غيره حتى منع من إدراكه . وضع المصدر موضع الصفة خبأته اخبائه خبأ . وما يوجد الله ويخرجه من العدم إلى الوجود فهو بهذه المنزلة فخبء السماء الأمطار والرياح ، وخبء الأرض الأشجار والنبات " ويعلم ما تخفون وما تعلنون " فمن قرأ بالتاء جعله للمخاطبين . ومن قرأ بالياء فللغائبين . والخبء والخفاء نظائر ، وقيل الخبء الغيب ، وهو كل ما غاب عن الإدراك .

⁹⁰ Ibid.

from concealment. Since, in the last part of this commentary, al-Ṭūsī mentions the association, which some have made, between *al-khaba'* and *al-ghayb*, the *hidden* and the *unperceived*, one finds in these remarks another association between the un-perceived/un-sensed (*al-ghayb*), and *al-ma'dūm*, which is a *khaba'*. Again, this appears from the above discussion to be something in the same way that *al-khazā'in* are of something.

IV.2 Al-Qushayrī and the Sufi journey

Al-Maḥw

In the discussion to follow, the topic of effacement (*maḥw*) has been chosen to demonstrate the relation between *al-'adam* and *al-wujūd*. This explores the theme of the desire to return to a state of being in God prior to the state self-consciousness. The emphasis made here is on the fact that this desired state is of the effacement of the self, or its *'adam*, that is sought by the Sufi. This is not only something to be achieved by disposing of one's body –or death– since this state is achieved in this life whilst being an existent being.

In the commentary on Q.2:115 “Unto Allah belong the East and the West, and whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance. Lo! Allah is All Embracing, All Knowing,” we are informed that:

The hearts have brilliancy caused by the stars of knowledge and suns of gnosis. Whilst the brilliancy is shining, the heart's destination is clear and manifest, when the Truths dominates, the reign of this brilliancy vanishes away, like the hiding of the stars at the rising of the

sun. So it is also when the Truth becomes manifest, what takes place is eradication (*iṣṭilām*) and subjugation (*qahr*), since in this there is no witnessing of a thing's trace (*rasm*) and no endurance of sense or discernment. The intellect and knowledge lose their reign, and gnosis its light. The existence of these qualities is befitting for the enduring human beings, and if the qualified things are effaced (*maḥw*), where would their qualities endure.⁹¹

The heart, being the source of knowledge and gnosis, is given in this quotation some positive associations expressed in terms of light-related expressions such as stars, suns, brilliancy, clarity and manifestations. Knowledge and gnosis are in this passage associated with seeing clearly and with discernment. All these qualities, which the human beings possess, are arranged in an ascending causal order from the most basic to the more complex, the clearer and the truer. This order starts with the existence of the external *rasm*, or the traces of external things which cause our witnessing their existence through our senses and discernment which in turn are subjugated to the intellect, knowledge and gnosis. In this order, one can either assume a hierarchical arrangement of human faculties based on the baseness or elevated nature of each -such as sense, discernment, knowledge and gnosis- or one can assume a hierarchy based on a sequential ordering of a causal chain which in turn determines the status of each faculty. In this analysis, we will follow the second of these interpretations, which is derived from the text itself. The chain of causes springs from the fact, or the event, of the manifestation of the Truth. The light of this manifestation effaces all trace of all that exists outside of the human being. The brilliant light of Truth which effaces all things outside, blinds the human being, and the senses' efficacy are thus abrogated. What follows is the loss of the

⁹¹ Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, p. 116.

وللقلوب شوارق وطوارق . وطوارقها هواجس النفوس تطرق في ظلمات المنى والشهوات. وشوارقها نجوم العلوم وأقمار الحضور وشموس المعارف. فما دامت الشوارق طالعة فقبلة القلوب ، واضحة ظاهرة ، فإذا استولت الحقائق خفى سلطان الشوارق ، كالنجوم تستتر عند طلوع الشمس ، كذلك عند ظهور الحق يحصل اصطلام وقهر ، فلا شهود رسم ، ولا بقاء حس وفهم ، ولا سلطان عقل وعلم، ولا ضياء عرفان . فإن وجدان هذه الجملة صفات لانفكة ببقاء البشرية ، وإذا صار الموصوف محو فأى لهم ببقاء الصفة.

intellect's power, knowledge and gnosis. All these qualities are attributes of things on the outside, of things other than the self. Without an object of knowledge, a subject to which things are attributed, there is no knowledge. The effacement of all other turns out to be an effacement of all human faculties. The only thing that remains to be witnessed is the light of Truth itself.

Before leaving this passage one must point out that the manifestation of the Truth could be seen to eradicate and efface all these human qualities simultaneously without the need of a sequential causal link, this, however, will only highlight the two means of journeying to God. One is through struggles against human imperfections, starting from the most base, leading the traveller to move from one station (*maqām*) to another. The other means is not dependent on the act of human beings, the effacement of the qualities described earlier can be attained through a direct bestowal of light from God without any associated human effort, this is what is known in Sufi terminology a *ḥāl* or state.⁹²

⁹² The term *maqām* is used to mean spiritual standing. The spiritual station is defined as the standing of the servant of God between the hands of the magnificent and the exalted. This spiritual standing is achieved through the undertaking of spiritual struggles and exercises as well as the acts of worship (*ibādāt*). The *ḥāl* on the other hand descends from God, it is that which God bestows in the heart of his servants, which is temporary and has clear association with time, one that is not made in the state of *maqāmāt*. It is not the fruit and outcome of the physical and spiritual struggles or the acts of worship. For this earliest understanding of these terms by the Sufis see: Al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma' fi 'l-taṣawwuf*, (1960), pp. 40-41. Al-Qushayrī defines *ḥāl* as the meaning (*ma'nā*) which appears in the heart without involving any intentions of achieving it or acting to earn it. Unlike a *maqām* which is dependent on effort, the *ḥāl* descends directly from the Being itself, for "the *aḥwāl* are gifts (*mawāhib*) from God, and the *maqāmāt* are earnings (*makāsib*)." From Al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fi 'ilm al-Taṣawwuf*, p. 56. See also Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Maḥjūb*, (1975), p. 409; Al-Suhrawardī, *Awārif al-Ma'ārif*, (1991), p. 300. For modern studies see Knysh (2000), p. 303-309; Ernst (1997), pp. 104-106 and Smirnov (1993), pp. 76-78.

On verse Q.2:173:

He hath forbidden you only carrion, and blood, and swine flesh, and that which hath been immolated to (the name of) any other than Allah. But he who is driven by necessity, neither craving nor transgressing, it is no sin for him. Lo! Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

Al-Qushayrī comments that God has forbidden these things that belong to the world of the manifest. This confirms that we are involved in the world of the real existents and what follows in the text refers to this same world. God is said to have forbade the inner mysteries from the companionship of any other than God or to witness any other than God. The one who is not totally consumed in Truth has only the path of the law of Allah to follow. One is either effaced in God, existing (*qā'im*) through God or acting for God.⁹³ The natural, the right and the decreed way of existing in our inner being is in witnessing no other than God and of befriending no other. This is because there is in this true way of being no real other. The path that leads to the effacement of the self must be traversed while adhering to the revealed law and this leads to different degrees of being. The lowest of these degrees of being is existing as an agent for God (*āmilan lillah*) in this life, where one is aware of the commands decreed in the revealed law and acts accordingly. The second of these ways of being is surrendering one's actions to the will of God. One is aware in this way of being that all actions are achieved through God, hence one exists through God. The final

⁹³ Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, p. 148.

حرّم على الطواهر هذه المعدودات وهي ما أهل به لغير الله ، وحرّم على السرائر صحبة غير الله بل شهود غير الله ، فمن اضطر - أي لم يجد إلى الاستهلاك في حقائق الحق وصولاً - فلا يسلكنّ غير سبيل الشرع سبيلاً ، فإما أن يكون محوّاً في الله ، أو يكون قائماً بالله ، أو عاملاً لله ، والرابع همجٌ لا خطر له.

way of being and the highest is through the effacement of the self, of the awareness of such a self and of any other than God.⁹⁴

In this concept of *maḥw* (and *istihlāk*), it is not only the other, all that is outside of the personal self or what is distinguished from it, that is effaced, but the personal self itself is said to be effaced. The only thing remaining is the act of witnessing itself. What is interesting, is that there is no indication that this witnessing is a collective witnessing and it still seems to be initiated by an individual distinguished self. This is the same self which in reality is a living being (a Sufi saint presumably). This can lead us to the understanding that effacement occurs on the level of perception (and consciousness or intelligibility). The process that leads to such a way of being is in principle the act of the wayfarer upon his self. So it is either in achieving the effacement of the self followed by that of all other, or the other way, by effacing all other than the self. Following this is self gnosis and then the effacement of the remaining self, leaving only one perception, or one act of witnessing, that of God.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ In some cases, being conscious of witnessing God is considered to be the final veil for the one on the spiritual path. One must lose the desire to witness the light through the annihilation of the annihilation of the self (*al-fanā 'an al fanā*), Ibn al-Dabbāgh (d.696/1296), *Fi maqāmāt al-sālikīn wa aḥwāl al-ārīfīn*, (1965).

⁹⁵ Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, p. 196.

فهو محوٌ عما سوى الله.

Ibid., v. 1, p. 485.

ويقال قوله - عند شهود الكواكب والشمس والقمر - { هَذَا رَبِّي } إنه كان يلاحظ الآثار والأغيار بالله ، ثم كان يرى الأشياء لله ومن الله ، ثم طالع الأغيار محواً في الله .

Ibid., v. 1, p. 555.

فالخلق محوٌ فيما هو الوجود الأزلي فأبى سلطان لآثار التفرقة في حقائق الجمع؟

Ibid., v. 2, p. 76.

ونحن المتولي عنك وأنت مُستَهلكٌ في عين التوحيد؛ فأنت بنا ، ومحوٌ عن غيرنا ويقال يمحو العبد عن أوصافه ويثبت به بالحق فيكون محواً عن الخلق مثبتاً بالحق للحق .

Ibid., v.2, p. 236.

ويقال يمحو العارفين بكشف جلاله ، ويثبتهم في وقت آخر بلطف جماله.

Again and again the emphasis is on the state of union (*jam'*, *al-tawhīd*) between beings and God, where all others (*al-aghyār*) are effaced (*maḥw*). The state of being *maḥw* is that of being a *ma'dūm*, as has previously been mentioned, and this association is made by al-Qushayri himself where he associates effacement with non-existence, and subsistence (*ithbāt*), the opposite of *maḥw*, with origination.⁹⁶ In this, one finds a valid comparison between the pre-origination state of being *'adam* with *maḥw* and *fanā'*. These are states of being negatively characterised with the perception of self,⁹⁷ and other,⁹⁸ and positively with the witnessing of the one true light, of the one real existence.⁹⁹

If it is possible to suggest a link between the state of being prior to creation and the state of being of the Sufi in the state of *fanā'* (because of the stated desire for the return), then it would follow that there could be some mode of being prior to creation. In which case, the *ma'dūm* could be considered to have a particular mode of being. However, al-Qushayrī categorically denies such a possibility, and we have previously pointed to the fact that he is a believer in Ash'arī theology, which

Ibid., v. 2, p. 380.

أي رددناهم إلى حال صحوهم وأوصاف تمييزهم ، وأقمناهم بشواهد التفرقة بعد ما محوناهم عن شواهدهم بما أقمناهم بوصف الجمع.

Ibid., v. 2, p. 384.

هم مسلوبون عنهم ، مُحْتَطُّون منهم ، مُسْتَهْلَكُونَ فيما كوشفوا به من وجود الحق؛ فظاهرهم - في رأي الخلق - أنهم بأنفسهم ، وفي التحقيق : القائمُ عنهم غيرُهم . وهم محوٌ فيما كوشفوا به من الحقائق.

Ibid., v. 1, p. 601.

ومن فوق الجميع فأصحاب البقاء والفناء ، والصحو والمحو ووراءهم أرباب الحقائق مُنْبِتُونَ في أوطان التمكين ، فلا تَلَوْنُ لهم ولا تجنُّسُ لقيامهم بالحق ، وامتحانهم عن شواهدهم .

⁹⁶ Ibid., v. 2, p. 234.

المحوُ يرجع إلى العدم ، والإثباتُ إلى الإحداث.

⁹⁷ Ibid., v. 2, p. 235.

ويقال يحو العارفين عن شواهدهم ، ويثبتهم بشاهد الحق.

⁹⁸ Ibid., v. 2, p. 540.

حتى يقوموا بالله لله بمحو ما سوى الله.

⁹⁹ Ibid., v. 2, p. 235.

ويمحو عن قلوب المُوحِّدين شهودَ غير الحق ويثبت بذلك شهود الحق ، ويمحو آثار البشرية ويثبت أنوار شهود الأُحدية .

considers this to be a central point in which they depart from the Mu‘tazila’s belief in *shay’iyyat al-ma‘dūm*.

The wayfarers’ journey back to God is a journey back to a moment before creation, a moment when things were in God. Those who take this journey have already been greeted by God before their material creation. In verse Q.27:59 “Say (O Muhammad): Praise be to Allah, and peace be on His slaves whom He hath chosen! Is Allah best, or (all) that ye ascribe as partners (unto Him)?” Al-Qushayrī makes a link between those God had chosen before He created them and the corresponding existing selves. He comments that:

God in His past eternity has greeted them when they were under the concealment of non-existence (*kutum al-‘adam*) at-hand to His knowledge and contingent on His power and they were not entities (*a’yānan*) in the non-existence... and when He made them manifest in existence He greeted them with that greeting.¹⁰⁰

What is pointed out in this passage, is that God greeted the same things twice, once before they were created when they were in their eternal past state of non-existence (the state of being in *ayyām Allāh*) as will be discussed, and for a second time when they were really existing, that is alive. The issue at hand remains the old question of how could God speaks to non-conscious beings!

The element that is of value to us in this commentary is that al-Qushayrī clearly and definitively states that things before their creation are not entities (*a’yān*), and not

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., v. 3, p. 43.

هم الذين سلم عليهم في آزاله وهم في كتم العدم ، وفي متناول علمه ومتعلق قدرته ، ولم يكونوا أعياناً في العدم ولا أفادوا ، فلما أظهرهم في الوجود سلم عليهم بذلك السلام

things, as is clearly stated elsewhere.¹⁰¹ What they were, however, is still a state that is eternal past with God, that is, they were, at all the time that has been before creation (if such a notion is possible), at-hand to His knowledge, meaning the objects of His thought, and contingent on His power. This means being under the eternal power of God, awaiting the commanding *kun* to be moved to the state of existence.

V. *Al-Mīthāq*

V.i Al-Qushayrī

In his commentary on Q.5:7 “Remember Allah’s grace upon you and His covenant by which He bound you when ye said: We hear and we obey,”¹⁰² which is concerned with the God’s covenant (*al-mīthāq*), al Qushayrī informs us of an early state of being, that humans had, when they were under the concealment of non-existence (*kutum al-‘adam*). This is the state of being they had when they were without a material substance and without any affect, when they were neither seen nor known by others. It is the mode of being that was succeeded by God’s act of bestowing life (*iḥya*) and making manifest (*iẓhār*). What we have here is a mode, or state, of being that is not non-existence in itself, what we rather have is non-existence as a concealer of this mode of being, and this is represented by *kutum al-‘adam*. That is,

¹⁰¹ Ibid., v. 3, p. 71.

ولم نكن في العدم أعياناً ، ولا أشياء ، ولكننا كنا في متعلق القدرة ومتناول العلم والمشينة.

¹⁰² Ibid., v. 1, p. 406.

ويقال أمرهم بتذكر ما سبق لهم من القسَم وهم في كُثم العدم ، فلا للأغيار عنهم خير ، ولا لهم عين ولا أثر ، ولا وقع عليهم بصيرة ، وقد سماهم بالإيمان ، وحكم لهم بالغفران قبل حصول العصيان ، ثم لما أظهرهم وأحياهم عرفهم التوحيد قبل أن كلّفهم الحدود ، وعرض عليهم بعد ذلك الأمانة وحثهم الخيانة ، فقابلوا قوله بالتصديق ، ووعدوا من أنفسهم الوفاء بشرط التحقيق ، فأمدّهم بحسن التوفيق ، وثبتّهم على الطريق ، ثم شكرهم حيث أخبر عنهم بقوله جل ذكره : { إِذْ فَاتِمُّ سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا }

we have a mode of being characterised by hiddenness, lifelessness and is uniquely the subject of God's knowledge.

One of the most important features of this interpretation, which is similar to other types of writings dealing with the *mīthāq*, is that those addressed by God and those who are the subject of an oath must be 'conscious' beings related, in one form or another, to humankind. Following this new and additional feature, the state concealed by non-existence seems to be given more positive qualities, albeit shrouded in obscurity. The term *shay'* is not used in this passage but we are definitely dealing with things that are under a particular form of being which is emerging as having particularly negative, as well as positive properties that lead to a demarcation from what can be presently described as pure nothingness. The missing label of *shay'* could be seen as an attempt to avoid associations with the issues that the Mu'tazila had to face when dealing with the concept of thingness (*shay'iyya*).

Staying with the same commentary and the same theme of *mīthāq*, al-Qushayrī labels the period during which this covenant was taken by the name of 'days of Allah' (*ayyām Allāh*).¹⁰³ He uses this name in his commentary on Q.14:5

¹⁰³ Ibid., v. 2, p. 240.

أخرج قومك بدعوتك من ظلمات شكهم إلى نور اليقين ، ومن إشكال الجهل إلى رَوْحِ الْعِلْمِ . ودَكَرَهُمْ بِأَيَّامِ اللَّهِ؛ ما سلف لهم من وقت الميثاق ، وما رفع عنهم من البلاء في سابق أحوالهم .

ويقال دَكَرَهُمْ بِأَيَّامِ اللَّهِ وهي ما سبق لأرواحهم من الصفة وتعريف التوحيد قبل حلولها في الأشباح : سقياً لها ولطيبها ولحسنها وبهاتها ... أيام لم (.) ... ويقال دَكَرَهُمْ بِأَيَّامِ اللَّهِ وهي التي كان العبدُ فيها في كتم العدم ، والحق يتولى عباده قبل أن يكون للعباد فعلٌ؛ فلا جُهْدَ للسابقين ، ولا عناءَ ولا تَرْكَ للمقتصدين ، ولا وقع من الظالم لنفسه ظلم . إذ كان متعلق العلم متناول القدرة ، والحكم على الإرادة . . ولم يكن للعبد اختيار في تلك الأيام .

We verily sent Moses with Our revelations, saying: Bring thy people forth from darkness unto light. And remind them of the days of Allah. Lo! therein are revelations for each steadfast, thankful (heart)

Here, however, it is God who uses this label. Apart from associating these days with the *mīthāq* period he also offers another interpretation, however, this time it appears to have been offered by other Sufis (as he starts with *yuqāl*). *Ayyām Allāh* appears to be the period of time when humankind were in their pure state of souls before being ‘incarnate’, a period in which they were defined and confined by God’s unity (*ta’rīf al-tawḥīd*). He then follows this by another interpretation known to him from presumably his tradition, where he associates *ayyām Allāh* with *kutum al-‘adam*. We learn in this case that the human beings, in this state of being, had no actions and no choices and were thus entirely dependent on God.

If we apply the methodological approach suggested in the introduction to this chapter and to this text, the emerging relation is that *ayyām Allāh* refers to a period preceding creation during which the event of *mīthāq* took place. This is a period in which things, and in particular the human souls, existed in some form, whilst no mention is made in this particular passage of a preceding creation. In this mode of being, things lacked any form of independence and were entirely reliant upon God, and these human souls, we are informed, lacked the ability to produce acts. Not only do we have a link between *ayyām Allāh* and the *mīthāq* but we also have a direct link with *kutum al-‘adam* which is another confirmation of the relationship that we noted earlier.

If the concept of *tawhīd* is related in this discussion to the state of being where these things or souls, in their state of non-existence, are not to be found outside God but rather inside God (in a manner of speaking), then this term becomes a reference to the only existence at this stage, God's existence. In addition, this refers to the fact that there is only a state of non-existence in God, and not outside, for the souls would not have known this state of unity to which they are eager to return. If we take souls as representative, in this particular discourse, of things that are in a state of non-existence, then we are not only dealing with things that are subject to God's knowledge, but also with things which have some kind of consciousness. This suggests that we are dealing with things that only lack, as it appears so far, a visible body, or substance, and independent action (or independent life). What is starting to emerge here is that these things are not simply ideas in the mind of God, or simply the objects of his knowledge.

V.ii Al-Sulamī

The theme of the *mīthāq* has been shown to be one of the areas that forced the issue of existence prior to creation. The verse which forces the interpreters to struggle most with this idea is Q.7:172:

And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea, verily. We testify. (That was) lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! of this we were unaware.

The obvious question concerning this verse is when did this covenant between God and the children of Adam take place? And who were these children of Adam? Were they beings (conscious things)?

Al-Sulamī cites a number of opinions regarding this verse, but since we are mainly concerned with the stage prior to creation, we shall restrict our discussion to those that are mostly related to this stage and the nature of the things at this stage of being. One of the most relevant to our inquiry is the statement that:

God addressed them whilst they were not existent except through his finding/encountering/creating them, they came to find/encounter Him without finding/encountering themselves, God was truly existent in a mode unknown to others.¹⁰⁴

There is some difficulty in translating this passage, since one has to find a specific term that combines the existence of a thing along with encountering or finding this same thing. Al-Sulamī uses different terms that are derived from the root w-j-d to denote existence (*mawjūd*) and finding or encountering (*ijād*).¹⁰⁵ What is suggested in this passage is that the things that are involved in the covenant with God have no independent existence of their own outside of God. Their existence is solely dependent on the encounter with God. This text reflects the primary perception that God has of these things, but it also mentions the things encountering and

¹⁰⁴ Al-Sulamī, v. 1, p. 247. The same text is found in *kitāb al-Mīthāq* of al-Junayd (Al-Junayd, *Rasā'il al-Junayd*, 2005, pp. 149, 150):

وقال يوسف في هذه الآية: قد أخبر أنه خاطبهم ربهم وهم غير موجودين إلا بإيجاده لهم، إذ كانوا واجدين للحق من غير وجودهم لأنفسهم، كان الحق بالحق في ذلك موجود بالمعنى الذي لا يعلمه غيره ولا يجده سواه.

¹⁰⁵ On the idea of w-j-d as finding, see Frank (1999), p. 165 ; (1980), p. 191.

finding God. In this secondary encounter, however, the things do not encounter (find or perceive) themselves.

It has been mentioned before, in the case of the objects of God's Command to 'be', that the addressee must be some conscious things (capable of obeying or disobeying God's obligations, or *mukallaḥ*). If some commentators avoided this line of reasoning by suggesting that this is primarily a demonstration of the effortless nature of the act of creation, then it is very difficult to follow suit in this particular verse since this is a pact between two sides. If human beings are reminded of this *mīthāq*, then there is an assumption of some perception being present at the time. This is what the commentary is referring to in this particular case. However, this perception or awareness is not self-awareness; it is rather an awareness that only springs from, and is entirely dependent on, the encounter with (and awareness of) this complete other, God. There is a denial in this interpretation of the finding or the encountering of the other things, or the children of Adam. The reciprocity of the encounter between God and these beings appears here to be primarily dependent on God's finding and encountering, thus, rendering the things being of a secondary nature. This is not specifically stated in the text itself but this could be inferred from the statement that it is God who was 'truly' existent.

If one is to choose a different interpretation for: "غير موجودين إلا بإيجاده لهم", by rendering it "non-existent without His act of bringing them into being" then the above sentence would become a simple statement of the fact that God was their creator and that without Him they would not have existed. However, if (*ijādihī lahum*) is interpreted as bringing into being then the next sentence "إذ كانوا واجدين للحق", might have to be

given the same meaning –“and they brought God into being”- and this would be far from the intended meaning of this particular text. This is the reason for choosing the words finding and encountering as the equivalents of *ijād* in this particular passage, with the idea of existing incorporated in the meaning of finding.

Another possible confirmation for the use of the idea of encountering is found in another passage where al-Sulamī refers to the same idea again, but this time using *wujūdihī*: “*illā bi-wujūdihī lahum.*”¹⁰⁶ Here *wujūdihī* is derived from *wajada*, which clearly means finding and not bringing into existence (although the root of the word does link the idea of finding with existing).¹⁰⁷

In the first commentary quoted here, we are informed that God was truly existent in a mode of being unknown to others, however, in a very similar passage, another person (Ibn Banān, not Yūsuf from above) makes use of almost the same wording except he ends with a reference to the other existents. He states: “He found the existents in a mode of being unlike the mode they found themselves in,”¹⁰⁸ whilst in the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., v.1, p. 250:

خاطبهم وهم غير موجودين إلا بوجوده لهم.

¹⁰⁷ Regarding the idea of *wājīd* and the knowns in God, we find the following idea in *Maqālāt*, v. 2, p. 182.

فزع الجبائي أن القول في الباري: أنه موجود قد يكون بمعنى معلوم، وأن الباري لم يزل واجداً للأشياء بمعنى أنه لم يزل عالماً، وأن المعلومات لم تزل موجودات لله معلومات له بمعنى أنه لم يزل يعلمها، وقد يكون موجوداً بمعنى لم يزل معلوماً، وبمعنى لم يزل كائناً.

Ibn Fūrak also relates this idea to al-Ash‘arī himself, Ibn Fūrak (2005), p. 25.

وكان يقول: إن الموجود ما وجده واجد. إنه موجود بوجود الواجد له، ولوجوده له ما كان موجوداً له. ويجري ذلك على معنى المعلوم، وأن الباري تعالى موجوداً لنا على معنى أنه معلوم لنا بوجودنا له. وهو علمنا به. وإن معنى قوله عز وجل: “ووجد الله عنده” من ذلك والمعنى أنه علم الله عنده. وأما الموجود المطلق الذي لا يتعلق بوجود الواجد له فهو الثابت الكائن الذي ليس بمنتهى ولا معدوم.

And in Ibid., p. 43:

وأما وصفه بأنه موجود فذلك على وجهين: أحدهما: أن يرجع إلى وجود الواجد له وهو علمه به وذلك يجري مجرى “معلوم”، والثاني: أن يراد به الثبوت والكون الذي هو نقيض الانتفاء والفقد، ويوصف بجميع ذلك على الوجهين.

Similar ideas are also found in an Ibāḍī source (Al-‘Utābī, v. 2, p. 6):

وجائز أن يوصف بأنه يجد الأشياء لأن العلم وجدان في اللغة والعالم بأشياء في اللغة واجد له، فلما كان الله تعالى بالأشياء عالماً كان لها قادراً.

Note that this quote links *ijād* with the known and *al-qudra*.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Sulamī, v. 1, p. 249.

previous passage we had a denial of finding things other than God. At this stage, the creator is said to have been “a finder, an addresser, and a manifest witness in their state of annihilation,” which is a mode of being, which remains, like God’s mode of being, absent from our understanding and comprehension. There is only an affirmation of being in all of the above, yet there is a complete lack of any formulation of the nature of such being.

In the section that follows, we are informed that during this event of the covenant, there were no ‘real’ entities (which as living beings would have possessed organs and senses). What is to become real and existent in the real world was not really existent at the time of the covenant. At that time there was but one real existent who was simultaneously the addresser and the addressee. There were no other existents outside of this one existent, and those who were other than God were “existent/present (*mawjūdīn*) as possibles in God’s power (*fil qudra*) absent from witnessing the oneness of God”¹⁰⁹ or “absent from witnessing existence.”¹¹⁰ This is a type of being that is distinguished from the real existence of the One; it is existence as potential subjects of power or, presence as possibles, where reality and manifestation are not considered to be an associated qualities. What is interesting in these two passages is the change between the witnessing of the “oneness of God” and “existence”, a reaffirmation of the idea mentioned before, that God in his oneness is the only one truly existing. It is necessary to emphasise the affirmative

قال ابن بنان في هذه الآية : قد أخبرك أنه قد خاطبهم وهم غير موجودين إلا بوجوده لهم ، إذ كان واجد الخليقة بغير معنى وجودها لأنفسها بالمعنى الذي لا يعلمه غيره ولا يجده سواه ، فقد كان واجدا مخاطبا شاهدا عليهم بديا في حال فناتهم عن بقائهم الذي كانوا به ، كذلك هو الوجود الرباني والإدراك الإلهي الذي لا ينبغي إلا له.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

nature of the descriptions associated with this stage that preceded the creation of the human beings.

There is no mention here of *'adam*, but only of modes of being, or different degrees of existence associated with the one who truly exists. These possibles, which are under the dominance of God's power, have presence, yet in some sections they appear to (here is the negative part) lack the qualities of sense and perception and only God appears as the perceiver. In other cases, they seem to have a secondary quality of perception that results from God's perception and is directed toward Him.

Regarding the things that God addresses before creation, and in the particular case of those things commanded to be (*kun*), al-Sulamī offers an explanation as to who were the addressed. It comes as an answer to the question of why were God's desire and volition not sufficient for the being of things:

After the vanishing of the desire and will, the generated things (*akwān*) became manifest in the known which then became manifest through the pronouncement to be, through this, He brought forth the generated things (*akwān*) to existence.¹¹¹

Al-akwān are usually associated with that which comes to be, the created following the commanding word 'be', hence our choice for the expression 'generated things' as the English equivalent in this particular case.¹¹² Entities, as generated things, are said to become following God's desire and will. Desire and will seem to be the cause

¹¹¹ Ibid., v. 1, p. 366.

خفيت الإرادة والمشينة فأظهر الأكوان في العلوم وظهر لفظه كن فأخرج بها الأكوان إلى الوجود.

¹¹² In this, I follow Chittick's choice in, Chittick (1989), pp. 40, 41, 89, 100, 139.

for generating the known things (objects of knowledge), and the word ‘*kun*’ is then used to cause a second appearance of things but this time as existents in reality.¹¹³

Following the above, we find in the same page of this exegesis, and quoted from al-Wāsiṭī,¹¹⁴ a passage that poses great difficulty in capturing the actual meaning intended by the author. Some of the difficulty is due to the preservation of the text itself, and others due to the intended meaning itself, since it is easy to fall in the trap of interpretation from an understanding derived from later Sufi generations.¹¹⁵

The original text is:

إنما قولنا لشيء إذا أردناه : أنه على قدر المعارف اشارة إلى القدرة فأما الحقيقة فليس للحق
مكون كما أنه ليس له موجود إذ(ا) لم يكن له معدوم فإذا كانت الأشياء بذاته ظهرت وبه وجدت
لا بصفاته فلم يزل كما لا يزال إلا أنه لم يكن أظهر بعضهم لبعض ظهور الأشياء بذاته لا
بصفاته.¹¹⁶

The first part of this quotation refers to the same verse discussed above Q.16:40: “And Our word unto a thing, when We intend it, is only that We say unto it: Be! and it is.” It informs us that the commanding of the willed/desired to be existent intends to demonstrate God’s power, in the sense that what is to be, what is to gain existence, is the object of this power. As to the next part of this passage, one can find a number of meanings.

¹¹³ We shall also encounter the idea of desire as the source of generation, in our chapter on Jābir.

¹¹⁴ This is Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (Alive in 320/932), a companion of al-Junayd.

¹¹⁵ If compared with the same quote found in Al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-Bayān fī Ḥaqā’iq al-Qur’ān*, 2008, v. 2, p. 319, we find these variations in the text اشارة instead of اشارة for example, but more importantly إذ instead of إذ. The author of this commentary is Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Fasā’ī al-Daylamī al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad al-Baqlī (d. 606/ 1209), for further information see Ernst, C. "Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Fasā’ī al-Daylamī al-Baqlī al-Shīrāzī, Ṣadr al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad", in *EF*.

¹¹⁶ Al-Sulamī, v. 1, p. 366.

If we choose ٱ in the above text then what follows implies that ‘in reality’ God has no generated thing (*kawn*) and no existent since He has no non-existent that He brings to existence in the first place. This ‘in reality’ refers to God as absolute, God as He is in Himself as pure being and where the idea of non-existence is meaningless. The *things* that are manifest in His essence and have existence through Him as He is and as He was in all eternity, are not manifest to each other. Becoming manifest in such a way (self perception and of other existents) is a mode of being that is not descriptive of their being ‘in reality’, or in God as He is in Himself, this is rather a mode of being that follows the manifestation and appearance through one of God’s attributes. The attribute that is possibly intended here is the Word, for as it is stated by al-Baqlī before quoting the same passage “speech is one of the attributes of God.”¹¹⁷ Alternatively, it is all of God’s attributes that participate in the creation of beings (including speech). This act of creation we describe as the bringing forth from the mode of being ‘manifest-to-Other’, or from manifest to God only, to the ‘manifest-to-itself’, or manifest to itself and others that are the ‘created other’.

If, however, we choose to stay with the text as it is, in the current uncritically edited printed version, and use ٱ instead of ٱ then the text’s meaning will differ slightly yet the general meaning suggested above remains. The new reading in this case is that, in truth, it is not possible to have generated things (*kawn*) or existents that were not a non-existent at a prior stage. These non-existents as they are manifest to God in His essence do not challenge His being eternally unchanged, as these are not

¹¹⁷ Al-Baqlī, v. 2, p. 318.

the real manifest beings that follow from His command to be. These non-existents are, however, things that are clearly distinguished and manifest to God, and as non-existent things, they do not change the mode of His being from past eternity.

The ideas of ‘manifest-to-Other’ and ‘manifest-to-itself’ would remain the same in both interpretations. It is also an idea that one finds with later Sufis, notably with Ibn ‘Arabī in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makīyya* where he writes:

[Y]ou did not possess the existential thingness which in reality is the manifesting thingness, that is manifesting to itself despite being manifest whilst in the state of subsistential thingness when it was distinguished in its reality from others but that is only to God and not to itself. Its being manifest to itself occurred only after the association with God’s command *kun*, which made it manifest to itself, so that it came to know itself and witness its reality. Thus, it has transmuted from its subsistential thingness to its existential thingness, and if you wish you may say transmuted in itself, when it was not manifest to itself, to a state whereby it became manifest to itself.¹¹⁸

Here, Ibn ‘Arabī clearly distinguishes between the two states of manifestations. He clarifies that things are characterised by their manifestation after and before the commanding word ‘be’. This manifestation is associated with a distinction between two types of *shay’iyya* (thingness); one is *shay’iyyat al-wujūd* (existential thingness); and the other is *shay’iyyat al-thubūt* (subsistential thingness).

Shay’iyyat al-wujūd, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, is that which in reality has *Shay’iyyat al-ẓuhūr*, or what has in reality the quality of being a manifest thing to itself. This is the ‘manifest-to-itself’ referred to earlier, where the thing gains awareness of itself,

¹¹⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makīyya*, v. 3, p. 254.

or come to perceive itself as existent, and it is also able to witness the existence of things other than itself and God.

Shay'yyat al-thubūt, on the other hand, is also qualified by the quality of being a distinct (*tamayyuz*) manifestation, however, in this case the thing is manifest to God only. The thing's being as a 'distinguished' manifestation is not sufficient, in the stage before '*kun*', for it to have self-perception, or for it to perceive anything other than God, the only Other that is perceivable, hence the choice made earlier to label this mode of being 'manifest-to-Other'.

The transmutation mentioned in the above quote suggests that a thing's thingness, what qualifies it as the thing it is in-itself, remains the same. The distinctness of the thing is confirmed to exist prior to the real manifestation in the world as a distinct entity. In this case, God's act of creation with the commanding *kun* appears to be rendered into the act of changing the state of manifestation, of expanding the degree and circle of perception. This refers not to God's perception, for this remains the same, what changes is the perception of the thing. The thing becomes after the act of creation a self-perceiving thing, which moves away from its non-self-perceived state of being in God to the state of being manifest to self and other things (or perceptible).

The Sufi path

The difference between the two types of existence is a distinction between two modes of being whilst on the Sufi path. They are commonly found under the rubrics

of *baqā'* (perdurance in God) and *fanā'* (annihilation), which are the goals and aims of Sufis on their journeying to the state of unification with God.¹¹⁹ This aspiration for the return to the state of being in God is articulated in terms of the annihilation of all that is outside of God. In other terms, of all that is perceived by the self in its state of being 'manifest-to-itself'. Since this state is seen to act as a veil from the perception of the Real, and in this way of being, one is trapped in a world of causes and effects. In al-Sulamī's commentary, Ja'far al Ṣādiq is quoted as saying:

[I]ndeed God has determined for every thing a cause and has made the causes the meaning of existence and he who witnesses the cause is obscured from the originator of the cause.¹²⁰

The return to God becomes the reversing of the process of creation, the cessation of the perception of the personal self and the other selves of this world that are linked through the chains of causation. This leads to the intensification of the presence of God so that the only presence, the only perceived is the Other, God. The journeying of the Sufis is thus from the 'manifest-to-itself' to the 'manifest-to-Other' or from *shay'yyat al-wujūd* to *shay'yyat al-thubūt*. The journey is the return to the state before and during the covenant described by al-Junayd (d. 298/910) as the time when:

God tells you that He spoke to them at a time when they did not exist, except so far as they existed in Him. This existence is not the same type of existence as is usually attributed to God's created beings; it is a mode of existence which only God knows and only He is aware of. God knows their existence; embracing them He sees them in the beginning

¹¹⁹ See our earlier discussion of this idea with al-Qushayrī.

¹²⁰ Al-Sulamī, v. 1, p. 416.

when they are non-existent and unaware of their future existence in this world. The existence of these is timeless.¹²¹

With this early version of the return to origins, we find another fundamental Sufi concept, that of union and unity. The version of unity expressed by some of the early Sufis emphasised the return to non-existence as has been discussed thus far, hence avoiding threatening the unity of God as He is in Himself. The case advocated in al-Junayd's time and school was the one committed to the return to the state of solely witnessing the one, the state where the only perceivable is God who is the only 'truly existing'. This is also the mode of being where the things are only manifest to the One Other. We also find in this idea an explanation of the Sufi concepts of *fanā'*, *ghayba* and *shuhūd*, which become another means of expressing the same idea of being a distinguished entity 'manifest-to-Other' and not to itself or to any other thing. This is the state of only one Other being, witnessed by all things that are in a state of being not 'manifest to-itself'.¹²²

¹²¹ Abdel-Kader (1976), p. 76.

¹²² Al-Kalābādī, *al-Ta'arruf li Madhhab Ahl al-Taṣawwuf*, (2001), p. 136-139:

- فمعنى الغيبة أن يغيب عن حظوظ نفسه فلا يراها، وهي -اعنى الحظوظ- قائمة معه موجودة فيه، غير أنه غائب عنها بشهود ما للحق والشهود: ان يرى حظوظ نفسه بالله لا بنفسه.
- وغيبة أخرى وراء هذه، وهي أن يغيب عن الفناء والفاني بشهود البقاء والباقي لا غير، كما أخبر حارثة عن نفسه، ويكون الشهود شهود عيان، ويكون غيبته عما غاب غيبة شهود الضر والنفع، لا غيبة استتار واحتجاب.
- وعبر عن الشهود بعض مشائخنا فقال: الشهود أن تشهد ما تشهد مستصغرا له معدوم الصفة لما غلب عليك من شاهد الحق
- معنى قوله: "الجمع أفقدهم من حيث هم": أى علمهم بوجودهم للحق في علمه بهم أفقدهم من الحين الذي صاروا موجودين له، فجعل الجمع حالة العدم، حيث لم يكن إلا علم الحق بهم. والفرق: حالة ما أخرجهم من العدم إلى الوجود.

We also find in Al-Kharkūshī (d. 407/ 1015), *Tahdhīb al-Asrār fī Uṣūl al-Taṣawwuf*, (2006), p. 353:

- الفناء فناء العبد عن كل شيء بالتوحيد، والبقاء بقاء علم التوحيد.
- الفناء فناء العبد عن رؤية العبودية، والبقاء بقاء العبد شاهدا الإلهية.
- الفناء فناء الخلق، والبقاء بقاء الله تعالى.
- وقال الشبلي: أفن كلك لمن أحببته حتى لا يبقى لك منك شيء.
- الفناء ان تبدو العظمة على العبد فتتسيه الدنيا والاخرة، والاحوال، والدرجات، والمقامات، والاذكار، وتغيبه عن عقله ونفسه، وعن فنائه عن الاشياء، وعن فنائه عن الفناء، فيكون الله تعالى يقويه للاشياء كما انطقهم حين أخرجهم من ظهر آدم عليه السلام واخذ عليهم الميثاق.

VI. *Al-Thubūt*

The idea of differentiated and distinguished entities was mentioned in relation to Ibn ‘Arabī’s concept of *shayyyat al-thubūt*, where we discussed the idea of distinct identifiable manifestations to God. Here, as there, the main theological idea is that of *thubūt* or subsistence which we shall discuss in more detail in this section. The main debate revolved around whether or not existence (*wujūd*) and subsistence (*thubūt*) differed in what they designate. Some saw the two as being exactly the same, others found *thubūt* to be a more general mode of being that encompasses all the really existing things as well as the things we’ve been discussing, what the real things were before origination.¹²³

Taking the word *thubūt* and looking for the linguistic ideas that are associated with it, and without referring to any particular theological discussion at this stage, we find these meanings: fixedness, stability, permanence and immutability as well as the idea of trueness or truth. Looking at these terms as they are listed here draws one’s attention to the associations that these words have as descriptive terms of the one Truly existent, God. The word itself in what it means in the Arabic language has all the connections and associations with existence itself, but not any secondary existence, of the world of the manifest reality, which is outside of the really existing. *Thubūt* has central meanings linked with the idea of *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq* the true source of all the secondary modes of being. Thus, this term reflects etymologically some of the qualities associated with the mode of being of the Truly existing which precedes the mode of existing in the world of motion and decay.

¹²³Al- ‘Ubaydilī, *Ishrāq al-lāhūt fī naqdī sharḥ al-yāqūt*, (2002), p. 157.

In terms of the meanings of *thubūt*, related to something being immutable and fixed, and in relation to our previous expositions on the concept of *ma'lūmāt*, one notices that these *ma'lūmāt* can literally be stated to be *thābita*. We noted earlier that al-Ṭūsī and al-Qushayrī considered that *al-ma'lūm* does not undergo any change *lā yataghayyar* but can be regenerated. *Lā yataghayyar*, as that which is unchanging, literally means that something is immutable and fixed, or *thābit*. God's knows may therefore be considered, literally and linguistically: *thābita wa lā tataghayyar*.

The other link that one finds between the meaning of this word and the *ma'lūmāt* is the idea of permanence. These *ma'lūmāt*, having been considered eternal past in God's knowledge, remain the same and unchanged once created and brought to existence, and remain so once they cease to exist. The known remains permanently the same, what changes is only the relevant time associations, in the sense of something will be, is or has been, as something that can be at this moment or the next, or even as something that cannot be at any time.

Finally, the linguistic association leads to the last words in the above list, that is, trueness. *Al-ma'lūmāt* cannot be said to be truly existent in the sense that they exist in reality. However, what can be said of them is that they are not separate from the Real, the truly existing. These *ma'lūmat*, in the more specific sense of the *khazā'in* and *maqḍūrat*, reflect a truer mode of being, where, as noted earlier, this is represented in the journeying to a truer existence in God as the *telos* of the Sufi return to God.

One must note at this stage that the linguistic associations presented above are not necessarily the same descriptions of the things existing in reality. When one uses the expression *thabuta annā* it could very well mean something definitely having taken place in the real world, as well as intellectually proven that this or that thing is true (permanently fixed to be true at all times). *Thubūt* thus connote things that are definitely true existents either externally or mentally.¹²⁴

In order to understand how the word *thubūt* was understood and used in relation to meanings related to existence, it is useful to trace some of the occurrences of this word in cases referring to some kind of being or existence. Interestingly, *thubūt*, as some mode of being, appears to occur in the consulted *tafāsīr* in a specific way when it is related to God.

In the case of al-Qushayrī for example, when referring to some of the qualifications associated with God, he uses: “to Him belongs eternal past existence (*wujūd*)...and to Him belongs the subsistent oneness (*al-thubūt al-aḥadī*).”¹²⁵ If the word *thubūt* is being

¹²⁴ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 2, p. 298:

والثبوت تمكين الشيء في مكانه بلزومه إياه . وقد يقال ثبت بثبوت ثبوتنا ، وأثبتته إثباتنا وثبتت تثبتنا ، واستثبت استثباتنا ، وثبتته تثبتنا . ورجل ثبت المقام : إذا كان شجاعا لا يبرح موقفه ، وطعنه فأثبت فيه الرمح أي نفذ فيه ، لأنه يلزم فيه . وأثبت حجته إذا أقامها . والقول الثابت الصحيح يلزم العمل عليه ، ومنه قوله : " يثبت الله الذين آمنوا بالقول الثابت " أي يؤدبهم به ليلزموا طريق الحق فيه . وفلان ثبت أي ؟ مأمون فيما روى . وأثبت الحسنات في الدفتر ، لأنك ضبطه ، أصل الباب اللزوم .

We also read (ibid., p. 132):

والثبوت حصول الشيء في المكان على استمرار ، يقال لمن استمر على صفة : قد ثبت كثبوت الطين.

Al-Ṭūsī, v. 7, p. 503:

قوله تعالى " تبارك " قيل في معناه قولان :

أحدهما - تقدس الله ، وجل بما هو ثابت لم يزل ولا يزال ، لأن أصل الصفة الثبوت .

Al-Ṭūsī, v. 10, p. 58:

(تبارك الذي بيده الملك) فمعنى تبارك بأنه الثابت الذي لم يزل ولا يزال . وأصل الصفة من الثبوت من البرك وهو ثبوت الطائر على الماء . ومنه البركة ثبوت الخير بنمائه . وقيل : معناه تعاضم بالحق من لم يزل ولا يزال ، وهو راجع إلى معنى الثابت الدائم . وقيل : المعنى تبارك من ثبوت الأشياء به إذ لولاها لبطل كل شيء لأنه لا يصح شيء سواه إلا مقدوره أو مقدور مقدوره ، الذي هو القدرة ، لأن الله تعالى هو الخالق لها .

¹²⁵ Al-Qushayrī, v. 1, p. 45.

used to describe a specific and special quality that belongs to God, then this sentence could be understood to mean that *thubūt* can only be used to describe His unique mode of being one. Existence, in this passage, and in its specific ascription to God, seems to be distinguished from another type. This particular existence is of an eternal past being, which simply renders the existence of the other, or the originated in time (*muḥdatha*), limited.

In another section, he uses the term *wujūd* in a very similar way yet uses something else for *thubūt*, whilst still associating these two words with God. He states that:

[T]hey say He is “the first” since there is no commencement to his existence (*wujūd*) and “the last” since there is no cessation (*inqiṭā*) to His subsistence (*thubūt*).¹²⁶

In another part of the same commentary, al-Qushayrī exchanges the time association of these two words. Whilst in the previous quotation he used *wujūd* with past eternity and perdurance with *thubūt*, in this section he uses (*qidam*) past eternity with *thubūt* and perdurance (*baqā*) with *wujūd*.¹²⁷ If this exchange of words is to imply anything, then this could be that the relationship these two terms have with the signified is interchangeable, that is, in eternity God can be said to be *mawjūd* (existent) or *thābit* (subsistent) in the past *qidam* or in the future *ʿazal*.¹²⁸

Another occurrence of a similar association is in reference to Q.6:83 where he suggests that this verse refers to:

¹²⁶ Ibid., v. 3, p. 531.

¹²⁷ Ibid., v. 2, p. 626.

¹²⁸ See also Al-Ṭūsī, v. 10, p. 57.

[T]he progress from the witnessing of His signs to affirming His essence (*ithbāt dhātihī*)...and through His attributes one knows His subsistence (*thubūtihī*).¹²⁹

Here, *thubūt* is associated in the first part with some form of affirming the existence of God's essence and in the last part with God's subsistence (*thubūt*) in general. It is, according to this sentence, in God's attributes that one finds the proof and indication of His subsistence. As these attributes are uniquely associated with Him, His subsistence becomes, in accordance with the earlier quote, unique.

In relation to God, the word *thubūt* is primarily used to establish God's eternal existence as well as His unique mode of being, His oneness. This may be found in al-Qushayrī's *tafsīr* as well as in some of the others. For instance, al-Ṭabarī states regarding the verse "There is no God save Him," that this is *ithbāt* (affirmation) of God the exalted,¹³⁰ that He is one.¹³¹ The idea of *thubūt* and God's oneness is also found in al-Māwardī's *Nukat* "God, lord of the worlds, *ithbātan* (affirming) His oneness and *nafyan* (negation) the lordship of any other."¹³²

When the word th-b-t is used in cases other than God's, we still find the same connotations associated with it. In *al-Tibyān* al-Ṭūsī states that:

[N]egation (*nafy*) is an announcement of the non-existence of a thing (*'adam al shay'*) just as affirmation (*ithbāt*) is an announcement of its existence (*wujūdihī*).¹³³

¹²⁹ Ibid., v. 1, p. 486.

¹³⁰ Ibid., v. 2, p. 54.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 307.

¹³² Al-Māwardī, v. 4, p. 251.

¹³³ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 2, p. 54.

Nafy, as negation, is always used as the counterpart of *thubūt*, which does suggest that one ought to use affirmation as the regular translation for this word. This, however, does not fully reflect the significant use made of this word, which reflects the concepts of existence and subsistence. In many of the cases that are not listed here, as they are of no use to us, *thabata* simply means the affirmation of an idea; hence, the translation as subsistence would be erroneous in those cases. In the above quotation, however, as well as the previous ones, which were associated with God, both, affirmation and subsistence, could equally be applied as affirmations of a mode of being.

Al-Ṭūsī's explanation of the meaning of *nafy* and *ithbāt* relates the definition to the idea of announcement (*ikhbār*). This implies that these terms are used as indicative and informative words of either non-existence or existence. *Nafy* would thus involve a negative statement negating existence, whilst *ithbāt* would be the counterpart statement affirming existence. These two are in this case not the words or the signs related to existence or non-existence, they are rather the words or signs related to the information regarding existence or non-existence. In another part of the same commentary,¹³⁴ we find the same explanation regarding announcement or informing of existence or non-existence, however, this section is preceded with an explanation of the term *maḥw*, which we have previously discussed. Here, we are told that *maḥw* is the act of effacing and not simply the act of informing about the effacement. What we understand from this distinction is that there is a difference between the informing of existence, *athbata*, and the act of

¹³⁴ Ibid., v. 6, p. 263.

making something existent, *awjada*, and subsequently between *nafā* and *maḥā/a'dama*.

In relation to the real world, the created world, al-Qushayrī does not use the word *ikhbār* to describe the words *nafy* and *ithbāt*. He still, however, links these two words to existence and more specifically to the originated world. In his discussion of the idea of God's desire, which he does not consider to be part of what has originated in time, he states:

[T]he attributes of God's essence -glory to Him- of utterance (*kalām*), knowledge (*ilm*), speech (*qawl*) and judgement (*ḥukm*) do not come under *maḥw* and *ithbāt* for *maḥw* and *ithbāt* are said of His attributes of action. *Al-maḥw* is ascribed (*yarjī'u*) to non-existence and *al-ithbāt* to origination (*iḥdāth*).¹³⁵

In this quotation, *maḥw* is chosen as the counterpart of *ithbāt* and non-existence remains with the same meaning. In the term *ithbāt* we have something that is different from *wujūd* despite being associated with a shared meaning. It is interesting that al-Qushayrī himself only associates *thubūt* with God, in the same sense that *wujūd* is said to be really only applicable, in the truest sense, to God. We also noted that *thubūt* was specific to God in the sense that eternal existence can only be said of God, and can be applied to none of His creatures. Here, however, we have a very different usage, as the association of *th-b-t* is not simply with existence in general, but with the specifically originated, that which has gained existence in time, and which will cease to exist at some point.

¹³⁵ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 234.

فصفات ذات الحق - سبحانه - من كلامه وعلمه ، وقوله وحكمه لا تدخل تحت المحو والإثبات ، وإنما يكون المحو والإثبات من صفات فعله المحو يرجع إلى العدم ، والإثبات إلى الإحداث

The difference in these two meanings, which use the same root of the word and which mean some mode of being, is in the way they are used. *Thubūt*, in the cases one comes across in the al-Qushayrī's tafsīr, is only used as a qualification of God, it is not applied to any of His created beings. *Ithbāt* on the other hand, which in al-Qushayrī's case is not part of an announcement, or an informative word, is rather a word associated with action, as has been demonstrated in the above quotation. *Ithbāt*, in this case, is said, not of God's attributes of the essence but of His attributes of action. He clearly states elsewhere that: "to no one belongs *al-nafy* and *al-ithbāt* through bringing to being (*ijād*) and origination (*iḥdāth*)..." save to God the creator and the originator.¹³⁶ In al-Qushayrī's case, one might think of *thubūt* as a qualification of His essence and of *ithbāt* as His act of creation and origination, the first relates to His essence and the latter to His action.

Some of the uses of the couple *maḥw/ithbāt* are listed in al-Qushayrī's tafsīr as a commentary on Q.13:39 "Allah effaceth what He will, and establisheth (what He will), and with Him is the source of ordinance." Apart from what has been mentioned, what is important in this list are the following statements:

[T]hey say He effaces (*yamḥū*) the gnostics (*ʿārifīn*) from what they witness and He establishes their being (*yuthbituhum*) through witnessing the Truth.¹³⁷

Similarly:

¹³⁶ Ibid., v. 3, p. 76.

¹³⁷ Ibid., v. 2, p. 235.

ويقال يمحو العارفين عن شواهدهم ، ويثبتهم بشاهد الحق.

[T]hey say He effaces the servant (of God) from his attributes and He establishes his being (*yuthbituhu*) in God so that he is effaced from the other creatures and is established through the Truth for the Truth.¹³⁸

These sentences reflect the state of being that the Sufis undergo as they cease witnessing the multitude of created beings, which are established as existents in God. This later state of existence, which is referred to as *ithbāt* in God, is considered to be truer as it is closer to the Truth.

Ithbāt, in al-Tha'labī's commentary *al-Kashf wal-bayān* is also associated with existence, but more importantly to what the thing is in itself. In this commentary he states that:

[R]efrain from saying about your God-most exalted- that which the unbelievers say about Him and from attributing to Him what the deniers (*mubtīlūn*) attribute to Him. They have made the name relational (*ṣilatun*), and find that it is possible for the name to be its meaning. Refrain from attributing to your God what is unworthy of Him because the name, the essence and the self are expressions (*ibāra*) referring to existence (*wujūd*) and *ithbāt*.¹³⁹

What is significant is that this passage refers to attributes and qualities of God, yet the theme of associating the name with the named is applicable to God as well as to the created beings, which is precisely what concerns us. Those who are accused in the above quotation assume that the name given to something is the same as the thing itself, as that which is meant and intended by the name, or the same as the

¹³⁸ Ibid.

ويقال يمحو العبد عن أوصافه ويثبتته بالحق فيكون محوا عن الخلق مثبتا بالحق للحق.

¹³⁹ Al-Tha'labī, v. 10, p. 183.

نزّه ربك الأعلى عما يقول فيه الملحدون ويصفه به المبطلون ، وجعلوا الاسم صلة ، ويجوز أن يكون معناه ، نزّه ذات ربك عما لا يليق به ، لأن الاسم والذات والنفس عبارة عن الوجود والإثبات.

Similar to this, we find in Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā*, (2005), v. 6, p. 112, a quotation from Ibn Fūrak, al-Tha'labī's teacher, which resonates with this:

ان اهل الحق يقولون: اسم الشيء هو ذاته وعينه، والتسمية عبارة عنه ودلالة عليه فيسما اسما توسعا.

essence of the named. They consider that the name, the essence and the self, affirm the existence of the thing but also that they are the existent thing itself. However, naming something according to al-Tha‘labī is the act of using expressions (*‘ibāra*) to inform of a state of existence. The informing in this case is an informing (*ikhbār*) of the existence or of the *thubūt* of the self (or the essence) of what is named, as we noted in the case of al-Ṭūsī. The name, the essence and the self are words or signs that point to the subsistence or the existence of that which is denoted by the name and they are not the thing in itself. The word as a sign, according to this, is not the signified or part of it, what is designated by the word is the particular subsistence/existence of what is marked by the word (name, essence and self).

This quotation linked five terms together in two groupings. The first of these groups were the three words: self (*naḥs*), essence (*dhāt*) and name (*ism*), whilst the second grouping was composed of existence (*wujūd*) and subsistence (*thubūt*). The first of these groups was presented as the verbal expressions of that which is in the second group. The first three words can be taken to mean one and the same thing, basically the content of the second group, which must then be considered to be the same, mainly existence. The naming of a thing ‘A’ is using a word to express ‘the essence’ of A or ‘the self’ of A which capture the meaning intended by them, mainly that A is existent/subsistent. This in turn would lead to the interpretation that naming something is informing about the essence and the self of what is named which is simply existence/subsistence.

Al-Lawḥ

One part of God's knowledge, the part that is concerned with knowing something to be a future existent, as an entity or as an event, is also linked with the idea of *ithbāt* in the sense of establishing something as true and as eternal (future sense). This *ithbāt* is the particular act that God ordained when the preserved tablet *al-lawḥ al-maḥfūz* was written. According to al-Qushayrī:

He has the mother of the book, it is said that it is the preserved tablet in which He has established/fixed (*athbata*) what He has known and His judgement of which there is neither alteration nor modification.¹⁴⁰

In the writing of this tablet, God has established in advance the existent things and events that will become, and also God's judgement on the acts of the creatures to come. The *ithbāt* in this case is assigned to a specific *ma'lūm*, that which is *maqdūr*, and more specifically to that which will definitely become, as it is established (*uthbita*). *Ithbāt*, in the sense relevant to the *lawḥ*, reminds one of al-Ṭūsī's use of *ikhbār*, except that this information is of the existence of an established future thing/event. The writing in this case is the fixing and the establishing of what is to be a real existent, entity or event (since the idea of judgement involves the idea of human acts). One could also interpret this in following sense: what is *muthbat* in the preserved tablet, what is affirmed and fixed in writing, is what would be *muthbat* in reality, and what would become subsistent, it is God's foreknowledge of what would be.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Qushayrī, v. 2, p. 236.

With regards to Q.13:39 “Allah effaceth what He will, and establisheth (what He will), and with Him is the source of ordinance,” al-Māwardī recommends some interpretations, and in one of them he introduces the idea of another book along with the mother of the book (*umm al-kitāb*). He states that the effacing and establishing could mean that:

God effaces what He desires and establishes what He desires in a book that is other than *umm al-kitāb*, for they are two, one is *umm al-kitāb* which He does not modify and does not efface from it anything that He willed.¹⁴¹

This conception assumes the existence of two ‘books’ (*kutub*), one where what is written and established cannot be altered under any condition, whilst the other allows for the possibility of effacement. If one is to link the idea of the two books with the idea of *maqdūrāt* and what is fixed to be existent, it would be possible to think of the second book mentioned above as the book of *maqdūrāt* in general, that which has the possibility of existing. When God effaces one of these possibilities this means they cease to be a possible. As to the *muthbatāt* in *umm al-kitāb*, they are what would definitely, and in accordance with God’s knowledge, come to be real. In the case of effacement, God *yurajihu* gives preference to non-existence in the case of the effaced *maqdūr*, and in the case of *ithbāt* He gives preference to bringing into existence of the particular *maqdūr*. No *tarjih* could be so suggested to exist in the case of the preserved tablet, since one could look at it from the perspective that *tarjih* towards existence preceded the writing of the tablet, and that the writing is the record of this *tarjih*.

¹⁴¹ Al-Māwardī, v. 2, p. 318.

If we take this one step further, by linking this idea with the idea of the preserved tablet containing the words or the names of the *maqḍūrāt* (which in turn are knowns), then the names of the *maqḍūrāt* would be in this case the selves and the essences of what would at some future time become real existents. Since these names, essences and selves point to one thing (subsistence/existence), then *al-maqḍūrāt* in themselves (essences) are all the same. They could be considered in this case particularisations of the same, that is of subsistence/existence. Returning to the original quotation from al-Thaʿlabī reveals that the meaning of the name, that which the name designates, is not the thing in itself, the thing that is the essence, the self of this or that particular named, it is rather existence/subsistence itself. Each name, each self or essence, is a particular sign to subsistence/existence. In some sense, this is a reaffirmation of the Sufi belief that in reality there is only one subsistence, only one existence. Hence, what is written on the preserved tablet could be considered the individual names, or the different signs, that ultimately have but one thing that is pointed to, one aim, the one true Being *al-mawjūd* and *al-muthbat*.

Again, and as in previous occasions, this is not clearly stated in the texts under consideration but is an underlying potential understanding which became part of a particular Sufi interpretation of existence. This Sufi interpretation can find its roots in this presented understanding but can also be found in the contemporaneous texts. In al-Sulamī's commentary regarding Q.41:53: "We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth", he quotes Abū ʿUthmān regarding the witness (*al-shāhid*) as saying: "I do not

deny the belief in the witnessing for he who witnesses all things to be one thing.”¹⁴² *Al-shāhid* is the Sufi who experiences a witnessing, a seeing by which all the singularities and particularities vanish as illusions. It leaves the experiencer, the witness with only one thing to be seen and witnessed, the only true being. ‘All things are in reality one thing’ is a statement that corresponds to our interpretation of al-Tha‘labī’s link between the name/the essence and the true meaning that is intended by these words which is *wujūd/thubūt*. If the Reality of God, the Truth of God and His essence is pure existence, then it is possible to understand the idea that all things are in reality one thing, since all the realities, the selves and essences of all that is existent is existence/subsistence which is only one. Following the above passage, al-Sulamī also quotes al-Wāsiṭī as saying:

He became manifest in everything through what He made manifest (of the thing or of Himself).¹⁴³ His act of making things manifest is His becoming manifest in them. If he (the witness) seeks them he will not find anything save God.¹⁴⁴

This quote returns to the idea of manifestation but this time to emphasise that, despite the thing’s thingness, there is nothing but God. All things are but manifestations of the really existent, the visible and the tangible side of what existence is in itself.

Before starting the section on *thubūt* we quoted a statement by al-Ṭūsī regarding God’s knowns. The quote which was “His knowns are differentiated (*mutamayyiza*) to

¹⁴² Al-Sulamī, v. 2, p. 221. We Assume this is Abū ‘Uthmān Sa‘īd al Nīsābūrī (d. 298/910).

¹⁴³ Both are possible interpretations of the text, but we prefer the first as it corresponds with the rest of our interpretations.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Him,”¹⁴⁵ held the link with *shay’iyyat al-thubūt* of Ibn ‘Arabī which emphasised this idea of differentiation and distinctness (*tamayyuz*). The idea of *tamayyuz* seems to have been the underlying principle that has governed the larger part of this section. With regard to *thubūt* as only applicable to God in His unique way of being, one finds a lack for any need to this governing principle of differentiation. However, as soon one uses *ithbāt* in the sense of God’s act, writing in the tablet or the affirmative *ikhbār*, the need for such a principle becomes necessary. The *ithbāt* as God’s act of affirming the existence, of making something existent is the act of particularising an existent/existence, of differentiating a particular existent/existence from an other, or simply the affirming of a *wujūd mutamayyiz*. The *ithbāt* on the preserved tablet is another act of *tamyīz*, another act of differentiation since everything that is written as a *maqḍūr muthbat* is differentiated from the next one, using the fact that His knows are *mutamayyiza*, as has been stated.

Consequently, if one returns to the distinction between *thubūt* and *ithbāt* then it becomes possible, with the idea of *tamayyuz*, to define or understand one through the other in a different way. In simple terms *ithbāt* is *tamayyuz al-thubūt*, it is the act of differentiating/particularising the Truly existent himself. Also, what follows from this is that God’s act of origination of the existent is the making manifest of *al-muthbat al- mutamayyiz*. It must be noted at this stage that in the theological domain, the idea of *tamayyuz* was central to the argument of the thingness of the non-existent. It was argued that the ““the non-existent is *mytamayyiz*, and every *mutamayyiz* is *thābit*” therefore the non-existent is *thābit*.”¹⁴⁶ The problem for the

¹⁴⁵ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 10, p. 42.

¹⁴⁶ Al-‘Ubaydilī, p. 157.

deniers of the thingness of the non-existent is that for them *ithbāt* and *jād* are one and the same thing, hence the above statement would become ‘the non-existent is existent’, which is a clear contradiction. The only way out of this contradiction is in considering *wujūd* to be a more specific case of *thubūt* as we have attempted to show and as is present in the quoted argument, which relates *tamayyuz* to *ithbāt* and not to *wujūd*.

The distinction between *thubūt* and existence can also be found in some of our commentaries. Al-Ṭūsī, for example, in his distinction between the being of things and their actuality states that:

the actually existing (*al-wāqī'*) cannot be except as an originated thing... for it is the clearest thing in origination, as for being (*kā'in*), it is more general because it is on the level of the affirmed existent (*al-mawjūd al-thābit*) which is originated and not originated.¹⁴⁷

According to this quote, *al-kā'in* is the same as the *mawjūd al-thābit*, which in turn is more general than the originated, since both, what is originated and what is not originated, are included in this category.

The idea of expanding the meaning of *thubūt* and making this concept more general than existence is not the only solution. An alternative to this would be the previously discussed idea of thinking of *wujūd* in terms of levels, depending on the closeness to the originator of existence. This would also incorporate the two modes of existence, the intelligible existence and the tangible existence.

¹⁴⁷ Al-Ṭūsī, v. 1, pp. 224, 225.

الفرق بين الواقع والكائن أن الواقع لا يكون إلا حادثاً تشبيهاً بالحائظ الواقع ، لأنه من أبين الاشياء في الحدوث ، والكائن أعم منه لأنه بمنزلة الموجود الثابت يكون حادثاً وغير حادث.

A large part of this chapter revolved around demonstrating the idea that the commentators did consider that the things, before their creation were, some kind of thing, despite denying the thingness of the non-existent. Whilst emphasising the negation of the thingness of the non-existent, al-Samarqandī declares in his commentary that all things before their originations were existents in God's knowledge.¹⁴⁸ This is not an affirmation that the non-existent as *ma'lūm* or *maqḍūr* is *thābit* or that it is a thing, rather it proposes the idea that the thing prior to being originated is existent. Origination is therefore another stage of the existence of the thing, what we had referred to as the manifest existence as opposed to the hidden, or in this case the intelligible existence. The affirmation of the existence of things in God's knowledge as intelligible existents is also an affirmation of the eternal existence of things, since God's knowledge is eternally existent with Him. This is generally denied in Islamic theology as God is the only eternal existent.

This affirmation of the existence of things before their creation or origination also comes as an attempt to understand God's command to 'be', in Q.2:117. It has been mentioned that the problem with this command was regarding what was commanded, and whether it was existent or non-existent. Al-Samarqandī denies that it was non-existent as it is simply impossible to command what does not exist. The only alternative is that the things commanded must have been existent. The problem that arises in this case is how could that which is already a being (*kā'in*) be commanded to be! One of the solutions he offers, is that the things were existent

¹⁴⁸ Al-Samarqandī, v. 1, p. 153.

فإن قيل قوله " كن " هذا خطاب للموجود أو للمعدوم فإن قال الخطاب للمعدوم قيل له كيف يصح الخطاب لشيء معدوم وكيف يصح الإشارة إليه بقوله " كن " فإن قال الخطاب للموجود قيل له كيف يأمر الشيء الكائن بالكون فالجواب عن هذا من وجهين أحدهما أن الأشياء كلها كانت موجودة في علم الله تعالى قبل كونها فكان الخطاب للموجود في علمه.

(*mawjūda*) so that they can be addressed but he does not state that they were beings (*kā'in*). This means that al-Samarqandī resort to creating his own ontological distinction between *al-kā'in* and *al-mawjūd* along similar line to the distinction between *al-thābit* and *al-mawjūd*.

Conclusion

This chapter has mainly been concerned with three issues. The first interest has been to explore the applications of the terms of creation as discussed in the chosen commentaries. The main reason for including this section, which expands on what is already known, is to set out the important idea that the Qur'ānic terms of creation are terms that may also be applied to existing things. The same terms that are used in expressing the idea of creation *ex-nihilo* are also used to express creation from something or transformation from something. Even the term non-existent is shown in this section to mean a non-particular existing thing, or something that is not already what it is or what it ought to be. None of the commentators that are included in this chapter are deniers of creation *ex-nihilo*, yet they are happy to use the non-existent as something that is not formed or is not a particular something. *Khalq*, which is the primary term for creation, appears to be the bringing of a new state to an entity that is already something. It is important to establish the acceptance of the possibility of such usage of terms, even if one might argue that whatever acquires a new state and becomes a particular something, was brought to existence from nothing.

The second main concern in this chapter was to look at other ideas that refer to what becomes existent. If the first section looked at creation as transformation of what is not a particular something, then the second section looked at creation as bringing forth to existence that which is already a particular something. The second part of this chapter explored the different ideas and terms associated with the things that are addressed with the commanding *kun*. This is a development of the

idea that the knowns are non-existents, yet they are things that are differentiated, and as potentials are subject to God's will and power, and therefore, to His commanding *kun*.

The association of the knowns with the term thing, which is also applied to what is real and existent, creates from the idea of thingness a linking principle between the two sides of the *kun*, since a thing is what remains the same before and after this command. The thingness in the before stage appears as an entity of knowledge (*ma'lūm*), as an entity in its potential stage subject to God's will and power (*maqḍūr*), as the jewels of the repositories of the heavens and the earth or as the inscribed on the preserved tablet. Things in this case are always things before and after originating in time.

Many of the commentators do not seem to object to using the pre-existents as things but they do object to using the term 'thing' for the non-existent. This we argue is not simply due to the fact that it becomes an admission of pre-eternal existents with God, but because this idea has been associated with the Mu'tazila. It has been shown that considering what is prior to existence to be a non-existent is acceptable; to treat it like a thing is also acceptable, but to consider it and name it a thing, which makes it a non-existent thing is denied. This is due to the fact that this affirms and assigns a form of being to the non-existent, which eventually leads to a multiplicity of eternals.

The first two sections developed the idea that there is a degree of being before creation, that the non-existent that is discussed in Islamic discourse is not of pure

non-being (*'adam maḥḍ*). There is always a case of being in these discussions and we do not come across the real non-being. Furthermore, in the developing of the third section it becomes clear in the Sufi discourse that a strict distinction between the existent and the non-existent is difficult to sustain. The Sufi journey of return is a journey through different modes of conscious being that leads to a final non-conscious mode of being in God, where self identification is lost and God's being is witnessed. This stage is what reflects the mode of being prior to creation where things were distinguished in God's knowledge.

It is in this last section that we develop the concept of *thubūt* which was beginning to make an appearance in the previous two chapters. *Al-muthbat* is what is affirmed in the tablet and what is known to God. It is essentially that which is distinctly different from another *muthbat*, or a known thing that is distinguished from another known. The *thubūt* reflects what does not change in a thing and what remains the same throughout the changes in the degree of being. The non-existent known is an affirmed thing which does not change once it becomes existent but only its being is renewed. The ground of the idea of *thubūt* is the unchanging nature of God's knowledge and therefore of His knowns before and after they become existent. In this case, *al-thubūt* becomes a new category of being that includes the two modes of being, the two sides of the commanding *kun*. It is a category that was later seen to be an attempt at going beyond the law of the excluded middle which encompasses the 'is' and 'is not'. Since *al-thābit* remains the same under both modes of being, the transition from the 'is' to the 'is not', or from the 'non-existent' to the 'existent' is made possible, since existence becomes a quality that is acquired and lost by a thing or a *thābit*.

The discussion of thingness and *thubūt* may be considered an attempt at accounting for change in the existents, but more importantly it may also be considered an attempt at linking the two worlds that are completely separated by the principle of *tanzih*. The intelligible world and the sensible world are linked in this case through the objects of God's knowledge or the subsistent knowns, which are distinguished and eternal non-existent beings. The next chapter reflects a very different attempt at linking these two worlds, but to do this, it requires restructuring the model of the intelligible and the real world according to Neoplatonic grounds.

Chapter Four:
Jābirian Philosophy

Introduction

Stepping into the subject of Jābir and his alchemical work is stepping into a space with a large number of fascinating as well as problematic issues. One of the most controversial and lengthy debates on this subject relates to the actual identity of this Muslim alchemist as well as his relation to the Latin Geber, or his relation to the Latin corpus that is meant to be translations of his Arabic works. The problem of identity not only surrounds the existence of the original individual, whether there was one Jābir or a number of individuals who chose to go by this name, but also Berthelot's doubts of the transmission from the Muslim to the Latin Jābir (Geber). The doubts in the first case are largely due to the voluminous Arabic texts extant under this author's name and some historical inconsistencies. In the second case, however, Berthelot's doubts stem from what he considers a lack of technical development and sophistication in the Muslim Jābir in comparison with the Latin counterpart whose work seems to be less riddled with mystical jargon.

The debate on this issue is not what concerns us in this chapter, particularly the part that relates to the Latin Geber. As to the Muslim Jābir, it makes no great difference to us whether his texts that will be covered in this section are produced by one person or a number of persons. What is important for us is that, even if Jābir was more than one person, the Jābirian corpus was already established in the period leading up to the 4th century (A.H.) which warrants the use of such material in our study. The fact that there might be more than one alchemist who participated in the writing of these texts only serves to emphasise our contention of a collective intellectual production in the Islamic cultural field of this period.

We are not interested in this section to demonstrate the existence of earlier Greek translations of particular texts, as is the case with Nomanul Haq's work.¹ Since we are not tracing the development and the dating of the Jābirian corpus, we will not be so concerned with the ideas of the transmission of Greek texts and the dating of the author's life to relate what were the available translations.

The texts that have been chosen for this chapter are those that include philosophical considerations. These are mostly found in Kraus' *Mukhtārāt* but also in Berthelot's early translations.² What permits us to consider these texts together is not only the author as such but also the sense of consistency and development that links these texts to each other. The fact that there might be more than one author, who associated themselves with one name, would narrow down the intellectual field represented and reflected by these texts.

In each section of this chapter, we consider one particular *kitāb* or book that incorporates elements from the main themes that have been analysed in the previous chapters. However, each one of these themes is analysed in these books from a different perspective, some are from a cosmological and metaphysical sense whilst others are from a more corporeal sense, and some are from a purely logical perspective. The largest part of this chapter is set as an exposition of the different Jābirian books in isolation. In the initial stage, each text is studied separately in order to attempt to understand each of the sampled texts without prior assumptions of unity in the selected texts or relation to the entirety of the Jābirian

¹ Nomanul Haq (1994).

² Kraus (1989) ; Jabir ibn Ḥayyān, *Mukhtārāt Rasā'il Jābir b. Ḥayyān*, (henceforth, *Mukhtārāt*) ; Berthelot (1893).

corpus. As we develop more understanding of Jābir's thoughts and ideas we will begin to find similarities and differences within the sampled texts of this chapter. The similarities would be indications of the consistency in the Jābirian project, and maybe the corpus, whilst the discrepancies would indicate differences in authorship or a development (change) in the authors ideas.

The sampled texts of the previous chapters revolved around the questions of the relation of the creator and the created and the nature of this created thing. This produced questions regarding substance, principles, elementary qualities and *tawḥīd* in the Sufi tradition. In this chapter we revisit these same themes as they appear under different considerations. Substance is first considered as a part of the intelligible realm of a Neoplatonic cosmology and then as the indivisible part of *Kalām*. Jābir's interest in the physical and concrete world also leads to the consideration of substance in its relation to the natural elementary qualities and the Aristotelian *categories*. From the seemingly separate texts on cosmology, physics and the *categories*, we propose a developing process of a Jābirian conception of *tawḥīd* that unites the intelligible and the physical worlds through the construction of a unified substance. We also show that this comes as a critique of a dualist conception of principles/substances.

The limitation in space has prevented us from considering other philosophical emergences in the largely unedited Jābirian corpus, but also from seeking the influence of these ideas on his work in the laboratory. The practical mind of Jābir is central in his writing, for even in his cosmological considerations and in the act of discussing the different models available to him, the practical side of the laboratory

is always at the centre of his science of the balance, it is what makes one model more viable for him than another.

We need to keep in mind that in what follows Jābir ought to be seen as attempting to unify a view of the cosmos with his own practical work. Each side of his worlds, the higher and the lower, relates to the other and exists because of the other, and neither may be known without the other.³

³ For some background on the subject of alchemy see: Holmyard (1931) ; Sheppard (1970) ; Ryding (1994) ; Haschimi (1961) ; Hamarneh (1982) ; Burnett (1992) ; Lory (1989). On the Jābirian author(s) see: Marquet (1986) ; (1991). For the relation of Jābir with the latin Geber see Ahmad al-Hassan excellent website where he presents the arguments against any such relation, but also the evidence from the Jābirian corpus for this relation: <http://www.history-science-technology.com/default.htm> (23/11/20011). For the different realtions between chemistry (also alchemy) and the study of nature see: Schummer (2003). For the gnostic links see: Plessner (1954) ; Sheppard, (1957).

I. Jābir's Cosmology

There is no clear metaphysical or pure philosophical work that remains in Jābir's body of work that is scattered around the world. A number of such works are mentioned but none are available to us. What remains instead are a few dispersed philosophical ideas, some of which are logical in nature and others are more metaphysical. However, what is important is that, according to Kraus, there is an astonishing coherence to this Jābirian philosophical system, which is ultimately presented as the essential ground on which Jābir sets his physics. The philosophical principles are for Jābir the same as those of the science of alchemy.⁴ In his texts, Jābir mentions few of Aristotle's works and the commentaries on some of them. However, Kraus notes that his cosmological view "presents traits that are distinctly Neoplatonic."⁵

I.1 The beginnings of a multilayered cosmology

In *k. al-Aḥjār*, Jābir criticises the speculative multilayered stages of creation that the Sabians believe in. They consider the first stage of creation, or existence, to be prime matter whose image exists only in the imagination. The second stage is considered to be a transformation of this prime matter, which is not a physical thing, into a three dimensional body.⁶ In the third stage (which is not called as such in this work since it is only referred to as what comes after the second stage) the four qualities

⁴ Kraus, p. 135 ; *Al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr* in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 234.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶ It seems to be the same order of appearance that we can find in Ikhwān al-Safā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā' wa Khillān al-Wafā'*, (1979), v. 3, p. 187:

وانبجس من النفس جوهر اخر يسمى الهيولى الاولى، وان الهيولى الاولى قبلت المقدار الذي هو الطول والعرض والعمق، فصارت بذلك جسما مطلقا وهو الهيولى الثانية

are said to pass into this physical body, and following this the elemental bodies are formed.⁷

The main point of his criticism, we suggest, is the speculative nature of the cosmological structure suggested in the Sabians' model. For Jābir the elaborate proposed development of things from prime matter to the concrete and real is a hypothetical proposition into the unknown,⁸ and that it is easier to assume that things arise and are created from nothing.⁹

Nomanul Haq translates the relevant passage from the book as:

[N]ow the afore-described stages [of creation] proffered¹⁰ by you are all intangible. But, as compared to what you describe, it is easier and less demanding on one's imagination to visualize that things arise but not out of a single [abstract] entity."¹¹

We suggest a slight change to the last part of this quote so that instead of "that things arise but not out of a single [abstract] entity" we would read "that the things [of this world] would originate from no-thing." The slight change in this translation would reflect a more familiar language used by Jābir that points directly to creation *ex-nihilo*. He seems, at this stage of his work, less interested in speculative and elaborate models of creation and existence. He finds it sufficient to just assume a simple model of this creation since what he is mostly interested in is the actual relation between all the existent things. The nature of what was before existence

⁷ Nomanul Haq (1994), pp. 157-158. Note that the *jawhar* in *kalām* is a real three dimensional object of thought that becomes the building block of body and also the substrate of qualities (accidents).

⁸ Ibid., p. 157

⁹ Ibid., p. 158

¹⁰ Sic.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 199, and for the Arabic see p. 158.

does not seem of great importance. This, however, is not the case throughout Jābir's work. The other reason for the denial of the system and structure of the Sabians is that for him creation *ex-nihilo* is the belief of *ahl al-tawḥīd* or the monotheistic belief, which is opposed to those who believe in *kumūn* and the existence of one thing hidden in another.¹² This should also be noted to play a part in Jābir's denial- in this book- of the existence of the four natures in something other than themselves or that which they form. He also denies that they could be found potentially existing in something other or prior to their coming to be.¹³ They are, for him, simply the objects of God's acts.

In the twenty-seventh book of the *k. al-Sabʿīn*, what is also called *k. al-Khalāṣ*, Jābir uses the same term that he uses in 'the Book of Stones' to describe a different version of a layered existence, this is the term stage or *martaba*. This text appears to be an early stage in the development of the Jābirian corpus as it clearly tries to combine the idea of creation *ex-nihilo* with a multilayered vision of existence. He writes:

إن المراتب مرتبتان، مرتبة أولى ليس يخلقها شيء بثة ولا ينحل منها شيء ولا يرتفع اليها شيء من المرتبة الثانية. والمرتبة الثانية هي المخلوقة للقديم الأول وكلما كان دون تلك المرتبة فهو لا محالة مرتفع اليها وإذا صارت إلى تلك فهي المرتبة العليا.¹⁴

¹² *Mukhtārāt*, p. 299. Relevant to this idea is the fact that one of the differences with the Neoplatonic model that is pointed out by Carusi, is that the Islamic alchemist believes in a voluntary act of creation by God and not an emanation from Him, (Carusi (2005), p. 175.) This difference is not only based on the background of the Islamic tradition but it may also be attributed to the desired relation between God and the world, which the alchemist would like to model himself on.

¹³ In Gannagé (1998). Aristotle considers these qualities as existent in the potential sense, they are potentially what the corresponding elementary bodies are in actuality (v. 1, p. 37).

¹⁴ Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *k. al-Sabʿīn*, in *Majmūʿat Rasāʾil Jābir ibn Ḥayyān*, Ms. 1878, (copy of MS Hüseyin Celebi 743 II, Halk Kütüphanesi, Bursa), p. 175. There is a facsimile edition of this manuscript Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *The Book of Seventy*, Sezgin, (1986).

The stages [of existence] are two. The first of these stages is not created by anything whatsoever. Nothing from it degenerates and nothing from the second stage ascends to it. The second stage is the one created by the first Eternal and all that is below it shall necessarily ascend to it, and if it attains this stage it would be the highest stage.

The language used in this text reflects a more mystical language than a practical one, particularly since what follows the above quotation suggests the ascent of the believers to this second stage. Nonetheless, this is an attempt at structuring a multilayered existence where the first layer is said to be uncreated. If this layer is the Eternal God then Jābir is here creating a structure that includes God as one of its layers or stages. However, if the first Eternal is outside this structure, that is, if God is not represented as one of its stages, then the first stage is not the creator but another eternal. The statement that nothing from it degenerates suggests that it is similar to prime matter, but the idea that nothing from the second stage reaches it draws us away from this assumption. The second stage, that is a created stage, seems to occupy this position of resembling prime matter since things are said to be elevated to it, but the imagery and the language is not of a return to origins. The ascent in this passage does not reflect the idea of a descent from an origin, or the idea that things originated from this second stage and will return to it.

We may suggest that this is an early Jābirian interest in what is beyond the material world of his laboratory. It is still defined by a clear division between two stages, one that is beyond any link with anything below it whilst the second is related to the created world. We take this to be an early speculative stage for Jābir, who affirms creation *ex-nihilo* and wants to keep a safe distance from the elaborative speculations of the Sabians.

I.2 The cosmology of *k. al-Taṣrīf*

It is apparent that Jābir subsequently moves closer to the Sabians position, as he accepts more than their speculative approach and creates a model of the world which comes close to theirs.¹⁵ The best available general overview of the more developed cosmological view is set in *kitāb al-Taṣrīf*, which has been partially edited in Kraus' *Mukhtārāt* and completely edited by Gannagé. The text appears to have strong Neoplatonic influence and a great similarity to the subsequent philosophy of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā.¹⁶

I.2.i The First Circle (First Cause)

In his cosmological model, Jābir sketches an image of the world that is first of all set to include an imagined infinite circle attached to the first thing contained within it.¹⁷ Jābir states that “the philosophers denote this circle by the first cause (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā*)” which is modelled as an infinite circle endowed with agency “دائرة لا نهاية لها فاعلة.”¹⁸

This first cause, or the first circle, is capable of intelligence and is intelligent in

¹⁵ We here quote another model from an unknown 10th century alchemist who has left us a work entitled *Miftāḥ al-Ḥikma*. The summary is found in Carusi (2005), p. 174, where we read: “[...] the sequence of the first stages of the creation of the world: God’s “silent” intention to create the world, a stage that corresponds to the creation of prime matter, absolute potentiality; God’s utterance which defines the first two opposites, light (hot and dry nature, circumference of the cosmic sphere) and dark (cold and dry nature, centre of the cosmic sphere); generation of the Soul (humid nature or balanced), intermediary term between the first two natures; generation of the Intellect (hot and humid nature) and the Spirit (cold and humid nature), intermediary term between respectively Utterance/Light and Soul, and between Soul and Dark.”

¹⁶ With regard to the ideas of creation *ex-nihilo* and the Neoplatonic emanationist, Netton considers the Ismāʿīlī Aḥmad al-Nasafī (d. 942/3) to have marked a “move from a mainly – but not exclusively-creationist mode of discourse to a streamlined, dual creationist and emanationist one where the divine creation of the Intellect is a necessary prelude to the emanation of all else.” (Netton (1994), p. 214). Our discussion of the Jābirian corpus reveals a similar attempt.

¹⁷ One of the possible meanings that is suggested by Kraus is that the difference between the circumference of the circle and its content are abolished as there is a contradiction in the concept of infinite circle (Kraus, note 4, p. 139)

¹⁸ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 405.

actuality. The intelligible in this case is nothing but the Truth, the Good and the Just, but also things associated with the self, things like happiness and satisfaction.¹⁹ In a nonfigurative way, the first cause is simply infinite, active, knows only the Truth and is only capable of knowing the Good and Justice.

The intelligence, this first cause is endowed with, is not only potential intelligence but is actual intelligence “قادرة على العقل وانها عاقلة”²⁰ However, that which is intelligible -the Good, Justice and the Truth- is only depicted as an object of knowledge and not as that which the first cause is actively involved in doing. This idea is suggested by Maḥmūd in his commentary on this section where he interprets the ‘intelligent not in potentiality but in actuality’ by having the first cause produce the good and the just and create the beautiful.²¹ With regards to the first circle, Jābir’s text only refers to intelligence being actual and not potential and the only activity that is associated with this circle is that of knowing. The qualities of Good, Just and True are associated with the known and not with acts that are other than that of knowing. However, Maḥmūd would still be justified in assuming the activity of the first cause to be more than knowing since Jābir affirms that the first circle is really intelligent and is endowed with agency. In this case the qualification of activity of the agent corresponds to knowing, this idea, however, is not clearly stated in the actual text.²²

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 406 ; Kraus, p. 139.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Maḥmūd (1962), p. 166.

²² Marquet in his comparison between Jābir and the Ikhwān points out that this circle, the circle of the first cause, seems to be the order of God, which in the case of the Ikhwān is impossible to represent as such. Marquet (1988), p. 71. Also, Makarem points out that the Ismā‘īliyya and the Drūze deny that God is the cause of causes as this is associated with the first originated being, the Intellect

Before moving to the next circle, we need to note that in this discussion of the different constituents of the world, Jābir does not use a language that affirms or argues that the world is structured in this or that particular way. From the very beginning of his construction of this structure, he invites the reader to ‘imagine’ (تصور) a circle rather than state that the world is specifically this or that entity. This is why he also uses “و لتتصور” or “and let us imagine another circle” when introducing the second constituent, of what is a possible model of the structure of the world, and this is why he uses the term ‘مثال’ or model when he introduces the first infinite circle.

According to *k. al-Taṣrīf*, the God of this world that is set in a perfect circular motion, is not modelled and is not imagined as a circle. God is rather:

[T]he one above the first cause (the first circle) and is below the centre of the smallest circle of this world we are in, and He is the first and the last.²³

Kraus notes that this God that is beyond the first circle and is in the smallest one reflects but one model for Jābir, since God is not so in other writings. In *k. al-Khamsīn*, Kraus informs us, Jābir considers God to be the occupier of the first hypostasis above the circle of the Intellect, and he also quotes *k. al-Baḥth* where Jābir states that:

It is then established that God the most high is neither the Sphere, as some have proclaimed, nor is He the movement like others have claimed, nor the planets as others have also claimed, He is rather the

or *nous*. God in this philosophical scheme is considered *mu‘īll al-‘ilal* (make something to cause), this is due to the relation between the cause and effect which ultimately leads to changes in the cause, see, Makarem (1984), pp. 81-91.

²³ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 413.

first cause and the active principle of the entire world, the agent behind the permanent causes as well as the perishable ones.²⁴

I.2.ii The Second Circle (Intellect)

Within the first circle, Jābir imagines another circle that is endowed with intelligence but not with agency,²⁵ “it knows but it does not act” according to Maḥmūd.²⁶ Not only is this circle incapable of having agency but it also lacks the potential for such agency. For Jābir this circle:

[I]s capable of conceptualising (تصور) all things, the apparent and the hidden, the minute and the great as well as the universal and the general.²⁷

By stating that one circle, the second, is within the other, the first, Jābir is only interested in geometrically demonstrating through his model the ‘inferiority’ of one circle in comparison with the other. This is why he states:

[T]he philosophers have been unable to establish the ratio of the inner circle to that which is above it, since it is not possible to attain the first one through conjecture or through measure.²⁸

One wonders why it is only the first one, the first circle, that cannot be subject to measure and conjecture, since he declares that both circles are the subject of imagination and are models for that which is not sensed. This is particularly

²⁴ Kraus, p. 150.

²⁵ In *Ikhwān*, v. 3, p. 197:

واما العقل فانه جوهر بسيط روحاني، ايسط من النفس، واشرف منها، قابل لتاييد الباري تعالى، علام بالفعل، مؤيد للنفس بلا زمان.

²⁶ Maḥmūd (1962), p. 166.

²⁷ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 406.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

problematic since the second circle is not even given agency in this world, thus it is one that does not even have an effect through which it is possible to know it by.

Geometrically speaking however, Jābir defines the first circle as infinite (despite being a circle) and that which is limitless does not have a measure. The second circle, on the other hand, is not defined as limitless for it is within the bounds of the first circle, thus, it is limited and measurable by implication. This second circle is the circle of the intellect that it is the possessor of all forms and is the cause of the forms of all things.

I.2.iii The Third Circle (Soul)

Within the second circle Jābir invites us to imagine a third circle that is much smaller in its dimensions than the second circle. Here Jābir informs the reader that the majority of the philosophers, if not all, have found through conjecture that the ratio of the third to the second circle is that of one to a hundred. For Jābir, however, this is not his own or his masters' belief since for them the difference is much larger or even infinite.²⁹ It is impossible according to Jābir to arrive at real figures and measurements in this case since all these are for him but approximations. These are mere signs of the difference in measurements for imagined circles that are immeasurable. This last circle has agency and power but lacks intelligence or knowledge.³⁰ It is similar to the first in terms of having agency and potential but

²⁹ His master is Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.

³⁰ In the case of the *Ismā'īlī al-Sijistānī*, it is this lack of knowledge which causes the Soul to seek perfection from the Intellect which in turn is good, complete and has no reason to move beyond itself. This is the reason for the Soul's eternal motion, see Walker (1993), p. 96.

differs from it in ignorance and in lacking intelligence.³¹ On the other hand, it is different from the second circle since it has potential and agency which is absent in the second circle. It is also different from the second circle in that it lacks intelligence. This third and last circle, in this group, is the circle of the Soul whose world is of an indeterminate measurement.³²

I.2.iv The Fourth Circle (Substance)

Further to these three circles, Jābir imagines a fourth circle within the third one, much smaller in dimensions yet still indeterminate in size. This circle is characterised by negative qualities, since it possesses neither knowledge nor ignorance and it has no potentiality.³³ It is also appropriate for this circle not to possess activity or passivity. This is the World of Substance (*jawhar*), of the ‘dispersed dust’ (*al-habā’ al-manthūr*),³⁴ that from which the world is formed, and what is referred to by some as the *hylē*.³⁵

³¹ In Ikhwān, v. 3, pp. 197-198:

واما النفس فانها جوهره بسيطة، روحانية، علامة بالقوة، فعالة بالطبع، قابلة فضائل العقل بلا زمان، فعالة في الهيولى بالتحريك لها بالزمان.

³² Ibid., p. 407

³³ In Ikhwān, v. 3, p. 197:

وصارت الهيولى انقص رتبة من العقل والنفس لبعدها من الباري جل وعز. وذلك ان الهيولى هي جوهره بسيطة، روحانية معقولة، غير علامة ولا فعالة، بل قابلة اثار النفس بالزمان، منفصلة لها.

³⁴ The term *habā’* is a translation of the word “motes” which appears in the Arabic translation of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. In this section, Aristotle discusses Democritus’ atoms, fire and soul where he compares the spherical nature of fire and soul to the motes in the air seen through the shafts of light. See Aristūṭālīs, *Fī al-Nafs*, 1980, p. 8 (404b 1-5):

وليس بين جميعها شيء مستدير كروي ما خلا النار والنفس مثله الهباء المنبث في الجو الذي يستبين لنا بشعاع الشمس الداخل من الكوى- زعم ذومقراط أنه عنصر لجميع الطبيائع.

The language of this text appears to be very similar to Jābir’s, with the exception of the substitution of the word *al-munbath* with the Qu’ānic *al-manthūr*. The last sentence states that this *habā’* is the element of the four natures, this is discussed in our section on the four natures. We also noticed that Kraus (p. 154, note 6) from his analysis of the appearance of the word *habā’* in the relevant Arabic literature had concluded that “motes” in *De Anima* is equivalent to *habā’* but he did not have the

With the circle of Substance, Jābir completes a model of a structure that begins with what has intelligence, potentiality and agency, through what has pure intelligence, then to what has potentiality and agency and ending with what is simply undefined and neutral. Circles two and three are not only geometrically within the first circle but their definition is also contained in the description and definition of the first circle. The final circle's definition, as pure negativity, also permits its inclusion within the first circle in terms that are other than purely geometrical. This representation of the four circles reflects a vision of a unified whole that is boundless but nonetheless accepts relative limits, that is, limits in relation to other circles further defined by relative limitations.³⁶

I.2.v The Fifth Circle (world of the natures)

After dealing with the unit of four concentric circles, Jābir proceeds to another circle that is geometrically divided in a way that differs from the other more unified structure. He is clear at this stage that there is some disagreements regarding the way the fifth circle is meant to be divided. There is the possibility of a division by two perpendicular lines that divide the circle into four equal parts, still with

Arabic text to confirm his analysis. Interestingly the word *habā'* and its association with *hylē* also appears in Ibn al-ʿArabī, see Netton (1994), pp. 283, 284, 315.

³⁵ Ibid., Kraus, p. 142. In Ikhwān we find the same hypostasis v. 3, p. 181:

كذلك من فيض الباري وجوده نشأة الخلائق وتمامها وكمالها، وكما ان الاثنتين هو اول عدد نشأ من تكرار الواحد، كذلك العقل هو اول موجود فاض من وجود الباري عز وجل، وكما ان الثلاثة ترتبت بعد الاثنتين، كذلك النفس ترتبت بعد العقل، وكما ان الاربعة ترتبت بعد الثلاثة، كذلك الهيولى ترتبت بعد النفس.

³⁶ These circles are not expressed in terms of emanation as in the Neoplatonic school. In Ikhwān, v. 3, p. 184, we find these entities described as follow:

وذلك ان العقل جوهر روحاني فاض من الباري عز وجل، وهو باق تام كامل. والنفس جوهرة روحانية فاضت من العقل، وهي باقية تامة غير كاملة. والهيولى جوهر روحاني فاض من النفس، وهو باق غير تام ولا كامل.

We notice that the Ikhwān use the expression “spiritual substance” to describe each of these entities, which is not the case with Jābir. (Also, they use the three terms *bāqī*, *tām* and *kāmil* in positive and negative association with each of the three spiritual substances.)

unspecified dimensions. These four sections include the four simple elements: heat, cold, moisture and dryness. Jābir attributes this model along with the others that follow to unnamed philosophers. Some philosophers, according to Jābir, reject this model and believe that there is nothing within all these worlds, so far modelled as circles, that might be structured or modelled as a square or a triangle, nor in fact in any other noncircular shape.

What is rejected by Jābir in this section might not be the arrangement of the simple elements within the world of nature. Instead, it is possible to assume that he is attacking the view that the composite elements (earth, water, air and fire) are the foundations of the natural world. This assumption would be based on Plato's geometrical representation of these elements, which is ultimately based on the triangles and squares.³⁷

³⁷ For Plato's emphasis on the superiority of the sphere over regular solids see, *Timaeus* (33b), and for his description of the geometrical representation of the composite elements see, *Timaeus* (55d-56b), and for a comparison between Plato and al-Kindī see Rescher's chapter 'Al-Kindī's treatise on the Platonic Solids', in Rescher (1966), pp. 15-37, and the original text: *Risālat al-Kindī fī al-sabab al-ladhī lahu nasabat al-qudamā' al-ashkāl al-khamsa ilā ah-usṭuqsāt*, in al-Kindī (1953), v. 2, pp. 54-63. Also in *Jawāmi' Ṭīmāūs* we read (Galenus (1951). p. 15):

فلما بين فلاطن بهذا القول ان لكل واحد من الاشياء المكونة نوعا معقولا قسم بعد ذلك انواع النار والماء والارض والهواء فقال: ان نوع النار هو الشكل الناري، ونوع الارض هو الشكل المكعب، ونوع الماء هو الشكل الذي له عشرون قاعدة، ونوع الهواء هو الشكل الذي له ثمانين قواعد.

And in (Ibid., p. 24):

وخلق الله تبارك وتعالى الدماغ من مثلثات ملس لاعوج فيها. ومن البين انه يعني بالمثلثات في هذا الموضع التي قال فيها فيما تقدم ان اشكال الاسطوانات- اعني النار والارض والماء والهواء- خلقت منها.

Al-Kindī also has an epistle where he uses geometry to prove the concentric nature of the universe based on Ptolemy's model. Interestingly however, like Jābir, he extends this model to the spheres of elements (earth, water, air and fire). He rejects the idea that this structure of the universe can have an angular rather than circular base. See: *Risālat al-Kindī ilā Aḥmad bn al-mu'ṭaṣim fī anna al-anāšir wal-jaram al-aqṣā kurayyat al-shakl*' in al-Kindī (1953), v. 2, pp. 47-53 ; and for the English translation of this epistle see Khatchadourian & Rescher (1965), pp. 190-195. See also Pines (1997), pp. 157-159 on al-Rāzī (based on ms. Paris, arabe 5802) who briefly discusses the first principles which consist of particles (*habā*) and their associated shapes (including the conic and the cubic) ; the original text may now be found in Ibn Sīnā & al-Rāzī, 1980, v. 2, p. 182.

Jābir himself prefers to continue with the model of the concentric circles. He suggests that what is contained in the fifth circle is a set of four equal size circles that represent the world of heat, the world of cold, the world of moisture and the world of dryness.

The third and final model presented by Jābir is one that resembles the previous structure of the four circles, that is, a system of concentric circles inside what he calls the 'circle of the world of the elements'. The first circle inside this fifth major circle is the circle of the world of heat inside which there is the world of the action of the heat which is 'the Luminous' circle named otherwise as dryness. Following this circle there is the circle of the world of cold which in turn contains the circle of the action of the cold, named moisture, which is also the 'circle of rest'.³⁸ Finally, with regard to what is inside this circle of moisture, Jābir agrees with those he says are of the opinion that there is a vast circle that is simply void.³⁹

The Greatest Luminous Sphere

We may also look at the fifth circle, also known as the Greatest Luminous Sphere, from a different perspective.⁴⁰ The sensible world that is known to us is the result of the interaction between two circles, or two different levels of the structured world suggested by Jābir. According to him, when the third circle, the circle of the world of the Soul, becomes attached (*tashabbatha*) to the fourth circle which is the circle of Substance, they join to create a single visible thing. This is the first thing to be

³⁸ *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 408-410; Kraus, pp. 143-145.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁴⁰ Possibly the *augoeides*. See Mead (1906), v. 1, p. 416.

actualised in this world, the first thing to come into being through an act (*mā infā'ala*),⁴¹ and it is from this combination that desire (*al-shahwa*) comes to be.⁴²

This attachment between the world of the Soul and the world of Substance marks the beginning of the lower world of generation (*kawn*) imagined to be a circle in like manner to the previous worlds. This circle is the circle of the world we live in, “it is the circle of the ‘Greatest Luminous Sphere’ which embraces our world and the entire world above us.”⁴³

The mixture of Substance and Soul descends to the world of heat and dryness from which they appropriate a potent section which becomes thus the mass of the circle which is named Ether and sphere, it becomes an animated fire that is distinct from the fire (of here below), which possesses the Soul only potentially.⁴⁴

In this quotation, Jābir tells us that the Soul/Substance becomes attached to heat and dryness, presumably because they are the first two layers in the presented model of this world. This combination takes from this world, a tough portion (*juz' qawī*), which then becomes the mass of the circle that is the circle of Ether or the sphere. Jābir then describes how, in following this attachment of the Soul/Substance to the first two Elements, seven more circles are constructed, these are: the circles of Saturn followed by Jupiter then Mars then the Sun and the Moon after which follows the world of the Zodiac and the rest of the other planets.⁴⁵ It is not clear from this

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 412; Kraus, p. 145. Here the expression *mā infā'ala* is translated as “douée de passivité.”

⁴² *Mukhtārāt*, p. 412. In *Ikhwān* v. 3, p. 186 we read of something that is different from the concept of *shahwa*:

واما الهيولى فليبعدها من الباري، تعالى ذكره، صارت ناقصة المرتبة، عادمة الفضائل، غير طالبة لفيض النفس ولا راغبة في فضائلها، ولا علامة ولا مفيدة ولا حية، بل قابلة حسب. فمن اجل هذا يلحق النفس التعب والعناء والجهد والشقاء في تدبيرها وتتميمها لها. ولا راحة للنفس الا اذا توجهت نحو العقل وتعلقت به واتحدت معه.

⁴³ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 412.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 413 ; Kraus, p. 147.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 413 (as previously mentioned).

book, what is the nature of the relationship of the Soul/Substance to the other two elements found in this world, since we only have a description of the relation of this substance to the active heat and the passive dryness. This could reflect the greater importance given to the element heat that one finds in this book.

The distinction made between the animated fire and the fire here below, is a possible distinction between the pure fire of the spiritual world (Soul) and the one that is sensed by us in this concrete world.⁴⁶ This may be compared with Aristotle's idea that the fire below is an excess of heat,⁴⁷ and that it is not as balanced as the fire above, which is in equilibrium, a simple pure hot and dry in equal measures.⁴⁸

On geometrical representation

Before proceeding any further with the exploration of the two divisions of the world known to us, the higher and the lower, the intelligible and the sensed, we need to consider the meaning attached to the geometrical considerations in Jābir's model for the world. The first thing that must be clarified is that a circle in the previous discussion is in reality a two dimensional representation and consideration of what is in three dimensional actuality a sphere. The reason for this representation is, according to Jābir, because the geometers consider the circle to be that which surrounds 'what lacks a mass'. The circle is a geometrical representation of a sphere

⁴⁶ In ps-Apollonios of Tyana, *Sirr al-Khalīqa wa Ṣanat al-Ṭabī'a: Kitāb al-ʿIlal*, (1979), p. 105, we read: وكذلك الحرارة ليست بصنف واحد في هذا العالم وان كانت لا تدرك ذلك عقولهم، وانما قويت عقولهم على ادراك ما اتصل بهم في خلقهم من جميع العالم لانهم من العالم والعالم منهم فهم ينالونه بقدر ما فيهم من العقل و العلم.

⁴⁷ Gannagé (2005), p. 27. See also Cooper (2009), for the different types of fire in Stoic philosophy, which resonates in some ways with the way Jābir uses it, particularly in its active and generative sense.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

that lacks a mass or simply one that has no 'body', thus lacking concrete material reality. A line for these geometers is something that is only qualified by length and lacks width and body or anything relating to mass. When it comes to the smallest of the geometrical representations, the point, it is considered to be something that cannot be a subject of the senses but can only be a subject of the intellect's imagination, it is subject to intellectual perception and not to sensation. The point is a potential that subsists in the imagination and can only exist as an imaginary subject of the senses. The point that is sensed in the world of senses is thus not a real point and does not reflect the essence and the reality of what a point is.⁴⁹

Another model

Jābir's exposition of the meaning of geometrical representations is used to reflect the ontological nature of our world. It is presented in the section that explores the relation of the elements inside The Greatest Luminous Sphere, what is also called the 'sphere of substance'. Jābir informs the reader that, in this sphere, heat is represented by the circle that encompasses this sphere, and that the centre point represents the cold. This appears to be a different structure from the ones suggested earlier, and this is due to the meanings that Jābir wants to transmit to the reader. This is achieved through the meanings he has given to the different geometrical representations just discussed. Both the centre of the sphere and the circle of the sphere are non-corporeal entities lacking mass and body, as we have just noted. One of these, the cold, is a point and this is regarded as a non-sensible entity that can only be a subject of the intellect, while the other, the circumference, is a line (which

⁴⁹ K. *al-Mizān al-Ṣaghīr* in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 427.

forms the circle) and its reality is not only geometrically different but is also used to reflect or symbolise a different nature specific to heat. This simple element is something that has length but no mass, yet its representation as a line adds more concreteness to it, in comparison with a point, thus reflecting the more positive nature of the element heat.

The circle which surrounds the body of the sphere is, as Jābir tells the reader, “the apparent and the higher,” and when the sphere that is generated between the centre and the circumference rotates, it is primarily the heat that is in a state of motion and not the centre. Nonetheless, these two elements, heat and cold, are considered to be the active elements, since it is because of the movement of what constitutes the sphere (the circle around the centre) that the third element dryness is generated.⁵⁰ This element is “neither cold nor hot, it is arid, hidden and barely noticeable by the senses. It is inferior to heat in terms of its subtlety and penetration.” Finally, from all these elements the last and fourth element moisture is generated which is described as soft and opaque and is expandable.⁵¹

I.2.vi Other considerations

The simple and the composite

The primary movement of heat in this ‘sphere of substance’ is presented as the source of the other elementary qualities. This sphere is the sphere that holds together the four qualities otherwise known as the four ‘natures’ which are also the

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 426.

⁵¹ Ibid., Kraus, p. 152.

isolated and simple elements.⁵² From the combination of these four elements the four composite elements are generated and these are: fire, air, water and earth.⁵³ Jābir states that the sphere of the four natures is ‘absolutely above’ the composite elements just mentioned. This seems to be a reference to the idea that the simple elements are ontologically in a higher world to the composite elements, since Jābir also refers to these composites as being below (beneath) the sphere of the four natures. This is not a mere reference to a geometrical place but to a certain degree of available manifestation, where this lower occupied place refers to what becomes a denser object available to sense perception.⁵⁴ This may possibly be so since the simple element dryness is described as being scarcely available to the senses,⁵⁵ suggesting that what is below the lowest level of the sphere of natures becomes subject to sense perception. In other terms it is the composite elements that are the true objects of sense perception.⁵⁶

⁵² Kraus., p. 151.

⁵³ *Mīzān Ṣaghīr*, p. 425.

⁵⁴ In this regard, Job of Edessa writes: “We affirm that because the simple elements have expansive parts, they do not fall under the senses, nor do they possess three dimensions; that they flee from one another by nature, and the more they flee from one another, the more expansive they become; and that the more expansive they become, the more remote they become from tangibility, and the less they possess three dimensions... When their parts come together, through the sympathetic and affinitive movement, to form a composition, they become condensed and fall under the senses, and by falling under the senses they acquire the three dimensions.” Job of Edessa, *Book of Treasures*, (1935), p. 21.

⁵⁵ *Mīzān Ṣaghīr*, p. 426.

⁵⁶ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 4.

فاما ما كان في البسيط الاول فممتنع ان يخرج كل ما فيه بالقوة الى الفعل لا لذاته ولا لاجزائه. اما لذاته فلان البسيط غير متناه، وما لم يكن متناها فهو غير فان، واذا وجب ذلك فليس كل ما فيه بالقوة خارجا الى الفعل. واما لاجزائه فلان الناس خاصة لا يصلون الى موضع البسيط.

The Fifth nature

This 'sphere of substance' which we are now considering appears to be different from the 'Circle of Substance', the fourth in the initial set of concentric circles, since those were presented as the set of purely incorporeal things. Here, in this sphere, the same elementary qualities (the four natures) are considered, however this time there is also a consideration of the distinction between the simple and the composite things, as well as the degree of their susceptibility to sense perception.⁵⁷ There is a sense of an intensification of things in the process of combining the simple.⁵⁸ More importantly, in the concentric circles model substance was considered as a circle, an incorporeal thing, yet it is here transformed into a sphere with a mass. In the move to the representation of the corporeal world, Jābir reveals another dimension to this sphere. The corporeal side of things becomes mathematically speaking the mass of the sphere, which in ontological terms is what he names the 'fifth nature' or 'substance'. This sphere, which incorporates the corporeal elements of the world, is what he also denotes as the 'Greatest Luminous Sphere', the outcome of the relation between the Circle of Soul and the Circle of Substance.

⁵⁷ Marquet (1988), p. 76 points to Kraus, pp. 155-6, suggesting that the world of Substance and the world of the four natures are found in the superior sphere, as intermediaries between the corporeal and the incorporeal. Incorporeal as simple substances but corporeal once mixed with Soul.

⁵⁸ In Alibhai's chapter on al-Sijistānī's philosophy, we find regarding the relationship between the spiritual and the corporeal worlds: "Al-Sijistānī states that the two worlds resemble each other in respect of substantiality (or-substance-ness) (*min jihat al jawhariyyah*). This is the aspect of both the spiritual and bodily substance which remains unaffected while the change is in process. What changes is the aspect responsible for the fineness or the coarseness of the substance. For in his view, while substances are alike insofar as they are substances, they are different insofar as they are fine or coarse." Alibhai (1992), p. 172. For intensity in being and substance see Rizvi (2003).

We notice that substance is the name of the fourth circle in the incorporeal set of concentric circles and it is the name of the mass of the sphere that emerges from the circles just mentioned, which is also known as the ‘fifth nature’.⁵⁹ The emergence of the fourth circle, in relation to the other larger ones, appeared to be qualified by its lack of properties when compared with the others, which were marked by qualities pertaining to intellect and activity. In moving to the more corporeal world, the fifth nature in the ‘Greatest Luminous Sphere’, or substance, appears to have a fairly similar negative quality, primarily a passive lack, as well as the complete opposite quality, a complete fullness with potentiality, marked by the symbolic reference to the mass of the sphere, and therefore, its corporeality. Jābir writes:

The meaning of what we say is: the mass of the sphere is what has been known in our discourse, in agreement with the philosophers, as the substance susceptible to receiving all things. It is that which is in all things and from which all things are and to which all return. It is thus that God most high, our lord, has created and fashioned it. He made it the constituent of all things, and that to which all things shall return.⁶⁰

He also adds regarding this substance:

[S]o it is the thing that fills all void and it is the thing shaped (*mushakka*) by every form. All things are in it and from it all things are composed and to it they shall all be decomposed.⁶¹

In this section too, we are informed that this substance is the ‘dispersed motes’ (*al-habā’ al-manthūr*) which was also considered in the World of Substance, with

⁵⁹ This is a different view from the one we find in the Job of Edessa (1935), pp. 5, 8: “The simple elements of which we shall speak first, as they are the first principles, are perceived mentally, while the compound elements fall under the senses.” Which in turn is similar to the view presented later from *k. al-Tajmī*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

absolute negativity, including a complete lack of potentiality. In addition, Jābir informs us that this is itself the ‘Greatest Luminous Sphere’, which is the body that is in all of the three living things (animals, plants and minerals).⁶²

Motion

What is important to know at the end of this section is that some of these circles possess motion whilst others do not. Those circles that possess motion intrinsically drive those without motion to move in their turn. Once movement occurs in these circles the different three kingdoms of the sublunary world, the animals, plants and minerals come to be, the first of these are the animals and the last are the minerals.⁶³ This is the order and relation from the first of the concentric circles, the first cause, through the circle of Ether and the sphere containing the world that bears direct relation to our being, the world of moving circles that causes the emergence of the three kingdoms of the sublunary world.⁶⁴

The main reason for this choice of a circular world in circular motion is, according to Jābir, due to the fact that there is a [reasoned purpose] or *telos* behind it. This is the idea that circular things have minimal defects and are not vulnerable to destruction, except if God wills it so.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ For Job of Edessa: “If there were no contrary movements, there would be no existing beings and no composition.” The movements are the movements of the simple elements towards or away from each other. Job of Edessa (1935), p. 18. See also al-Sijistānī on the relation between the movement of the Soul and the movement of the sphere encompassing the corporeal world, which is thought to lead to the different mixtures and combinations of the elements, in Walker (1993), p. 104.

⁶⁴ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 414.

Methodology

The principle of enumerating different past views and structures relevant to the circle of the world of elements reflects one of the main methodologies in Jābir's work. He states the following:

Here is all that they [previous philosophical schools] have said regarding this subject. It is necessary for you to imagine this however you wish for you will not be falling into error, notably in matters regarding the science of balance.⁶⁵

Jābir invites the reader to be involved himself in imagining a structure or a model that incorporate the four elements. This means that one has the choice of either choosing one amongst the available listed views, or imagining something different. What appears to be important for Jābir, in this particular approach, is to imagine a structure that is valid, or is of use in his science of balance. He is aware that there are geometrical and philosophical reasons for choosing a particular model over another, that he can himself demonstrate which one is right and which is wrong, this however is beyond the scope of his interest in this exposition. He states that some of it has been demonstrated elsewhere in his work, but in reality, it could only be demonstrated through every book in the world. Jābir is suggesting that to prove the truth of a model, which is supposed to expose the structure of the world, one would need to refer to, and reveal, all that has ever been written and known. Since this proof is impossible, Jābir's grounding for the truth of his imagined model is the laboratory, where he practices his science of balance and tests the validity of his models.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 410.

The structure drawn for us, and which we have been asked to imagine, seems thus far to be based on inherited models from previous philosophical schools. The listing of models and the constant invitation to imagine this or that new world is not a matter of proof, for this would require an infinite argument for the truth of the structure. Moreover, the truth itself does not lie in the model itself, as this is only an imagined model, it lies rather in the science of balance, the science that is subject to experimentations in the laboratory. This science, which appears to be the ground on which lies the whole proof of the structure of the world, is itself the subject of the structure that he wants us to imagine. All that has been imagined so far leads to the elements that become the objects of the science of balance itself. What holds the proof of the content and the structure, is subject to the same content and structure.⁶⁶

I.2. vii Substance in *k. al-Taṣrīf*

In *k. al-Taṣrīf* substance is considered under the order of concentric circular worlds, the world of Substance, and it is also considered as the outcome of the combination of the last two of these concentric worlds (world of Soul and world of Substance). The first time the term substance is used, it is to signify something with absolute negativity whilst in the second time, it is to signify the outcome of the combination of what appears to be two non-corporeal worlds. This combination produces the

⁶⁶ Regarding the balance in the universe, which the alchemist intends to emulate, Papathanassion mentions in his chapter on Stephanos that according to Plato (*Tim.* 53b) before the ordering of the universe, all the indivisibles (the four elements) were found without proportion nor measure, they, however, possessed traces of their later existence which is determined by forms and numbers. Papathanassion (2005). p. 118, no. 35. In *k. al-Mawāzīn al-Ṣaghīr*, Jābir writes (*Mukhtārāt*, p. 114) :
 ووجب بالبرهان ان ما اعتدلت منه ثلث طبائع وزاد الرابعة كان خالدا ايضا لانا وجدنا العالم العلوي اعتدلت طبياعه وطالت مدته وبعد الفساد منه.

material of the world that is the base of all things in it, and which appears to potentially contain all the things of the world. Here the use of the term 'potentially' is not to signify that the things that do come to existence in reality exist potentially in this substance prior to their coming to be. The use of potential, in this case, suggests that all the things of this world that become existent come from this substance. This means that substance can potentially be formed into all of the really existing things of this world. Substance as matter, may be seen by the naked eye, it may not be touched, handled and formed by anyone save God almighty and the chosen ones amongst His servants on whom He bestows this power.⁶⁷

In order to reconcile what might appear to be a difference in meaning associated with the term substance, we need to reconsider the relation between the third and the fourth circle. We recall that this third circle, the circle of the world of the Soul, is in Jābir's terms a circle of power and activity that lacks intelligence; this may be interpreted as a pure undivided and undistinguished energy.

On the other hand, the fourth circle, the circle of the world of Substance, is a world that is susceptible to activity, it is undefined and capable of differentiation in terms of heat and cold and their actions: moisture and dryness. In other terms, the world of Substance is a field in complete balance capable of variations in terms of different degrees of heat. The idea of balance (or state of balance) that is of great importance

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 429.

in Jābir's alchemy, is suggested in this case because of the negative descriptions associated with this world, the simple lack of any quality, it is neither cold nor hot.⁶⁸

The attachment that occurs between these two worlds, the world of energy and the world susceptible to variations in heat, leads to the creation of the 'Greatest Luminous Sphere'. This is the sphere that results from the polarisation of the world of Substance due to the undifferentiated power and agency of the world of Soul. This luminous sphere is the same world of Substance but differentiated and polarised, so that heat is on the surface and cold is at the centre, and their actions result from the different degrees of interactions according to the different intensities between these two polar opposites.⁶⁹ Endowed with power, the heat of the surface of this sphere is caused to move, and it is this movement that forms the mass of the sphere or its body, otherwise known as the fifth nature, or substance.

This reinterpretation could explain the difference between the two uses of the term substance.⁷⁰ They both refer to the same thing except that the first use refers to this matter in its balanced, undifferentiated and unqualified state (world of Substance), whilst the other, refers to it in its energised and thus differentiated state, which

⁶⁸ Close to this idea, we read in Gourinat (2009), p. 67: "Diogenes Laertius 7. 137 states that 'the four elements taken together are qualityless substance, i.e. matter', and this is also acknowledged by Plutarch as a Stoic tenet, when he says that 'substance is given by some Stoics the epithet "without quality" not because it is devoid of every quality but because it has all qualities'. The idea seems to be that the pairs of contradictory qualities (hot + cold, liquid + dry) add up to a null sum."

⁶⁹ See Gannagé (2005), p. 11, for the Alchemist's role on changing the constitution of a body through altering the intensities of the natures.

⁷⁰ We find the idea of different intensities of heat in ps-Apollonios of Tyana (1979). The variation is the cause of the coming to existence of the different things, we read (p. 106):

فلما لم تكن الحرارة صنفا واحدا في هذا العالم اختلف الخلق، فصارت تلك القطع الاثنا عشر علة لعدد البروج الاثنا عشر التي في الفلك... واقول: ان الحركة لما ابتدأت بالتحرك صعدا كان عدد تلك الحركات زمانا ووقتا وله نهاية حتى ينفذ فلا يكون زمانا... ثم ان الحر ايضا دام على ما اسفل منه فاسخنه و اثاره واصعده، فاضطرب الكل اضطرابا شديدا اشد من الاضطراب الاول واصعد شيئا اغلظ من الذي اصعد اول مرة، فاختلف كل بكل، ثم انه انفصل ايضا وتقطع قطعا، فكان ذلك القطع اربعة عشر قطعة.

permits its compositions and formations (sphere of substance or fifth nature). In both cases, however, Jābir considers substance to be *al-habā'*.

II. The Four Elementary Qualities

In his emphasis on the importance and centrality of the theory of the four elementary qualities, or the four natures, Nomanul Haq reduces the importance of substance in Jābir's work due to the lack of any practical use of such a notion. According to him, substance is not so important for Jābir since the practical world of alchemy lies fundamentally on the manipulation of these qualities. The centrality of these elements and their manipulation is what renders Jābir's scientific text, with its "notorious incoherence", a coherent whole.⁷¹

The other emphasis is the idea that in his definition of the four natures, Jābir moves along Neoplatonic lines yet "in a direction far removed from his Hellenistic predecessors."⁷² In one sense, Jābir hypostasises these four natures since they are represented by one of the concentric circles (the world of simple elements), which lies inside the supreme sphere. However, unlike the Hellenistic/Neoplatonic predecessors, these elementary qualities are not the "Empedoclean bodies" fire, air, water, earth but rather the four qualities hot, cold, moist and dry.⁷³ Jābir hypostasises the four qualities and not the Empedoclean primary elements, and "in the intelligible world existed not some "absolute Fire" but the incorporeal hot."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 57.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 58.

The Neoplatonic model is also seen to influence Jābir's explanation of the formation of the material things of this world through the descent of the Soul, which through its desire (*shahwa*) "endowed substance with formative power."⁷⁵ In this attachment between Soul and Substance, this latter gains a spherical form (shape) and becomes, due to this desire, attached to "one of the four isolate [*sic*] qualities whence it becomes a corporeal body."⁷⁶ Nomanul Haq states that it is inside the concentric sphere of the world of the four qualities, inside the sphere of void that substance becomes differentiated due, presumably, to the attachment to qualities.⁷⁷

It appears that *jawhar* only becomes differentiated after its attachment to the elementary qualities, suggesting that it was not so prior to the descent caused by the desire of the Soul. This differentiation, which is the ground of the variety of things of this world, is due to the different quantities of natures that this substance becomes attached to. This is what allows our alchemist to explain the rise of the different objects through the quantifiable measure of elementary qualities.⁷⁸

In agreement with Kraus, Nomanul Haq confirms Jābir's deviation in structure from Aristotle's philosophy. We are informed that Jābir avoids denoting the four elementary qualities with the Aristotelian appellations *dunameis* (*quwā*) or *poiotês* (*kayfiyyāt*), and instead he uses other terms like principles (*uṣūl*), bases (*arkān*), first simples, first elements or mostly natures.⁷⁹ More than that, Jābir according to

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Nomanul Haq “sometimes explicitly distinguish them from *kayfiyyat*”⁸⁰ and for this he quotes:

[...] a thing is characterized by one nature or another (*bi ṭabʿī[m]ḥ mā*). This nature is signified by a quality (*kayfiyya*). If you augment a contrary quality in this body, it will undergo transmutation.⁸²

In this quotation, Nomanul Haq appears to confuse Jābir’s use of the terms nature and *kayfiyya*. It will become apparent in our discussion on natures that quality (*kayfiyya*) in this quotation is exactly what Jābir refers to by the term nature (as an elementary quality). The *bi ṭabʿīn mā*, in this case cannot be the conceptual ‘nature’ (meaning elementary quality) that is normally used by Jābir, but merely a general non conceptual reference to the nature of a thing. Therefore, this quotation distinguishes between the nature of a thing and its natures (its elementary qualities), and not between the natures and *kayfiyyāt*.

Nomanul Haq seems very keen to remind us of the conceptual and terminological difference with Aristotle. One of the main differences for him is that these natures are not accidents that inhere in a material substratum, since Jābir uses terms that suggest a material or corporeal nature to these qualities. Substance is said ‘to stick’ to these natures, ‘to unite’ with them, ‘to mix’ and ‘to cling’ to them. Some of these expressions are also said to apply to the relation of these natures with each other. Interestingly, these natures seem to be associated with some power, since they are said ‘to attack Substance’⁸³ and ‘to act upon it’, ‘shape it’, ‘embrace it’ and ‘compress

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Should be *ṭabʿīn*

⁸² Ibid., p. 78, ref no. 170.

⁸³ Viano remark that the *Timaeus* uses terms of combat to refer to the reciprocal transformation of the elements, see Viano (2005), p. 99.

it'.⁸⁴ Nomanul Haq states that “by conferring on the qualities this independence and corporeality, Jābir has assigned to them the role of true elements.”⁸⁵ In this statement, there is an emphasis on the materiality and corporeality of these founding elements, which are more fundamental than the compounds that emerge from them, air, water, earth and fire.⁸⁶ Nomanul Haq’s distinction between these two sets of elements seems to be solely based on how basic and fundamental is each set, where the natures are considered the corporeal foundation of the second set. This distinction does not reflect any difference in the degree or level of existence, since both seem to be corporeal material qualities.

For Nomanul Haq, this corporeality is specifically emphasised in the description Jābir gives of how to extract these natures. It seems possible according to him to separate a nature and cause it to exist separately from the secondary compound elements that it forms with another nature. The alchemist has the power to extract natures from the elementary bodies, since these are compounds of two natures. The elementary body earth, for example, is formed from the combination of the elementary qualities cold and dry in addition to substance, whilst in Aristotle’s case it would be in addition to matter.⁸⁷ Nomanul Haq point out that for Aristotle, the privation of one of these elementary bodies of one of these qualities, leads to the surfacing and domination of the opposing quality. In this case, depriving fire of hot leads to the appearance of the opposite quality cold, leading to a transformation from fire to earth, which is cold and dry. This is not the case for Jābir since according to Nomanul Haq, it is possible to extract hot from fire leaving it simply as pure dry

⁸⁴ Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 60.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Lewis (2008), p. 126.

(as it is a combination of hot and dry). This particular extraction of the hot is not substituted with the opposing cold, thus leading to a transformation from one elementary body to another.⁸⁸ Nomanul Haq contrasts Jābir with Aristotle on the ground of the possibility of the separability of each of the elementary qualities. It seems possible for the alchemist to have these natures in isolation and in possession of a specific weight.⁸⁹ This idea of weight also applies to substance otherwise, we are told: “the union of two things which are neither visible, nor actually existing, would produce nothing.”⁹⁰ It appears from this that natures and substance must have weight to gain this quality of materiality and corporeality, otherwise nothing concrete would be produced from their union.

In this section we present Jābir’s views on the nature of the elemental qualities which continues from the previous section. Some of the views that will emerge from our sampled texts will appear to challenge the notion of the weight of these qualities, their separability and their corporeality, which is greatly emphasised in Nomanul Haq’s analysis.

In the above section we emphasised the idea that Jābir drew the image of this world in terms of concentric circles to emphasise and reflect the intelligibility of this world rather than its corporeality. What is fundamental to us is that the world of Elements is itself represented in terms of a circle reflecting its imaginary and intelligible nature. What is also of great importance, and what emphasises this same idea, is that Jābir recounts the different ways that people have imagined the organisation of this circle, pointing out that the structure in itself is not what is important but rather

⁸⁸ Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 60.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 60, 61.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

how one puts this or that image to use, or the practical sense of how we use this idea in this corporeal world. One of the suggested images is splitting the circle of elements into four equal quarters using two crossing vertical lines whilst the other one splits the same circle into four smaller equal circles. Each one of these images points to the equality between the four elementary worlds, the world of heat, world of cold, world of dryness and the world of moisture. However, the last suggestion given by Jābir is one that has more details and is set up in a different way. As we have explained before, this image is that of the circle of the world of the Elements containing concentric circles or as Jābir states “containing the opposites.”⁹¹ It starts with the world of heat followed by the circle of dryness. Inside this circle exists the circle of the world of cold which contains inside it the circle of rest (*sukūn*) or the circle of moisture.⁹²

II.1.i Soul/Substance in *Maydān al-ʿAql*

In *k. Maydān al-ʿAql*, Jābir states that it is because of *shahwa* that Soul becomes attached to Substance, and it is what renders it visible and possessing a colour. In this section Jābir emphasises the idea that what results from this attachment between these two worlds has not a single accident (*ʿarḍ*),⁹³ it is rather a pure essence (*dhāt*). The reason for this particular view, that what results is an essence and not an attribute or an accident, is according to Jābir because it ceases to exist once the Soul and Substance cease to be.⁹⁴ There appears to be a clear contradiction

⁹¹ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 410.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 408-410.

⁹³ In the first instance Jābir says: “ليس بعرض فيه بل هو ذات” that it has no quality, however, few lines below he says: “ووجب انه ليس بعرض” that it, the new substance is not a quality. *Mukhtārāt*, p. 211.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

in the two successive statements where one affirms that the result of the union is a visible substance qualified by a colour whilst the other statement declares that the result is an unqualified essence. Following this union the new entity which is an essence becomes present in a new world that is different from its constituent (Soul + Substance) and from this world it acquires the elements.⁹⁵

The world where the Soul/Substance descends,⁹⁶ is the world of the Elements, which some say is void (*khalā*) whilst others say is plenitude (*malā*).⁹⁷ This distinction between the two descriptions of the world of Elements (with no Jābirian commitment to either), reflects in some ways a dual nature of this world. It is a way of pointing to a layer of existence that is between two different worlds, one is the world that belongs to intellection and imagination, and the other is the concrete world of plenitude, it is something between the incorporeal and the corporeal. Once it descends into this world of Elements, the Soul/Substance would necessarily become attached to these elements and would not leave this world without such an attachment to an Element. The text suggests that the initial unification of Substance with Soul is what creates an essence without any qualification,⁹⁸ following this, the new entity becomes attached to other things from the world that is ontologically lower than Substance. This suggests that the Substance/Soul becomes qualified in this lower world by some qualities, through the act of what Jābir describes as

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 413.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 211.

⁹⁸ We are not aware if there are numerous essences created this way or simply a single one.

“acquiring the elements.”⁹⁹ This acquiring of the Elements is attained in degrees or according to the yearning (*shawq*) of the Soul for one of these elements.¹⁰⁰

We may note in this section that Jābir distinguishes between two movements of the Soul, the first one is caused by what he calls *shahwa* or desire, whilst the second one is caused by what he calls *shawq* or yearning. Both of these movements seem to point to the same drive, which leads in one case to a union with Substance and in the second to a union with the elements (or the qualities). We mentioned that in *k. al-Taṣrīf*, *shahwa* was the first of the created things that sprang from the union of Substance and Soul, and it is here considered to be the force that drives the motion of Soul towards Substance and towards the Elements. One may suggest from both of these Jābirian views that desire (*shahwa/shawq*) is the first cause of the movement of unification of two worlds (Soul and Substance), and is itself the first created thing, or the first affected thing.

II.1.ii Yearning and Balance

Following this union, we find in *k. Maydān al-‘Aql* another model that is loosely related to that of *k. al-Taṣrīf*. In this book, it is the yearning of the Soul that determines the attachment to one of the Elements. If the Soul yearns for heat, it will acquire this element, otherwise it would be the cold or any of the other elements.

⁹⁹ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 211.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

There seems to be no hierarchy of preference given to one element over the other, not even in terms of active or passive natures.¹⁰¹

In this section of this *kitāb*, we encounter a very interesting line that may play a part in understanding one of the essential terms in Jābir's vocabulary, that is, the concept of balance, which classifies the science of alchemy as the science of balance. Balance as a concept refers to the different weights of the different elements that compose a particular substance.¹⁰² The sentence that may help us to understand the meaning of this weight is “فنسب أصل الموازين و كونها لتوقان النفس الى العناصر”¹⁰³ Kraus reads the first term of this sentence as *nusiba* or ascribe, which would mean that this sentence means: “the origin of Balance and its existence is ascribed to the longing of the Soul to the elements.” In conjunction with the following section we might understand by this that the science of balance is a measure of the Soul's desire to be attached to this or that element. Jābir clearly states that “فهذه الشهوة هي التي ينبغي أن يقع عليها الميزان أو مقدار ما”¹⁰⁴ This might be translated as:

It is to this Desire that one must apply the balance, or it may be applied to the capacity the Substance has for each one of these worlds.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 212.

¹⁰² Kraus, pp. 184, 185, quotes from *k. al-Baḥth*.

إنه قد ذهب عليكم معنى الخفيف والتثقل ما هو وأنه نسبة الشيء الى المكان فقط.

Also for Gannagé the theory of balance establishes the degree of intensities of the different qualities in each of the existent things of this world. In other terms it could also be seen as the measure of the proportion of these qualities, meaning not an exact actual measure of a weight but of a proportional relevant weight. See Gannagé (2005), pp. 10-11.

¹⁰³ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

The weight that Jābir talks about is therefore a practical measure, not of the real weight of the elements, but rather a measure of the desire of the Soul or the capacity of substance.¹⁰⁵

The mechanism through which the Soul/Substance becomes attached to the elements is well described in *k. Maydān al- 'Aql*. This Soul/Substance is driven by its desire for the element that is mostly desired. Its attachment is said by Jābir to resemble a paste that is soaked in alcohol or honey. In the case of the paste it absorbs whatever it absorbs until it reaches its maximum capacity. This, however, is not the case with Soul/Substance, since it can absorb up to its maximum capacity but as it is endowed with choice, this means it does not have to absorb until it reaches this maximum capacity.¹⁰⁶

The point that is emphasised by Jābir is that Soul does not only have desire, it is also capable of choice "إذ كانت النفس مختارة فاعلمه"¹⁰⁷ If this Soul/Substance chooses to absorb heat first of all, then it will go to this part of the world of Elements, absorb up to its maximum capacity and according to the degree of its desire. Following this step, the Soul/Substance leaves the world of heat and enters the void that lies between it and the world of dryness. If it desires to enter this world and absorb a second most desired element it would do so, otherwise it would enter the following world, the world of cold or the one after, the world of dryness. Each time the Soul/Substance

¹⁰⁵ Kraus, p. 195, quotes a passage from *k. al-Baḥth* where Jābir states:

انا نحن قد اخترنا لانفسنا نوعا من الاوزان فمن اختار ان يعمل به فهو له وان اختار ان يرسم لنفسه رسما اخر فذلك اليه.

Kraus also quotes another passage from the same book which emphasises the unimportance of the specificity of the system followed by Jābir to order the measurement of the different weights:

وليس ترتيبنا لذلك امرا ضروريا لابد منه بل ذلك لكل احد اذ علم القياس بين افعال الطبايع يرتبه على اختياره كيف ما شاء.

¹⁰⁶ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 212.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

enters a new world it absorbs from it up to its maximum capacity which in turn is reduced as it moves from one world to the next, since each attachment reduces the maximum capacity to absorb the next element.¹⁰⁸ This means that weight is ultimately determined by the desire of the Soul and by the order in which an element becomes attached to the Soul/Substance. Also of some importance in this description is that the void not only plays the role of a buffer between two successive Element worlds, but also permits the transition to a world that is not next in order in the concentric circles model. In some sense, the model that works better in this particular mechanism is the one with four equal sized circles inside the world of elements separated by this void.

One could suggest a model that corrects Jābir's suggestion of a circle of void inside the final concentric set of circles ending with Moisture. In this suggestion, one can have the void as the ground on which all the circles rest, thus, creating a buffer between each one of them. We are entertaining this thought experiment to demonstrate how Jābir 'refers' to previous models and chooses one that best explains how he imagines things in the incorporeal world. The model is simply what helps make a particular image clearer, even if that can be achieved by a combination of different models. We notice that Jābir does not do the act of combining different models himself and that instead he merely suggests the different views.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 212-213.

II.2 The natures in *k. al- Sab'īn*

In this section we explore some of the definitions, descriptions and associations that Jābir links to the elemental qualities or natures. Some of these descriptions might prove to be a challenge to some of the conclusions that are drawn from his other works. This is either due to clear contradictions in Jābir's work, or simply because we have clearer explanations that force the reader to find different interpretations to other texts. Since much of this book has not been edited, we will include the original Arabic version and our own translations.

K. al-Qubba

II.2.i The active natures

First of all, Jābir informs us of the relation that exists between substance and the four natures. It could be suggested that the term substance here is either substance as simple matter or, as we have so far referred to in this section, as Soul/Substance. The first reference that is of interest to us regarding this relation comes in *k. al-Qubba* (from *k. al-Sab'īn*) where Jābir writes:

أولا أعلم ان الطبايع لما إستعملت الجوهر استعملت كلها وكل متكون موجود هو من جوهر
وأربع طبائع لا غير.¹⁰⁹

First of all, know that when the natures utilise the substance they are utilised in their entirety. And every generated thing that exists is formed from a substance and four natures and nothing else.

¹⁰⁹ Ms. 1878, p. 143.

The structure of the sentence is a little ambiguous, but it does convey nonetheless some important information regarding these natures. In the previous section, it was said that it is the Soul/Substance that descends to the world of Elements and becomes attached to different elements according to the desire of the Soul. Here, however, we notice that it is the four natures that utilise substance, where the term *استعمل* suggests acting upon something, which in this particular case is substance. This endows the natures with the power to act upon substance, they are thus active agents in their relation with substance and not simply subjects to the Soul's desire, as was suggested earlier in the case of the descent of the Soul, or when considering the world from the Soul/Substance perspective.

The ambiguous part of the sentence is "الطبايع لما إستعملت الجوهر استعملت كلها" or "when the natures utilise the substance they are utilised in their entirety." What is suggested in this phrase is that it is the natures that act on the substance but are also simultaneously acted upon.¹¹⁰ What is generally emphasised, however, is the activity of the natures rather than the substance. This could be due to the fact that Jābir is presenting the relation between the substance and the elemental qualities from a different angle. Previously the emphasis was on the descent, meaning from a higher intellectual ontological level, while here he is considering these same entities from the perspective of what is formed, generated and existent. This is clear from the end of the above quotation, since he is defining the entities that are generated and exist in this corporeal world. From our perspective, the existing human being (or the alchemist in this particular case), it is the activity of these natures that concerns us.

¹¹⁰ See Kraus, p. 172.

It is not only the active nature of these natures that is important but also the way they are distributed or divided in the existing body. Jābir tells us:

وهذه الطبيع لما استعملت الجوهر كان التغاير من الطبيع في ذلك الجسم فما غلب من الطبيع ظهر وما غلب منها بطن.¹¹¹

When these natures utilise the substance a variance results in their appearance in the body. Those natures that are dominant become manifest and those that are dominated become hidden.

So here again, one finds in this sentence the active nature of the elemental qualities. What Jābir is discussing here, however, is the variance in the distribution of these natures inside the existing corporeal body.

II.2.ii The hidden and the manifest natures

We noticed in the previous section that when dealing with the incorporeal world, balance depended on the desire of the Soul and the relative reduced capacity to become attached to the successive natures. In the more concrete world of the alchemist however, the distribution of the natures in the body is set in two modes, the dominant and the dominated or the manifest and the hidden. Before mentioning the measure of the desire of the Soul, we noticed the variation in the powers of these natures themselves. The dominant ones are those that are apparent and manifest whilst the dominated and weaker ones are hidden and unseen.

We are then informed of the following characteristics of an existent thing:

وكل واحد من هذه الموجودات فيه اربع طبيع، اثنان منها باطنان واثنان ظاهران والظاهران هو المنسوب اليهما فعل الشيء.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Ms. 1878, p. 143.

Every one of these existents has four natures, two of which are hidden, and two of which are manifest. It is also to the manifest natures that one attributes the activity of the thing.

لأنه لا يكون شيء موجود إلا وفيه هذه الأربع طبائع.¹¹³

For there is no thing that becomes existent without necessarily having these four natures.

These two sentences clearly define what is the really existent thing. For Jābir, all that is classified as such, as an existent thing, must have in its constitution the four elements. Whatever this existent thing is, it is always in possession of two manifest natures and two hidden ones. Any of the activities that are associated with the existent thing are attributed to the manifest natures. It is not so clear what Jābir intends to mean by this activity, but we may assume for now that it is any positive qualifications that are associated with the thing and are caused by the activity of the active natures. This set of manifest and hidden natures establishes an opposition within the existent things of this world. The manifest is what we associate with all that is recognisable about the things of this world, but everyone of these things, necessarily holds within itself opposing characteristics that are hidden from us.

II.2.iii Mixtures and variation

One of the other features of these elements concerns their combination with the bodies they are a part of. In this respect, Jābir writes:

فكلما إمتزجت هذه الطبائع وعلقت بالجسم أخذت مواضعاً وأخذ الجسم منها مقداراً فاختلقت فروعها وانفقت أصولها فما انحل من هذه الموجودات رجع إلى تلك الأصول وما لم ينحل فهو

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 144.

على حالته أو حامل لشيء من تلك الأعراض... والجوهر أيضا فما انحل من هذه الأشياء وبقي جوهره فهو راجع الى أصله كالكلام على العناصر وانتلافها وافتراقها.¹¹⁴

Therefore, whenever these natures are mixed and become attached to the body, they occupy positions, and the body takes a measure from them, hence there is variation in the branches and agreement in the principles. All the existents that are decomposed return to these principles whilst that which is not decomposed remains in its state or supports some of these accidents (qualities)... and so too is the substance, so that those things that are decomposed and their substance remains, it returns to its principle in the same way that the elements are combined and separated.

The above quotation includes two entities which appear to behave in a similar way.

The first of these are the four elementary qualities or the natures, and the other is substance. We saw in the previous section how all existents are made from a substance and four natures, here, however, Jābir treats the same idea from another angle. What we have in this case is a relation between these elements themselves and the body they are related to, or simply body in general. The first of these relations is that these qualities mix with each other forming different possible combinations and therefore mixtures. These elements in their various combinations are said in this particular quotation to become attached or stick to the body.¹¹⁵ Interestingly, this choice of expression suggests that a body is a thing and the natures are separate things that only stick or are attached to it. Here, Jābir uses the term body and not substance, suggesting something with an already concrete reality, a substantial body to which the elements become attached to. In addition, the act associated with this body seems closely related to the Soul/Substance combination, since this body takes a measure of these natures and the Soul/Substance becomes attached to them according to its desire. In these cases, it is

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 60.

the substantial form that acts upon the natures and not the other way around. This is very different from the more positive role associated with natures, since they are here only given the positive act of becoming attached to particular locations or positions in this or that body. The body, whatever Jābir means by it, is given the power of choosing the particular measures and quantities that makes it distinguished from other things. In this particular instance, it seems that the variation in measures, or quantities of natures, is what makes the variation in the branches, the different existing things of this world. In other words, it is the variations in the mixtures made from the different measures of this or that nature, along with the variation in the positioning in the body, that creates the various existents of the world. The principles of all these variations and multiplicity in this world remain, however, the same four natures.

As these natures are considered to be principles and the origin of the various things of this world, these existents must return to this same origin. The existing things emerge from these principles and return to them. The origination and corruption of things emerge and return in a cyclical pattern to the same original principles. In this case, the different ratios and quantities that compose the various mixtures, which emerge from the world of Elements, must return in their state of corruption to this origin. Things have either returned to their principles and decomposed, or are in a state of composition that includes a body and different accidents or qualities (natures).

In the second section of this quotation, Jābir deals with the other part of what makes the existents. In this case, he calls it substance but the fact that he refers to it as that

which remains after decomposition (presumably the decomposition of the natures and their return to their initial state), suggests that substance is what he originally referred to as body. This assumption is based on the fact that there is nothing other than body that is referred to outside the mixture of natures. In this quotation, substance itself follows a similar pattern to the natures and returns to its origin, presumably to the world of Substance. This would thus be a return of a differentiated substance to the original undifferentiated Substance.¹¹⁶

One can conclude from this part of the text that Jābir distinguishes between two principles that are combined together to form the existents. One is substance, which is a distinguished and differentiated substance in this concrete world, and the other is the four natures that exist here in the form of mixtures with particular or specific quantifiable measures. It is these second principles – natures- that differentiate the first principle –substance- into the things of this world.

II.2.iv The alchemist and nature in k. al-Riwāq

In *k. Riwāq*, or the eighteenth book of *al-Sabʿīn*, we find the sequence of development of the natural order, or more specifically the three kingdoms, the stones (minerals), the plants and the animals. First of all, the elements fire, air, water and earth are formed from the mixtures of the natures and substance. Fire is set to occupy the high positions, followed by air, which like fire, contains heat,

¹¹⁶ On the idea of principle, we read in Gourinat (2009), p. 49: “We do not know of any Stoic definition of ‘principle’ [...]: ‘principle’ is characterized only by being distinguished from the ‘elements’ [...], as ungenerated, indestructible, and shapeless. To distinguish between principles and elements may seem innovative, when compared to Plato or Aristotle, since both of them qualify here and there the elements as principles.” And (p. 55): “many other sources maintain that the Stoic principles are bodies. Basically, the principles are ‘that which acts and that which is acted upon’.”

followed by water and earth.¹¹⁷ As the sphere containing these elements begins to rotate, the first set of elemental composites emerge, these are the stones or the minerals. The stones are considered to be nature's first product, because the activity of the natures is weak at this stage of composition and generation. As the rotation of the sphere increases, the natures become stronger which leads to the production of the plants and the trees. Once the rotation of the sphere reaches its peak and perfection, the animal kingdom is generated.¹¹⁸

The alchemist who knows the workings of nature through the four natures, can imitate the process and cause things to be generated and combined from other things. The imitation of nature does not only mean transforming the minerals from one state to another but it also means generating plants and animals, including humans.¹¹⁹ The possibility of human creative power of generation stems from the fact that all the existing things of this world have five principles. If the existents are simply variations in the ratios of combinations then the alchemist, who knows the science of balance and how these ratios may be changed, has the power to generate new things.¹²⁰ The ability to generate anything from anything does not mean that

¹¹⁷ *K. al-Sab'īn* in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 460.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ The positive activity of the natures on substance is viewed by Jābir to be either subject to God's will or more importantly, to the human will as well. However, despite this human capacity to work on the natures they are still in Jābir's view incapable of achieving creation in a similar way to God. We are told in this respect:

وهم يصلون الى ان يفعلوا بالطبائع ما أحبوا وبالجوهر والزمان والمكان والكمية والكيفية وأعجزهم بعد قدرتهم على ذلك أن يعملوا فيه
كعمله!

'Al-Mīzān al-Ṣaghīr in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 445.

When not speaking of God as the cause of the different things of this world, Jābir mentions the activity of nature in this production. In such a case he also compares the human ability to create to that of nature's ability. He writes in this respect:

ثم انه بعد ذلك لما امتزجت هذه الاصول واخلطت وعلق كل عرض من هذه الاعراض بالجسم ظهر الظاهر فاخبر ان في قوة الانسان ان
يعمل كعمل الطبيعة.

'K. al-Sab'īn in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 463.

Jābir believes in *kumūn*, that some hidden things exist in other things, which is a belief that he criticises and attributes to the Manicheans.¹²¹ It is not the idea that things as they are exist in other things as hidden that permits the science of alchemy, it is rather the idea that all things originate from and return to their simple components that grounds this science. Jābir writes:

[E]very one of the three genera is in fact generated and made to appear from fire, air, water and earth. There is therefore no doubt that the three genera are one.¹²²

This science, which allows humans to become like gods and transform all things into all things, was modestly reduced with many later alchemist to the art of transforming minerals. The simple reason was the fact that these are closest to nature in the chain of composition, which means the easiest to decompose and recompose.¹²³

Also in the extract from '*k. al-Tajmīr*' (*Mukhtārāt*, pp. 341-392) Jābir discusses the different complex alchemical means of transforming stones, plants, animals and humans into each other, all of this through changing the relation or ratios of the four natures inside each body through the science of balance.

¹²¹ '*K. al-Khawās al-Kabīr*' in *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 299-301.

وأيضاً فإنه لا يخلو من أن يكون تجنس من ظهور بعض الأشياء من بعض... من أن يكون عن كمن بعض في بعض كقول المنانية أو عن استحالة وإبداع ثان عن ليس، وهو قول أهل الإبداع عن ليس اعني الموجود.
[...]

فأما الذي يقول فيه أهل الإبداع فهم القائلون بالتوحيد والمبطلون قول المنانية وغيرهم ممن قال بقولهم في كمن بعض الأشياء في بعض.
¹²² Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *al-Jumal al-Ishrīn*, in Ms. 1878, p. 384 and '*k. al-Ḥay*' from *k. al-Sab'īn*, Ms. 1878, p. 111.

¹²³ In a tenth century alchemical text *miftāḥ al-ḥikma* we learn that that the elements are generated from the natures and once they decompose they return to the natures. In the same manner the minerals are generated from the elements, the plants from the minerals and finally the animals from the plants. Each case of decomposition is a case of return to a prior state in the chain of generation (Carusi (2005), p. 186). Also al-Jaldakī (d. 742/ 1341) mentions that unlike metals, the animals and the plants are restricted in their generative capabilities, for they have attained their limit (*telos*) and their generation have been completed:

بقوله غير مقيدة كاشخاص الحيوان والنبات فإن اشخاص الحيوان والنبات انتهى بها الكون ووقف عند غايته.

Al-Jaldakī, *Nehāyat al-ṭalab fī sharḥ al-muktasab*, Ms. 512, p. 8.

II.3 Substance and accidents in the 44th book (the principles)

To further understand the nature of these principles which are the base of the composite elements fire, water, earth and air,¹²⁴ we refer in this section to a hypothetical conversation between Jābir and someone who doubts the nature of the elementary qualities. This is found in the forty fourth book of *k. al-Sabʿīn*.

كان أصل هذه العناصر التي ليس أصل غيرها الحرارة والبرودة والرطوبة واليبوسة وهذه لا يحس العقلا ولا يشاهد عيانا كان علينا في ذلك علة لان ليس لهذه اصل. وهو يعارض معارض ما

فيقول: حارة يابسة

فيقول: او ليست معينة موجودة

ففيقول: نعم

فيقول: فهل تجد¹²⁵ الحرارة التي هي اصل النار حسا¹²⁶ ومشاهدة غير التي هي عرض

ففيقول: لا، لأن ذلك لازم

فيقول: فهل تجد¹²⁷ اليبوسة التي هي أصل النار مع مجاورة الحرارة، واليبوسة كالاصفار في الاعداد التي لا ينتج شيئا¹²⁸ لانها غير محسوسة ولا [غير] مرئية فلم اذا اضيف ما لا يوجد ولا يحس يحدث بينهما ما يوجد ويحس فالجواب فيه وهي غير مقنع بل هو تلبيس على الاصل وليس بالحق. فنقول بالعكس انا اذا جمعنا ما يرى الى ما يرى ويحس يحدث بينهما ما لا يرى ولا يحس...

والجواب على ذلك: أن ما يرى ويحس قد يحدث بينه وبين ما يحس ما يوجد ويحس وما لا يوجد ولا يحس فليس بشيء، كقولنا إن قلنا ليس زيد وليس عمر ويحدث بينهما فعل ما وانسان اخر...

لكن نقول وبالله التوفيق: إن الحرارة والبرودة والرطوبة واليبوسة لا يوجد واحد منها ولا يحس لعمرى وقولك انا اذا اضفنا ما لا يوجد ويحس مغالطة لان كل موجود في العالم من الطبائع التي

¹²⁴ Ms. 1878, p. 260.

¹²⁵ تحد

¹²⁶ حقا

¹²⁷ تحد

¹²⁸ شياء

لا توجد ولا تحس لكن هي محمولة في الجوهر القديم الذي هو اصل الاشياء كلها فليس منه مكان خال وكل منحل من هذه الاشياء فعائيد اليه والحرارة والبرودة والرطوبة واليبوسة أعراض فيه وبها يكون أحمر وأبيض واسود وكل لون وكل صورة.¹²⁹

Also, the principle of these elements, of which there is no other, is heat, cold, moisture and dryness. These are neither sensed by the intelligent nor witnessed by sight, because they themselves have no principle. An opponent might oppose this view and say: hot and dry? Isn't this determined and existent?

And we would say: Yes.

And they would say: so can heat, which is the principle of fire, be found by sense and observation as something other than what is an accident?

And we would say: no, for this is necessary.

And they would say: so can dryness, which is the principle of fire and proximate to heat, be seen to exist? And dryness is like the zeros in number from which nothing can be produced, for it is not sensed and not observed. So why is it that when an un-sensed non-existent is added a sensed existent emerges? The answer to this question is weak and unconvincing, it obscures the principle and it is not the truth. What we say is the opposite. If we add what is observed to what is observed and sensed what results between them is unobserved and un-sensed...

And the reply to this: it may happen that when the observed and sensed is added to what is sensed it would produce what is sensed and existent, and that which is not existent and is not sensed is not a thing. It is as if we would say not-Zayd and not-Omar would produce a particular act and another human being...

However, we say, and by God we succeed: indeed heat, cold, moisture and dryness do not exist and are not sensed in isolation. As to your statement if we add what is not existent and sensed it is a fallacy, since all the existents of this world are from the natures that do not exist and are not sensed. However, they inhere in the eternal substance which is the principle of all things, so that there is no space that is free from it, and every decomposed thing returns to it. heat, cold, moisture and dryness are accidents (qualities) in it and it is through them that it becomes red, white, black and every colour and every form.

¹²⁹ Ms. 1878, pp. 260-262.

The elements that are mentioned at the beginning of this quotation are the compound elements air, fire, water and earth. Jābir confirms the secondary and derivative nature of these elements which come from the primary qualities or the elementary qualities.¹³⁰ He names these qualities principles, as the elementary bodies are derived from them and they are derived from nothing else, or as he says, they “have no principles”. The distinction made in this first part relies heavily on the idea of something being the principle or origin of something else, or of something being the founding element of another. Having a principle, suggests having an origin that is more basic in the cosmos, and in this case, the natures are more basic than the elements, since they are their founding ground, and they themselves have no such principle of origination. This is what renders the qualities more basic and simple, and this is the cause for the distinction made between the simple elements (elemental qualities) and the compound elements (the elemental bodies).

Once the difference between the material elements and the natures is established, Jābir introduces an imaginary interlocutor who knows his ideas of the principles and their combinations. This is apparent from the start of the dialogue where the reality of what is a hot and dry element is assumed. The combination of the hot and the dry is what produces fire, a really existing and distinguished element. The opponent then moves from establishing the concrete nature of fire to specifically challenge the nature of its individual components, heat and dryness. He questions if it is possible to find any of these founding elements in forms that are other than

¹³⁰ Gannagé says that for Jābir the elementary qualities are tangible and primary because only they are reciprocally active and passive through themselves and not through anything else, Gannagé (2005), p. 13.

accidents (qualities). Since the response to this is in the negative, that heat and dryness or any other elemental quality may not exist in forms other than qualities or accidents, the question becomes how can that which truly exists as a distinguished entity be only formed or be a compound of qualities only?¹³¹ How can that which is concrete be a compound of what is not so? The interesting metaphor to express this puzzling fact is the idea that the elemental qualities appear to be similar in nature to the way zeros are in numbers. No zero can be added to another and produce a number that is different from them (a non-thing comes from two non-things).¹³² The zero is used as a number reflecting the nature of an un-sensed non-existent entity, which somehow simplifies the nature of what is existent as that which is sensed, which is a simple materialistic view of what is really existent. The challenge is basic: what is not an existent sensed entity may not produce something of an opposite nature if added to something of a similar nature. The only possibility that the interlocutor accepts is that two sensed existent entities may be added together and for the result of the combination to be a non-existent entity, in other words it is possible for two existing entities to annihilate each other in combination.

In Jābir's opinion, this last case is not supported by his observations. What his observation supports is that the sensed and the observed, when added to something of the same kind, would produce something sensed and existent. The relations between the sensed and the existent only produce things that are ontologically the same, sensed and existent things. He confirms that what is not sensed and existent is

¹³¹ Job of Edessa (1935), p. 12: "the elements are found both before and after the composition, and they did not come into being at that moment, as did the body which was composed of them. They remain what they are both before and after the composition [...] The elements only underwent displacement, while their essence did not cease to exist as it is the very substance of their identity."

¹³² Same challenge to the idea of points being added together.

not a thing, and by 'not a thing' he seems to be saying 'does not exist'. The relation between the term 'thing' with the context of the discussion suggests that a 'thing' is that which exists in the real concrete world, or is akin to the things that an alchemist would work with in his laboratory. The example that Jābir uses to counter the argument of his fictional interlocutor is that of two non-existent human beings, a non-existent Zayd is added to another non-existent human being Omar. This combination cannot produce an existent thing of any kind, human or not human, and it may not produce an act of any kind too. Hence, one may deduce that for Jābir, an act is a thing as well, which may not result from a non-existent thing or a combination of non-existent things.¹³³ It must be mentioned that Jābir starts this particular criticism from the point of what is real and concrete, what he says is sensed and observed. He confirms that these things produce a sensed and existent thing but he does not discuss what other things may be considered as existent or if there are other existent things. However, he does mention in his example the word act which does suggest that his category of a thing or the existent is larger than simply the sensed and the observed as material things.

In the last paragraph, Jābir deals directly with the issue of the combination of the natures and what these are ontologically. He states and confirms the interlocutor's idea that these natures, these elemental qualities, are neither existent nor are they non-existent entities. What is central in Jābir's philosophy is that these are non-existent when they are simple and in isolation, or in their original nature so to speak, however, this is not the case when they are in combination. Everything that is

¹³³ See also ps-Apollonios (1979), pp. 71-73 on the nature of the act:

وقد يلزم الفعل ما يلزم الاشياء لانه يدرك بالحواس الظاهرة والباطنة وهو محدود وله ابتداء وانقضاء في وقت معلوم... ولا يكون الا في مكان ولا يكون الا لعلة، فلزمه نعت المخلوق كله ...

seen and observed in all the existents of this world are made from the combinations of these non-existents. Every thing, every existent arises from the non-exist and unsensed natures. If one stops here, it is not clear how this can be justifiably considered a response to the interlocutor, since the problem remains the same; Jābir's confirmation that non-existent things combine and produce the various existent observable things of this world. This in itself may not be considered sufficient as a counterargument.

The actual response to this problem relies on the idea that it is not sufficient to merely state that these natures are non-existents and are not sensed, since they also have to be associated with substance. The solution that he offers is that these natures are in the substance and are attributed to it, but it is not very clear how this resolves the main problem of combining two non-existents and producing an elemental body. For Jābir, the solution is in the idea that it is only with substance that this combination is achieved.

We had come across the idea that what exists is not merely a combination of two elemental qualities, as the interlocutor suggests in this passage, and that in fact it is this as well as substance that make up the existent. Nomanul Haq's belief that substance is in some ways not so important for Jābir is not quite right, since nothing that is concrete and real is without substance.¹³⁴ Substance might be irrelevant in the calculations of the science of balance, the ratios and weights of natures that differentiate the different materials of this world, but it is essential in the

¹³⁴ Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 57.

philosophy that renders this science of alchemy possible.¹³⁵ It is this substance that renders the non-existent into an existent thing, or into all the existent things.¹³⁶ What is not clear, however, is why Jābir refers to this substance as the eternal substance (*al-jawhar al-qadīm*). Were these natures in this substance before their combination and becoming attributes of this same substance?¹³⁷

Jābir states that the eternal substance is the principle of all things since all things return to it and it is in all things. This description sounds very similar to the one given to the natures and could in some way contradict it, since when dealing with them it was said that they were the only principles. If substance is the principle of these natures then they may not be said to be principles since according to him they would be originating from something else. One possible suggestion is that these elemental qualities are also principles and are coexistent with substance but are nonetheless non-existent, thus substance becomes the principle in the truest sense of the term. These natures are in the substance eternally since otherwise they would originate from it and would cease to become principles, also their ontological status

¹³⁵ In another part of our manuscript (Ms. 1878. pp 284-285.) we read:

والاصول الاول اربعة وهي أمهات هذه الاشياء كلها ومنها كانت هذه الاشياء كلها واصلها خامس وتلك الاربعة محمولة على هذا الاصل. فاما الاصل فالجوهر البسيط المسمى هيولى وهو الهباء المملو به الخلل وذلك متى اذا طلعت عليه الشمس بان بجميع الاشكال و الصور و كل منحل اليه وهو أصل لكل مركب والكل أصل له وهو أصل للكل وذلك دائم الى الوقت المعلوم.

Jābir maintains, in this quotation, his way of referring to the four natures as the principles, in the plural sense, of all the existents. Here we have a clear relation between these four principles and the fifth principle that is their principle and the principle of all things. The idea of a fifth principle could also be related to what had been mentioned in the section on substance, what was named the 'Fifth nature'. It is the prime matter that Jābir refuses to speculate about when arguing against the Sabians, and it is what he regularly refers to as the dust that fills the empty spaces. We find that Jābir considers that the four principles are attributes of the fifth principle which is ultimately the origin of all that exists. Substance is in this sense not only related to the four natures in that their composites form the existents of this world, but also in the sense that substance is the source or the principle of these principles. Jābir permanently ends by interlocking substance and the four natures. What we have at the end of the above quotation is a major deviation from the Sabians' belief, Jābir here states that this prime matter will only last or exist for a time that is known, suggesting a time with a known end. This also appears to be different from his consideration in other sections of this chapter.

¹³⁶ We had come across the idea that by substance Jābir means exist and by the natures he means concrete.

¹³⁷ This idea was challenged in al-Rassī's discussions.

as non-existent appears to be the only solution to their coexistence with this true principle. Their nature of being non-existent is resolved by being denied a separate and independent existence since they are in the substance only in the form of attribute or accidents.¹³⁸

The use of the eternal substance (*al-qadīm*) suggests that this is not a created thing and the natures are always within it. They become sensed only when combined with each other and the substance that they are in. This means that they become manifest only in combination. Since all the things of this world are from this substance, and since there is no space that is empty of it, and all things return to it, we may conclude that the ontological change from a non-existent being to an existent being, within the same substance (that is eternal), is only a matter of combination. This combination is limited or determined by the specific ratios (or weights) of the different qualities and it is regulated by the laws of balance that are known by the alchemist.

II.4 The Eternal substance and its accidents (attributes)

The above suggestion is possible only if one interprets the previous quotation in isolation, particularly the section concerned with the status of the natures as non-existents or their status prior to any combination. The next quotation, which is from the same book, helps to clarify certain issues yet it still leaves obscure the nature of things that are non-existent. We gain no knowledge regarding the question of

¹³⁸ Note the similarity with the question of God's attributes, particularly knowledge.

whether or not these things are eternal or if they return to what they were before coming to be.

فأما من قال أن الجسم فيه أعراض مختلفة بعضها يزول وبعضها لا يزول من الجسم ابدأ، يريد بذلك إبطال ما سلف لنا من القول من حلول الأعراض، قيل له: هل الجسم <متجدد بنفسه>¹³⁹ أم قدمه وانفراده مخصوص بنفسه قائم بذاته وإذا أوجب ذلك أوجب زوال ذلك العرض لذلك الجوهر ابدأ. قيل له قولنا جوهر ومعه عرض لا يفارقه و عرض مفارق خطأ لانا قلنا عرض غير مفارق و عرض مفارق ولم نشترط في أحد العرضين شرطا، فقد وجب أن العرض اللازم و العرض المفارق واحد فلم وجب ان يزول واحد ويثبت الاخر وان لزم ذلك الزمننا ان الثابت قد يزول والزائل يثبت في وقت كما زال هذا في وقت وثبت الاخر... ان من قولهم ان العرض اللازم لم يكن باصل في ذلك الجوهر فقد ثبت ووجب ان يزول اذ كان داخلا عليه في أول الامر، ولن يكون حال في جميع الاشياء في جوهر ما إلا وهو يزول عنه او يجب ان يزول...

إن الكلام المنغلق على الناس جميعا هو ماتقوله نحن لانا نقول ان الجوهر ينفرد بوجود وحده وهو الهباء المملوء به الخلل والتركيب في ذلك أن تصوره الاربع الطبايع الفاعلة فيه فيكون بذلك جملة هذه الموجودات.¹⁴⁰

As to those who say that the body has different accidents, some of which vanish whilst the others eternally remain in the body. They want to negate what we had said regarding the inherence of the accidents. We say to them: can the body be found by itself? Or, are its eternal being and its singularity characteristic of its self subsisting nature? If they affirm this, they will affirm that the accidents would always cease to exist in that substance. We also say to them that for us to state that a substance has an accident that becomes detached and another that remains attached is erroneous for we would be stating that an accident remains attached and another detaches itself without a condition that applies to either of the two. This would mean that both of these accidents are the same, so why would one cease to exist and the other subsist? If we accept this then the one that subsists may cease to be and the one that ceases to be may subsist at different times... what they also say is that the subsisting accident was not a principle in that substance. This would confirm that it is necessary that it should cease to exist since it is foreign to it in the first instance, and there would be nothing that inheres in any substance that does not cease to be or necessarily cease to be...

What the majority of people are hindered from seeing is what we say ourselves, for we say that the substance does exist by itself, it is the dust that fills the void. The composition of substance is through the formative act of the four natures which produce these numerous existents.

¹³⁹ Not clear in Ms. 1878.

¹⁴⁰ Ms. 1878, pp. 263-265.

This quotation discusses the nature of the elemental qualities from the perspective of whether or not there are different ones, and the nature of their relation with substance. The main idea that Jābir is trying to defend is that the qualities or the accidents inhere in substance and that substance is what it is without relying on these accidents.¹⁴¹ He starts with the essential nature of substance and establishes that this does not require the elemental qualities. The nature of substance appears to be its eternal existence, its singularity and its self-subsistence, and none of these are related or dependent in any way on the four natures, since they belong to the essence and nature of substance as it is in itself.¹⁴² The fact that substance is what it is without the need for any of the accidents that may dwell in it, suggests for Jābir that these accidents would necessarily cease to exist or inhere in the substance.

Following the statement that establishes Jābir's position on the time bound nature of the relation between substance and accidents, he proceeds to show that this applies to all accidents. There is no distinction for him between the accidents based on a different time relation, that is, all the accidents cease to be at one time or another.¹⁴³ The reasoning behind this idea is that if one affirms that some accidents cease to exist in substance and become detached from it whilst also believing that other accidents remain attached, without qualifying this type of accidents with other

¹⁴¹ Al-Ash'arī distinguishes between four views regarding substance, two of which are with regard the relation to accidents. One view states that if substance becomes existent it becomes the carrier (*ḥāmil*) of accidents, but substance is substance in itself before coming to be, this is the view of al-Jubbā'ī. The other view states that substance is what may potentially carry (*iḥtamala*) the accidents, suggesting that substance may exist without accidents, this is the view of al-Ṣāliḥī, *Maqālāt*, v. 2, p. 8. (We disagree with Dhanani's translation of *iḥtamala* as "contain" since this would change the meaning of the text in ways that does not seem to be intended by the text, Dhanani (1993), p. 56). Jābir appears to attempt a synthesis of the two views despite stating that substance does exist without accidents.

¹⁴² Note that these are the qualities associated with God in Islamic *kalām*.

¹⁴³ This same idea was discussed in the first chapter regarding the eternity of states, and in the second chapter with regard to the changing accidents and their relation to the atom.

qualifications, then it is not clear what would make some behave in this or that particular way. If there is nothing that distinguishes one accident from another in terms of time duration of inherence in the substance, then all accidents are essentially the same in terms of their timed existence, they all cease to exist.

The possibility that an accident is permanently attached to substance is denied by Jābir because for him there is nothing in the essence of any accident that makes it permanently attached to substance. If such an accident were to exist, then it would have to be eternally in the substance and it would have to be a principle along with substance. If the accident that is attached to substance did not always exist within it then it must have come to inhere in it at some point. For Jābir, whatever comes to inhere in something at a particular time must cease to do so at another time. The underlying principle that is at work here is that whatever comes to be must cease to be or, whatever is generated at a particular time must become corrupt at another time. Ultimately, there is nothing essentially eternal about accidents and their attachment to substance, there is nothing in the essence of accidents that makes them permanently attached to substance.

Since it is necessary for the attached accident to cease existing, one would suppose that the substance either becomes attached to another accident that would cease to exist at another time, or that there would be a time when this substance is without any attached accident. In the last part of the quotation, Jābir states that what people fail to understand is that substance is not necessarily attached to accidents, its essence in a sense excludes this attachment. For him, substance may exist, and does

exist, on its own without any attachment, it is what he refers to as the motes (*al-habā*) that fills the empty spaces or the void.¹⁴⁴ Since the void and empty space contains nothing that is recognisable as a particular thing, it is the role of the four natures, the accidents and qualities that become attached to substance, to form the composites that are sensed.

This enforces the idea that there is no real empty space in our world since space is always occupied with substance. This substance is either in its original pervasive state of dust like existence or it is formed, shaped and composed into the different recognisable things that occupy this world. It is worth noting that in this last perspective, the four natures are the active ingredients that form and shape things, and substance appears to be this neutral and passive element subject to formation, combination and manipulation. This substance is the pure matter that an active agent may form and shape through the activity and power of the four natures, in the same way that a human being shapes and forms the stuff of this world.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Langermann (2009), p. 280 makes a link in his paper between this vision of substance and the atom, *al-jawhar al-fard*.

¹⁴⁵ With regard to the idea of a dust like state of substance and the role of the four natures, we find in the *Book of Treasures* an interesting passage that relates to this idea, despite the fact that Job of Edessa denies the existence of matter. The text refers in this particular case to the condensation of the four natures in their becoming attached to each other. We read (p. 21): “Take the example of dust and chaff of wheat, which, because they have expansive parts, flee from our vision when they mount up in the air, and also from the three dimensions. When, however, we collect them, bring their parts together and condense them or mix them with water, so that through the humidity of water their parts may stick together, they fall under the senses and receive a form.”

III. Jābir's Categories

III.1 The Categories of *k. al-Tajmīr*

On a number of occasions, one finds in Jābir's work specific sections that deal with what is categorised as the existent. These sections are specifically put under the rubric of the ten Aristotelian categories which Jābir identify as the principles of the world (*uṣūl al-ālam*). These categories are in turn: 1) one Substance (*al-Jawhar*)¹⁴⁶, and the other nine accidents or qualifications *kayfiyyāt* 2) Quantity (*al-kamiyya*), 3) Quality (*al-ayfiyya*), 4) Relation (*al-iḍāfa*), 5) Time (*al-zamān*), 6) Place (*al-makān*) 7) Position (*al-ʿayyina*), 8) State (*al-Nuṣba*), 9) Agent (*al-Fāʿil*) and 10) Affection (*al-Munfaʿil*).¹⁴⁷

The main focus of this section is substance and the associated ideas concerning this category. The accidents will only be considered in terms of their relation to this substance. It will become apparent that there is no direct interest in a cosmological view in this particular consideration since the main concern appears to be in the practical world.

¹⁴⁶ "Essence" is the French translation by Houdas in Berthelot (1893), p. 193.

¹⁴⁷ For more on Jābir's categories and their application see '*k. al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr*' in *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 241-261 ; '*k. al-Mizān al-Ṣaghīr*' in *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 428-438 ; '*k. la-Tajmīr*' in Berthelot (1893), pp. 164-168.

III.1.i Substance

For Jābir, substance is “the subsistent principle (*aṣl*) which supports all the accidents.”¹⁴⁸

None of the above mentioned nine accidents can be without the existence of this supporting ground. This substance is one of two kinds: it is either a universal (*kullī*) substance, which is also named the first substance,¹⁴⁹ or a particular (*juzʾī*) substance, which is the secondary and composite substance.¹⁵⁰ According to Jābir, it is difficult and even impossible (*taʿassara*), for the senses to detect a substance in isolation since it is something that may only be perceived by mind. It is an intelligible thing not in the sense that it is an object of thought but in the sense that the senses are ill equipped to detect or perceive it.¹⁵¹ We are informed that in considering a body that is a mixture of some kind, it is possible for the senses to perceive it since it has a length, a width and a depth, that is, it has associated accidents that permits the

¹⁴⁸ K. *al-Tajmīr*, p. 164.

¹⁴⁹ Notice that Jābir reverses the Aristotelian order of first and second substances as they appear in the categories, so that the first is not the concrete individual but the universal.

¹⁵⁰ In Kraus, p. 319 and within the discussion on the influence of Aristotle, we notice that amongst the list of works that are listed in the Jābirian corpus is Porphyry's *Isagoge*. In note 8 we read:

وقد يدللك على ذلك قول أرسطوطاليس في المقولات ان الاجناس عشرة وان لها جنسا (وانه لها جنس ms. يعلوها).

From this and from the inclusion of universal substance in the actual discussion of the category of substance along with the introduction that substance is one, we may assume that Jābir is attempting to reconcile the categories with the Neoplatonic model of the world which includes the intelligible *ousia*. On the problem of genera and the Aristotelian categories see De Haas (2001) ; Hadot (1990). Here we find this quotation from Dexippus which Hadot concludes is from Porphyry (p. 127): “[...] the principle *ousia* extends across all things, taking successively the first, second and third rank insofar as it gives being to one primarily and to others in another manner. This is why, if everything leads to this principle of *ousia* (since everything is suspended from it), Aristotle' description of *ousia* can also provide a glimpse principle of *ousia*, from which the *ousia* has fallen to its lowest degree. (Dexippus, *in Cat.* 40, 25-41, 3).” The sensible *ousia* is in a homonymous relation with intelligible *ousia* but it is what provides the ‘glimpse’ of this principle through the relation of analogy and metaphor since “all *ousia* refer ultimately to intelligible *ousia*, from which they all originate” (Hadot (1990), p. 136). Interestingly, both articles point to the idea that it is in Plotinus' same text that one finds the resolution to Plotinus' own challenge to Aristotle's categories.

¹⁵¹ Similar to some cases of atom definitions encountered earlier.

occasion of perception. Without these accidents, the body may not be perceived but reason knows that the substance of this body necessarily remains.¹⁵²

III.1.ii Substance as stuff

Jābir introduces some examples to demonstrate what a substance is. In this case he presents things that the senses can perceive, which in turn one may use to intellectually understand what a substance is. The examples that are taken from the corporeal world suggest the idea that substance is the stuff of the world, or the materials from which the concrete things of this world are formed. More than that, they suggest that substance is the different specific materials formed to make the different things that exist in this world. He tells us that substance is the straw used for a pen, or the gold used in a bracelet or ring.

It is not clear if these examples are applied here for their demonstrative use rather than as an actual definition or listing of what a substance is. These examples appear to obscure what substance is in reality. In the examples given of substance, it is not clear if they suggest the existence of different substances, straw and gold, or if these materials are different manifestations associated with substance, or alternatively if these are simply representations which thought might use to understand substance that is not perceivable by senses.¹⁵³

¹⁵² K. *al-Tajmīr*, p. 164.

¹⁵³ If it is the case that these examples of different materials or stuff do in fact suggest differences in substance or different substances, then we need to understand Jābir's examples as an affirmation of some kind of differentiation or individuation that belongs to substance without any attachment to accidents. This suggestion is based on the fact that substance is said to be the supporter of all

Jābir proceeds to inform us that the mixture of qualities that are attached to substance, which gives it form and shape, and a particular use, are the accidents that subsist in the substance.¹⁵⁴ His discussion of the proportions (or ratios) of what makes a particular body what it is may support Jābir's use of his examples as a reflection of reality, of the way things are rather than a mere facilitator to mentally perceive substance. He tells us that philosophers have disagreed with regard to the proportional weight of the elements of a corporeal thing. Regarding the quantity of substance that is a body, he relates that some have said that all of it is substance since the accidents lack weight, some others have suggested that half a body is substance whilst the other are accidents. For Jābir, however, the senses confirm that a body is mostly substance and only some of its weight is accidents, and this is well demonstrated by the case of gold in a bracelet or in a ring.¹⁵⁵ This reflects a Jābirian use of the term substance as simple stuff in its particular corporeal existence, or simply the raw materials of this world.

accidents, that it is not available to the senses yet it is defined in these examples as a thing prior to its acceptance of the different forms. This means that it is possible to imagine in thought what an individual substance is without any of the accidents that give it the different forms in which it is found or formed into. In this case we may think of substance as essence, or that a thing is what it is without its association with its categories that form it into what it is. In this sense, the substance gold which is not available to the senses, prior to its particular formed existence, is according to this interpretation gold before its attachment to its accidents.

¹⁵⁴ *K. al-Tajmīl*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

III.1.iii Substance as matter

To reach the *jawhar*, Jābir tells us that one must imagine stripping the body, through a thought experiment,¹⁵⁶ of every one of the nine categories, one at a time until one reaches the ultimate ground and subject of the coinciding accidents.¹⁵⁷

Regarding the relationship between the substance and the nine qualities, Jābir writes:

We say: substance is a genus (*jins*) which supports the accidents and the qualities, since the accidents cannot subsist in other accidents nor do they support each other. We here intend to make it clear to you that the natures may only be perceived in their simple state by the intellect in the same manner that substance may be perceived. When we say that there is something here that is hot, dry, cold, moist and existent, then we mean to cover by existent the definition of substance and by hot and dry to cover the definition of the corporeality of this thing. The body is associated with the accidents and the qualities like the length, the width, the depth, the colour and other things since all the things of this world from all the particulars of the genera belonging to the three different kingdoms of the sublunary world may not be without the ten categories.¹⁵⁸

This quotation not only emphasises the above mentioned points, but it also refers to the nature of the qualifying elementary qualities. They are clearly set in this text as that which may only be perceived in their simple state by the intellect, thus denying any access to them by the senses. Interestingly, Jābir states that if one refers to a thing as existent and hot, dry, cold or moist then the notion of existence is a reference to the substantiality of the thing, whilst an association with the

¹⁵⁶ In his discussion of a similar thought experiment set by Aristotle, Nomanul Haq, says that “one distinguishes between the sum total of properties making this body what it is, and that which by its properties is made into this thing. The latter is matter, while the former is form.” Nomanul Haq (1994), p. 52.

¹⁵⁷ *K. al-Tajmīl*, p. 165.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

elementary qualities is an association with the concrete corporeal reality. This may be taken to suggest that a thing may be an existent thing in that it is a substance prior to any attachment to elementary qualities, which means prior to corporeal existence. It is only once this or that substance becomes a supporter of natures and accidents that it becomes existent in the corporeal sense.¹⁵⁹

III.2 Synthesis and Analysis (matter becoming stuff)

The entire science and activity of the art that Jābir is concerned with is essentially reduced to two things, composition (or synthesis) (*tarkīb*) and decomposition (or analysis) (*tahlīl*), where one emerges from, and the other returns to the primary element, substance. Alchemy is thus essentially synthesis and analysis, construction and deconstruction.

Combination and composition is what produces determination, and starting from substance, the first thing that is combined with it, and defines it in different ways, is quality. More accurately, it is not the first thing that is combined with *jawhar*, it is the first thing to be composed on it “*tarakkaba ‘alayhi*.”¹⁶⁰ The effect of the produced combination is the gaining of colour and a definite state, this is what Jābir refers to as a substance with a quality (*jawhar bi kayfiyya*), in possession of length, width, depth or colour. Following this first composition, Jābir adds the category of quantity,

¹⁵⁹ See Gourinat (2009) for his discussion of the two meanings of matter (unqualified substance and qualified matter).

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 169.

thus allowing the new composition to have a measure of amount in number and weight.¹⁶¹

In the discussion of the order of acquiring the different accidents and in the becoming of the particular substance, we are informed that after acquiring quality followed by quantity, the substance not only gains weight and some measurable dimensions but also acquires materiality (*taḥṣul lahu mādda*), which is obvious from the descriptions given thus far.¹⁶² This materiality, is what we assume was referred to as substance in the examples of the gold in the ring, it is simply a reference to the becoming of the stuff of the world of nature.

After materiality, substance becomes associated with time and space and then all of the qualities that accompany the four natures. For Jābir, some of these are associated with heat, such as the colour red, incandescence, bitterness, dilation, etc., and others are associated with cold, such as cooling, the colour white, contraction, etc.

Our understanding of substance in this section, which deals with the concrete existent, appears to be a continuation of the relation between substance in the fourth circle of the world of Substance and substance that is the fifth nature, in the sphere that emerges from the attraction between Soul and Substance. In this case

¹⁶¹ Ibid. If amount and number follow quality in the order of composition then this must mean that the reference to the qualities of length, width and depth is not a reference to a measurable quantity. This appears to be a reference to non measurable dimensions which in some ways is similar to the paradox of space occupying (*taḥayyuz*) entity that possesses no quantifiable measure in Mu'tazilī atomism. See Dhanani, for the physical theory of matter and the Mu'tazila. Of particular interest in this respect is (Dhanani (1993), chp. 4, pp. 90-140) where there is a discussion of the idea of *jawhar* having a magnitude but neither length, nor breadth nor depth.

¹⁶² *K. al-Tajmīl*, p. 169.

too, Jābir appears to associate substance with a difference in the degree of manifestation or corporeality.

The stuff of the world emerges from the attachment of substance to the non-corporeal qualities or natures, and it becomes a qualified substance without the other nine corporeal accidents. The attachment to the simple elements leads to a process of composition on the level of the corporeal world, where substance actually becomes the substrate of the nine accidents; this is the process that allows substance to surface in the sensible world. The first composition results in the occupation of non-corporeal space as well as the gaining of colour which leads substance to incur some form of primary definition and, in the second stage of the composition, permits this substance to possess measurable quantities, including volume and weight.

Jābir's interest in Aristotle's categories appears to be a necessary process for at least two reasons. Most importantly, Jābir is a scientist interested in understanding the world of nature and knowing how to manipulate it at its most fundamental level, hence, Aristotle's classification of what exists in this nature is important. On the other hand, this world is only a small part in the grand picture of the world, since the world of nature appears last in the set of concentric circles in Jābir's cosmological structure. This world of nature, this sensible world, is considered a continuation and an extension of the intelligible realm. Jābir's work appears, in this context, to be an attempt to combine Aristotle's categories with his *Metaphysics* along the Neoplatonic tradition. Considering the categories to be part of or an

extension of the Metaphysics is also evident in Jābir's use of these categories in the refutation of other cosmological structures. This is evident in the next section which only takes the category of substance as the ground of the argument against dualism. Before proceeding to this section, however, we should summarise the different uses of the term substance encountered in *k. al-Tajmīr*, which deals with the categories and *k. al-Taṣrīf*, which deals with Jābir's cosmology.

Substance in K. al-Taṣrīf and al-Tajmīr

If we are to combine the different references to substance we have encountered thus far we will have the following uses of this term by Jābir:

K. al-Taṣrīf

- 1) Substance as the absolute lack of any definition: this use we encountered in association with the fourth circle, the circle of the world of Substance. This substance is purely intelligible.
- 2) Substance as the fifth nature: this resulted from the combination of the world of Soul and the world of Substance leading to the undifferentiated substance or matter. This is an Intelligible substance charged with potentiality yet still undifferentiated. It appears to be the beginning of the process of material corporeal existence.

Parallel with this usage we have come in the above discussion across a different division of substance which could either be from a different perspective or could be a continuation of the above manifestation and materialisation of substance.

K. al-Tajmīr

- a) The universal Substance or the first Substance: this is not explained in the *k. al-Tajmīr*, however, the terms used to classify this substance could suggest that this is either of the above stages of substance. This, however, could also be a reference to the first cause.¹⁶³
- b) The particular substance or the second substance: this is a determined and defined substance that remains as an object of thought. It has none of the categories that are associated with the existent in the corporeal world.
- c) Particular corporeal substance: this is the particular substance from (b) that has become corporeal. It is a determined substance attached to the nine categories. It is the different materials that the different things of this world are made from such as gold, wood, etc.¹⁶⁴

Jābir appears to be attempting to create gradation in one substance that belongs to the intelligible realm and the concrete world. This attempt should help us understand the ground from which he refutes dualism, the idea that there are two substances that act as principles to the world.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ *K. al-Qadīm* in *Mukhtārāt*, p. 545.

¹⁶⁴ In *Ikhwān* we have the following meanings of Substance, v. 3, pp. 183-184:

والهيوولى يقال على اربع جهات، فاقربها الى الحس هيوولى الصناعة مثل الخشب والحديد والقطن بحسب ما بينا. فان كل صانع لايد له من هيوولى يعمل فيه ومنه صناعته. والثاني هيوولى الطبيعة وهي النار والهواء والماء والارض. وذلك ان كل شيء تعمله الطبيعة التي تحت فلك القمر من الموجودات، فان هذه الاركان الاربعة هيوولى لها. والثالث هيوولى الكل اعني الجسم المطلق الذي يعم الافلاك والكائنات اجمع. والرابع الهيوولى الاولى وهو جوهر قابل للصورة، فاول صورة قبل هي الطول والعرض والعمق، وكان بذلك جسما مطلقا. وهذه الهيوولى من المبادئ الاولى المعقولة.

¹⁶⁵ The combination of the different meanings of substance seems to resonate with Gourinat (2009), p. 65: “god is an active principle always present in matter during all the phases of the history of universe, but he may incorporate himself in particular elements (fire or air) or compounds (breath), through which he exerts his action during the phases of the universe. What is engendered after the

III.3 Refutation of dualism

In the introduction to the section on substance we noted that Jābir initially divides substance into two: the universal substance and the particular substance. Not much consideration is given in *k. al-Tajmīr* to this division, since it mostly discusses the second of these two substances, whilst completely ignoring the universal substance. We have tried, however, to link this division with our previously constructed Jābirian cosmological view to arrive at something like a general coherent view and meaning of this term for Jābir.

K. al-Khawāṣṣ

In other parts of Jābir's work, we find other references and uses of substance. For example, in 'the Book of Properties' or *k. al-Khawāṣṣ*, we find some chapters that are concerned with the refutation of the arguments of the dualists. These arguments are structured and centred on the ten categories mentioned in the previous section. In these chapters, Jābir takes each one of the categories and assumes a dualist basis and argument to each one of them. Each structured argument is reduced *ad absurdum* and the dualist ground is refuted. Since we are primarily concerned with substance, we present here his reasoning in the refutation of a dualist principle of the world based on this Category. We should mention that these chapters, which involve the same grounds for the arguments, are some of the rare occasions where Jābir offers any logically structured reasoning in support of his philosophical point of view. Yet oddly enough, apart from what Jābir is arguing against, it is not very clear what he is

elements and the particular matter is not god as a principle, but god as the incorporation of this principle in various phases of world-history and in various parts of the substance of the world."

arguing for. We may only assume certain things from the text itself and possibly find a justification for why Maḥmūd uses these chapters under the section entitled “Existence is absolutely one.”¹⁶⁶

Jābir starts his arguments against a dualist notion of the principles of existence using the first of the ten categories, substance. Before he begins his arguments we are informed that the two generated worlds (*kawnān*), which are generated in accordance with the ‘balance’ (*kawn al-mīzan*), are either true or false. This means that his arguments will either prove the existence of two generated worlds or not, and this he achieves through arguments regarding the principles of these two worlds. We shall come back to this point after presenting Jābir’s arguments.¹⁶⁷

The two generated worlds in this discussion are found to be in one of five possible combinations, either:

- a) Both are substances.
- b) Both are accidents.
- c) One is a substance and the other is an accident.
- d) Both are a substance and an accident at the same time.

¹⁶⁶ Maḥmūd (1962), pp. 236-255.

¹⁶⁷ *K. al-Khawāṣṣ al-Kabīr* in *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 241-242.

e) Neither are substances or accidents.¹⁶⁸

The details of the arguments will appear to be concerned not with two universes or worlds as such, but with two principles that generated two worlds. The obscurity of the text forces the reader to look for some signs and indications in the text to allow for the interpretation and the understanding of this text, whilst assuming some unity in the argument. This shall be done after presenting the arguments for each of the above possibilities.

e) Jābir starts with the last of the five options listed above, since this would force the following arguments to be structured in terms of worlds composed primarily of substance and accident. We have previously noted that all that exists must be one of the ten categories, either a substance or one of the nine accidents or categories. Here Jābir tells us that:

1. “All the categories are either substances or accidents.”
2. If something is sensed then it exists, and the generated world is sensed so it exists.
3. If something is sensed and is not one of the ten categories then it does not exist.
4. This thing both exists and does not exist.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 242.

The contradiction in the last point leads to the conclusion that, whatever the discussion and the arguments are going to be, they must be structured in terms of substance and accident since it is a discussion of what is generated and exists, or is (*ays*).¹⁶⁹

a) Both worlds are substances devoid of accidents. For anyone who interacts with the physical world, and can see this world through the Aristotelian categories, this poses a problem. Jābir states that “accidents exist,” he does not present arguments for this, he rather simply states it as a clear known fact. If these accidents exist and the two principles are only substances then they -the accidents- must be originated (*muḥdatha*). Here, Jābir starts with two principles of existence and compares them to what is known to exist in this lived existence regardless of whether it is of a dualist nature or not. What we have here is either:

- i) These accidents originated from something other than these two principles, from a third principle or more.
 - 1. What is applicable to two, the beginning of multiplicity, is also applicable to three or more.
 - 2. The contradictions that are found in two principles are applicable to all multiplicity.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. Jābir uses the terms *ays* for “is” or “exists” and *lays* for “is not” or “does not exist”. We use the term “exist” since Jābir himself has linked the categories to what exists.

3. There is no third principle from which the accidents are originated.¹⁷⁰
4. This, according to Jābir, leads to the knowledge that balance is one and also to the truth of *tawḥīd*.

One could follow Jābir's argument that 'one needs not look for a third principle if all the arguments for two principles are denied', since whatever is denied of the beginning of multiplicity is applied to any number higher than two. However, if the above argument is set to show that there isn't a third principle, this by itself does not show that there aren't two principles, thus Jābir is not quite justified in including the fourth point above. This last point ought to have been stated at the end of all his arguments against the dualist notion of existence, as we point out in the rest of the presentation.

- ii) These accidents originated from the two substances (principles). This is impossible according to Jābir, as this would imply "the presence of what is non-existent (*'adam*) in them," when they are in actuality two masses. The only possible way for this to occur is through transmutation (*istiḥāla*). If transmutation is what allows for these accidents to originate then the eternal nature of these two principles diminishes and vanishes. The causes, in this case, the two principles, follow their effects which are parts of them. These come to be at one moment and are annihilated at another moment through

¹⁷⁰ This is not clearly stated in the text but is implied by the argument.

transmutation, thus there is an end to these principles, which were initially considered to be eternal.¹⁷¹

c) One of the two is a substance whilst the other is an accident. This comes as a solution to the previous proposition, which led to the transmutation of the substances to account for the origination of the accidents. This case presupposes the co-existence of accident and substance. However, Jābir argues:

1. “[T]he accident does not subsist by itself and requires some other thing in order to subsist.”
2. “The accident is in the substance.”
3. “Therefore, there is one essence (*dhāt*) attributed with all the attributes (accidents/categories).”
4. If it is an essence with all the attributes, it must be a body (*juththa*) -“this would be necessary in the case of balance but not so in *al-tawḥīd*”- because it is surrounded (*yuṭīq*) by space,¹⁷² and it is originated since it is counted (or measured) with time (*al-zamān ‘adduh*).
5. In this case, we have an eternal principle that is also an originated thing in time, or something that is simultaneously infinite and finite. This is a

¹⁷¹ Compare this idea with al-Rassī’s argument against changes in the principles.

¹⁷² Kraus chose *yuṭīf*, *Mukhtārāt*, p. 244.

clear contradiction and the argument for the eternal existence of a substance along with an accident is refuted.

d) Both principles are simultaneously a substance and an accident. This is refuted in the same manner as in case (c). The argument would show that both are finite and originated in time.

b) Both principles are accidents. This is refuted through a similar argument:

1. An accident subsists in substance.
2. What subsists in something other, and this other is-not (*lays*) or does not exist then it is itself a *lays*.
3. They are both generated (*kawnān*), hence they exist (*ays*).
4. They are simultaneously *ays* and *lays*. Another clear contradiction that Jābir rejects.

The above arguments against a dualist notion of existence are an important contribution to the history of the Islamo-Manichaeism debates. This discussion's importance lies in its early use of philosophical arguments that rely on Aristotle's categories since the few chapters, that follow the one just considered, take on the other categories and refute through similar structured arguments a presumed dualist notion of existence. Its importance also lies in the fact that it demonstrates a

struggle with concepts and notions that are not clearly finalised and defined, yet are still used in logically structured arguments.

We mentioned earlier that there is a certain obscurity regarding the intentions of the arguments themselves. What is known is that they are set to refute a dualist notion of existence, however, this appears to be against a dualist principle of existence and sometimes a dualist notion of existents. Also, the assumption which is reinforced on some occasions, suggests that Jābir is trying to prove a mono-principle of existence or a monistic existence. The mention of *tawḥīd* in the text is not very clear since it is only assumed and is not explained.

Let us begin by looking at the reasons for what we have described as an ambiguity in the text. From the earliest section of this chapter we are told that we are to look in this chapter at the states of balance '*aḥwāl al-mīzān*'. Even if this particular expression is not very clear we can assume that it is a reference to a state of being that is regulated or is in accord with Jābir's central theory of balance, it is the state of existence in this corporeal world. With regard to the theory of balance, it suffices to say that it is a theory that governs the balance and ratios of the four natures in compound substances or bodies.¹⁷³ So, from the very start we are told that the arguments of this text are relevant to the physical world, which is structured through combinations and in accordance with to the theory of balance. In this we have an emphasis that this chapter is about corporeality. This important point is not solely derived from the statement '*aḥwāl al-mīzan*' but is also found in the two further points mentioned in the introduction. One of these is that Jābir starts the

¹⁷³ Kraus, p. 309.

section on substance with the statement “these two generated worlds” (or هذان الكونان) by which he says that he means “the generated world of balance and all that is derived from it.”¹⁷⁴ Here then the two worlds that are to be considered are worlds of balance which, as has just been mentioned, are worlds of combination through balance. The second point that emphasises this idea is that Jābir follows this sentence with “and it is generated if it has been acted upon” (وهي كون إذا كانت مفعولة),¹⁷⁵ hence the worlds under consideration are worlds that have been affected.

We have other references to Jābir’s own understanding of the term *kawn*, one of which is very important in establishing a link with his own cosmology. In another part of the text (a. ii) Jābir informs us that what he is dealing with are masses or *jaramayn*, a clear indication of the corporeality of the subjects under consideration. Jābir clearly identifies the term *kawn* with composite substances in opposition to simple substances. The composites are either first composites, second or third. The first degree composite are things like the natures (which he also refers to as simples in other texts), the second composites are fire, air, earth and water, and the third are animals, stones and plants.¹⁷⁶

Everything thus far points to the fact that Jābir intends to write about this corporeal world yet we soon realise in his arguments that he is discussing principles of existence and that what he is doing is arguing against the dualist principles. This is evident in (a. i) where he clearly uses the expression ‘two principles’ and also in (a.

¹⁷⁴ *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 241-242.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. Kraus reads معقولة instead of مفعولة . This choice drastically changes the meaning of the sentence and we find it to be erroneous as it neither corresponds to the general definition of *kawn* nor to Jābir’s own use.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

ii) and in (d) where these are clearly implied since he refers to their eternal and infinite nature and denies their origination in time. This is also evident from his conclusion to this chapter where he states that he has discussed all there is to be discussed regarding the two principles from the point of view of substance and accidents.¹⁷⁷

The above refutation of the dualist principles to the universe is a refutation of the idea that there are two substances in the universe. In conclusion, substance appears as the first thing that is created by God, that which all things come from and is in every thing. This naturally means that this refutation depends on Jābir's own definition or at least his own understanding of this term which, at this stage, appears to be originated and not eternal. *Tawḥīd* in this case is the belief that there is but one substance in this universe that is the principle of all things.

Regarding the arguments that were pertinent at the time on how many substances there are, al-Ash'arī in his *Maqālāt* summarises as follows:

People have disagreed upon whether or not substance is one kind (*jins*)? And if the substance of the world is one substance? There are seven opinions:

Some have said: the substance of the world is one substance, and that the substances differ and coincide according to their accidents, and even their differentiation through the accidents indeed they are differentiated by a differentiator that may be eliminated, so that the substances become one essence, one thing, and this is the opinion of Aristotle's followers.

And some have said: substances are of one kind, and they are substances in themselves, they are different in themselves and similar

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 245.

in themselves, and they are not different in reality, and the person who says this is al-Jubbāī.

And some have said: substance is two different kinds: one of them is light, and the other darkness, and they are opposites, and that all light is one kind, and that all darkness is one kind, and these are the dualists, and it is reported of some of them that every one of them is five kinds of blackness, whiteness, redness, yellowness and greenness.

And some have said: the substances are three different kinds, and they are al-Marqūniyya.

And some have said: the substances are four contrary kinds of heat, cold, moisture and dryness, and these are the people of natures.¹⁷⁸

And some have said: the substances are five contrary kinds: four natures and a spirit.

And some have said: the substances are of contrary kinds, some of it whiteness, some blackness, yellowness, redness and greenness, and some of it heat and cold, and some of it sweetness and sourness, some of it smells, some of tastes, some of it moisture, and some dryness, some of it forms, and some spirits, and he used to say: all animals are one kind, this is the saying of al-Nazā'īm.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ This may be the view of Job of Edessa who writes: “[...]they [the four natures] have no change in them; they are simple elements, and there is no other element before them... but since there is nothing in this universe but themselves, the compound elements composed of them, and bodies composed of the compound elements, there can therefore be nothing else beyond themselves.” Job of Edessa (1935), p. 6 and in (p. 9) he denies the existence of matter.

¹⁷⁹ *Maqālāt*, v. 2, p. 9:

- واختلف الناس: هل الجواهر جنس واحد؟ وهل جوهر العالم جوهر واحد؟ على سبعة أقاويل:
- 1- فقال قائلون: جوهر العالم جوهر واحد وأن الجواهر إنما تختلف وتتفق بما فيها من الأعراض وكذلك تغايرها بالأعراض إنما تتغاير بغيرية يجوز ارتفاعها فتكون الجواهر عيناً واحدة شيئاً واحداً وهذا قول أصحاب أرسطاطاليس.
 - 2- وقال قائلون: الجواهر على جنس واحد وهي بأنفسها جواهر وهي متغايرة بأنفسها ومتفقة بأنفسها وليست تختلف في الحقيقة والقائل بهذا هو الجبائي.
 - 3- وقال قائلون: الجوهر جنسان مختلفان أحدهما نور والآخر ظلمة وأنهما متضادان وأن النور كله جنس واحد والظلام كله جنس واحد وهم أهل التنشئة وذكر عن بعضهم أن كل واحد منهما خمسة أجناس من سواد وبياض وحمرة وصفرة وخضرة.
 - 4- وقال قائلون: الجواهر ثلاثة أجناس مختلفة وهو المرقونية.
 - 5- وقال بعضهم: الجواهر أربعة أجناس متضادة من حرارة وبرودة ورطوبة ويبوسة وهم أصحاب الطبائع.
 - 6- وقال بعضهم: الجواهر خمسة أجناس متضادة أربع طبائع وروح.
 - 7- وقال قائلون: الجواهر أجناس متضادة منها بياض ومنها سواد وصفرة وحمرة وخضرة ومنها حرارة ومنها برودة ومنها حلاوة ومنها حموضة ومنها روائح ومنها طعوم ومنها رطوبة ومنها يبوسة ومنها صور ومنها أرواح وكان يقول: الحيوان كله جنس واحد وهذا قول النظام.

The opinion that we assume represents Jābir's throughout this work is the first in the above list, the opinion of Aristotle's followers who believe in only one substance, regardless of what this substance is understood to be. Those who are criticised in this section are those of the third opinion who believe substance to be of two opposing kinds, light and darkness.¹⁸⁰

IV. The Eternal

IV.1 Radical opposition in *k. al-Qadīm*

One of the philosophically interesting works of Jābir is *k. al-Qadīm*, or the Book of the Eternal (eternal past). In the beginning of this book, one finds a clear demarcation between the Eternal and everything else that exists in this world. He informs the reader that the discussions that involve the ideas of the Eternal and the originated (*muḥdath*) are amongst the most difficult for the philosophers.¹⁸¹ In what follows we shall explore Jābir's own understanding of the distinction between these two, the Eternal and the originated, starting from the most basic and fundamental assumptions. Amongst those he attacks in this exploration of these concepts are the theologians, who according to him use the mistaken method of inferring from the

¹⁸⁰ As to the other opinions that we have listed, we have the opinion of the Mu'tazila, more specifically the followers of al-Jubbā'ī who have an atomist view of substance. In their case, all atoms are of the same kind but are not all one in number, they may be similar or different from other atoms because of the way they are in themselves and not through an extrinsic differentiator. The fourth opinion is that of *al-Marqūniyya*, who are dualist but believe in a third element that exists as an intermediary between the two principles, that is either different from the two or permits mixture to occur (*Milal*, pp. 118-119). The fifth opinion is that of *aṣḥāb al-ṭabā'i'*, or the people of natures, who seem to only believe in the four natures as the founding ground of this world, substance for them is nothing outside of the four natures. These are probably the people who have influenced Jābir's overemphasis on the active role of the four natures. The sixth opinion seems to be similar to the fifth except for the added element of spirit which seems to animate the four natures. Jābir follows a similar line with his addition of Soul/substance to the four natures. The seventh opinion suggests that the world is all the contrary elements that it contains.

¹⁸¹ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 542.

world of the seen to the world of the unseen, and from the part to the whole.¹⁸² He says early on in this book:

And that is because not every *hylê* is for every form (*ṣūra*) but every *hylê* and every form are unequal, for some require a medium and some do not. If that which concerns the Eternal is as we had said, so would things necessarily be in the case of the originated, since it is its opposite and unlikeness. Knowledge of one of the opposites is knowledge of the other, this is the opinion of the truthful (*ṣādiqīn*) and the holy (*rabbānī*).¹⁸³

The first part of this quotation is best understood through a similar idea found in the works of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā.¹⁸⁴ Jābir is simply stating that not every matter accepts every form. Wood, for example, may accept the form of a chair but it may not accept the form of a dress. The idea of a medium on the other hand suggests that there must be an order in the acquisition of forms so that bread, for example, must first have the intermediary forms of flour and dough, then finally, the form of bread.

The main point that Jābir is trying to put forward however, although it is not clear at this stage how this relates to *hylê* and form, is that the Eternal and the originated are unlike each other, or even opposite to each other. Knowing about one still leads to knowledge about the other, however, for him this is not done through the concept of similitude but through the idea of a corresponding opposite, so that whatever applies to the originated the opposite would apply to the Eternal. This is

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 543.

¹⁸³ *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 542-543.

¹⁸⁴ Ikhwān, v. 3, p. 183:

وليس كل هيبولى تقبل كل صورة، لان الخشب لا يقبل صورة القميص، ولا الشقة تقبل صورة الكرسي، ولا الهيبولى تقبل اي صورة تقدمت، لان القطن لا يقبل صورة الشقة، ولا الغزل يقبل صورة القميص. لكن القطن اول ما يقبل صورة الغزل، ويتوسط صورة الغزل، يقبل صورة الشقة، ثم صورة القميص. وهكذا الطعام اول ما يقبل صورة الدقيق، ثم صورة العجين، ثم صورة الخبز.

Jābir's main opposition in this text to the method of the theologian, assuming that they consider whatever applies to the originated necessarily applies to the Eternal.¹⁸⁵

So what are the things that are related to the Eternal but not related to the originated? Jābir tells us that:

What is most distinctive of the Eternal is the existence which spares Him the need for an agent. This is so since He is always eternal and if He required an agent it would have been before Him. Since that which is other than Him did not come to be before Him, it is not eternal. Thus, existence is the most distinctive of its characteristics.¹⁸⁶

This quotation establishes the essential characteristic of that which is called the Eternal, existence. The main argument is that since the Eternal exists eternally it must exist so without the need of the act of an agent, as any agent would have to precede it in time, and nothing is before the eternal past.

One may also arrive at this idea through another argument based on the previous reasoning; all that is other than the Eternal is said to be the opposite of it, thus all that is other than this Eternal is not eternal, which means that there is nothing other than God that is eternal. What becomes specific of this eternal is its eternal existence that requires no agent for its occurrence. This argument, we must emphasise, is built on the method that was previously mentioned, one that establishes radical opposition between the Eternal and everything else. This method

¹⁸⁵ In ps-Apollonios (1979), p. 100, we also read of this difference between the creator and the created, we read:

تعالى الخالق وجل عن ان يشبهه خلقه او ان يشبهه شيء مما خلق او ان تقع عليه الاوهام او ان يناله التفكير او تدركه الابصار او ان
يسمع بالاذان.

¹⁸⁶ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 544.

in itself erects two things that are the terms of the opposition. The term ‘the Eternal’ suggests in itself only one such eternal and that the originated is everything other. Jābir offers no arguments for this particular fundamentally dualistic method that establishes two essentially different modes of being. He simply presents an entity that is predefined without any argument and then concludes with an essential attribute of this entity, a simple circular argument, which includes the conclusion as a premise in the argument.¹⁸⁷

IV.2 Similitude

Regarding the things that are other than the Eternal, Jābir says:

However, the originated exist as well, and they have become so necessarily. This is the case because the effects of the cause (*mu'aththir*) are similar to it, and this is so because the effects are, in the best of ways, similar to the properties of the cause since the difference between the agent and the receiver (*qābil*) is in excellence (*faḍīla*) and deficiency (*naqs*). Since this is the case, the existence of the originated becomes necessary from the existence of the Eternal. However, the existence of the Eternal is in the way of a necessity that dispenses of an agent and in the way of a cause for others, not as an effect.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Similar to al-Rassī's.

¹⁸⁸ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 544:

لكن المحدثات موجودة ايضا وبالواجب كانت كذلك...

وإذا كان الأمر كذلك وجب الوجود للمحدث عن وجود القديم، لكن وجود القديم على جهة الوجود المستغني عن الفاعل وعلى جهة العلة لغيره لا على جهة المعلول.

This seems to be an early use of the idea of *wājib al-wujūd* which could reflect the late writing of this text. It is possible, however, yet not very likely, that this is an early development of some ideas already found in the Arabic *De Interpretatione*. The terms *wājib* and *mumkin* already appear in the translation attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa' (Ibn al-Muqaffa', *Kitāb fariyārmānis*, in Al-Mantiq, 1978), but the use of the expression *wājib wujūd* is clearly found in the translation attributed to Ishāq b. Ḥanīn where we read:

ان الوجود للشيء اذا كان موجودا ضروري... ليس قولنا ان وجود كل موجود فهو ضرورة اذا وجد هو القول بان وجوده ضرورة على الاطلاق... وذلك ان كل شيء فوجوده الان او غير وجوده واجب ضرورة... لكن الواجب ضرورة انما هو ان يكون او لا يكون. Aristūṭālīs, *Kitāb al-ībāra*, in *Mantiq Ariṭū*, (1980), pp. 112,113.

This is a very important passage that resonates with much of the Islamic philosophy and theology that discusses existence in terms of the necessary. Before we discuss this quotation, we must give mention to an important twist in Jābir's reasoning, for nothing that follows can be achieved without this step. The beginning of this book marked Jābir's emphasis on the radical opposition between the Eternal and the originated, and this is what he used to prove that existence is the most fundamental thing that is associated with this Eternal. This, however, is a reasoning that could potentially limit much of what can be said about the Eternal and the originated, and this is why Jābir resorts to another principle that actually links the two sides of what is under consideration. The principle that he uses in the above text is the idea that cause and effect are rigorously intertwined.¹⁸⁹ The effects, according to Jābir, are in the best of ways similar to their cause, despite not being similar to it in excellence; the effects are similar to their cause but are simply not as good as this cause.

Jābir seems to be unable to support and proceed to philosophical speculations, about what is beyond the material world, without the use of the principle of similitude. This is the main principle that appears to allow a process of knowledge that proceeds from what is known to what is not known, it is the ground of speculative thought.¹⁹⁰ He appears to be adopting two stances towards the Eternal, one that establishes an absolute uniqueness and detachment from anything other than itself, the originated, whilst the other establishes extreme resemblance and similitude between the two, since one is the principle or cause of the other. In this

¹⁸⁹ This idea was encountered with al-Rassī, and it is relevant to the Ismā'īlī Neoplatonic model, see Makarem (1984).

¹⁹⁰ This relation between cause and effect is precisely what led al-Rassī to deny that God is a cause.

method Jābir adopts the two fundamentally different approaches in Islamic theological discourse; *tashbīh* or anthropomorphism, and *tanzīh* or de-anthropomorphism. The first of these is what Jābir criticises at the beginning of the chapter whilst the other is what he uses in the second discussion on the nature of the originated.¹⁹¹

Based on this idea of similitude, Jābir moves on from establishing that the essential quality of the Eternal is existence to the idea that the originated as the effect of the cause, or the Eternal, must itself be essentially qualified with this existence. Since the effects are similar to their cause but are not in the same degree of excellence, this existence is subject to deficiency in comparison with the origin.¹⁹² Despite this deficiency, this existence is in the same way as the Eternal's existence, essentially, a necessary existence (*wājib al-wujūd*). The difference between the two is that the Eternal exists necessarily, in the way that it is in itself, whilst the originated exists necessarily because it is caused by the Eternal and it must be similar to it because it is its effect. The Eternal's necessary existence is by way of its independence from a cause whilst the existence of originated is derivative, in the sense that it relies on the agency of the first. This is a very important step in relating the originated and the Eternal, or the cause, since this relation establishes that the essential attribute of both, the Eternal's and that of the originated is the same, it is existence in both

¹⁹¹ In ps-Apollonios (1979), we find a gap between the Eternal and the created things of this world. Because of the principle of similitude, Belyanus makes the Word to be the cause of creation. He states in pp.101-102:

ان اول ما خلق قوله ان قال: ليكن كذا وكذا! فكانت تلك الكلمة علة الخلق كله و سائر الخلق معلول، فهذا ابتداء الازدواج و هو الخلق... فنقول في ذلك: ان المخلوق لا يبد له من علة والا كان فردا، وهذا ما لا يقدر عليه ولا يقدر احد ان يدعيه و يقوله، فان كان لعله لا محالة، فلا يعدو ان تكون علته متصلة به او ليست متصلة به، فان كانت متصلة به فهي مخلوقة، وان لم تكن متصلة به فليست بمخلوقة وليست اذا بعلته. ولا يجوز ان يكون الخالق علة ما خلق لان العلة لا يبد من ان تشبه المعلول في وجوه وان تخالفه في وجوه، والخالق- تبارك وتعالى- لا يشبهه المخلوق في شيء كما ذكرنا، فان كان هذا هكذا، فان العلة غيره لا محالة وهي على ما وصفنا من شبه الخلق في نحو وتخالفه في نحو.

¹⁹² Compare this with al-Rassī's critique of *tafāḍul* in light.

cases. The difference between the two cases is merely in the degree of excellence for one is independent in itself whilst the other is contingent and derivative from the other. The introduction of this chapter completely isolated the higher world of the Eternal from the concrete world, but with similitude, the two became similar or essentially similar.¹⁹³

For Jābir, the Eternal has only two characteristics which, according to him, are but one. The first of these is that existence is the attribute (*ṣifa*) that causes the effects and the second is that the effects are similar to their cause. The idea that the effects are similar to the cause but not the same is for Jābir the reason why these effects have many attributes unlike the cause which in reality has but one.¹⁹⁴

IV.3 Substance intercourse

From the idea that the cause and effect are similar, Jābir moves to naming the Eternal the 'first substance' and first cause, and the first originated thing the 'second substance'. What is of great importance here is the image he draws for us that links these two substances. He says:

Know that there had existed between the first eternal substance and the second, which was its effect and its deficient originated action (*fi'luhu*), something likened to intercourse (*nikāḥ*). When it dropped (*alqā*) its semen they became intermixed in a weak mixture for the originated is weaker than the Eternal. The reason why the Eternal

¹⁹³ See Wisnovsky (2004), for the development of the relation between the concept of the Eternal or *al-Qadīm* and the necessary existent. He also states: "al-Āmirī was the first to predicate the entire expression *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī* ("necessary of existence in itself") of God." (p. 84).

¹⁹⁴ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 544.

chose this intercourse is to save the deficient originated from the darkness of the earth.¹⁹⁵

If this is not a unique passage in the Islamic tradition, this is without a doubt a rare passage that describes the relation of the Eternal with the created and the originated as a relation similar to intercourse, where the element of semen is also involved. To get to the point of being able to draw such an image linking the Eternal and its effects, Jābir had to build on the idea of similarity between the two sides of the intercourse. Both of these sides are referred to, in this imagery, as substances. One is the first and eternal substance and the other is the second substance, both are substances but one is superior in order and excellence. They both need to be referred to as substances for no interaction, or more precisely, no mixture can come to be between the two if they were of a different nature. Still, this mixture is not said to be directly between the two substances, but the first substance produces semen that becomes the element that mixes with the second substance. One might wonder why it is that Jābir draws a process whereby the second substance, which originates from the first, needs to have another thing that originates from the latter and mixes with the second. We may suppose that one of the reasons for this is that the second substance is a product of the act of the Eternal, it is similar to it for the reason given earlier, but this is still a distant and, in some ways, a different thing.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 545.

¹⁹⁶ Interestingly, we read regarding the Stoics in Gourinat (2009), p. 50: “the divine craftsman in Zeno is immanent: he pervades matter, he is not transcendent, and he does not shape the world by taking inspiration from a transcendent paradigm. He works matter from the inside, biologically, like semen in animal reproduction.” And he adds in p. 51: “Aristocles (first century ad) says that Zeno has two principles, ‘god and matter, like Plato’ and, according to him, the only difference is that ‘Zeno says that they are both bodies, . . . whereas Plato says that the first active cause is incorporeal.’” And (p. 60), we read: “god, being the seminal reason of the world, informs matter, and transforms it from fire into water through air. Then, the four elements are progressively generated from this primitive state

Semen, implies something related to the essence of the Eternal that is not itself the first substance. It is a way of bridging the gap between the two radically opposing substances of the *tanzīh*. The first may not directly mix with the second since this would resonate with the ideas of incarnation, instead Jābir offers semen which carries the essence of the first substance but is not so itself. This thing, which originates from the Eternal, is close in its similitude and far enough in its distinction from the Eternal that it may not be said to be the Eternal. It is also, what may mix with the effect of the act of the first substance but is not its effect at the same time.

The relation between the two substances, the excellent and the weak, is based on, or is due to a particular reason. This is the idea that the weak substance is base, low and dark or earthly, something that refers to a bare material substance lacking form, life and soul. This relation between the two substances is another model for the relation between Soul and Substance that is grounded on the desire of the Soul. Here, however, the relation is based on the idea of the first substance's desire to save the second substance from its base and dark nature, to elevate it to something better and closer to itself. Surprisingly, however, this process of ameliorating the second substance, of elevating it and bringing light to it leads to a change in the first substance itself. On this idea Jābir writes:

When this intermixture took place the Eternal became lower and the originated became higher, it is thus that nature came to be. It is for this reason that the natural acts became associated with the low, lack of purity, ignorance and lack of knowledge.¹⁹⁷

of substance.” And: “in the first stage of the world, it is fire as the substance of the universe that is described as semen.”

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

What is surprising is that Jābir had attempted earlier in the same book to distance the first substance from the originated, in his introduction of the idea of opposition between these two, and the idea of semen, which protected the Eternal from mixing with the second substance. In this case, one finds that the mixture affects the Eternal itself, and that all the distancing between these two did not save the origin from diminution. The Eternal, we are told, becomes lower (*khaṣṣa*) and weaker because of this mixture. This idea of a reduction and a loss of something in the Eternal would challenge the nature of this Eternal in many theological and philosophical arguments. This is the reason for the rejection of the idea of change in the Eternal for it is the base of the argument in generation and corruption, which the Eternal is supposed to be exempt from. That the second substance is honoured and elevated to a higher position in existence, because of this relation with the higher substance, is a familiar theme in this religious context, however, the reciprocal change, diminution and lowering of the position of the Eternal is a novel approach in this context.

What is familiar on the other hand, and by this we include Jābir's work, is the idea that the relation between the higher and lower entities produces the world of nature. This resonates with the above mentioned relation that includes Soul, Substance and the four natures with, the bounding element of desire. Here, the relation is between the first and the second substances bound together through some form of intercourse with the outcome being the natural world.

The last sentence in the above quotation is not very clear, and Jābir does not offer any reasoning for why he states that the natural acts are associated with the low.

We may suggest, however, that the natural acts are not associated with the first substance, their cause lies in the second substance, but it is only in the relation between these two (the first and the second substances) that the natural acts come to be. What is not clear is why these are associated with the low, the impure and with ignorance, when the mixture has indeed an element of the first substance.

IV.4 The natural world

Following this relation and mixture, Jābir informs us more about the natural world and its relation to the world above. He writes:

Following the coming to be of nature, two opposite things came to be, these are motion and rest; motion is on the circumference, and rest is in the centre, thus each came to be in the furthest position from the other. Once they became separated and differentiated, the pure *hylē* accumulated along with every good, beautiful, light and brilliance that was within it on the circumference. It is thus that the act of the Eternal honoured it and it became likened to the Eternal, with the exception that the Eternal had no need for motion and this one was in such a need for our own benefit.¹⁹⁸

In this quotation, we are presented with the formation of the first natural existents that came to be from the mixture of the two substances. The image of circles is here again employed to demonstrate the relations in the world of nature. The outer part of this circle, the circumference, is motion whilst the other, which is equally furthest away from all the points of the circumference, is the point of rest, the centre. The symbolism of circumference and centre reflects again something of the nature of these two opposites. This model resembles a previously encountered model of the world of natures where it was heat that was on the circumference of

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

the sphere and the cold at the centre point.¹⁹⁹ In these cases, it is what is in possession of energy (heat and motion) that lies on the circular periphery where it may perform the perfect circular motion. On the other hand, what lies on a point, in the centre, is that which is in a complete lack of the elements that lie on the circumference, the opposing and the negating cold and rest.²⁰⁰

Therefore, the first things that came to be in the world of nature are two opposites, a thing and its complete negation, motion and rest. In their initial state, these two seem to be completely differentiated and isolated. All that is good and may be associated with the higher world is to be found on the circumference of this world of nature, and this includes the good, the light and *hylê*. These, Jābir tells us, are what honours this world and are what causes it to be likened to the Eternal. What is expected to be found in a list of positive attributes associated with the Eternal are the terms, light, brilliance and the good, however, what is unfamiliar in such a list is the word *hylê*. It is not clear how Jābir intends to use this term as a positive reference to the Eternal. As far as motion is concerned, Jābir denies that its origin of goodness lies in the Eternal, he, nonetheless, associates it with this quality but only in the sense that motion is good for us, the existents of this world, and as for the Eternal He has no need for it.

¹⁹⁹ With regard to natural places, Gannagé states that there is no such thing in the Aristotelian tradition that is assigned to the elemental qualities. However, fire and air have the tendency to occupy the higher places, as they tend to move up; as such they move toward the periphery of the cosmos. On the other hand water and earth in their movement down occupy the centre of this cosmos. Gannagé (2005), pp. 28-29. In ps-Apollonios (1979), p. 104, we also read:

نقول: ان الحركة اخذت سعدا للحرارة التي حدثت فيها بالحركة، فتحررت فزاد الحر فيها من كثرة اضطرابها فصعدت بقدر قوتها الى نهايتها، فكان ما صعد الطف مما بقي حتى صعد اللطيف كله وبقي ما غلظ وثقل اسفل.

²⁰⁰ In Viano (2005), the colour black is said to contain all the other colours. Also, what is relevant to us here is that in the *Timaeus* the colour white dilates and the black concentrates. The world that we are here considering is said to be under the mechanism of association and disassociation, contraction and dilation.

IV.5 Desire and the guiding path

It was noted earlier that the first substance's relation with the second is through semen, and that the relation of Soul/Substance with the four natures is through desire. In the next quotation, Jābir returns to the idea of desire, however, this time it is presented from a different angle. He writes:

[...] and desire for us is from the *hylē* and its unification (*ittihād*) with the Eternal substance. So that when the spheres rotated for our own benefits and we could not sustain adhering to what had become pure of the *hylē*, which itself adhered to the Eternal substance, and with our need to be so, the everlasting substance (*al-qā'im*) made a path to Himself. Since the desire that is in us is a yearning, but a yearning for things that are base (*khasīs*), the Eternal fashioned in the *hylē* in which he manifested His act, a yearning similar to this yearning yet contrary to it in kind. This is so that the yearning unites with the yearning by virtue of similitude, and one of them would prevail over the other due to the act of motion and rest and the greatness of the circumference over the centre.²⁰¹

The origin of desire appears to be at the same stage of the intermixture between the first and the second substances. In this case the terminology changes slightly, the first substance still refers to the Eternal substance, the second, however, becomes the familiar *hylē*, and the term mixture, which earlier on referred to semen and the second substance, is in this case substituted with unification. Desire in this case makes its appearance as the early cause for the unification of the second substance with the Eternal but it is not clear what kind of unification this is. The ground of this desire is not clear in the early part of the above quotation, but since the world

²⁰¹ *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 545-546.

of the higher realms appears to be reflected in the lower realm, one would come to a better understanding of this function from the rest of the passage.²⁰²

The relation between us, the *hylê* and the Eternal, seems to be fairly similar. The *hylê* appears to be in a process of purification which leads to its following and adhering to the Eternal. The existents (or humans) appear to follow, or according to Jābir, are in need to follow the same pattern, that is presumably to follow a purifying path to become close and adhere to the *hylê*, which is similar to its adhering to the Eternal.

The path to this unification with the *hylê*, or presumably a return to it, is made possible because of what has been given to us humans. The Eternal in this passage appears to have given us a mechanism that allows for the return and the adherence to the *hylê*.²⁰³ This same mechanism, however, is also what drives us away from the *hylê*. Desire in humans is naturally set to drive us towards the base and the vile, that which is away from the good and the light. In order to modify our natural orientation toward the base and guide it toward to the Eternal, God created, according to Jābir, a desire in the *hylê* so that it may find its way back to Him. In this sense, the desire and the yearning for unification with the first substance guides the path of the *hylê* towards the Eternal. Since this yearning is in us and it is similar to the *hylê*'s yearning, we may reorient our natural desire for the base to become a

²⁰² It is worth mentioning that this relation of desire or longing is what exists between Soul and Intellect in the philosophy of al-Sijistānī, Walker (1993), pp. 96, 97. There is no mention of intellect in this part of Jābir's work, unless his first substance is the Intellect, we, however, dismiss this idea as the arguments are to do with the Eternal (God).

²⁰³ We find the following relevant passage in ps-Apollonios (1979), p. 104:

ثم ان الجزء الاسفل الساكن البارد اشتهى الحركة واللحاق بالجزء الاعلى لانه منه خرج وهو اليه اخرج من الاعلى الى الاسفل، فلما دام الحر مغطيا لذلك الجزء الاسفل، سخن ما يليه منه فتحرك فاخذ بالصعود ولم يقدر لثقله ان يلحق بما قد كان صعد قبله.

desire for the *hylê*. The cause of this change of orientation from the base and the vile to the high and the good is that yearning draws yearning to itself through the principle of similitude.²⁰⁴ As to why the direction changes from ‘towards the centre’ to ‘towards the circumference’, we are told that this is due to motion and rest and the fact that the circumference is greater than the centre.

This idea appears to be slightly odd, but let us come back to something Jābir says regarding the spheres in the beginning of this text. He mentions the rotations of the spheres as a cause for our good benefit and then he follows this with the idea of purifying the *hylê*. We had come across the idea that on the circumference of the world of nature the purified *hylê* is to be found along with motion, the good, light and brilliance. The act of the circular motion of the sphere of nature, or the heavenly spheres in general, appears to be the source of the act of purification on both accounts, the *hylê* and us. On the circumference one finds the pure *hylê*, the good and motion, and the direction of this purifying act appears to be from the centre towards the periphery. This is the guiding direction of the *hylê*'s desire for the Eternal, and this becomes the path that we need to follow in our similar act of purification. This could suggest that the reverse would be our natural desire to move away from the light, the good, motion, and towards the centre of the sphere, where one finds rest and darkness.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ “The movement of the elementary body towards its proper place will be a movement toward what is similar to it” Gannagé, Gannagé (2005), p. 30.

²⁰⁵ In Gannagé (2005), p. 34 we read: “[...] in Philoponus’s commentary the term *rhopê* (inclination) designates the very nature of the elements as heavy and light, in the two texts of Alexander just mentioned, it refers to the internal principle of the movement of simple bodies.” The Arabic equivalent for the term *rhopê* is *ميل*. We are also informed in p. 35 that: “Alexander recognizes this inclination as an internal principle of the movement of inanimate bodies, but goes further by

V. From multiplicity to unity (light, fire and heat)

In this section, we shall investigate some of the occurrences of the terms fire and heat, but in a context that is slightly different from that of elementary qualities and bodies. In this process, we attempt to see if there is a unifying principle in Jābir's work.

- a) One of the earliest mentions of the word heat that we have used in this chapter was from *k. al-Taṣrīf*, where Jābir described the different models of the world of the four natures. In one of these models, the different natures are represented as a set of concentric circles, where we find heat to be on the surface and the world of the action of the cold (moisture) to be the centre. In this model, heat, as one of the two active elements in this world, is on the 'luminous circle'.²⁰⁶ What we have in this model is a version of an association between the terms heat and light (luminous) which is also on the circumference of a circle.

- b) Another mention of the term luminous and, by association, light, happens in the same book but this time it is in the circle named the 'Greatest Luminous Sphere', which embraces the entire world that we live in. This sphere, or circle, is the combination of the world of Soul and the world of Substance. In one hypothesis, the combination of Soul/Substance first descends to the

drawing an analogy between the inclination of inanimate bodies and the desire of the soul in animate bodies. The two notions derive from the more general term impetus (Gk. *hormē*, Ar. *ishṭiyāq*). He thus unifies all movement in the natural realm under the concept of inclination, which may manifest itself either as impulsion or as desire."

²⁰⁶ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 412.

world of heat from which it appropriates a potent section and becomes an animated fire that is the mass of the sphere. This Soul/Substance combination is to be the beginning of the world of generation where we find, following the animated fire, the seven circles that represent the concrete planets followed by the zodiac.²⁰⁷

- c) In the preceding section, which is based on the text of the *k. al-Qadīm*, we discussed the idea of nature and the existence of two contraries that define this world, motion and rest. Motion is represented by the circumference of a circle, and rest by the centre of the circle. The circumference in this particular model is also described as containing light, brilliance, the good and the purified *hylē*. We have already briefly compared this model with that of case (e).
- d) In Kraus' book on Jābir, we find a very important quote from the *k. al-Baḥṭh*, which we translate here for its importance. The context of the quotation is the relation between the beginning and the end and how the end is contained in this beginning, in the sense of a teleological cause. Jābir writes:

[I]t was said in the teachings, the last of thought is the first of the activity (*'amal*), and the last of the activity is the first of thinking [...]

As to the second act, it is heat, the fiery part of it which is the cause of the becoming (*kawn*) of all and the stimulation of what is latent (*bāṭin*) in the centre of the universe (world of generation or *al-kawn*). It is the cause of the high and the high is its cause, and the attachment (*ittiṣā*) is one as was said by Belyānis: "since its first is attached to its last and its last is attached to its first." If the motion stimulates what is in the

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 413 ; Kraus, p. 147.

centre, and what was in the centre was cold, the universe came to be etc.²⁰⁸

This is a very revealing passage that relies heavily on the idea of *telos*, and the relation, or the attachment of the first with the last. The first part of the quotation expresses the first and the last in terms of thinking and activity, or the duality of thought and act. Thought is considered to be the first and naturally act is considered the last. The end of one marks the beginning of the other, despite having the order of a first and a last. The attachment of the two contraries is what appears to be central in this idea, which in some ways leads to the similar idea of one containing the other.

This passage also suggests that the first act is thinking and the second act is heat. This heat is not necessarily the same as the heat of the elemental qualities since it is not mentioned in association with them. What is interesting is that Jābir mentions a fiery part to this heat which is the direct cause of all that exists in this concrete real world. The process of creation in this particular case is presented in the act of stimulation caused by the fiery part of heat on what is latent in the 'cold' centre of the generated world. Heat, as the first and the high, is attached in this case to the cold, which is at the centre. One is said to be the cause of the other as the introductory section suggests, but in some sense they are two sides of the same coin.

The cause of this act of creation through stimulation is motion itself. Motion and heat appear to be the cause that brings what is latent and cold to

²⁰⁸ Kraus, p. 281, note no. 4.

become existent. The cold is thus what is at rest, hidden and latent, whilst the heat is what is in motion and the cause of the coming to be. We should not forget that Jābir emphasises that both are the causes of each other but in different senses of the term cause. In addition, the use of the term ‘centre’ suggests the idea of a circle or sphere, which would mean that heat, as the high is that which is found on the circumference of this circle or sphere.

Before leaving this point, it is worth remembering an early quotation from *k. al-Taṣrīf*, which resonates with the principle that is central to the above idea. In this quotation, Jābir tries to position God the creator in relation to the concentric circles that include our world, he writes:

He is the one above the first cause (the first circle) and is below the centre of the smallest circle of this world we are in, and He is the first and the last.²⁰⁹

Belyānis’ foundational principle of the attachment between the first and the last is, in this particular phrasing, pushed to the point beyond similitude, to identity. When this principle is applied to God it is a case of identity, but in the case of the opposites: heat and cold, motion and rest, Jābir emphasises the opposition whilst maintaining an essential connection and attachment.

- e) In *k. al-Mizān al-Ṣaghīr*, Jābir discusses the difference between the line, with the idea of the circumference of a circle in mind, and the point or the centre of a circle. We may recall that he considers a point to be the subject of the imagination and intellection whilst the line is what lacks a body, therefore,

²⁰⁹ *Mukhtārāt*, p. 413.

the circumference becomes what encompasses that which has no mass.²¹⁰ From this, Jābir moves to the idea that the sphere of the four natures is made from the apparent line of the circumference, which represents heat, and the point of the centre, which is cold. These two natures have been considered the active elements and it is the movement of rotation of the circumference or heat around the centre, cold, that causes the other natures coming to be.²¹¹ We may take from this representation some familiar themes from the other points made above. Heat is on the circumference of a circle and is not a body but its motion causes things to come to be. As for the centre, the cold, it is given an active role like heat, however, its association is not with movement but with intellection and objects of imagination.²¹²

f) Kraus found another description or simple model for our world in *k. al-khamsīn*. From the 49th chapter he quotes:

Heat is the support (*ḥāmila*) of movement,²¹³ which is the support of nature which is the support of the Soul which is the support of the Intellect. The Air is the support of fire and fire is the support of heat; water is the support of air and earth is the support of water.²¹⁴

In another quotation from the same book, but this time from chapter fifty we read:

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 427.

²¹¹ *Mukhtārāt*, pp. 426-427.

²¹² See Cooper (2009), pp. 101-105, for a similar idea amongst the Stoics as they associate a fiery element with turning and the generation of new substances.

²¹³ We accept Kraus' correction based on other passages which contradict the original that makes Nature before Movement.

²¹⁴ Kraus, p. 136.

The best of things subject to generation and corruption is fire. Fire is the carrier (*markab*) of heat,²¹⁵ and heat is the carrier of movement, and movement is the carrier of nature, and nature is the carrier of Soul, and Soul is the carrier of Intellect, and Intellect is the origination of the creator most high.²¹⁶

The final quotation, that is given to us from this book, has the same idea but we include it for the slight change in terms as well as the important statement at the end. Jābir writes in chapter 25:

[...] Form, movement, nature, Soul and Intellect, and these five are according to some one in essence but they are distinguished through the supports (*ḥawāmil*), the matter (*mawād*) and the substrates (*mawḍū'āt*). So that by way of an example we say: Soul is the substrate of Intellect, nature is the substrate of Soul, movement is the substrate of nature and form is the substrate of movement. The consensus is that Intellect is more general than the four since it is a former (form), a 'naturer' (nature), a mover (movement) and the perfectionist (Soul), since things are known and perfected by it.²¹⁷

In the above quotations, one notices a consistency in the order and the nature of relation of one element to the other. The first quotation uses the term 'support' (*ḥamala*) to relate one category to the other, the second uses the term 'carrier' (*markab*) for this relation and the last uses 'substrate'. All movement is from the lowest category to the highest but each has a different beginning. In the first quotation, we find the first five central concepts of heat, movement, nature, Soul, and Intellect but also two of the elementary bodies, fire and air. In the second quotation we find the same five and the element fire but in the last quotation, we only have the first five with a change in the lowest of these categories, heat and form.

²¹⁵ In the translation Kraus writes movement, which contradict his earlier correction and the Arabic text. Heat is omitted from the translation.

²¹⁶ Kraus, p. 136.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

What is interesting in these quotations, is the sequence that follows Soul, in this case, nature, movement and heat. Nature here is the same as the ‘Greatest Luminous Sphere’ we discussed in (b) but it is not very clear how movement can be positioned ahead of heat, which is the first and on the surface of the world of the four natures.²¹⁸ Movement itself has been positioned on the surface of the world of nature but this is in model (c). It is not clear why Jābir would choose to order one before the other in this book. One possible reason may have to do with the role movement plays in the Jābirian world schemes. This is reflected in the act of desire that results in the attraction of Soul/Substance towards the four natures, which are positioned on a lower level than substance.²¹⁹ Jābir finds no place for substance in this scheme, since following Soul we find nature listed and not substance.

We noticed earlier a term modification in the last quotation. In the first two quotations Jābir talks of heat as the carrier or support for movement, yet the last quotation, he substitutes this with the category of form. This change may suggest that the two are related in some way or another, but what appears to be the cause for this change is the idea that four of the five categories discussed, fall under the category of Intellect. It is considered to be the most general and the one that causes the other four, which is why Intellect is a former and not a ‘heater’. We assume that since heat is not

²¹⁸ In ps-Apollonios (1979), p.104, we also find:

فذلك علمنا ان علة الحركة الحرارة وان علة السكون البرودة.

²¹⁹ Papathanassiou (2005), p. 125, reminds us that Soul processes three active substances: movement, sensation and ardour. He quotes Aristotle, *De an.* I 2, 405 b 11 where Soul is said to be defined by three characteristics: movement, sensation and incorporeality.

generally associated with Intellect, it is excluded from the list which relates the subsequent four categories to Intellect. Another way of explaining this change might be that, as we noted in (e), it is cold that has the latent elements of nature and it is the one that is associated with intellection, while heat is what brings things to surface, to actuality.

Finally, for a person who emphasises the belief in *tawhīd* and the unity of the principle, we find in the beginning of the last quotation a reference to a group of people who believe that the five principles discussed in above are in fact one in essence. According to this conception, the difference between these appears to lie in the different degree of existence or manifestation. The more manifest the principle is the lower it is in the above scheme. Each lower principle is the support, the carrier, the substrate or the matter of that which is above, but in essence, all are one thing. Jābir follows this by identifying what is the more general, or what comes at the beginning of the sequence of the different degrees of manifestation. According to this scheme, the Intellect is the first because it is that which can act upon the other four, it is the former, the 'naturer', the mover and the perfectionist, and all are directly linked to this Intellect. The union between all five principles may also be seen as a union between the act and the agent of the act.

All the above cases revolve around the world of nature, but more precisely on what there is on the verge of becoming existent. It is not solely based on the idea of elementary qualities or bodies but more on an intertwined unified or single

principle. The four natures are reduced to the active two, heat and cold, without the other two: moisture and dryness. In this there appears to be an attempt at reducing the principles and finding a way back to a single all encompassing principle.

What drew us to consider this analysis was the fact that heat and fire, in general, appear to have an active part in Jābir's work, not only in the sense of heat being one of the two active natures but more as the actually active principle that sets things in motion. We are interested in the model of heat being on the circumference of the world of natures, which is followed by its action (dryness) all the way down to the action of cold in the centre (moisture), as in model (a). Still, this model was included because of its similarity to model (e) with heat on the surface and cold in the centre. In this alternative model, however, the other two natures are not set as the actions of the individual active natures; they are instead the outcome of the interaction between these two natures, but more precisely, they are generated through the movement of heat around the centre, which is the cold.

Heat, in this model, is related to motion since it is the motion of heat that causes the other natures to surface. These two, motion and heat, are also found in conjunction in some of the other models, in (f) for example motion follows nature which is then followed by heat which in turn renders heat the substrate, the carrier and the supporter of motion. In the other models considered, the order and the nature of the relation between heat and motion appears to be different. So, we noticed that in (e) we have the idea of the motion of heat; in (c) both motion and light/brilliance

(fire or heat) are on the circumference of a circle with cold at the centre; in (d) both heat (fiery part) and motion stimulate what is at the centre, the cold.²²⁰

Despite the difference in their field of application -(a) and (e) in the world of natures and (c) and (d) in the world of nature- what emerges from the different models is fairly consistent. On the one hand, we may assume the existence of heat and motion on the circumference of a circle and at the centre we find cold and rest. The pairs of opposites are heat/cold and motion/rest, these two are not equated as much as associated with each other. Heat is not motion but they come together in this scheme without being presented with a clear relation between them. This pair, however, appears to have the active nature that leads things to come to be, or stimulate their coming to be, as Jābir says in (d). On the other hand, the cold and rest, the subjects of the activity of the other two, represent according to the same model (d), that which is latent, or in other terms, the potential that is brought to be through the activity, or motion, of heat.

Model (d) makes the very important point that the opposing pairs are fundamentally attached to each other and that the end of one is the beginning of the other. The cold as the latent or the potential (what is at rest), is here associated with thought, whilst heat and motion are associated with activity. Creation, origination or the coming to be in the concrete world of nature, becomes the

²²⁰ Regarding heat and motion we find the following passage in ps-Apollonios (1979), p. 103:

ونقول: ان اول ماحدث بعد كلام الله - عز وجل وتعالى علوا كبيرا - الفعل، فدل بالفعل على الحركة ودل بالحركة على الحرارة، فكان هذا هو الابتداء في الخلق المعلولة. ثم لما نقصت الحركة جاء السكون عند فنائها، فدل بالسكون على البرد، فكانت تلك الحركة التي هي الحرارة روح ابينا ادم - عليه السلام. ثم لم يزل الخلق يصنع له وتزيد تلك الحرارة حالا بعد حال حتى استخرج له منها المنافع والشجر والغذاء.

perfect circular motion of heat in its act of stimulating the latent and the potential that is an object of thought and is in a state of rest.

Let us now add to this Jābirian scheme another principle which we had said was absent from (f). This principle is substance or more specifically *hylê* as it appears in model (c). In this particular case, the pure *hylê*, is said to accumulate on the surface or the circumference of the circle along with motion, light and brilliance. So, in this model, we would find on this circumference: heat, motion and *hylê*, or the active agents, and on the centre, we would find the opposing: cold, rest and potentials, which we had said are related or the objects of thought. This would allow us to go a step further and assume that in the same way that heat and motion may be related, *hylê* may also be related to them in their act of stimulating and bringing things forth to real existence from the latent and potential existence.

This idea, or further elaboration on Jābir's thoughts, may also be supported with model (b), where the combination Soul/Substance descends and acquires heat through the motive of desire. This results in what Jābir names an animated fire that is different from the one below in the concrete world, and it is through this fire that the world of generation and corruption comes to be. In this sense, Jābir's *hylê* is not Aristotle's matter, it is rather the active agent, the animated fire that causes things to come to be.²²¹ This *hylê* is substance in the sense of Soul/Substance, it is the animated substance that is driven by desire to acquire heat to then become a

²²¹ For an interesting comparison, see Gourinat (2009), who writes (p. 51): "according to Antiochus, the Old Academy acknowledged two 'principles', the one active, 'force', and the other passive, 'matter', and those two principles combine in 'body'. The active principle is also said to be god and the world-soul."

creative animated fire that causes the world to be. This becoming of the concrete world is not from a pure no-thing, it is instead from what is base, low, cold, at rest and at the centre of the world, from the potentials which are the objects of thought.

In the same way that the first substance is drawn to the second substance by desire, a desire to animate it, this second substance is similarly drawn by desire to animate what is base and a latent potential at the centre of the world of nature, which in turn is but an object of thought, presumably of the first substance. This may be the way to interpret the first is the last and the last is the first, or the idea that God is outside the world and in the centre of the world.

Conclusion

The introduction to this chapter pointed to what this chapter is not. It neither attempts to prove the early existence of the author of the texts considered nor attempts to prove the unity of this author. It also shows no interest in demonstrating that Jābir is the same Latin author who went by the name Geber. All that could have been unified in our considerations are the themes and concerns of the texts that were explored in this chapter.

It is difficult to state that there is consistency in the texts that have been consulted and studied in this chapter. We came across the idea that natures attack and act upon substance, and the alternative ideas that substance is the principle of those natures, that it must be active, and that it desires natures. In this or in any other representation of the relation between substance and natures one might find an indication of different authorship or at best a sense of development of ideas in the same historical author. Alternatively, one might choose to read Jābir in his own pragmatic way and suggest that these are reflections of the different stages or contexts the author or the authors wrote under. What might be seen as a discrepancy could simply be interpreted as the impracticality of using a particular model in contexts that are not served by it. This would reflect Jābir's recommendation to find a convenient or supportive model in the works inherited from past generations. A philosophical, cosmological or geometric model is any model, that helps transmit the ideas that are known to practically lead to results in the concrete world of the laboratory.

In his cosmological text, Jābir attempts to represent the world in its entirety, all the way from the spiritual world of Intellect and Spirit down to the natural world of the elemental qualities and their combinations into the different existing animate and inanimate things of this same world. In such a model the higher natures of the spiritual substances are emphasised and the path drawn for us is the same as that of the descent from the higher realms to the lower ones. In this particular consideration, it makes sense in his model to refer to the activity of Soul/Substance in its act upon the four natures and to understand the science of balance as a measure of the desire of the Soul/Substance to these natures. On the other hand, when Jābir is under the context of attempting to imitate in his laboratory the workings of nature, in its production of the existents of this world, he would generally be emphasising the four natures as the principles of this world, as that which makes it what it is. This is the condition under which, and in agreement with Nomanul Haq's opinion, substance becomes absent due to the lack of a specific quantifiable measure of its presence and affect.

From a closely related perspective, it is also possible to see Jābir's work in his laboratory as the act of imitating the action of the Eternal substance. God the creator acts upon the *hylê* through the qualifying four natures and so does the alchemist in the laboratory. The emphasis on the activity of the four natures is due to the fact that they are what the alchemist may control and manipulate through changing their balance and ratios in the compound, with the mind set on the idea of the return of things to a balanced perfect state.

One of the other themes that appeared as a potential contradiction is the nature of the elementary qualities. Nomanul Haq had put an emphasis on their concreteness which he based on the fact that they have a measurable and defined weight. We noted that this, however, ignores the idea that the measure of one nature is only expressed in relation to the other natures in a compound. Nomanul Haq's weight ignores the relative nature of weight in Jābir's jargon and fails to understand the arbitrariness of the unit of measure of such weight. Jābir's science is a science of balance and not of weight, since one does not measure one element in isolation but an element in a relative relation with other completing natures and in their manifest existence in a compound, the only way they may be said to exist concretely.

The relativity in measurement and balance, that each nature is to be measured in relation to other present natures in a compound, and in relation to the other existing compounds, is an indication of the centrality of the relational principle in the natures' quantifiability. In this idea we may include the idea of active and passive natures, or the manifest and the hidden natures. All these point to the interconnectedness of the four natures which only become truly manifest once they enter into combination with at least one other nature. The process of quantifiability or measurability in terms of the similar other reflects the beginning of the combination process that leads up to the generation of the existents.

These four natures, as principles of the concrete real world, are reduced in Jābir's work to two main or principle natures. Those that Jābir refers to as the active ones, heat and cold, are set to be in opposition to each other. The other two natures

appear to be more of a product of this heat and cold. We found that in one particular geometrical model the circumference of the circle represented heat whilst the centre represented cold. The motion of this circumference around the centre led to the gradual production of the two other elementary qualities. Finally, out of the two active natures, we noticed that it was heat that appeared to have the more active nature as it is its motion around its negation, the point in the centre,²²² that produces the rest of the elements and subsequently the existing things. This is a process that leads from four principles to two active principles, which is then expressed or reduced to the one and its negation.

With the elementary qualities, we have the link to the higher intelligible world yet this transition could not be made possible, in Jābir's work, without substance. This element is the one that appears to exist in the concrete as well as the intelligible worlds. It is presented as the different materials of the world that are transformed into the different objects (gold, wood, iron, etc.). It is that in which the four natures inhere since it is the substrate of the four natures, and it is in their combinations that the elementary bodies come to be. Substance is also said to be the principle of these four natures and in other texts to be subject to the act of the four natures. It is presented as the animated substance, or what we have called Soul/Substance, which is drawn to the four natures by its desire. It is also the hypostasised Aristotelian *hylē* found after the circle of Soul. And finally substance is used in association with the Eternal to refer to God the creator, to *Allah*.

²²² Related to the idea of zero, nothingness, lack of tangibility, latency and potentiality.

Substance animated with Soul as principle, *hylê* and substrate, is qualified into the four natures through its descent, after its creation from nothing by the Eternal. The notion of desire and longing is the cause of the motion of descent and the materialisation process into this corporeal world. Desire leads to the existence of the things of the world that are said to necessarily exist through another, and their existence is but a reflection of the truly existing one. This same notion and motion in the reverse direction is what leads that which has become more dense and concrete to find its way back to the origin, to the Eternal one and the necessarily existing by itself.

Jābir's work, in its dispersed form, is unified in one particular sense; it is at least unified in the philosophical project it undertakes. It is an attempt at finding a meaning or an interpretation of the central Islamic concept of *tawḥīd*, a term that is frequently repeated in Jābir's text and is directed against the dualist conception of the world. His particular understanding is based on a unifying process, on creation *ex-nihilo* and on the existence of one substance that undergoes different modifications through desire, motion and intensification.

Synthesis and Conclusion

In the introduction and the appendix of this research, we set out an argument for Ringer's sampling method from the field of cultural production, on the basis that works within a field are interrelated and refractive of each other. This is what permitted the selection of a wide range of texts from different schools of thought within the Islamic cultural field. The different chapters that we have presented do not discuss this methodology since this was the ground that established the selection of the texts, and not the analysis of the sampled texts themselves.

In attempting to understand the thoughts of the different participators in the field, we did not need to assume that they were restricted to produce what complements or agrees with their own schools or the general intellectual field of the time. The initial task of this project was to free ourselves from the already established classes and divisions under which each author ought to fall under. However, this did not prevent us from assuming a unity in the cultural field as a whole. Following the sampling and selection process, each intellectual product was studied and analysed in isolation with the assumption that once this is achieved we might begin to see the unifying field as it is refracted by each position within it. In some sense, we expected the unity in the intellectual field to shine through the selected works following their separation into analysable parts which ultimately requires the whole to be understood correctly. We must emphasise that unity in the intellectual field does not mean unity of opinions, arguments, conclusions or methods, it rather means and suggests a process involving each of the different positions within the cultural field.

The best example that reflects what we mean by a unified intellectual field is our chapter on the Qur'ānic commentaries. The majority of authors we have sampled are deniers of the thingness of the non-existent; yet we were able to learn much about this idea through their own texts. The Mu'tazilī idea penetrates areas and positions within a field where it ought to be absent. The authors who are present in the same cultural field are not only forced to face the opposing views, to include the voice of the other, no matter how distorted, but they are also forced to vocalise and pronounce their rejection whilst permitting some of the meanings of the rejected pronouncement to become part of the personal discourse. Some of the other works discussed in this chapter transmit and criticise a particular discourse yet they allow that which is rejected to be expressed in different ways, or simply without creating a class to their shared meaning. They might consider the knowns to be the non-existent and they might consider them to be things but they would not affirm the thingness of the non-existent as this statement belongs to another voice within the field from which a difference is to be established.

The important restriction that we applied to our sampling method was the question of the nature of the relationship between the creator and the created. The idea of the thingness of the thing seemed to us from the very beginning to be the element that linked these two separate modes of being. This directed our interest toward texts that discussed this relationship, and reflected the process of establishing differences and similarities binding and separating these two modes of being.

The different texts that have been considered are texts that deal with the question of creation and the nature of this act, whether this act is applied to something or

not, and if applied to something, what is its relation to the existent? The other relevant questions are related to the created, that is, if the world is created then there must exist in this created world an indication of the act and the cause that led to its existence, hence the questions of knowledge and the nature of the relation between cause and effect. The idea of creation naturally led to questions regarding the creator or creators that cause the things to originate. This is mostly apparent in the debates or arguments with naturalists, Christians or dualists as we noticed with al-Rassī and Jābir.

Dualism and unity underlie all of the texts we have sampled. They are applied within the different texts in different ways, but they all interact to form new meanings. Dualism primarily appears in al-Rassī's refutation of Ibn al-Muqaffa's beliefs, and in Jābir's critique of the idea of two principles of this world. Unity on the other hand appears in the arguments for one principle of this world which underlies the concept of *tawḥīd* that is central to Islamic belief and discourse. Unity, however, also appears in the ideas of the naturalists who do not seek a principle outside of the existent world itself. Finally, dualism itself becomes the underlying principle of al-Rassī's own view of the transcendent God and the world. This, for us, is a process of associating different meanings with specific terms, which reflects the active nature of the cultural field.

The arguments against the other, and the different meanings associated with the same terms, still produce what we consider to be a unified intellectual field. The unity, which appears in the research as a whole, is a unity of differences containing

elements of the other. It is what produces a dynamic process of negating, acquiring and affirming something of the other within the cultural field. The synthesis of these differences is what is set out in the sections that follow, where each contains a theme that the different chapters contribute to.

Knowledge

The question of knowledge primarily appears in two chapters. In the field of *kalām*, our chapter on the Ibādī school distinguished between two types of knowledge, the instinctive and the acquired. The first is essentially the *a-priori* knowledge which allows for the possibility of human knowledge, whilst the second is what one acquires from the concrete and real world. It is this knowledge of the natural world that is set as essential in order to know God. Whatever is knowable of God is from his creation and is based on the principle that the maker of things is knowable from the things he made (i.e. argument from design). On the other hand, the theologians also apply the principle of *tanzīh* or de-anthropomorphism which sets God as the absolute transcendent and the radically different. What results from the knowledge of such a difference is essentially that the world is originated but since God is the radical other of what is originated He must be the eternal and the creator. This same idea appeared in Jābir's text on the eternal, where he criticised the method of the *Mutakallimūn*. We noticed that his text contained contradictions since he initially started from the principle of *tanzīh* only to then find himself dealing with the question of cause and effect and the similarity between the two. This led him to establish the nature of the two, the creator and the created, through the principle of similitude. What becomes apparent in this case is that without similitude, there is in

a sense no knowledge. This, for us, is another example of a discourse denied yet applied nonetheless.

There is another angle to knowledge that is found in Jābir's work. He does not state that one must study nature in order to know God, as in the *kalām* case, since this does not appear to be his project. He still, however, alludes to the empirical nature of knowledge whilst dealing with the metaphysical. In constructing his particular view or model of the entire existence, the spiritual and the concrete, we discussed his approach in constructing different models. Apart from consulting the work of the ancient philosophers who do not seem to agree amongst themselves, he informs us that one is free to construct one's own model as long as it is tested and is shown to work. Variation in structures of the universe is not a problem for Jābir as long as what is based on this construction of the universe -which ultimately is of nature and the world we live in- works in the laboratory. It is not very clear if Jābir is interested in knowing God for the sake of knowing Him or simply to know how the maker of the universe creates his work in order to be imitated and in order that the human being may also work on this same universe but more specifically, the natural world we live in. Alternatively, one may also think of Jābir's work in the laboratory as an attempt to manipulate the existents of this natural world, in order to see how it came to be, to understand and know how its maker made it what it is. The first interpretation is a positive approach to the sciences where the scientist sees himself on a path to becoming a maker and a creator in the natural world. The second interpretation may be seen to be more passive since the scientist seeks to know in order to be closer, not in the sense of being like a god, but in the sense of having a truer knowledge which brings one close to what is knowable.

Before leaving this section, it is worth noting that the chapter on al-Rassī does reflect some interest in the natural world but only when an argument of an opponent was discredited through a reference to what is observed in the real world. This however does not go as far as constructing models of existence as is the case with Jābir's cosmological and natural models and the Ibāḍī's atomic structure of the existent. This reflects the two sides of the intellectual field that are part of its dynamic nature, a defensive apologetic nature and a progressive constructive nature.

Changing States and atoms

Changing states, or change in general, seems to be the essential and fundamental idea that underlies all the texts. It is at once the problem and the solution to the question of existence since change needs to be explained, why it is there rather than not, and how it occurs. At the same time, however, change in our texts implies a changing agent, which is generally assumed to be the creator of the changing world, the world of generation and corruption.

The term 'states' is primarily used in al-Rassī's arguments against the naturalist. This debate is essentially about change and the possible relation between states and principles. Change is also considered in this chapter from the point of view of latency, which ultimately meant that all things are all things or, in other terms, change is simply transformations within a single substance that contains all the possible existents.

In the case of al-Rassī, the discussion is mostly regarding the changing states and the negation of the eternity of an underlying substance and principle. The same concern is developed into the theory of atoms and their accidents as presented by Shaykh Bashīr from the Ibādī school. This theory reflects the same concerns with states and substances and presents a compact view and solution that answers the question of change at the most fundamental level of existence.

The more easily accepted idea that states, or accidents, change and that they do not move from one accident to another but rather occur in a substance or an underlying substrate, is supplemented in the atomic structure with the mutual interdependence of accidents and atoms. In the concrete world of nature, it is not only the accidents that need a substance to inhere in but the atoms also, in their coming to existence, depend on the accidents to gain corporeality. These atoms are real and concrete but they cannot exist in isolation, since, to exist for an atom necessarily means to be with another atom, in other terms, to exist as a composite.

In this model of the world, the foundation of existence is a basic singular and finite substance that is essentially dependent on the accident of contiguity, which permits formation, structure and multiplicity. The agent who changes the states in al-Rassī's discourse is in Shaykh Bashīr's atomic model considered the one who combines and joins the atoms in accordance with His will to form the different things of the natural world. In the discrete world built from atoms and accidents, change only comes from above. God is always emphasised in this model to be the one who changes the states of things, even if in some atomic models, the atoms are what

they are before their coming to be. Change in the end is emphasised to have a vertical cause.

If the natural world of the *mutakallim* is a world of atoms and accidents then the world of the alchemist is the world of the four natures (heat, cold, dryness and moistness). In the same way that God is seen in the prior model to act upon the accidents and the atoms to form all that exists, the God of the alchemist uses the four natures to form the natural world. The aim of the alchemist is to know how God forms the world using these natures in order that he too may form and transform. The two models appear to rely on two different traditions, the atomic on one side, and the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic or hylomorphic on the other.

Jābir's founding elements of the world are not simply the four natures, for ultimately these four natures come from his fifth nature or substance. The ground of the four natures is this substance, which Jābir regularly refers to as *al-habā'* or the motes that are seen through the sunlight. *Al-habā'* we noted was the Arabic translation for the term 'motes' as it appears in the Arabic translation of Aristotle's *De Anima* when referring to Democritus' atoms. Although the idea of *motes* ascribes visibility to substance, Jābir's work suggests that this is only an indication of what atoms might look like since the visible world of nature becomes what it is in the composites of the five natures as each is simple and a principle.

So, one of the alchemist's models also includes an atomic ground that becomes manifest in association with the forming four natures similar to the accidents associated with the atom of the *Mutakallimūn*. In both models, the atoms may not

exist, in the sense of being perceived, in isolation as they are generally considered intelligible, or somehow exist between the intelligible and the sensible in Jābir's case. On the other hand, we mentioned in a note that the Mu'tazila debated whether or not the atom is what it is prior to existence and we noticed how Jābir's substance undergoes a process of change all the way from the intelligible realm down to the sensible world of nature. The two models of substance are therefore not the same but they certainly exhibit a great deal of similarity.

With regard to change in the world, Jābir also emphasises, like the *mutakallimūn*, the vertical causal relation, however, he also greatly emphasises the horizontal nature of change. The possibility of such a change is simply the ground of the science of alchemy.

The idea that there could be a similarity between *kalām* and hylomorphic atomism forces the question of the possibility of a link between the two, and if there is another source that could be added in response to the question of the origins of *kalām* atomism. The hint at a common source or influence comes from the geometrical representation of atoms. In Jābir's work, we noted his emphasis on the circular geometry of the intelligible realm as well as the natural world. In the natural world we also noticed his criticism of the angular models of the four natures, which in turn led us to compare this idea with al-Kindī and his agreement on the circular or concentric model. However, this also led us to al-Kindī's discussion of the geometrical shapes of the composite elements, earth, water, air and fire. Al-Kindī's angular geometrical figures are Plato's solids found in the

Timaeus that has exerted a great influence on the development of alchemy and was translated and summarised early on in the translation movement.¹

If the Islamic alchemists had found the *Timaeus* or its derivative alchemical works to be of great importance in their science, this in itself is still not an indication of any influence on the development of atomism in general let alone on *kalām* atomism. What does point to a possible link between the two traditions, however, is that the theologians' discussions of the atom involve an analysis of the shape of an atom and the shape of the most basic body. We mentioned in a note that there were disagreements amongst the early atomist regarding the number of atoms required to form a body. Amongst the options that were considered and that eventually became the accepted model, is the idea that the most basic body is formed of six faces, which eventually was clearly stated to be a cube formed of six square atoms. Later theologians also inform us that there were disagreements on whether the atom is shaped at all and whether it resembles or is a circle, a square or a triangle. This for us reflects a discussion on the geometrical nature of the atom, if not its essence, particularly since what it is in itself is related to space occupation, or *taḥayyuz*.

It is not only the geometrical nature of the debate surrounding the atom itself that points to Plato's solids but also the fact that the geometrical figure that is generally

¹ For the relation between *Timaeus*' solids and Arabic alchemy, see the relevant geometrical discussion in the alchemical text of *K. al-Rawābī* on Plato's solids, ps-Plato, pp. 127-130. See also Jābir's *k. al-Ḥajar* for his discussion of the opinions on what is the shape of the most fundamental element, Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, '*K. al-Ḥajar*', in *The Arabic Works of Jābir ibn Ḥayyān*, (1928), pp. 13-42. There are two other important ideas that require further investigations in this book. The first is a reference to the alchemical stone as that which is indivisible and has no parts (p. 18), and the second is a listing of five eternal principles: the first substance, hylē, form, time and space which seem remarkably similar to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's principles.

chosen to form the most basic body is the square that forms a cube which in turn is the shape of the element earth. That the smallest divisible body has the geometrical form of earth is not far from Jābir's smallest particles of motes. The earthy and dusty nature of the basic particles of nature appears to be similar in both cases. Further to this, Jābir's substance as primary matter is also called in some occasions *al-ḥīna*.² In his note on this term, Kraus guides us to al-Maḡdisī's *al-Bad' wa-l-tārīkh* where, prior to his discussion on the atom, he associates the term *ḥīna* with substance (*jawhar*), matter (*mādda*), *hylê*, the part (*al-juz*) (presumably the indivisible part or the atom), the elemental qualities (*al-'unṣur*) and the elements (*uṣṭuqs*).³ The key text that actually links these ideas together is found in the following page where al-Maḡdisī relates, regarding the atom and the early philosopher:

The ancients are in disagreement regarding this subject, similar to the disagreement amongst the people of Islam, for some assume that one sees before the four elements (*uṣṭuqsāt*) other elements small in parts and indivisible. They are extremely small in size and from them is the composition of the elements (*uṣṭuqsāt*) from which the world is composed.⁴

Later on, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī informs us that the ancients disagreed on the shapes of these founding elements, which he calls (*al-habā'āt*). The atoms are, therefore, also seen as the founding blocks of the elements similar to Plato's geometrical figures. The difference between the shapes of the founding elements is also found in *al-Rawābī* of ps-Plato:

² Kraus, p. 171, note 1.

³ Al-Maḡdisī (1899), v. 1, p. 39.

⁴ Ibid., p. 41. Later on, al-Rāzī informs us that the ancients disagreed on the shapes of these founding elements, what he calls (*al-habā'āt*) and he discusses the conical and the cubic. Ibn Sīnā & al-Rāzī (1980), v. 2, p. 181.

Aḥmad Said: Plato has found that the ancients advocated that the principles of things were intelligible principles. These are the reasons for the being of the sensible simple which is subject to composition. Some of the ancient say that the simple has the shape of a circle since its parts are similar. Plato is in disagreement with the ancients and he says: the circular shape is disjointed for the circumferences do not join in their entirety, if it is so then empty space will occur in it and that is not permissible in the simple. He also says that the simple is the intelligible element and he judges the intelligible element that does not accept division to be the simple. He also says that its indivisibility is not due to its smallness but due to its being one in essence.⁵

This is the argument set against the idea that the founding parts of the simple elements, or *al uṣṭuqsāt*, are circles as this leads to the creation of empty space in the simple. This is why we are then told that the simples are formed of triangles or squares.

Finally, it is no surprise that the earthly nature of the simplest bodies in existence is also related to the Qur'ānic vision of creation from earth (*turāb*) in Q. 3:59; 13:5; 18:37; 22:5; 30:20; 35:11; 40:67, as well as other verses which refer to clay and mud.

This similarity between Jābir and the theologians with regard to the primary substance of existence or atoms is limited in many ways. For Jābir, the idea of atoms as indivisible parts is rarely used apart from the suggestive meaning of *habā'*. However, what is similar between him and the theologians is the need for a constitutive element to the *uṣṭuqs* or the simplest body in existence, and he also makes some references to the geometrical basis of the elements as is the case of ps-Plato. It appears that the theologians use a geometrical unit of square as that which links the intelligible and the concrete since it is the sum of six such units that makes

⁵ Ps-Plato, p. 127. It is not known who is this Aḥmad, but for more information on the text see Thillet (2005).

up the most basic concrete body. For Jābir, on the other hand, what is important in his laboratory is that it is the sum of two natures that creates the most basic concrete composites (earth, fire, water and air), which in turn are the building blocks of the existents. These natures, like their counterparts in the atomic theory, are simple intelligibles in isolation, yet real and concrete in composition, which is what renders them the link between the intelligible and the sensible worlds. We should also remember at the end of this section that Jābir's natures are always in substance or a modification of substance whilst the theologians' atom is substance, yet in both cases it is at the level of combination with the accidents, the categories or natures, that the distinguished existents emerge.

Tawḥīd

In the theology of al-Qāsim al-Rassī, one finds few arguments against any multiplicity of principles. The beliefs of the Christians are compared to those of the star worshipers who consider God as their creator and the one who gave them the power to create the rest of the world. God the creator of gods, as represented by al-Rassī, now appears to be similar to the Ismā'īlī God who is a *mu'īll*, or a creator of the Intellect who is the cause of the existence of the rest of the world. This, for al-Rassī, is a way of evading the association of God with the relation of cause that essentially entails its effect. This, however, was not found to be a satisfactory answer to this problem, even in its different form presented by the Christian theologians. God is simply one and is in no need of intermediaries in His act of creation *ex-nihilo*.

The other locus for arguments against the multiplicity of principles is found in the refutation of the dualists. The argument in this section is essentially set in terms of the problem of the mixture of the two principles, the dark and the light. If the world is seen as the result of the mixture of light and darkness, this would mean for al-Rassī their transformation, or at least gradation or *tafāḍul*, in the being of light and darkness, thus leading to the problematic idea that light would have darkness within it.

Al-Rassī's anti-dualist view, in which he rejects the idea of gradation in the pure light through a mixture with darkness, reflects in some sense his own view of *tawḥīd* through *tanzīh*. God may be compared with this pure light, which is neither linked nor mixed with darkness nor with the world of mixture, generation and corruption, our natural world. Under this representation, God is not differentiated, graded and mixed, but the created world may be so. Al-Rassī's *tawḥīd* appears, in this context, to be a form of revisionism within the dualism he attacks, where the pure light is absolutely separated from the world of mixture.

Jābir also sets himself the task of arguing against a dualist view of existence and he uses Aristotle's categories to achieve his aim. It is interesting that he chooses to argue against the idea of dual principles using categories that are used to classify the existents. What we presented in the relevant chapter was Jābir's argument using the first category of substance with the aim to show that there is but one principle and that there is but one substance, this is what he calls *tawḥīd*. Jābir's anti dualism rejects the idea of a dual principle and substance. For him there is only one substance which is itself the principle. Although he does promote the principle of

tanzīh, his views on the nature of this principle and its relation to the world appears to stand in opposition to al-Rassī's view. Jābir's God is a cause, which means it is essentially tied to its effect, but more importantly, it is similar to it despite the variation in the degree of that which is similar. God and the world are in this particular order neither separated nor radically dissimilar. When discussing this particular cause and the world that is its effect, we found Jābir to be of the opinion that the essential attributes of God and the created are one in reality, it is existence or *wujūd*. The difference that is noted between the cause and its effect is only in degree or, as al-Rassī would think, in *tafāḍul*. In this order, God's existence as the cause is better (*afḍal*) than the existence of the created, which as an effect is derivative in nature. Al-Rassī's rejection of the dualism of Ibn al-Muqaffa' on the ground of *tafāḍul* in light is here accepted and applied to the essential attribute of God, His *wujūd*.

Both thinkers critique dual principles to the world, yet we find al-Rassī's model of what there is to be dual in nature. He establishes an order that maintains a fissure between God, the pure light, and the world that is a mixture of light and darkness. Jābir's project on the other hand, is not only anti dualist in terms of principles, but also anti-dualist in terms of what there is. For him, there is but one substance that accepts variation in degrees of being (*tafāḍul*). His project is to unify all the circles at the macro and micro levels of existence. Everything is in substance and everything is substance. God is outside the circles and is inside the smallest circle. This model is an extension of the Neoplatonic project but, in his case, the sensible world is not excluded from the hypostates. The natural world is not isolated from the intelligible world, it is instead an extension of it since it is where the

transformation from potentiality to actuality takes place. The difference between the sensible world and the intelligible world becomes, according to Jābir's project, only a difference in the degree of being.

The unity encountered in the Jābirian corpus could be said to have some similarity with the naturalist criticised by al-Rassī -who argued for the principle of *tawḥīd*- yet it is still a statement of *tawḥīd*. Similarly, al-Rassī's critique of dualism, in the name of this unity, produces his own form of dualism, where pure light is given its place of complete separation from the world. This is why we may think of the texts we have considered to be refutations of forms of dualism and unity and developments of new forms of dualism and unity. However, the new dualism, founded on the principle of *tanzīh*, must have faced some of the same arguments directed against the dualists. These are the arguments that challenge the nature of the relation between an absolute transcendent principle and the real world. This is where we start to see a shift, within the *kalām* discourse, that tries to bridge the fissure created by *tanzīh*.

Creation and thubūt

In the first chapter, al-Rassī classified two types of creations. The first of these is symbolised by Adam's creation, which was without an existing prior model and from an already existing unformed matter, the nature of which seems unclassified and unrelated to the second type of creation. The second type is what we considered to be more of a transformative progressive kind where things emerge from an already existing model, the symbolic Adam who is also the pre-existing

matter from which new creations proceed. Interestingly, despite arguing for creation *ex-nihilo*, one finds no space for it in this classification or the ones that follow.

The same idea of creation from something whilst affirming creation *ex-nihilo* appears in the Qur'ānic commentaries and in Jābir's work. In the third chapter, we explored the different uses of the terms of creation in the Qur'ān as well as the commentators. These terms appear to be frequently used as reflective of the idea of transformation from one thing to another or as bestowing life onto something to render it a living thing. The act of creation is shown on many occasions to happen to something that is associated with the known that awaits the commanding *kun* to change its mode of being from potential to existent. We used the term being to link the two ontological states, however, the *mutakallimūn*, particularly the Mu'tazila, were shown to have initially used the term *shay'* and then developed the ontological term *thubūt* or subsistence to convey the link between the two. A *shay'* is what has being as a potential or a known, as a distinguished thing that God commands to be and causes to exist, it then remains a distinguished thing that has existence. What remains in the two stages of being is subsistence and thingness which in turn applies to God's mode of being with the addition that He is a *muthbit* and *mushayyi'*.

In the case of the names and attributes of God, as well as the ontological nature of the non-existent thing, we have an attempt at defining a category that is between existence and absolute non-existence. This latter category (non-existence) was of no significance to the theologians since nothing is associated with it and nothing may be said of it. The non-existent things, however, which are God's knowns, are of

great significance since they are distinguished things that require identification and classification. Both, the non-existent things and God's attributes belong to the intelligible realm yet one of them becomes part of the sensible realm, the existent things, and the other causes this transformation. Thus, we consider the development of the idea of the thingness of the non-existent, and more specifically the concept of *thubūt*, to be a theological attempt at unifying the two worlds, the intelligible and the sensible in the sense that the existent is merely the subsistent in a state of existence, it is the same 'thing' at another degree of being. This conception is also found to be of use in explaining the possibility of the Sufi journey of return through the different degrees of being.

The different fields considered in this thesis, which are contained within the larger Islamic intellectual field of the time, reflect a movement that attempts to expand the meaning of *tawḥīd*. It moves from a critique of the dual or multiple principles to a unification of substance. In the period under consideration, this move or process is not sequential in nature but simultaneous. This, in some sense, reflects a difference between two trends, both are projects of unification yet they attempt to create a different structure of what there is. In *kalām*, God and the world remain at a distance despite relating what exists to what has being before existence. In this model, the discrete atom of the world, which is its foundation, accepts no intermixture with other atoms, and may also have being before existence where it remains discrete and different from the other similar. The relation between the world and God also reflects this strict division where there is no intermixture between things. This is a discrete hierarchical structure that maintains a distance between the principle and the world despite having the category of *thubūt* that

links the two modes of being, the sensible and the intelligible, or between existence and non-existence. However, even in this model, the fissure between God and the world is reduced by the Sufi interest in the return to the principle. Their return reflects a process of moving along stages or degrees of being which in the concrete world is reflected by the degrees of consciousness. There are clear foundations of the Sufi discourse in the *kalām* field as we noticed in the commentary tradition.

The relation of the returning soul through stages of purification also reflects its link to the other project of unification exemplified in our case by Jābir. *Tawḥīd* in the alchemical sense is also hierarchical, yet in Jābir's model we find no fissure as is the case in other Neoplatonic models. The concrete world changes through different continuous changes of ratios that relate the four natures, where everything may be transformed into another -after decomposition-. This ultimately reflects processes within a whole that is continuous and not discrete.

We hope that, by starting from studies in the social sciences, we have given good reasons for assuming the existence of a large scale of interaction between the different fields of cultural production. This interaction between what was already present and the new ideas, creates an entangled field where it is impossible to isolate one text from the other, on the basis that one stands in opposition to the other, or that one is foreign to the other. Texts, in this thesis, have been understood through other texts, which appear to come from different traditions or different disciplines, and are generally assumed to be different and distant from each other. This, not only expands our understanding of influences but also, the level of infiltration of some ideas in the larger field of cultural production. We have also

shown that the argument against an other shapes the views of those on both sides of the opposition; this is why we assume that polemical works are also sources of influence on cultural developments.

Apart from our emphasis on the dialectical nature of the cultural production of the period under consideration, and our exposition and analysis of dualism and unity in their Islamic and non-Islamic forms, we hope to have contributed in this research to a number of areas. One of these areas is the early development of *kalām*, particularly, to the study atomism, as we have interpreted an early Ibādī text that has largely been neglected in Islamic studies. With regard to atomism, we have suggested earlier sources for the development of this theory in the Islamic culture, which not only relates it to alchemy but also the Platonic solids. We believe that the exploration of a possible relation between *kalām* atomism and the Platonic solids should encourage further research in this area.

In addition, we have followed the development of the concept of *thubūt* and its relation to thingness. This has been traced from its early appearances in *kalām* discussions on the nature of God, followed by its discussion in the Qur'ānic commentaries. We have also referred to the importance of these concepts as they became central in the philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī.

We have also contributed to an exploration of the *kalām* field through an intertextual analysis of the Qur'ānic commentaries. This not only showed the centrality of the text of the Qur'ān to the development of *kalām*, but also the

existence of a space where opposition to the other becomes symbolised in the rejection of terms and not necessarily of ideas.

Finally, we have given an exposition of the Jābirian philosophy of substance, which has not received much attention. The ideas that are related to this concept have been noted to be contradictory at times, however, our own reading of the corpus has shown an attempt at creating a unified substance with different intensities in being. We hope that this has contributed to studies on the early development of philosophy and its relation to the practical sciences in Islam.

The method of sampling texts, from a specific period and with regard to a specific question, has allowed us to explore and present different relations and ideas within a specific culture. We believe that our work has confirmed some already established ideas regarding the Islamic cultural field and at the same time opened the space for investigations of other relations and interactions. This is why we believe that the material sampled in this research is still in its raw state and requires further studies and analysis that may yield further relations within the early Islamic cultural field.

Appendix

Theoretical grounds for the sampling method

I. Approaches in the study of the history of ideas¹

In studies of the history of ideas, two main dichotomous trends may be discerned, one emphasises the subjective nature of the creator or the contributor to the sum of human knowledge, whilst the other greatly emphasises the contextual basis (social, economic, political. etc.) of the individual. In turn, these approaches are themselves part of the larger modern competing philosophical, political and aesthetical views on the subject and her role. In cases of extreme contextualism, the human subject is diminished to a point of no recognition where she is dominated by a complex web of social, economic and political relations that dictates how she ought to think and act. In such a view, typical of some simplified Marxist approaches, the ideas of individuals can only change when the complex network of objective relations is modified, thus reducing the human being to the status of a player of a role preordained for her by the objective reality which can ironically only exist through this being.² The value judgement upon the intellectual product, and by association the intellectual, the artist or the writer, is based in this model on the best reflection of the

¹ The general outline of this section is based on Skinner (1969).

² Bennett writes: "if there is a common core to Marxist criticism it is the conviction that works of literature can be fully understood only if placed in the context of the economic, social and political relationships in which they are produced." Bennett (2003), p. 21. He also states that the main concern of the early Marxist's criticism and analysis (1930-1960) "was with the social determination of the philosophical content of literary works." (p. 30). Trotsky makes the link between art and the social in *Literature and Revolution* as follows: "The form of art is to a certain and very large degree, independent, but the artist who creates this form, and the spectator who is enjoying it, are not empty machines, one for creating form and the other for appreciating it. They are living people, with a crystallized psychology representing a certain unity, even if not entirely harmonious. This psychology is the result of social conditions. The creation and perception of art forms is one of the functions of this psychology." Trotsky (1996), p. 52. Also, he points out that Marxism "emphasizes the all-determining significance of natural and economic conditions in the formation of folklore" (ibid., p. 55). However, he does think that "It is unquestionably true that the need for art is not created by economic conditions" and that "[A] work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art." (ibid., p. 56).

world outside, of the network of relations and the balances in the social, political and economic structures as is best suited to the domain of her speciality.³

On the other hand, and in opposition to the over-determined human being, one finds schools that emphasise the importance of the subjective nature of a great mind. These schools do not deny the existence of an objective world of relations, however, they do not go as far as granting this world the power to condition and determine the creative actor who contributes to human knowledge since, for them, this objective world is subjected to the will of the genius creator. To understand the creative act of an artist, for example, one merely needs to know the private life of the individual under consideration, relations with parents, siblings, friends, competitors, educators or anyone who could have had an intellectual influence. The biographical approach in the study of a human genius does indeed go beyond the very subjective or psychological world but only extends to the proximate and direct network of relations. In principle, it is primarily this proximate direct world, which comes in contact with the subject, that can be assigned or granted the influential role.

One of the problematic issues in biographical histories is considering the body of works of an individual author to be a unified entity that may be studied, scrutinised and criticised

³ Bennett writes regarding the principle of reflection of the social context that preoccupied early Marxist analysis: "According to 'reflection theory', the crucial question refers not to the precise ways in which, in light of their formal properties, works of literature signify reality but rather to the extent of their correspondence to it." Bennett (2003), p. 31. With regard to Lukacs revival of the Aristotelian idea of mimesis "[T]he necessary corollary of such concern was an attempt to rank literary forms according to the degree to which they corresponded to 'the essence of things' -in this case, the class struggle as 'already known' within the terms of Marxist theory." (Ibid.) Lukacs writes: " [T]he profundity of the great realist, the extent and the endurance of his success, depends in great measure on how clearly he perceives - as a creative writer- the true significance of whatever phenomenon he depicts." Lukacs (2007), p. 33. Regarding the essence of things mentioned earlier: "[W]hat matters is that the slice of life shaped and depicted by the artist and re-experienced by the reader should reveal the relations between appearance and essence without the need for any external commentary." (Ibid., pp. 33-34)

according to this 'unity'. This is generally justified by the singularity of its origin, the one author. A whole body of works is assumed to complement each other without contradiction because of the possible challenge this might cause to the singular origin. As Skinner points out, the task of a biographer in these cases is to "resolve antinomies"⁴ and to systematically unify a corpus of work. The singularity and the essentially unified author necessitate the construction of a general system of beliefs, which the author is assumed to hold, and which brings about the dissolution of contradictions in the body of works. In a sense, the biographer constructs an author capable of holding a consistent unified body of beliefs to which her corpus of work belongs.⁵

The general division made between the subjective and objective views of the history of ideas comes in many diverse and evolving forms. Some of these are variations that come within a particular view, such as the objective approach of structuralism, and others are various combinations of the two.

I.1 Centrality of ideas

In the domain of the history of scientific and mathematical ideas, the general approach is to give ideas their own natural objective process of progression, where great individuals are the cause of the evolution or progress of particular ideas. This approach is also applied in works that seek to map out histories of particular ideas.⁶ Here, it is the idea which gains

⁴ Skinner (1996), p. 20.

⁵ See Foucault (1981), pp. 48-78, for a discussion on this idea. There he states, concerning the concept of the author, which he considers to be "another principle of rarefaction of a discourse" the following: "[T]he author is asked to account for the unity of the texts which are placed under his name. He is asked to reveal or at least carry authentication of the hidden meaning which traverses them. He is asked to connect them to his lived experiences, to the real history which saw their birth." (p. 58)

⁶ See in this respect Lovejoy's introduction to *The Great Chain of Being* where he proposes to approach philosophical systems by breaking "them up into their component elements, into what may be called their

the status of objective reality, it is then followed by the great authors who become landmarks in the movement of this idea. An objectified idea, in this particular approach, usually leads to a reification of concept and, due to the process of decontextualisation of the landmark, the author is rendered superfluous, since the meaning of her work can only be determined by future times when the unfolding idea becomes more knowable.⁷ Ultimately, in this idealised world view, neither subject nor context (social, economic, political. etc.) can really be said to determine the movement of ideas in time and place.⁸

I.2 Formalism and Structuralism

Similarly, the Russian Formalists' approach goes beyond the notion of a single idea that exists over a long historical period. It seeks to find fundamental ahistorical forms that are at the ground of the poetic and literary vision of the world.⁹ These underlying universal forms, which act as constructing networks of relations, are to be uncovered or revealed to the Formalist through the process of intertextual analysis of texts.¹⁰ The resemblance

unit-ideas." Lovejoy (2001), p. 3. This unit-idea is "definite and explicit... it consists in a single specific proposition or 'principle' expressly enunciated [...]" (p. 14). More importantly "any unit-idea which the historian thus isolates he next seeks to trace through more than one – ultimately, indeed, through all – of the provinces of history in which it figures in any important degree, whether those provinces are called philosophy, science, literature, art, religion, or politics." The workings of a particular idea or conception need "to be traced connectedly through all the phases of men's reflective life in which those workings manifest themselves [...]" (p. 15)

⁷ Skinner (1996), p. 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-16, 35.

⁹ Bennett remarks that the shift in the historical perspective in later formalism "[...] led to a greater appreciation of the relevance of historical and sociological considerations to the concerns of literary scholarship." Bennett (2003), p. 26. This historicity, however, was still considered within the literary field itself "where they were on perhaps more shaky ground was in their attempt to explain the dynamics of literary evolution as entirely the result of developmental tendencies at work within literature itself [...]. There is no doubt that, in part, these concessions were merely cynical responses to political necessity." (*Ibid.*, p. 27). Erlich also writes: "In this respect the Russian Formalist critic was not significantly different from his Marxist counterpart. Yet where to the latter, literary evolution was an epiphenomenon, a by-product or reflection of social change, to a Formalist, more exactly to an early Formalist, literary history was a self enclosed sequence, a succession of styles and genres, a process propelled by internal exigencies." Erlich (1973), p. 633. Todorov summarises this: "Poetic language, on the other hand, finds its justification (and thus its entire value) in itself; it is its own end, and no longer a means." Todorov (1988), p. 12.

¹⁰ Bourdieu (2007c), p. 178.

between this approach and the previous one lies in the fact that it is the system of works, or the network of relations that exists between texts that is reified and granted an independent reality.¹¹ The dynamics of this reality is found in the text itself and is independent of the historical agent.¹²

Closely related to the formalist method one finds a type of structuralism which seeks to find unconscious historical forms that are supposed to determine the produced 'type' of work,¹³ be it literary, religious, mythic or other.¹⁴ In a particular phase in the history of structuralism, the historical time and location of the object of study were significant in determining the structuring structures guiding particular types of work. This is where Levi Strauss' study of early mythology can be taken as an example. Initially, structuralists sought to find structures that were time specific rather than universal, ahistorical, and unconscious structures that determine all human thought and work, this is what came to be known as deep structures.¹⁵

Tyson describes how the conceptual system has three properties: wholeness, transformation, and self regulation. Transformation in this scheme does allow for change but only in what the structure is applied to. The structure in this case is considered

¹¹ Erlich writes: "[...] they were impervious to all theories locating the *differentia* in the poet rather than the poem, invoking a "faculty of mind" conducive to poetic creation." Erlich (1973), p. 628, and "[f]or Jakobson, the central problem is not the interaction between the percipient subject and the object perceived, but the relationship between the "sign" and the "referent," not the reader's attitude toward reality but the poet's attitude toward language." (Ibid., p. 630).

¹² Bourdieu (2007c), pp. 179-180.

¹³ The model and ground for the different application of the structuralist mode of analysis in structural linguistics is considered to have been developed by de Saussure, see Tyson (2006), p. 212. Bennett also writes in this respect: "for the structuralist usually maintains not merely that the various levels of human activity should be regarded as relatively autonomous. He also contends that, as there is present in each of these an order of culture, each should be viewed as being organised like a language." Bennett (2003), p. 29.

¹⁴ Tyson writes: "For structuralism sees itself as a human science whose effort is to understand, in a systematic way, the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience and, therefore, all human behaviour and production." Tyson (2006), pp. 209-210.

¹⁵ Bourdieu (2007a), pp. 32-33 ; (2007c), p. 179.

dynamic only because it structures and is applied to new material. The self regulating property, however, “means that the transformations of which a structure is capable never lead beyond its own structural system.”¹⁶

We may notice in the above short account of the different approaches to intellectual productions that they are reductionist in nature. The process of production is either reduced to the single author, the independent idea, or on a larger scale, to the economic historical structures or to the ahistorical structuring structures, which determine human behaviour. Absent, from these approaches, is the role of the person undertaking the act of analysing the process of cultural production, the person who undertake the act of reducing the cultural production process to either the subjective or the contextualist basis. This is where Foucault’s self reflective and structuralist approach comes into the picture.

I.3 Foucault’s archaeology

The next approach to cultural works, which is very closely related to the one adopted in this research, is Foucault’s archaeology. In this method, the particular author, artist, school, or any specific work in isolation, are not essentially significant. Foucault stresses the point that classifications of particular periods and subsequent emphasis on the inherited classes and categories established over long periods of time, prevent the researcher from identifying the significant elements that shape a particular culture within a specific historical phase and location.

¹⁶ Tyson (2006), p. 211.

Categories such as author, book, corpus and school restrict the outcome of a research precisely because they narrow down the boundaries of research and finalise, or limit, what is not limited. The significance and the meaning of a book, according to Foucault, cannot be found between its covers, in the biography or bibliography of an author. One must go beyond those traditional limits and boundaries to find meanings within a larger network of relations between the books, the paintings, the politics and the economy that exists at a particular time and location. To be more accurate on this point, it is not an objective network of relations that determines thought and knowledge, it is rather the archaeologist's constructed set of rules that can explain how people of a particular place, period and discipline construed knowledge.¹⁷ These rules, which are projected onto the space under observation, reveal dominant structures that are not the outcome of a structuring of the relevant time and place, but are simply constructed by the historian to explain the conditions of the possibility of a particular discourse.¹⁸ What is interesting is that these constructed rules are not unique in explaining and tying together the different enunciations of particular periods. Foucault allows the possibility of constructing different rules, depending on the delimiting of space of relations that requires understanding and explanations. Thus, it is not only time and location, which enter into the determination of rules, but also the domain set by the archaeologist. It is also very important to note that these rules do explain the different positions taken by those who belonged to the same place and period, but they do not aim to unravel unifying thoughts or beliefs that are characteristic of what is under consideration. In this regard, there is a distinction made between 'general history' which allows for the possibility of many histories and 'total

¹⁷ Kennedy (1979), p. 270.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 271.

history', which seeks to unearth the overriding principles upon which particular cultures or civilisation are founded, or simply the spirit of a particular civilisation.

As for the question of the creative act of a writer, painter, philosopher or any other producer of a particular intellectual work, Foucault finds it unnecessary to resort to the construction of a subject in order to understand the structuring rules of a particular intellectual object. This is because the subject himself can enter into a particular discourse, or be allowed to adopt a particular discourse, only when the rules governing this or that discourse are followed. The 'subject', as Kennedy writes:

[...] is an empty function, a vacant place whose parameters are defined by the rules of discourse within which the statement is made. The statuses of possible speakers, the situations – institutional and contextual- within which he may speak, his possible attitudes towards his topic, are all determined outside him.¹⁹

Although there is more emphasis on historical periods, locations and domains in Foucault's method, one can at least find two main criticisms. The first of these is that the role of the subject is rendered completely insignificant, since it becomes a vacant notion that is structured according to rules projected by a future historian, and as such, the intellectual becomes a subject of a future function determined by a future subject who in turn awaits future constructions. The second criticism, contained also in the first, is that whilst acknowledging that the rules, or the structuring structures, are dependent on locations, periods, and domains, they are still considered, by Foucault, to be delimited by ideas, and not by the concrete conditions of what there is. In this regard, Bourdieu's main criticism of Foucault is that he:

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 274.

[...] transfers into the 'paradise of ideas' [...] the oppositions and antagonisms which are rooted in the relations between the producers and consumers of cultural works.²⁰

This is why we summarise in the next section some of the most important concepts and approaches developed by Bourdieu to account for the real context of the process of cultural production. The exposition of Bourdieu's analysis of cultural production should reflect his attempt at accounting for both, the structuring context and the subject's disposition and role in the production process.

II. Bourdieu and cultural production

To understand the grounds and principles for the methodological approach adopted in this research, it is necessary to give an exposition of Pierre Bourdieu's approach in his analysis of cultural production. The word 'approach' is used to reflect Bourdieu's rejection of the systematisation of his 'method'.

Fields

In his critique of Foucault's idealisation, Bourdieu is not afraid to ground cultural production on a social base whilst avoiding a reductionist approach, which negates the subject and explains all intellectual products only in relation to politics and/or economy. He develops two concepts, which are fundamentally interlinked, to describe how intellectual works -whether in the fields of art, poetry, science, philosophy or any other- can come to exist. The first of these concepts is the 'field'. It represents a specific social

²⁰ Bourdieu (2007c), p. 179.

space that is governed by its own laws and is marked by different positions that are not directly dependent on economy and politics.²¹ Bourdieu defines 'field' as such:

[...] a field is a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy. The existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works.²²

In dealing with the autonomous cultural field, it is possible to focus on particular small fields which exist within the larger intellectual field. One may, in this case, only study the scientific field, the artistic field, the literary field or the philosophical field of a particular culture.²³ All fields can be studied independently of the greater and more general cultural field since each one of them has its own autonomous laws of functioning, yet they each refract relations that exist beyond the boundaries of the particular field.²⁴ One of the marks of the independence of a field is its specific 'capital', which expands and redefines the meaning and currency of power struggle.

Capital

For Bourdieu, all fields are social fields where individuals and groups struggle with each other to obtain and sustain particular forms of 'capital', which is a concept that Bourdieu employs and expands its signification beyond the standard economic boundaries. The forms of capital that individuals seek to accumulate in the different fields could be

²¹ In the case of a scientific field for example, Bourdieu writes: "the scientific field is a separate world, apart, where a most specific social logic is at work, affirming itself more and more to the degree that symbolic relations of power impose themselves that are irreducible to those that are current in the political field as well as to those instituted in the legal or theological field." Bourdieu (1991), p. 6.

²² Bourdieu (2007b), pp. 162-163.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bourdieu points out that "One must contend against the idealist representation, which grants science the power to develop according to its own immanent logic." Bourdieu (1991), p. 10.

economic, which has been the focus of much Marxist attention, or they could be cultural, symbolic or social. In each field, there is a struggle to accumulate specific capital that endows its possessors with the force to dictate and control rights of membership, that is, of who is allowed to participate in the struggle for power. Each field may have a dominant form of capital but it may not have a single type of capital. In the literary field, for example, it is possible to find different distributions of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital.²⁵

If the concept of ‘capital’ helps one isolate a particular field to analyse it in terms of its own capital, then one should not forget that the positions occupied by those who are active in the struggle are also positions within a larger field, and are subject to other forces and powers.

Positions

What must be noted regarding the complex struggles between the different forces of a field, is that positions situated in the domain of a specific power struggle, reflect the conditions of the same power outside the specific field to which it pertains. If one studies the various forces that define the different positions within the artistic field, for example, then one should not assume that the specific forces (economic forces for example) are

²⁵ Bourdieu describes the structure of any field as “the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field.” Bourdieu (2007a), p. 30. He also writes in this regard that a field “is a veritable social universe where, in accordance with its particular laws, there accumulates a particular form of capital and where relations of force of a particular type are exerted. This universe is the place of entirely specific struggles, notably concerning the question of knowing who is part of the universe, who is a real writer and who is not.” Bourdieu (2007b), p.164.

isolated from the larger field of which they are a refraction, that is, from the economic distribution of power capital in society at large.²⁶

In the use of the term 'autonomous field', Bourdieu intends to show that one can find in this, or that, field its own logic which governs the relations between the different positions within it. These different positions may also be seen to have a history which can be followed and traced. However, the autonomous status of a field does not mean it is isolated from other power struggles outside the field itself, or the larger context of the field.

Bourdieu writes:

[T]his autonomous social universe functions somewhat like a prism which refracts every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works.²⁷

With regard to what can be considered an influence on the production of work, one must note that there are objective conditions, real conditions in the real world which influence any work. These conditions and influences cannot, however, be reduced to simple economic conditions as is usually done in classical Marxism, which has tried to emphasise the reality of objective determining conditions that are also considered to be sufficient conditions. Bourdieu confirms the material (or objective) reality of influences but he also expands the domain to include other forces. More importantly for him, it is not possible to state that these conditions, in their manifestations as different power struggles, have a 'direct' effect on the production of work. Influences, from the general conditions of the

²⁶ Ringer (1990), p. 271. See also note 29.

²⁷ Bourdieu (2007b), p. 164.

world or society, are rather translated into the structure of a specific field through its own logic.

Each emergent field is initially more dependent on the laws and forces governing the sphere from which its evolution is initiated. To begin with, the positions, which are to be occupied by agents, need to be created before any laws regulating their relations can gain regularity and relative stability. This reflects the high degree of struggles and momentum required at the moment of creation of any field. This explains why those who are considered the founders of a field have to struggle the most to initiate their new field. This is so, because they have to gain enough power to break previous relations and to force new ones within a stable older field.

Bourdieu notes that with time emergent fields gain more and more autonomy, relations between different positions become more stable, and those who occupy established positions have less to do in order to occupy them.²⁸ It is thus very important in this approach to understand the emergence of particular positions within particular fields, and the significance of the positions themselves that are to be occupied by agents. In order to understand the work of a particular theologian from a particular period and place, for example, one must understand “the social conditions of the possibility of this social function, of this personage,”²⁹ which creates the relational specific environment in which he emerges.

²⁸ Bourdieu writes: “The more the autonomising process advances, the more possible it becomes to occupy the position of producer without having the properties – or not all of them, or not to the same degree – that had to be possessed to produce the position; the more, in other words, the newcomers who head for the “most ‘autonomous’ positions can dispense with the more or less heroic sacrifices and breaks of the past.” Bourdieu (2007a), p. 63.

²⁹ Bourdieu (2007b), p. 163.

What may be gathered from this is that to study a specific field is to analyse the different positions within it and the relations which bind them together. The ‘and’ in the previous statement is not an optional one since every position can only be analysed and defined through its relations with other positions. If one is interested in studying a particular theologian, for example, then it is necessary to analyse the ‘position-taking’, or what the theologian takes as his position (views and opinions), in terms of the position occupied by him. That is, one must study his position within his theological school, which occupies a relational position with other schools in the cultural field. Every position is defined by the limitations it imposes on its occupants which are determined by the position’s relations with the other positions that constitute the field and its structure.³⁰

This position, however great its effect might be, “never operates mechanically, and relationships between positions and position-taking is mediated by the disposition of the agent.”³¹ What has been termed ‘position-taking’ (*prise de position*) becomes nothing more than the manifestation through works, pronouncements, polemics, etc. of the position’s potentialities (possibilities)³² through those who occupy it, thus naturally linking every ‘position-taking’ to every other one within the field.³³ In the next section we look more at the question of subjective participation and whether or not it plays a part in causing change within fields.

³⁰ Bourdieu (2007a), p. 30.

³¹ Ibid., p. 62.

³² Ibid., pp. 30-31, and Bourdieu (2007c), p. 177.

³³ Bourdieu writes: “This space of possible, which transcends individual agents, functions as a kind of system of common reference which causes contemporary directors, even when they do not consciously refer to each other, to be objectively situated in relation to others, to the extent that they are all interrelated as a function of the same system of intellectual co-ordinates and points of reference.” Bourdieu (2007c), pp. 176-177.

Dispositions

If one stops at this stage, then it becomes difficult to avoid reproaching this method for reflecting a static view of the fields, as it is hard to see any source for change. This, however, is where the agents, the occupiers of positions in their relevant fields play the vitalising role. Every position, which is in a relational configuration with other positions, is seen to provide a set of potentials that are also relationally bound by a space of possibles. Since not all potentialities are realised or actualised at a particular time, it becomes up to the occupier, and in accordance with her dispositions, to bring to the surface, to the objective reality, that which has previously been hidden or merely a potential.³⁴ In this configuration, the positions can remain the same while the 'position-takings' can change in accordance with the changes in potentialities which, in turn, change when new choices are simultaneously given to the various positions, in other terms, when major forces of change occur in a society.³⁵

With respect to the occupiers of positions, Bourdieu points to the great correspondence that exists between the 'socially constituted dispositions' of agents and the 'socially instituted positions' they occupy.³⁶ These dispositions of agents, their likes and dislikes, ambitions, daring, modesty, disinterestedness, etc., which are in certain ways products of another history, another set of conditions, are not mechanically tied to the positions of the field. The concordance that exists between positions and dispositions not only leads one to the other but also helps the shaping of one by the other in a non-static relationship. This relation between post (objectivity) and agent (subjectivity) is that of correspondence and of

³⁴ Bourdieu (1991), p. 11.

³⁵ Bourdieu (2007a), p. 31.

³⁶ Bourdieu (1991), p. 11.

a dynamic struggle between the two, or put differently, of a dialectical relation.³⁷ What binds one to the other is the ability of the agent, who occupies a particular position, to be ‘most attuned’ to the potentialities that have been actualised, or await actualisation through her specific dispositions.³⁸ Not only is this relation dynamic but it also varies from one field to another and from one stage of the movement of a field to another.³⁹ Bourdieu shows for example how the literary field is marked by more continuous struggles compared with the academic field, and how fields in their formative stages –as we have seen- are marked by stronger confrontations between positions and dispositions.⁴⁰

Through the idea of disposition, the totality of objective external constraints is reduced, changed and given momentum. This totality is reduced because it becomes one of the poles in the dual dialectical relationship between position and disposition, and changed in the sense that objective potentialities are brought to life, thus changing this external reality. Finally, it is given momentum in the sense that no movement is possible without this disposition of the agent who actualises potentials, which in turn become active in the field and result in stable advancements. But, if the concept of the subject’s disposition is a way of granting some form of a personal active role to the subject, does this mean that disposition can be free from any theoretical analysis and systemisation?

³⁷ King, A. (2000), p. 418.

³⁸ Bourdieu writes: “agents are not pure creators, who invent in a vacuum, *ex-nihilo*, but rather they are, so to speak, *actualisers* who translate into action socially instituted potentialities.” Bourdieu (1991), p. 10.

³⁹ Bourdieu (2007a), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

Habitus

Bourdieu was very careful in his writings about the system of dispositions, the habitus, to point out that it is not an amalgam or sum of different individuals with separate dispositions, as he was interpreted by Anthony King in 'Thinking Bourdieu against Bourdieu'.⁴¹ Bourdieu emphasised the social nature of these personal characteristics since they are all linked in a network of relations, as are the positions of the field. All personal 'improvisations' that the different members of a field undertake are regulated improvisations which tend to reproduce their generative principle, that is, the structure within which those members improvise.⁴²

This leads us to Bourdieu's conception of the habitus, which we have just related to dispositions. An explanation of this concept normally starts by quoting Bourdieu himself, who defines the habitus as a:

[S]ystem of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively "regulated" and "regular" without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organising action of a conductor.⁴³

Some of the key points that need to be extracted from this very concise and specific definition are first of all, the idea that habitus is a product of real existing conditions, specific to any society under consideration. It is not a structure similar to Chomsky's

⁴² Lamert (1990), p. 299.

⁴³ Bourdieu (1990), p. 53.

'grammar', which is a structuring structure of all languages.⁴⁴ It is, simply, not the product of a singular element either specific to language, thought or mind. Habitus as a structuring structure is structured by a real set of objective relational conditions, be it material (literal sense), social, economic or intellectual, that are bound together in this structure. Also, this habitus neither acts nor causes through a commanding presence, known to members of a community and manifest in a set of regulating 'revealed' and 'finalised' laws.

In King's article, an attempt is made to find within Bourdieu's work, elements which can give more freedom to the individual, the subject. There, a contrast is made between Bourdieu's habitus and his 'practical' method. This is a critique of anthropologists who, in their creation of maps of cultures, translate the observed regularities into rules that are then projected as objective rules followed by the members of a community.⁴⁵ King finds more freedom in Bourdieu's practical approach where:

[...] individuals are embedded in complex, constantly negotiated networks of relations with other individuals; isolated individuals do not stand before objective structures and rules which determine their actions but in networks of relations which they virtuosically manipulate.⁴⁶

What is missed in this critique, where the virtuoso subject is emphasised, is that Bourdieu's critique of the anthropologists is a critique of the fact that the rules, which they construct, are taken to be static, concrete and timeless. It is also a critique of their idea that acts of individuals within a community are achieved in accordance with, and through, conscious obedience to these constructed rules.⁴⁷ This approach of the anthropologists, as it is

⁴⁴ Campbell (2003), pp. 100-103.

⁴⁵ King, A. (2000), pp. 419-421.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 421.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 419.

represented by King, stand in opposition to Bourdieu's more dynamic and dialectical field and habitus.⁴⁸

The habitus is a reflection of the social preconscious that has the tendency to generate the beliefs that are consciously held by a community. It is what orients the acceptance or rejection, for example, of what constitutes true knowledge or even the object of knowledge and belief. Vandenberghe wisely points out that it is not possible to understand these laws in terms of Humean cause and effect, where a particular structure or set of rules necessitate specific effects. Rather, it is necessary to approach this matter from the point that these laws or structures -which are the product of real material conditions: social, economic, etc.- do not cause effects (conjunction of events) but are the ground that brings about certain 'tendencies'.⁴⁹ The habitus as a 'theoretical operator' gives coherence to the phenomenal happenings in the real world that are apparently not connected or related to each other. This habitus is in one part not made conscious to those who are part of it, but it is also, never made known in other than theoretical signs that are logically connected with each other and reflecting, through their link, the structuring structure by a law of analogy.⁵⁰

To summarise all the above and to put things in a more direct way, people in the real world are conditioned to follow certain laws and rules throughout their lives, and these are not made manifest to them. Generally, these hidden rules are only known once they are broken or cease to have a direct influence. Since these laws are not fixed, but rather are in a state of movement or flux, they are noticed after long periods of time or after fundamental

⁴⁸ King's vision goes against Bourdieu's fundamental conception that the "field is not reducible to a *population*, i.e. a sum of individual agents, linked by simple relations of interaction." Bourdieu (2007a), p. 35.

⁴⁹ Vandenberghe (1999), p. 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 49.

changes in society. However, even when they become known theoretically, they are not known in the way that they are in themselves but only through theoretical formulations which reflect them, that is, they are constructed. In some sense, this greatly resembles the idea of scientists knowing the rules or regularities of nature through mathematical formulations which, themselves, do not exist in nature.

The exposition of Bourdieu's 'method' does not mean that we have analysed our historical texts according to his method and concepts. The above is the theoretical background that determined the way we selected our texts and the way we saw the relation between the texts before studying them. In some sense, it is the structure that determined the way we approached this study.

Glossary of Terms & Expressions

‘adam: non-existence
‘āqil: intelligent, rational
‘ayyana (v): substantiation
Adraka (v): perceive
aḥāṭ ‘ilmār: understand
aḥāṭa (v): encompass
aḥyā (v): bestowing life
akwār: generated things
ālā: instrument
‘alaq: a clot (a lump)
‘aliqa (v): attach
aqṭār: regions
aṣl: principle
athar: affect
awjada (v): make existent
awwal: original
‘ayr: body, substance, entity
ays: exists, is
‘azaba (v): absent (from mind)
al-basīṭ: the simple (indivisible)
baththa (v): disseminate
bil fi’l: in actuality
baqā’: perdurance
dabbara (v): direct
dhāt: self, essence
far’: branch
faraḍa (v): ordains
fasād: corruption

fāsida: erroneous
faṭara (v): separate from non-existence
fi’l: action
Al-ghayb: hidden, unseen, unperceived
habā’: dust, motes, (atoms)
ḥadd: delimit
ḥalla (v): dwell
ḥāmil: support
ḥaṣala (v): have actuality
hay’a: shape
ḥifz: preserve
ḥiss: sensation
ḥukm: judgement
ibdā’: innovation
ibtidā’: initial
idrāk: intelligibility
iḍṭirār: compulsion
iftirāq: separation
ikhbār: announcement
ikhrāj: bring forth to existence
ikhtara’a (v): invent
ikhtilāf: disaccord
iktasaba (v): acquire
‘illa: cause
inniyā: existence, (affirmation of being and existence)
inqitā’: cessation
iqtidār: capability
irāda: will
istiḥāla: transmutation

iṣṭilām: eradication
i’tilāf: accord
ittifāq: agreement
iḥhār: making manifest
jaram: mass
jins: genus
jawhar: substance
jawhar fard: indivisible part, atom
jawhar muqtaṣar: limited substance, atom
kalām: utterance
kawr: coming to be, generation
khasīs: base
khāṭir: mind
khawāṣṣ: characteristics
khazzār: repository
khilāf: contrary
kutum al-‘Adam: under the concealment of non-existence
lays: does not exist, is not
maḥmūl: attribute
maḥw: effacement
ma’lūm: known
ma’nā: signified
maqḍūr: possible, (actual by an agent)
al-maqūlāt: the categories
marsūm: contrived
mashī’a: desire
mayyit: inanimate
miqdār: measure
mithāl: equivalent, model

al-mīthāq: the covenant
mu'ayyar: determined
muḥāl: impossible
muḥdath: originated
mujānasa: similitude
mujāwara: contiguity
mukallaf: subject of obligation
mulhid: naturalist
mumāssa: contact
munfarid: singularity
muta'allaq: contingent, associate
mutanāwal: at-hand
mutawahham: imaginable
nazar: reflection
nash'a: formation
nuṭfa: semen
qaddar: determine
qahr: subjugation
qā'im: subsist
qawiyy: tough
qawf: speech
qidam: eternity past
qiyāss: syllogism
qudra: power of autonomous action
rasm: trace of thing
ṣarrafa (v): govern
ṣawwara (v): fashion, form
shabāh: similitude
al-shahāda: Perceptible (tangible)
shāhid: witness

shahwa: desire
shākala(v): correspond
shawq: yearning
shay'yyat al-Thubūt: subsistential thingness
shay'yyat al-wujūd: existential thingness
sirr: secret
ṣura: form
taḥaqqāqa (v): actualised
taḥayyuz: spatial occupancy
taḥlīl: decomposition
takhaṣṣus: specification
taklīf: commanding, God's imposition of obligations; divine law
ta'līf: composition
tamayyuz: distinction, differentiation
tanāsul: reproduction
tanzīl: de-anthropomorphism
tarkīb: composition
tashabbatha (v): cling to
tashbīh: anthropomorphism
ta'tīl: ellipsis, (suspended qualification)
tawassu': expansion of the sense of a term
tawlīd: generation
tawq: longing
thubūt: subsistence
'unsur: element
uqnūm: hypostasis
wahm: intelligible

wāqī': actual, real
yaḥul (v): inhere
yanfak (v): detach, cease to be attached
zahara (v): become manifest
zindīq: Manicheans, (dualist)

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