

Introduction to  
Islamic Theology and Law

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## Development of Law

humor pokes fun at lawyers—a literature that also found its way into the Thousand and One Nights.

The second consequence was the harmful effect on the course of religious life. The predominance, in religious learning, of the tendency to search into the law, using the methods of casuistry, as I have said elsewhere, gradually resulted in impressing upon the teachings of Islam the stamp of a quibbling legalism. Under the influence of this tendency, religious life itself was seen from a legal point of view. This was not likely to strengthen true piety, the devotion of the heart. A faithful adherent of Islam is thus, even in his own consciousness, under the governance of man-made rules. Next to them the word of God, which is for the Muslim the source and means of moral improvement, orders only an exiguous part of the customs and observances of life, and indeed is forced into the background. Precisely those people are considered doctors of the faith who employ the methodology of jurisprudence to investigate the ways in which the law's demands are fulfilled, who subtly develop and manipulate the findings of these investigations, and carefully see to it that they are adhered to. It is understood that these people are meant in the saying ascribed to the Prophet: "The scholars ('*ulamā*') of my community are as the prophets of the people of Israel"<sup>93</sup>—they, and not religious philosophers or moralists, not to mention the representatives of secular sciences.

I have mentioned that there was no lack of earnest men who raised their voices in strict condemnation of this perversion of the religious ideal, which manifested itself very early in the history of Islam, and who worked hard to rescue the inwardness of religion from the clutches of quibbling religious lawyers. We have seen that they have the support of excellent hadiths. Before making their acquaintance, we must turn our attention to the dogmatic developments in Islam.

<sup>93</sup> "Die Religion des Islams," p. 111:16ff.

## III. The Growth and Development of Dogmatic Theology

❖ 1. Prophets are not theologians.<sup>a</sup> The message that springs from the spontaneous urgency of their conscience, the religious conceptions that they awaken, do not take the form of a deliberately planned system. Indeed, more often than not, their teachings defy all attempts at rigorous systematization. Only in later generations, after a closed community has been formed by the common cultivation of ideas that had kindled the first believers' spirit, is the stage set, both by developments within the community and influences on it from without, for those to play their part who feel called to interpret the prophetic revelations,<sup>1</sup> who fill in the gaps in the prophet's teaching and round it out, who expound it (often incongruously) and comment on it—which is to say, who read into it things that never entered the mind of its author. The theologian answers questions that lie outside the prophet's sphere of interest; he reconciles contradictions the prophet would have been at ease with; he devises inflexible formulas, and erects rows upon rows of argument into ramparts, in the hope of securing those formulas against assault from within and without. He then derives all his systematically ordered tenets from the prophet's words, not infrequently from their most literal sense. He proclaims that those tenets are what the prophet had intended to teach from the outset. Theologian disputes with theologian, each hurling the cunning arguments of an arrogant subtlety at anyone who, using the same means, draws different conclusions from the living words of the prophet.

Before such inclinations can be acted on, prophetic revelation must take the form of a holy writ, a canonically fixed and formally defined text. A tangle of dogmatic commentaries then springs up around scripture, removing the text from the spirit that pervades its true essence. The

<sup>a</sup> On the development of Islamic theology, see Louis Gardet and M. M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie Musulmane: essai de théologie comparée* (Paris, 1948); H.A.R. Gibb, "The Structure of Religious Thought in Islam," in his *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, edited by S. J. Shaw and W. J. Polk (Boston, 1962), pp. 176-218; D. B. MacDonald, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam* (Chicago, 1909); and idem, *Aspects of Islam* (New York, 1911).

<sup>1</sup> This claim is expressed in Islam in the sentence *al-'ulamā' warathat al-anbiyā'*: "The scholars of religion are the heirs of the prophets."



commentaries are more intent on proof than on elucidation. They are the inexhaustible sources from which the speculations of systematic theology flow.

Shortly after its rise, Islam, like other religions, entered upon such a phase of theological development. Simultaneously with the events that were the subject of our second chapter, the beliefs of Islam also became objects of reflection. The growth of a dogmatic theology in Islam took place along with the growth of speculation about the religious law.

It would be an arduous task to derive from the Qur'ān itself a system of beliefs that is coherent, self-sufficient, and free of self-contradiction. Of the most important religious ideas we get only general impressions, which yield contradictory views on some particulars. The Prophet's beliefs were reflected in his soul in shades that varied with the moods that dominated him. In consequence, it was not long before a harmonizing theology had to assume the task of solving the theoretical problems such contradictions caused.

Now, search for inconsistencies in the revelation seems early to have made them, in Muhammad's case, a matter for reflection. Already during the Prophet's lifetime the revelations were exposed to critics who kept a watch for their shortcomings. The indecisive, contradictory character of his teachings was the butt of scornful remarks. Thus, despite the stress that the revelation was "a (clear) Arabic Qur'ān with no crookedness in it" (39:28, cf. 18:1, 41:3) the Qur'ānic text itself admits in a Medinese sura that the divine revelation consists "in part of solidly made verses, which form the core of the book, and in part of ambiguous ones. Those with an evil inclination in their heart seek after what is unclear in it, wishing to trouble people's minds and wishing to interpret it. But no one but God knows its interpretation. Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge say: 'We believe in it; it is all from our Lord' " (3:7).

Such scrutiny of the Qur'ān was all the more pertinent in the next generation, when not only the enemies of Islam busied themselves with discovering its weaknesses, but among the believers as well the careful consideration of its contradictory statements had acquired urgency.

An example will soon show us how in the debate over a fundamental religious doctrine—the freedom of the will—arguments for both sides of the issue could be drawn from the Qur'ān.

The hadith unfolds before us a picture of this intellectual movement in the community, as of every other aspect of the internal history of Islam. In the hadith, naturally, it is projected back into the time of the Prophet,

and the Prophet is associated also with settling problems. In fact, this intellectual trend does not antedate the period in which theological thought began to germinate. As the hadith would have it, believers had already harassed the Prophet by pointing out dogmatic contradictions in the Qur'ān. Such discussions (according to the hadith) stirred him to anger. "The Qur'ān," he says, "was not revealed with the purpose that you might seize on one part of it to strike at another, as the nations of the past did with the revelations of their prophets. Rather, in the Qur'ān one thing confirms another. You should act according to what you understand of it; you should accept on faith what is confusing to you."<sup>2</sup>

The artless believer's sentiment is put forward as the Prophet's own dictum. Such is the method of the hadith.

2. Political circumstances on the one hand, and the stimulus of contacts with the outside world on the other, imposed upon the early Muslims, who had not been much disposed to riddling over theological niceties, the need to take distinct positions on questions for which the Qur'ān had no definite and unequivocal answer.

That internal political circumstances stirred dogmatic controversy is readily shown. The Umayyad revolution presented the Muslims with a new political and constitutional situation. It also gave them the first opportunity in their history to try their hand at theological questions: to judge the new institutions in the light of religious demands.

Here we must once more turn our attention to a matter of early Islamic history that we touched on in the last chapter: the assessment of the Umayyad rulers' religious attitude.

The once current view of the Umayyads' relation to Islam may now be regarded as quite obsolete. Taking their cue from the Islamic historical tradition, students of Islam used to believe that the Umayyads stood in rigid and conscious opposition to the demands of Islam, and governed accordingly. The rulers of that dynasty, and their governors and administrators, were made out to be no less than the heirs of the enemies of nascent Islam, and it was thought that their attitude toward religion was a new guise in which the old Quraysh spirit of animosity—or at best indifference—to Islam had survived.

The Umayyads, it is true, were not holy-minded, and they affected no

<sup>2</sup> For hadiths disapproving of such inclinations, see Ibn Sa'd, IV, i, 141:15ff.; ZDMG, LVII (1903), 393f. Cf. also Bukhārī, *Tafsīr* no. 237 (concerning Sura 41), with a number of Qur'ān passages that were found contradictory and laid before Ibn 'Abbās for an explanation.



extravagant piety. Life at their court did not in all respects conform to the narrow, ascetic norms that the pious expected the heads of the Islamic state to follow, and whose particulars the pious put forward in their hadiths with the claim that they had been ordained by the Prophet. There are reports of the devout inclinations of certain Umayyads,<sup>3</sup> but there can be no question that they did not satisfy the pietists, for whom the ideal government was that of Abū Bakr and 'Umar in Medina.

The Umayyads were aware that as caliphs or *imāms* they stood at the head of an empire whose foundations had been laid by a religious upheaval: they were conscious of being true adherents of Islam. This cannot be denied them.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, a gulf stretched between their criteria in running the Islamic state and the pietistic expectations of the holy-minded, who watched with impotent fury the doings of their Umayyad rulers and whose party was in large measure responsible for the historical traditions preserved about those rulers. The Umayyads' view of the duty they owed Islam failed to conform to the notions and wishes of the "Qur'ān readers." The Umayyads knew that they were steering Islam onto new paths. One of their most powerful servants, the bitterly maligned Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, presumably spoke as the Umayyads thought

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Sa'd, V, 174:13. Before his succession to the throne, 'Abd al-Malik led a pious ascetic life (*ābid, nāsik*); see Julius Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz* (Berlin, 1902), p. 134 [translated as *The Arab Kingdom and Its Fall* (Calcutta, 1927), p. 215]. The *Kitāb al-imāma wa'l-siyāsa* (Cairo, 1904)—a book wrongly ascribed to Ibn Qutayba (cf., concerning this, M. J. de Goeje in RSO, I, 1907, 415ff.)—willingly offers information about the piety of the Umayyads. When people came to offer the caliphate to 'Abd al-Malik's father, Marwān I, they found him busy reading the Qur'ān by the light of a small lamp (II, 22 bottom). It is also reported that Marwān, even as caliph, was zealous in his efforts to have the religious laws laid down in established form (Ibn Sa'd, II, ii, 117:8). 'Abd al-Malik himself calls on people to "revive Qur'ān and sunna. . . . There can be no difference of opinion about his piety" (*Al-imāma wa'l-siyāsa*, II, 25:9). Even in Ḥajjāj, so odious to the pious, the sources report some traits of devotion (72:3, 74:10; cf. Ṭabarī, II, 1186, orders for days of penitence and prayer in the mosques. Particularly noteworthy is Jāhiz, *Ḥayawān*, V, 63:5 from bottom [V, 195], where it is reported of Ḥajjāj that he harbored a deep religious reverence for the Qur'ān—*yaḍīnu 'alā 'l-Qur'ān* [Hārūn emends to *yudnī 'alā 'l-Qur'ān*, a somewhat different sense]—in contrast with the partiality to poetry and genealogy prevalent among the Umayyads and their courtiers). Very important evidence is furnished by the poetry in which poets wishing to please caliphs and statesmen celebrate them as religious heroes; e.g., Jarīr, *Dīwān*, I, 168:8 [I, 296, vs. 24]; II, 97:5 from bottom [I, 275, vs. 17] (Marwān, the grandfather of 'Umar II, is called *dhū'l-nūr* and is mentioned in order to add to the glory of the pious caliph). In *Naqā'id Jarīr wa'l-Farazdaq*, I, 104, vs. 19, Jarīr calls the caliph *imām al-hudā*, "the Imām of right (religious) guidance." See also 'Ajājī, *Dīwān*, edited by Wilhelm Ahlwardt in *Sammlungen alter arabischer Dichter*, II (Berlin, 1903), Appendix p. 22:15. Cf. *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 381 [= *Muslim Studies*, II, 345].

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Becker, *Papyri Schott-Reinhardt I* (Heidelberg, 1906), p. 35.

when, at the sickbed of 'Umar's son, he dropped an ironic remark about the old regime.<sup>5</sup>

No doubt the Umayyads' rise to power inaugurated a new system. Their idea of Islam, honestly held, was political: "Islam had united the Arabs and led them to rule a world empire."<sup>6</sup> The satisfaction that religion afforded them was in no small measure due to the fact that Islam "had brought glory and high rank, and had taken possession of the heritage of nations."<sup>7</sup> To maintain and extend the political might of Islam internally and externally was, as they saw it, their task as rulers. In doing so they believed themselves to be serving the cause of religion. Those who crossed them were treated as mutineers against Islam, somewhat as Ahab, king of Israel, had treated the zealous Elijah as *'okher Yisrael*, "he that troubleth Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). When they battled rebels who claimed a religious ground for their resistance, the Umayyads acted in the conviction that they drew the punitive sword against the enemies of Islam in the course of duty, that Islam might endure and flourish.<sup>8</sup> They marched on holy places, they trained their mangonels on the Ka'ba (for centuries their pious enemies would charge them with this grave crime of sacrilege), but they believed, whenever the needs of state demanded their action, that they were acting in behalf of Islam: punishing its enemies, and menacing the seat of rebellion against the unity and internal strength of the Islamic state.<sup>9</sup> In their view, all those were enemies of Islam who, on whatever pretext, subverted the unity of the state that the shrewdness of Umayyad policy had consolidated. Despite all favors shown the family of the Prophet—a fact for which the evidence was first collected in Lammens' recent work on Mu'āwiya<sup>10</sup>—they fought the 'Alid pretenders who threatened their state. They did not flinch from the battle at Karbalā', whose bloody outcome has remained to this day the subject of the martyrologies of the Shī'īs, who heap maledictions upon them. There

<sup>5</sup> Ibn Sa'd, IV, i, 137:5, 20. Husayn and his partisans are fought as "renegades from the *dīn* who set themselves against the *Imām* (Yazīd, the son of Mu'āwiya)"; Ṭabarī, II, 342:16.

<sup>6</sup> So characterized by Wellhausen, *Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam* (Berlin, 1901; *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, V, no. 2*), p. 7 [translated as *The Religio-political Factions in Early Islam* (Amsterdam, 1975), p. 8].

<sup>7</sup> Ṭabarī, I, 2909:16.

<sup>8</sup> Jarīr, (*Dīwān*, I, 62:13 [II, 744, vs. 30]) celebrates the suppression of such rebels as a victory over the *mubtadi'ūn fī'l-dīn*, innovators in religion.

<sup>9</sup> G. van Vloten, *Recherches sur la domination arabe, le chiitisme et les croyances messianiques sous le khalifat des Omayyades* (Amsterdam, 1894), p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> Lammens, *Mo'āwiya*, pp. 154ff. (MFO, II, 46ff.).



was no severing the interests of Islam from the interests of the state. Accession to power had been, in the dynasty's view, a religious success. Their loyal supporters understood that the Umayyads' actions were faithful to Islam; their panegyrists forever praised them as its protectors. It even appears that among their loyal subjects, some groups held the Umayyads in religious veneration, as defenders of the rights of the Prophet's house held the 'Alid pretenders whose aura of holiness stemmed from their bloodline.<sup>11</sup>

The change that came with the Umayyads was seen in a different light by those pious people who dreamt of a kingdom that was not of this world, and who fostered, on various pretexts, an antipathy to the dynasty and to the spirit in which it governed. In the judgment of most of them, the power of this congenitally tainted dynasty had been conceived in sin. In the eyes of the dreamers, the new government was illegitimate and irreligious. It did not accord with their theocratic ideal, and seemed to hinder the effective realization of their aspiration: a state that would be to God's pleasure. In its origin it had already encroached on the right of the Prophet's holy family, and its political acts had shown it to be wholly without regard for the sanctuaries of Islam. Moreover, the representatives of the ruling system were seen to be men who, even in their personal conduct, did not show sufficient diligence in observing the laws of Islam as the pious dreamed them. This is the opinion put in the mouth of the Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn, the first 'Alid pretender: "They practice obedience to Satan and forsake obedience to God, display corruption, obstruct divine statutes, arrogate to themselves unlawful portions of the spoils of war,<sup>12</sup> and allow what God has forbidden and forbid what God has allowed."<sup>13</sup> They abandon the sacred *sunna* and promulgate arbitrary decrees that run counter to religious views.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> This follows from Ibn Sa'd, V, 68:23ff. [The veneration of the Umayyads in some Muslim circles, to which Goldziher first drew attention (see further his *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 46-47, 97; = *Muslim Studies*, II, 54, 96-97) was further discussed by Henri Lamens in his *Le Califat de Yazīd Ier* (Beirut, 1910-1921), p. 14, and forms the subject of an important study by Charles Pellat, "Le Culte de Mu'āwīya au IIIe siècle de l'hégire," *Studia Islamica*, VI (1956), 53-66, where other studies are also mentioned.]

<sup>12</sup> In tendentious reports this (*yasta'thirūna bi'l-fay'*) is dwelt upon as one of their offenses; Ibn Sa'd, IV, i, 166:11; Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, II, 183 [*Sunna* no. 27; see Wensinck, *Concordance*, I, 13:2f.]

<sup>13</sup> Ṭabarī, II, 300:9ff.

<sup>14</sup> For their *bid'as*, Kumayt, *Al-Hāshimīyāt*, edited by Josef Horowitz (Leiden, 1904), p. 123:7ff., is very important.

Now it should have been strictly demanded by intransigent advocates of religion that such people be resisted to the utmost, that at the very least one must passively refrain from according their rule any sign of recognition. As a theory this was easy to propose, but it would have been hard to carry into execution. The good of the state, the interests of the religious community, must prevail over all other considerations. This meant that violent shocks must be avoided and the actual government necessarily tolerated. The appeal to divine judgment, expressed in pious maledictions,<sup>15</sup> proved an ineffectual weapon. Man, it was felt, should offer no resistance to what God tolerated. The object of man's hope should be that God would one day fill with righteousness the world that was now full of iniquity. Such unspoken hopes gave birth to the idea of the *mahdī*; the real and the ideal were reconciled by a firm belief in the future coming of the divinely guided theocratic ruler. We shall have further occasion to speak of this subject (Ch. V, Sec. 12).

One of the public manifestations of the Islamic ruler's authority, and one that issued from the theocratic character of his rule, was that he or his representative exercised the office of leading the public religious service as *imām*, conductor of the liturgy. No matter how much it vexed the pious to see these embodiments of godlessness act in that sacred role—it was thought that they did not shrink even from performing it while drunk—they became reconciled to this as well. In the interest of maintaining tranquillity in the state, one may "perform the *ṣalāt* behind a pious man or behind a malefactor." Such was the formula for the toleration practiced by the pious.

But not all found a resting place in such a passive attitude. The matter also needed to be settled in principle. The experiences of daily life and the intransigent advocacy of religious demands brought into the foreground the question: is it at all correct to exclude from the faith, in principle, the transgressors against the law, and to regard one's position in relation to them as very nearly one of resigned submission to force? After all, the transgressors are Muslims, their lips acknowledge God and His prophets, and their hearts may well do the same. To be sure, they render themselves guilty of violations of the law—the terms for these were disobedience and revolt—nonetheless, they are believers. There was a large party that decided this question in a manner that suited the exigencies of reality

<sup>15</sup> For example, Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab, who in every prayer cursed the Banū Marwān; cf. Ibn Sa'd, V, 95:5.



even better than the common view of resigned submission. The men of this party laid down the principle that what mattered was the formal avowal of faith. Where there is faith, practice and behavior can do no harm; where faith is lacking, no number of lawful works can do any good. *Fiat applicatio*. Thus the Umayyads were vindicated as true and good Muslims. Since they were of the *ahl al-qibla*, those who prayed facing in the direction of the Ka'ba and so avowed their membership in the community of believers, they had to be regarded as believers. The pious scruples about them were quite groundless.

The party whose adherents theoretically elaborated this doctrine of toleration called itself *Murji'a*.<sup>16</sup> The word means "those who defer," and the sense of it is that they do not presume to ascertain the ultimate fate of their fellow men but leave it to God to sit in judgment over them, and to make His decision.<sup>17</sup> In one's relation to others in this world, one must be satisfied with their formal avowal of belonging to the community of true believers in Islam.<sup>18</sup>

For this stand there is a precedent in the moderation displayed amid the dissensions of an earlier age by those who wanted no part in the stormy dispute over 'Alī and 'Uthmān: which of the two was to be regarded as a true believer, and which a sinner and so unworthy of the caliphate. The moderate party left it to God to settle this question, which opposing camps of Muslims had made their shibboleth.<sup>19</sup>

Such moderation was naturally not to the taste of those pious groups who saw nothing but ungodliness and apostasy in the policies that had predominated in the state, and in the men who stood for them. To begin with, the leniency of the *Murji'a* stood in direct opposition to the views of those who supported 'Alid claims and nurtured the idea of a theocratic state built on divine justice and governed by the family of the Prophet. Hence the sharp antagonism between *Murji'*ites and the partisans of the

<sup>16</sup> The doctrine did not exclude the possibility that even a *Murji'*ite might rebel against Ḥajjāj's cruelties (Ibn Sa'd, VI, 205:12); by such resistance one was not pronouncing judgment on the Umayyad caliphate.

<sup>17</sup> Regarding linguistic usage, cf. Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā'*, p. 108:7 from bottom: Ibn Sīrīn was *arja' al-nās li-hādhihi'l-umma*, meaning that he was most forbearing in judging his fellow men, but stringent toward himself. [This is one of several explanations of the term *murji'a* offered by Muslim and Western scholars. For a discussion, see the article "Murdjī'a" in EI<sup>1</sup> (by A. J. Wensinck).]

<sup>18</sup> According to some *Murji'*ites, the pious caliph 'Umar II, with whom they had discussed these questions, embraced their view; Ibn Sa'd, VI, 218:20.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Sa'd, VI, 214:19: *al-murji'at al-ūlā*. The opinion of Burayda ibn al-Ḥuṣayb (*ibid.*, IV, i, 179:11ff.) is an example of this trend.

'Alids.<sup>20</sup> The contrast is even sharper between the *Murji'a* and another rebellious movement. As Umayyad successes accrued and the conflicts between opposing parties grew ever more bitter, those who had adopted the *Murji'*ite position found cause to sharpen their principal concepts, to take another step in formulating their view, and to reject explicitly the notion of denouncing the existing government as one of unbelievers. They were pushed to this step because the most inveterate enemies of the existing political order, the Khārījites (of whom we shall have further occasion to speak, cf. Ch. V, Sec. 2) spread disquiet by their slogan that faith in a general way was not sufficient, that grave sins irreparably barred the sinner from the community of believers. What then was to be the fate of the unhappy Umayyads, who were, in the Khārījite view, of all transgressors the worst?<sup>21</sup>

Thus the seedbed of this controversy, which reaches back into the earliest history of Islam (it cannot be dated with more precision), lay in the nature of the political developments in the state and in the various attitudes toward them that different strata of the Muslim population assumed. It was not a theological need that gave the first impulse to discussions of the proper role of '*amal* (works, praxis) in determining what makes a Muslim a Muslim.<sup>22</sup>

The time came when live political issues were no longer in the foreground of the debate over this question. It then became a topic for discussions of a more or less academic interest, with a few other dogmatic niceties and subtleties joined to it. If '*amal* is not an absolutely necessary element in the definition of who is a true believer, then—as the opposition says—an ingenious *Murji'*ite could conclude that a person cannot be

<sup>20</sup> For *Murji'*ites against the partisans of 'Alī, see *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, 91 n. 5 [= *Muslim Studies*, II, 92 n. 2]. Cf. *Sabā'ī*, fanatic Shī'ī (a follower of 'Abdallāh ibn Sabā') in contrast to *murji'* (Ibn Sa'd, VI, 192:17). This opposition survived into the time when the profession of *Murji'*ite views no longer had any but theoretical significance. Jāhīz, *Al-Bayān wa'l-tabyīn* (Cairo, A.H. 1311-1313), II, 149 bottom [edited by 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Ḥārūn (Cairo, 1367-1370/1948-1950), III, 350], cites the following epigram by a Shī'ī: "If it gives you pleasure to see a *Murji'*ite die of his disease in advance of his death, / Keep praising 'Alī in his presence, and pronounce prayerful blessings on the Prophet and those of his house (*ahl baytihi*)."

<sup>21</sup> The condemnation of the Umayyad rulers by these pious fanatics is thrown into clear relief in *Aghānī*, XX, 106. In Ibn Sa'd, V, 182:15ff., Khārījites most cruelly kill a man spreading a hadith in which the Prophet warns against rebellion and teaches passivity and patient endurance.

<sup>22</sup> This does not conflict with the information that van Vloten collected about *irjā'*; ZDMG, XLV (1891), 161ff.



branded a *kāfir* because he bows down to the sun; his act is only a sign of unbelief, and does not in itself constitute unbelief (*kufir*).<sup>23</sup>

Murji'ite ideas gave rise, in particular, to one basic question on which theological parties stood divided and Muslim theologians forever sharpened their wits: in faith can one distinguish degrees of more and less? Such a position is inadmissible in the view of those who do not consider works an integral part of the definition of a Muslim. For them the question of degree cannot arise. The extent of faith cannot be measured in feet and inches, or weighed in pounds and ounces. But those who see works as necessary, over and above the confession of faith, for the definition of a true Muslim admit the possibility of a quantitative view of the extent of faith. After all, the Qur'ān itself speaks of increase in faith (3:173, 8:2, 9:124, etc.) and in guidance (47:17). An increase or decrease in works entails an analogous change in the extent of faith. The orthodox theologians of Islam are not in full theoretical agreement on this point. Besides those who will not hear of increments and diminutions in faith, there are also theologians who uphold the formula that "faith consists in confession and works; it can grow and lessen."<sup>24</sup> All depends on the school of thought one follows within orthodoxy. It was in such subtle discriminations that a politically prompted controversy finally spent itself.<sup>25</sup>

3. At almost the same time, however, another problem brought forth the first germ of a truly theological interest.<sup>b</sup> This was a different matter from general quibbles over whether or not one person or another could be regarded as a true believer. It had to do with a religious idea of pro-

<sup>23</sup> Ibn Khallikān, II, 10, no. 114 [I, 277, no. 115].

<sup>24</sup> For differences of opinion within orthodoxy (Ash'arites and Hanafites) on this question, see Friedrich Kern, *MSOS*, XI (1908), ii, 267. It is characteristic of hadith that a Companion is represented as already discussing the theory of the increase and decrease of faith; Ibn Sa'd, IV, ii, 92:15ff.

<sup>25</sup> At length it became possible, it appears, to use the label *murji'a* for Muslim communities of a Deist sort, in which the principle of monotheism was maintained but ritual observations were dropped. True, the distinguishing feature of the Murji'a had been their low estimation of *amal*. Muqaddasī (wrote 375/985) applies the name Murji'a to nominal Muslims he has observed in the region of Mt. Demavand. He reports about them that there are no mosques in their region and the population neglects the practices required by Islam. They consider it enough that they are *muwahhidūn* and pay their taxes to the Islamic state (*Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, edited by M. J. de Goeje in *BGA* III, 2nd ed., Leiden, 1906, 398 bottom).

<sup>b</sup> On the question of free will and predestination in Islamic theology, raised by Goldziher in this and the following section, there is an extensive literature by modern scholars. For recent discussions, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London, 1948); Josef van Ess, *Zwischen Hadīṭ und Theologie, Studien zum Entstehen prädestinarianischer Überlieferung* (Berlin, 1975).

found urgency, on which definite positions were taken relative to a traditional, uncomplicated, unreflecting popular belief.

In Islam, the first violent shock to naive belief did not come with the intrusion of scientific speculation, as a sort of consequence of it. It was not the effect of an emerging intellectualism. Rather, we may assume that it grew out of a deepening of the Muslims' religious ideas: out of piety, not freethinking.

The idea of absolute dependence had generated the crudest conceptions of God. Allah is a potentate with unbounded power: "He cannot be questioned about His acts" (21:23). Human beings are playthings in His hands, utterly without will. One must hold the conviction that God's will cannot be measured by the yardstick of human will, which is encompassed with limitations of all kinds, that human capacity shrivels to nothing next to the limitless will and absolute might of Allah. Allah's might also includes the determination of human will. A human being can perform an act of will only as God directs his will. Such is the case also in man's moral conduct: the volition in making a moral choice is determined by God's omnipotence and eternal decree.

But the believer must be equally assured that God does not wreak arbitrary violence on man. The idea must not arise that God's government is that of a *ẓālim*, an unjust ruler, or tyrant—a conception that would certainly mar the image of a human ruler, too. Precisely in connection with rewards and punishments, the Qur'ān repeatedly reassures man that Allah does injustice to no one, not even "the size of the filament on a date-stone" (4:49) or "the groove in a date-stone" (4:124). "We lay on no soul a burden that it cannot bear; we have a book that speaks the truth, and no injustice shall come upon them" (23:62). "And Allah created the heavens and the earth with truth, so that each soul might be recompensed according to what it has earned, with no one wronged" (45:22). But the question must have arisen in the pious mind: can a greater injustice be envisioned than that God rewards or punishes actions determined by a will outside of human capacity? That God deprives man of all freedom and self-determination in his acts, that He determines human conduct down to the minutest particulars, that He takes from the sinner the very possibility of doing what is good, that "He has sealed up their hearts, and spread a heavy cover over their eyes and ears" (2:7), and will nevertheless punish man for his disobedience and deliver him to eternal damnation?

Many pious Muslims, in humble devotion to Allah, may have entertained a general conception of God as such an arbitrary being. For such an



exaggeration of the sense of dependence the holy book offers numerous instances of excellent support. The Qur'ān has many parallels to the notion of God's hardening Pharaoh's heart, and has a large number of general statements variously expressing the thought that God makes capacious enough for Islam the breasts of those He wishes to lead aright, but constricts the breasts of those He wishes to lead astray, as if they were trying to scale heaven (6:125). No soul is free to believe except with God's permission (10:100).

There is probably no other point of doctrine on which equally contradictory teachings can be derived from the Qur'ān as on this one. There are many deterministic statements, but one can set against them revelations in which it is not Allah who leads men astray but Satan, the evil Adversary and deceitful whisperer in men's ears (22:4, 35:5-6, 41:36, 43:37, 58:19), ever since the time of Adam (2:36, 38:82 ff.). Moreover, those who wished to advocate the total freedom of man's will, unthreatened even by the influence of Satan, could find a whole arsenal of arguments in the same Qur'ān, from whose unequivocal statements the precise opposite of the *servum arbitrium* could also be concluded. Man's good and evil deeds are referred to, characteristically, as his "acquisition," which is to say they are actions of his own effort (for example, 3:25, and frequently elsewhere). "The (evil) they have acquired covers their hearts like rust" (83:14). Even the notion of the sealing up of hearts can be quite well accommodated with saying that "they follow their own inclinations [*ittaba'ū ahwā'ahum*] (47:14, 16). Man's own desires lead him astray (38:26). It is not God who puts obduracy into sinners' hearts; rather, they grow hard (by their own wickedness), they are "like a rock, or harder" (2:74). Satan himself rejects the imputation that he leads men astray; man (on his own account) is far gone in error (50:27). Historical examples also lend this conception validity. God says, for example, that He gave right guidance to the impious people of Thamūd, but "they preferred blindness to guidance. Then they were overtaken by the thunderbolt of punishment, of humiliation, for what they had acquired for themselves. But we saved those who believed and were godfearing" (41:17). In other words: God gave them guidance and they would not follow; of their own free will they committed evil against God's decree; of their own free choice they made that evil their own. God guides man on the right path, but it depends on man whether he gratefully submits to that guidance or stubbornly rejects it (76:3). "Each acts in his own way" (17:84). "The truth is from your Lord. Let him who will, believe; let him

who will, disbelieve" (18:29). "This (revelation) is a reminder; whoever wishes, will take the road to God" (76:29). To be sure, God does not stand in the way of the wicked either; He gives them the power and capacity to do evil, just as He gives to the good the capacity to do good, and smoothes their way to it (*fa-sa-nuyassiruhu li'l-yusrā . . . fa-sa-nuyassiruhu li'l-'usrā*, 92:7, 10). In this connection, I want to make an observation that is of some importance for understanding the problem of the freedom of the will in the Qur'ān. A large part of those Qur'ānic statements commonly used to draw the conclusion that God himself brings about man's sinfulness and leads man astray will be seen in a different light if we understand more precisely the word customarily taken to mean "to lead astray." In a good many Qur'ān verses we read "Allah guides whomsoever He will and lets stray whomsoever He will," but such statements do not mean that God directly leads the latter into error. The decisive verb (*aḍalla*) is not, in this context, to be understood as "lead astray," but rather as "allow to go astray," that is, not to care about someone, not to show him the way out of his predicament. "We let them (*nadhharuhum*) stray in their disobedience" (6:110). We must imagine a solitary traveler in the desert: that image stands behind the Qur'ān's manner of speaking about guidance and error. The traveler wanders, drifts in limitless space, on the watch for the true direction to his goal. Such a traveler is man on the journey of life. Those whom belief and good works have proved worthy of God's benevolence, God rewards with His guidance, but the evildoers He allows to stray; He leaves them to their fate, withdraws His favor from them, extends no hand to guide them. But it is not as though He had led them outright into error. For the same reason, blindness and groping are favorite metaphors for the state of sinners. They cannot see; they must stray without plan or goal. With no guide to help them, they go irretrievably to their ruin. "Enlightenment [*baṣā'ir*] has come from your God; he who sees does so to his own good, he who is blind is so to his own harm" (6:104). Why did he fail to make use of the light that was lit for him? "We have revealed to you the book with the truth for mankind. He who lets himself be guided (by it) does so to his own good; he who goes astray (*dalla*) does so to his own harm" (39:41).

This state of being left to one's own devices, uncared for by God, is a notion much applied in the Qur'ān to people whose past conduct has rendered them unworthy of God's grace. It is the premise of God's action, when it is said that God forgets the wicked because the wicked have



forgotten Him (7:51, 9:67, 45:34). God forgets the sinner; that is to say, He does not care about him. Guidance is the recompense of the good. "Allah does not guide the wicked" (9:109); He allows them to stray aimlessly. Unbelief is not the consequence but the cause of straying (47:8, and especially 61:5). To be sure, "he whom God allows to stray cannot find the right road" (42:46) and "he whom He allows to stray has no guide" (40:33) and goes to his ruin (7:178). In every instance, what happens is a withdrawal, by way of punishment, of the grace of guidance; these are not cases of leading into error and causing ungodliness. The early Muslims, who were close to the original ideas of Islam, sensed and understood this. It is related in a hadith: if someone, out of disesteem (*tahāwunan*), misses three Friday assemblies, God seals up his heart.<sup>26</sup> The "sealing up of the heart" was understood to mean a condition into which man falls only through his neglect of religious obligations. An old prayer that the Prophet teaches Ḥuṣayn, a new convert to Islam, runs: "O Allah, teach me to walk rightly guided and guard me from the evil in my own soul,"<sup>27</sup> which is to say, do not abandon me to myself but extend to me a guiding hand. There is no question, however, of leading into error. On the other hand, the feeling that to be abandoned to oneself is the severest form of divine punishment is given expression in an old Islamic oath formula: "If I do not speak the truth (in assertory oaths) or if I fail to keep my vow (in promissory oaths), may God exclude me from his might and power (*ḥawl wa-qūwa*) and abandon me to my own might and power,"<sup>28</sup> which is to say, may He withdraw His hand from me, so that I must see how I manage without His guidance and help. This is the sense in which "allowing to go astray"—and not "leading astray"—must be understood.<sup>29</sup>

4. We have seen that the Qur'ān can be used to document the most contradictory views on one of the fundamental questions of religious ethics. Hubert Grimme, who devoted profound study to analyzing the

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* (Jābir), cited in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Kitāb al-ṣalāt wa-aḥkām tarīkiḥā* (Cairo, A.H. 1313), p. 46 [see Wensinck, *Concordance*, VII, 112:22ff.].

<sup>27</sup> Tirmidhī, II, 261 bottom [Da'awāt no. 69]. A favorite devotional formula begins: *Al-lāhumma lā taklīnā ilā anfasinā fa-nu'jiza*, "O God, do not entrust us to ourselves, lest we be wanting in strength"; cf. Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī, *Al-Mikhlāt* (Cairo, A.H. 1317), p. 129:2, where a large number of old devotional formulas are assembled.

<sup>28</sup> Such oath formulas (*barā'a*) can be found in Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, VI, 297 [IV, 201]; Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, II, 505, 509; Ibn al-Ṭiqṭaqā, *Al-Fakhrī*, edited by Wilhelm Ahlwardt (Gotha, 1860), p. 232 [edited by Hartwig Derenbourg (Paris, 1895), pp. 266f.].

<sup>29</sup> I now see that in this view I agree with Carra de Vaux, *La Doctrine de l'Islam* (Paris, 1909), p. 60 (published after the writing of the section above).

theology of the Qur'ān, reached an enlightening point of view that may help us work free of this confusion. He found that Muḥammad's contradictory statements about the freedom of the will and predestination belong to different periods in his activity and correspond to the different impressions that changing circumstances produced in him. In the first, Meccan, period he took the position of total freedom of the will and total responsibility; in Medina he sank closer and closer to the doctrine of unfreedom and *servum arbitrium*. The most striking doctrines on this score come from his last years.<sup>30</sup> If such a periodization could be established with certainty, it might provide a guiding thread for those ready to take a historical view. We cannot expect to find such readiness among the old Muslims who had to wind their way through contradictory doctrines, decide in favor of one or another, and by some manner of harmonization come to terms with passages that clashed with the position they adopted. The sense of dependency that prevails in all aspects of Muslim consciousness no doubt tipped the scales in favor of denying the freedom of the will. Virtue and vice, reward and punishment are, in this view, fully dependent on God's predestination. Human will has no role to play.

But already at an early stage—we can trace the trend back to the end of the seventh century—this tyrannical view began to perturb pious minds that could not be at ease with the unrighteous God that the dominant popular conception implied. Outside influences also contributed to the germination and gradual deepening of pious scruple. The earliest protest against unlimited predestination appeared in Syrian Islam. The emergence of that protest is best explained by Kremer's view<sup>31</sup> that the early Muslim doctors' impulse to doubt unlimited predestination came from their Christian theological environment, for, as it happened, in the Eastern Church the debate over this point of doctrine occupied theologians' minds. Damascus, the intellectual focus of Islam during the Umayyad age, was the center of speculation about *qadar*, the fixing of fate; from Damascus that speculation rapidly spread far and wide.

Pious scruples led to the conviction that man in his ethical and legal conduct cannot be the slave of an unalterable predestination, but rather, man creates his own acts and so becomes the cause of his own bliss or damnation. The doctrine of those who adopted this view came in time to

<sup>30</sup> Hubert Grimme, *Mohammed* (Münster, 1892-1895), II, 105ff.

<sup>31</sup> Alfred von Kremer, *Culturgeschichtliche Streifzüge auf dem Gebiete des Islams* (Leipzig, 1873), pp. 7ff. [translated in S. Khuda Bukhsh's *Contributions to the History of Islamic Civilization* (Calcutta, 1929-1930), I, 64ff.].



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be called *khalq al-af'āl*, "the creation of acts." Its upholders, because they restricted *qadar*, were curiously referred to—*lucus a non lucendo*—as the Qadariya. They liked to call their opponents the *Jabriya*, the people of blind compulsion (*jabr*). This was the earliest theological dispute in Islam.

While the Qur'ān could furnish both parties with arguments in equal measure, there was a mythological tradition favorable to the determinists. It may have evolved as a kind of *haggada* very early in Islam; it may have emerged only in the course of these disputations—who could set precise dates of origin in such matters? According to this tradition, immediately after creating Adam, God took his entire posterity, in the form of small swarms of ants, out of the substance of the first man's gigantic body, and already then determined the classes of the elect and the damned, incorporating them into the right and left sides of Adam's body. Each embryo has the fated course of its life outlined by an angel especially appointed to that end. According to an idea borrowed from India, it is "written on the forehead."<sup>32</sup> Among other things, the angel records whether the person is fated to bliss or damnation. Correspondingly, the eschatological tradition also takes a determinist course. God rather arbitrarily sends the unhappy sinner to hell. The only moderating element is the prophets' acknowledged right of intercession (*shafā'a*).

The conceptions underlying deterministic views were much too deeply rooted in the popular mind; the contrary doctrine of the Qadariya, stressing self-determination and full accountability, could not find a large body of supporters. The Qadarites had to put up a stiff defense against the attacks and objections of their opponents, who battled them with the received interpretation of the sacred scriptures and with popular fables like those above. For the history of Islam, the Qadarite movement is of great importance as the first step toward liberation from the dominance of traditional notions, a step prompted not by freethinking but by the demands of pious thought. The Qadarites did not lift their voice in a protest of reason against ossified dogma; theirs was the voice of religious conscience against an unworthy conception of God and of God's relation to His servants' religious instincts.

A hoard of hadiths, invented for the denigration of the Qadarite doctrine, bear witness to the opposition into which such tendencies ran, and to the scant sympathy that Qadarite thinking met with. As in other cases,

<sup>32</sup> Cf. ZDMG, LVII (1903), 398.

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the Prophet himself is made to express the general orthodox sentiment. The Qadarites are said to be the Magians of the Islamic community. For as the followers of Zoroaster set against the creator of the Good a principle that is the cause of Evil, so the Qadarites take man's evil acts out of the province of God's creation. Disobedience is created not by God but by the autonomous will of man. Hadiths, furthermore, represent Muhammad and 'Alī as sharply condemning the Qadarites' efforts to justify their doctrines through disputation, and as heaping every possible scorn and insult on Qadarite heads (see n. 32).

Yet another remarkable phenomenon has to do with the problem of *qadar*. The rulers in Damascus, people who did not, as a rule, show much of a taste for points of theology, were also uncomfortable with the Qadarite movement gaining ground in Syrian Islam.<sup>c</sup> At times they took a position of unqualified hostility towards the advocates of free will.<sup>33</sup>

These expressions of the ruling circles' disposition did not spring from an aversion to theological squabbles, harbored by men engaged in the great labor of consolidating a new state. Certainly, men whose energies were spent in laying the broad foundations of the state and in battling dynastic enemies on every front may have found it repugnant that the masses should have their minds stirred up with pedantic perplexities over the freedom of the will and self-determination. Strong-minded people in positions of power usually do not rejoice to see the masses adopt an argumentative habit of mind. But there was a more profound reason for the Umayyads' particular sense of danger on seeing the dogma of predestination weaken. The danger was not religious; it was political.

They were well aware that their dynasty was a thorn in the flesh of the pious, of the very people whose holy living commanded the heart of the common man. They could hardly fail to know that in the view of many

<sup>c</sup> On the political implications of the struggle between predestination and free will, see J. Obermann, "Political Theology in Early Islam: Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's Treatise on Qadar," JAOS, LV (1955), 138-62; and the article on Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in *EI*<sup>2</sup> (by H. Ritter). For a comprehensive survey of the exponents of free will in early Islam, see the article "Qadariyya" in *EI*<sup>2</sup> (by J. van Ess), where further references to sources and modern literature will be found.

<sup>33</sup> Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich*, pp. 217, 235 [= *The Arab Kingdom*, pp. 347, 377]. Wellhausen stresses in the second of these passages that political, not theological, considerations led them to take such a position. Advocates of the freedom of the will cite letters, reputed to have been written by Ḥasan al-Baṣrī to the caliph 'Abd al-Malik and to Ḥajjāj. In these letters this pious man tries to convince the rulers of the absurdity of persisting, as they do, in the belief that acts of will are predetermined. Cf. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb al-mīlāl wa'l-nihāl*, edited by T. W. Arnold (Leipzig, 1902), pp. 12ff. [= *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazila*, edited by Susanna Diwald-Wilzer (Wiesbaden, 1961), pp. 17ff.].



of their subjects they were usurpers who had come to power by violent and injurious means, enemies of the family of the Prophet, murderers of sacred persons, profaners of holy places. To curb the masses, to keep them from riot against the dynasty or its representatives, no form of belief was better suited than the belief in predestination. It is God's eternal decree that these men must rule; all their actions are inevitable and destined by God. It was opportune that doctrines such as this should spread among the people. The Umayyads listened with pleasure to their court panegyrists' laudatory epithets, in which their rule was recognized as the will of God, a *decretum divinum*. A believer could not very well rebel against that. And indeed, poets glorified the Umayyad caliphs as men "whose rule was predestined in God's eternal decree."<sup>34</sup>

Just as this idea was to serve the general legitimation of the dynasty, it was readily applied to calm the people when they inclined to see injustice and tyranny in the acts of their rulers. The dutiful subject must regard "the *amīr al-mu'minīn* and the wounds he inflicts as fate; let no one find fault with his doings."<sup>35</sup> These words come from a poem written as a kind of echo to an act of cruelty by an Umayyad ruler. The belief, it was intended, should strike root that whatever they did had to happen, that it had been destined by God, and no human will could avert it. "These kings," as some early Qadarites say, "shed the blood of the believers, unlawfully seize property that is not theirs, and say: 'Our actions are the consequence of *qadar*.'" <sup>36</sup> After the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik, who had to engage in a fierce struggle to secure his power, had lured one of his rivals to his palace, and there, with the approval of his confidential jurisconsult, had him murdered, he had the head thrown to the crowd of the victim's followers in front of the palace, who awaited his return. Then the caliph had it announced to them, "The Commander of the Faithful has killed your leader, as it was foreordained in God's inalterable decree. . . ." So it is related. Naturally, one could not resist God's decree, whose mere instrument the caliph was. The followers quieted down and paid obeisance to the murderer of the man who had a day earlier commanded their loyalty. While the historical accuracy of this narrative is not beyond question, it does furnish valid evidence for the connection people saw between the government's actions and the inevitability of fate. I ought not, it is true, neglect to mention that the appeal to divine foreordination was

<sup>34</sup> ZDMG, LVII (1903), 394. Consider Farazdaq's fatalistic verse in Joseph Hell, "Al-Farazdaq's Lieder auf die Muhallabiten," ZDMG, LX (1906), 25.

<sup>35</sup> *Aghānī*, X, 99:10.

<sup>36</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ma'ārif*, p. 225 [441].

accompanied by a quantity of dirhems, meant to palliate the horrible sight of the head of 'Amr ibn Sa'id flung to the crowd.<sup>37</sup>

The Qadarite movement in the age of the Umayyad dynasty was thus the first step in the undermining of simple Islamic orthodoxy. That is its great, if unintended, historical achievement, whose significance justifies my devoting such a large part of this essay to it. The breach that had been made in naive popular belief was soon to be made wider by endeavors which, in the measure as intellectual horizons broadened, extended the critique of the traditional forms of belief.

5. In the meantime, the Islamic world had become familiar with Aristotelian philosophy, and many of the educated were affected by it in their religious thinking. From this an incalculable danger to Islam arose, notwithstanding all efforts to reconcile the traditions of religion with the newly acquired truths of philosophy. On certain issues it seemed nearly impossible to erect a bridge between Aristotle—even in his Neoplatonic disguise—and the assumptions of Islamic belief. The beliefs in the world's creation in time, in the attention of providence to individuals, in miracles, could not live with Aristotle.

A new speculative system was needed to maintain Islam and Islamic tradition among rational thinkers. In the history of philosophy, this system is known as *kalām*, and its practitioners as the *mutakallimūn*. Originally, the word *mutakallim* (literally: "speaker") denoted, in a theological context, one who made a dogma or a controversial theological problem into a topic for dialectical discussion and argument, offering speculative proofs for the positions he urged. Thus the word *mutakallim* had originally as its grammatical complement the particular question on which the theologians' speculation centered. It is said, for instance, that a certain person is *min al-mutakallimīna fī'l-irjā'*, one of those who discuss the problem raised by the Murji'a.<sup>38</sup> The term soon came to be more broadly used, and was applied to those who "take doctrines, accepted in religious belief as truths above discussion, and turn them into subjects of debate, talk and argue about them, and state them in formulas meant to make them acceptable to thinking heads." Speculative activity to that end then received the name *kalām* (speech, oral discussion). In accordance with its purpose to give support to religious doctrines, the *kalām* started from

<sup>37</sup> *Al-Imāma wa'l-siyāsa*, II, 41.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Sa'id, VI, 236:19. According to some, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīya was the first to expound the theory of the Murji'a; *ibid.*, V, 67:16. For the definition given here, see also "Die islamische und die jüdische Philosophie," *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1909; Part I, Section v, of Paul Hinneberg's *Die Kultur der Gegenwart*), p. 64.



anti-Aristotelian postulates, and was, in the true sense of the phrase, a philosophy of religion. Its earliest fosterers are known as the Mu'tazilites.<sup>d</sup>

The word means "those who separate themselves." I shall not repeat the tale commonly told to account for the name, and I assume that the correct explanation of it is that this group too had its germ in pious impulses, that pious and in part ascetic people—*mu'tazila*, "those who withdraw" (ascetics)<sup>39</sup>—gave the first impetus to the movement which, as it was joined by rationalist groups, came to stand in ever-sharper opposition to dominant conceptions of belief.

It is only in their ultimate development that the Mu'tazilites justify the appellation "freethinkers of Islam" under which Heinrich Steiner, a professor in Zurich, introduced them in the first monograph (1865) devoted to this school.<sup>40</sup> Their emergence was prompted by religious motives, like that of their predecessors. Nothing could have been farther from the early Mu'tazila than a tendency to throw off chafing shackles, to the detriment of the rigorously orthodox view of life. One of the first questions pondered and resolved by the Mu'tazila was whether, in contrast to the Mu'ji'ite position, a grave sin attaches to a person the quality of being a *kāfir*, and thus brings him to eternal punishment in hell, just as unbelief

<sup>d</sup> In this and the following sections, Goldziher discusses the Mu'tazila, the first major theological school in Islam, and the pioneers of speculative dogmatics. At one time it was customary among scholars to describe the Mu'tazilites as rationalists or even as freethinkers. These descriptions, no doubt intended as compliments by nineteenth-century European writers, derived from the hostile and derogatory descriptions of the orthodox polemicists who until comparatively recently were our only source of information about Mu'tazilite doctrines. The recovery of some works of Mu'tazilite inspiration required a reassessment of their genuine role and, more particularly, of their political significance in early 'Abbāsid times. The beginnings of this reassessment can be seen in Goldziher's presentation. An entirely new theory of the nature and significance of the Mu'tazila movement was given by the Swedish scholar, H. S. Nyberg, in his article on the Mu'tazila in EI<sup>1</sup> (s.v.). For later discussions, see H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism, an Historical Survey*, pp. 112-18; Henri Laoust, *Les Schismes dans l'Islam; Introduction à une étude de la religion musulmane* (Paris, 1965), pp. 101ff.; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1962), pp. 58-71; J. van Ess, *Anfänge muslimischer Theologie* (Beirut, 1974).

<sup>39</sup> For this sense of the designation Mu'tazila, see my "Materialien zur Kenntniss der Almohadenbewegung in Nordafrika," *ZDMG*, XLI (1887), 35 n. 4 [= *Gesammelte Schriften*, II, 196 n. 4]. Cf. Ibn Sa'd, V, 225:4, where *mu'tazil* is used as a synonym of 'ābid and zāhid to mean an ascetic. In an old (1233) Arabic translation of the New Testament, of Nestorian origin, *pharisee* (one who sets himself apart) is rendered by the same word; Yūsuf Sarkis, "Tarjama 'arabiya qadima min al-Anjil al-Tāhir," *Al-Mashriq*, XI (1908), 905 penultimate.

<sup>40</sup> [Die Mu'taziliten; oder, die Freidenker im Islam; ein Beitrag zur allgemeinen Culturgeschichte (Leipzig, 1865).] There is a more recent monograph by Henri Galland, *Essai sur les Mo'tazélites: les rationalistes de l'Islam* (Geneva, 1906).

does. The topic does not indicate an upsurge of liberated thinking. Moreover, the Mu'tazila introduces into theology the concept of a middle state between those of believer and unbeliever—an unusual speculation for philosophical minds.

The man whom the Muslim historians of theology call the founder of the Mu'tazila, Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', is described by the biographers as an ascetic, and in a poem lamenting his death he is praised as "having touched neither dirhem nor dinar."<sup>41</sup> His companion, 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, is also described as a *zāhid* (ascetic) who prayed through entire nights, performed the pilgrimage to Mecca on foot forty times, and always made an impression as somber "as if he had come direct from his parents' funeral." A pious, ascetic sermon of admonition that he addressed to the caliph al-Manṣūr has been preserved—in stylized form, it is true—and it shows no sign of rationalist proclivities.<sup>42</sup> If we look through the biographical dictionaries of the Mu'tazilites, we find that even in later times<sup>43</sup> an ascetic way of life takes pride of place among the celebrated characteristics of many of them.

Nonetheless, the religious ideas their teaching particularly stressed (the reduction of the arbitrary power of God in favor of the idea of justice) contained many a seed of opposition to current orthodoxy, many an element that might easily lure a skeptic to join them. Connection with the *kalām* soon gave their thinking a rationalist tinge and compelled them more and more to set themselves rationalist goals. Cultivation of these goals brought the Mu'tazila into an ever keener conflict with standard orthodox opinion.

When we sum up our consideration of the Mu'tazila, we shall have to tax them with a number of unattractive traits. But they will retain one undiminished merit. They were the first to expand the sources of religious cognition in Islam so as to include a valuable but previously—in such connection—rigorously avoided element: reason ('*aql*). Some of their most highly respected representatives went so far as to say that "the first, necessary condition of knowledge is doubt,"<sup>44</sup> or "fifty doubts are

<sup>41</sup> Cf. the biography in Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Al-Milal wa'l-nihāl*, p. 18:12 [= *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazila*, p. 29].

<sup>42</sup> In Bayhaqī, *Al-Maḥāsin wa'l-masāwī*, p. 364 penultimate line ff. For the ascetic portrait, Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Al-Milal wa'l-nihāl*, p. 22:5ff. [= *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazila*, p. 36].

<sup>43</sup> In the fourth century: *shaykh min zuhhād al-mu'tazila*, "a shaykh from among the Mu'tazilite ascetics"; Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, II, 309:11.

<sup>44</sup> Alfred von Kremer, *Culturgeschichte des Orients unter den Chalifen* (Vienna, 1875-1877), II, 267.



better than one certainty,"<sup>45</sup> and more of the kind. It was possible to say of them that, to their way of thinking, there was a sixth sense besides the usual five, namely, 'aql, reason.<sup>46</sup> They raised reason to a touchstone in matters of belief. One of their early representatives, Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir of Baghdad, wrote a veritable paean to reason, as part of a didactic poem of natural history. It is preserved and commented on by al-Jāhiz who was of the same school of thought:

How excellent is reason as a pilot and companion in good fortune and evil,

As a judge who can pass judgment over the invisible as if he saw it with his own eyes.

... one of its actions is that it distinguishes good and evil,

Through a possessor of powers whom God has singled out with utter sanctification and purity.<sup>47</sup>

Some of them, in extreme skepticism, assigned to the evidence of the senses the lowest possible position among the criteria of knowledge.<sup>48</sup> At any rate, they were the first in Islamic theology to assert the rights of reason. In doing so, they had gone far from their point of departure. At its apex, the Mu'tazilite school engaged in relentless criticism of certain elements of popular belief that had long been viewed as essential components of the orthodox creed. They called into doubt the inimitability of the literary style of the Qur'ān. They questioned the authenticity of the hadith, in which the documentation of popular belief had taken shape.

<sup>45</sup> In Jāhiz, *Ḥayawān*, III, 18 [III, 60]; cf. *Ḥayawān*, VI, 11 [VI, 35ff.] about skeptics. Such principles had an effect even on Ghazālī, remote as his position was from the Mu'tazilites. Cf. his saying: "whoever does not doubt, cannot consider matters rationally," in Hebrew translation *mī she-lō y'sappēq lo y'ayyēn* (*Mōznē šedeq*, Hebrew edition by Jacob Golden-thal, p. 235). The Arabic original of Ghazālī's saying is cited in Ibn Ṭufayl, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*, edited by Léon Gauthier (Algiers, 1900), p. 13:4 from bottom [2nd ed. (Beirut, 1936), p. 16:8f., giving as his source Ghazālī's *Mizān al-'amal*; for this quotation, see the edition of the *Mizān al-'amal* by Sulaymān Dunyā, Cairo, 1964, p. 409].

<sup>46</sup> Māturīdī, *Commentary on Al-Fiqh al-akbar* (Haydarabad, A.H. 1321; of improbable authenticity), p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> Jāhiz, *Ḥayawān*, VI, 95 [VI, 292, vss. 12-15. Goldziher left a lacuna for a word in the printed text—and in the Vienna manuscript of the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*—which he considered corrupt. For a full text of these lines and alternate translations, see the note by Oscar Rescher in *Der Islam*, XVI (1927), 156.] This free exercise of reason is contrasted (96:6 [294, vs. 38]) with the passive acceptance of received opinion (*taqlīd*) characteristic of mediocre minds.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Marmonides, *Dalālat al-hā'irīn*, I, Ch. 73, Proposition XII. About the skepticism of the *mutakallimūn*, see my "Zur Geschichte der hanbalitischen Bewegungen," p. 2 [= *Gesammelte Schriften*, V, 136; partial French translation in *Arabica*, VII (1960), 135].

Their criticism of popular belief was directed chiefly at the mythological elements of eschatology. They eliminated from the body of obligatory belief, and gave allegorical explanations of, the bridge *Širāt* which one must cross before entering the next world, thin as a hair and sharp as the edge of a sword, over which the elect glide quick as lightning into Paradise, while those destined for damnation teeter and plummet into the bottomless pit gaping beneath them. They also eliminated the scales in which the acts of man are weighed, and many similar conceptions. The chief guiding thought of their philosophy of religion was to purge the monotheistic concept of God from those elements of traditional popular belief that had clouded and deformed it. This purgation was to take two principal courses: the ethical and the metaphysical. The idea of God must be cleansed of all conceptions that prejudice belief in his justice, and of all that might obscure his absolute unity, uniqueness, and immutability. At the same time they upheld the idea of a God who creates, acts, and provides, and objected vehemently to the Aristotelian version of the idea of God. The Aristotelians' doctrine of the eternity of the world, their belief that the laws of nature are inviolable, their negation of a providence that takes account of individuals—these were walls that divided the rationalist theologians of Islam, for all their freedom of speculation, from the followers of Aristotle. The inadequate proofs they worked with brought upon them the scorn and sarcastic criticism of the philosophers who did not recognize them as opponents of equal standing, or their methods of thought as worthy of consideration.<sup>49</sup> Their way of going about their business justified the charge that philosophical independence and unprejudiced thought were wholly alien to them, for they were tied to a clearly defined religion, and their purpose in working with the tools of reason was to purify that religion.

As I have already stressed, this work of purification was aimed particularly at two points of doctrine: the justice and unity of God. Every Mu'tazilite textbook consists of two parts: one contains the "Chapters on Justice" (*abwāb al-'adl*) and the other the "Chapters on the Profession of Faith in Unity" (*abwāb al-tawḥīd*). This division into two parts determines the plan of all Mu'tazilite theological works. Because of this orientation of their religio-philosophical efforts, they assumed the name *ahl al-'adl wa'l-tawḥīd*, "the people of justice and of the profession of faith in

<sup>49</sup> Bahya ibn Paquda, *Kitāb ma'ānī al-naḥs*, edited by Ignaz Goldziher (Berlin, 1907; *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, New Series, IX, 1*), n. to 4, 5ff.



unity." A relative chronology can be established for these considerations: the questions concerning justice were asked first. They are linked directly to Qadarite doctrines whose implications the Mu'tazilites follow up and make explicit. They start from the assumption that man has unlimited freedom of volition in his acts, that he is himself the creator of those acts. Were the case otherwise, it would be unjust of God to hold man responsible for what he does.

In the conclusions that the Mu'tazilites drew from this fundamental idea, advanced with the certainty of axiom, however, they went several steps beyond the Qadarite position. Having inscribed upon their banner the doctrine of man's self-determination, and rejected the notion of God's arbitrary rule, they found that this rejection implied something further for their concept of God: God must necessarily be just; the concept of justice cannot be separated from the concept of God; it is impossible to conceive of an act of will on the part of God that fails to meet the stipulations of justice. Divine omnipotence is limited by the requirements of justice, which it can neither ignore nor waive.

In taking this position, they introduced into the conception of divinity an element quite alien to the early Muslims' conception of it: the element of necessity (*wujūb*). There are things that, with reference to God, may be called necessary. *God must*. From the point of view of early Islam, such a phrase could only be regarded as flagrantly absurd, even as blasphemous. Since God created man with the intention of bringing about his eternal felicity, He had to send prophets to teach them the means of, and the ways to, felicity. That He did so was not the result of His sovereign will; it was not a gift from God that God's wholly autonomous will might have withheld. It was, rather, an act of divine benevolence that God was obliged to perform (*luṭf wājib*). Had He granted mankind no guidance, He could not be thought of as a being whose deeds are good. He was obliged to reveal himself through His prophets. God himself admits this necessity, in the Qur'ān. "It is incumbent upon Allah (He owes it, *wa-'alā'llāhi*) to give right guidance." Such is their interpretation of Sura 16:9.<sup>50</sup>

Besides the concept of the necessary *luṭf*, the Mu'tazilites introduced a second, closely related, concept into the notion of God: the concept of the salutary, *al-aṣḥāḥ*. God's decrees intend, again by necessity, man's ultimate felicity. A person is free to follow, or to reject, the teachings re-

<sup>50</sup> Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, V, 432.

vealed for the benefit of mankind. But a just God must, by necessity, reward the good and punish the wicked. God's arbitrary power that, according to orthodox tastes, capriciously peoples paradise and hell is abolished, and the incongruity that the just man's virtue and obedience do not guarantee a reward in the next world is adjusted by an equitability that by necessity governs God's acts.

They went a step further in this sphere of ideas. They laid down the law of compensation, *al-'iwaḍ*: yet another limitation to the arbitrary power of God as it is implied in the orthodox conception. For undeserved pain and suffering that the just endure here on earth because God finds it *aṣḥāḥ*, expedient and salutary, for them that they should do so, they must receive compensation in the next world. This would not in itself be a peculiar view; indeed, with the dubious word *must* toned down, it would agree with a postulate of orthodox sensibility. But a large part of the Mu'tazila postulates such compensation not only for true believers or innocent children who underwent unmerited pain and suffering here on earth, but also for animals. An animal must receive compensation in another life for the suffering that the selfishness and cruelty of mankind has inflicted on it in this world. Otherwise God would not be just. A transcendental protection of animals, as it were.

We can see how consistently these Mu'tazilites worked out their doctrine of divine justice, and how in the end they set a free man over against a relatively unfree God.

These views are related to one more essential ethical position.

From the viewpoint of religious ethics, what is good and what is evil? Or, as the theological terminology has it, what is pleasing (*ḥasan*) and what is abhorrent (*qabīḥ*)? Orthodoxy answers: good-and-pleasing is what God commands; evil-and-abhorrent is what God forbids. The divine will, which cannot be held accountable, and its dictates are the yardstick for good and evil. Nothing is good or evil because reason makes it so. Murder is reprehensible because God has forbidden it; had the divine law not branded murder as wicked, it would not be wicked. The Mu'tazilite disagrees. In his view, there is absolute good and absolute evil, and reason is the instrument for ethical value judgments. Reason is the *prius*, not the divine will. A thing is good not because God has commanded it, but God has commanded it because it is good. Is this not tantamount to saying—if we translate into modern terms these definitions of the theologians of Basra and Baghdad—that God, in decreeing His laws, is bound by the categorical imperative?



6. We have looked at a series of ideas and principles which show that the conflict between Mu'tazilite thought and the simple religious conceptions of the orthodox did not turn on metaphysical issues alone. The Mu'tazilites' conclusions were of radical importance for fundamental ethical views, and specifically within Islam they were relevant to the conception of divine legislation.

But their contribution was even greater in the other area in which their rationalist philosophy of religion was engaged: in the area of the monotheistic idea. To begin with, they had to clear away a heap of debris that had come to engulf this idea and debase its purity. Their foremost concern was to wipe out the anthropomorphic conceptions of traditional orthodoxy, which they saw as incompatible with a dignified conception of God. Orthodoxy would not agree to any but a literal understanding of the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions in the Qur'ān and the traditional texts. God sees, hears, is moved to anger; He smiles, sits and stands; He even has hands, feet, ears. Such matters, to which there are frequent references in the Qur'ān and other texts, must be understood according to the letter. The Ḥanbalite school in particular fought for this crude conception of God, which they considered *sunna*. At best these most conservative believers were willing to admit that while they demanded a literal understanding of the words of the text, they could not precisely say how one was to envision the reality to which such conceptions corresponded. They demanded unquestioning belief in the literal meaning of the text, *bilā kayfa*, "without *how*." (This position was therefore called *balkafa*.) A closer definition of that *how*, they argued, passes human understanding, and man ought not meddle with things that have not been rendered subject to his thought. Known by name are the old exegetes who considered it correct to say that God was "flesh and blood," with limbs, so long as one added that these may not at all be thought of as resembling those of man, following the Qur'ān verse "Nothing is like Him; He is the one who hears and sees" (42:11). But, in their view, one could not think of anything as really existing that was not substance. The conception of God as a purely spiritual being was for these people tantamount to atheism.

Muslim anthropomorphists on occasion set forth their view in an unbelievably crude manner. I am intentionally adducing facts from a later period, to suggest the free course such ideas must have enjoyed at a time when no spiritualist opposition had yet exercised its moderating influence. The example of an Andalusian theologian may demonstrate the ex-

cesses possible in this area. A very famous theologian from Mallorca who died in Baghdad around the year 524/1130, Muḥammad ibn Sa'dūn, known by the name Abū 'Āmir al-Qurashī, went to the lengths of making the following statement: "The heretics cite in evidence the Qur'ān verse 'Nothing is like Him,' but the meaning of that verse is only that nothing can be compared to God in His divinity. In form, however, God is like you or me." The case would seem to be as with the verse in which God addresses the wives of the Prophet: "O women of the Prophet, you are not like any other woman" (33:32), that is, other women are of a lower order of merit, but in appearance the Prophet's wives are just like them. It must be said that there is more than a little blasphemy in orthodox hermeneutics of this kind. Its proponent did not flinch from the most extreme consequences. He once read verse 68:42, in which the following is said of the Last Judgment: "On the day when the thigh is bared, and they are summoned to prostrate themselves. . . ." To refuse a figurative explanation as forcibly as possible, Abū 'Āmir struck his own thigh and said: "A real thigh, just like the one here."<sup>51</sup> A similar example is reported from two hundred years later. In the course of a lecture in Damascus, the famous Ḥanbalite shaykh Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiya (d. 728/1328) cited one of those passages in which God's "descent" is mentioned. To exclude any ambiguity and to illustrate concretely his conception of God's descent, the shaykh descended a few steps from the pulpit and said "Exactly as I am descending now" (*ka-nuzūlī hādihā*).

These are offshoots of the old anthropomorphic trend against which the Mu'tazilites waged the first religious campaign when, to assure the purity and dignity of the Islamic concept of God, they gave metaphorical interpretation and spiritual sense to every anthropomorphic expression in the sacred writings. Out of such endeavors a new method of Qur'ānic exegesis arose, which was called by the old term *ta'wīl* (in the sense of figurative interpretation), and against which, in all periods of Islamic history, the Ḥanbalites protested.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh Dimashq*, fasc. 340 (Ms. Landberg, now in the Yale University Library [cf. Leon Nemoj, *Arabic Manuscripts in the Yale University Library* (New Haven, 1956), p. 127, no. 1182].

<sup>52</sup> The Ḥanbalite theologian Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abdallāh ibn Qudāma (d. 620/1233) wrote a *Dhamm al-ta'wīl*, "Reprobation of *ta'wīl*." Two manuscript copies have recently been acquired by the Library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (*List of Arabic and Persian Mss. Acquired . . . 1903-1907*, nos. 405 and 795; these should be entered in GAL, I, 398 [cf. GAL, SI, 689, no. 19]). Ibn Taymiya (more about him in Chapter VI) wrote repeated polemics against the *ta'wīl* of the *mutakallimūn* and established limits for the traditionally acceptable



In the case of the hadith, another method was also available to the Mu'tazilites: they could reject as inauthentic those texts that reflected, or were conducive to, an excessively crude anthropomorphism. Thus they sought to rid Islam of all the debris of foolish fables that, favored by story-loving popular belief, had piled up especially in the area of eschatology, and had found religious accreditation in the form of hadiths. No conception is more stressed in orthodox theology than the one based on the words of verse 75:23, that the righteous will see God bodily in the next world. The Mu'tazilites could not accept this, and were not particularly impressed by the more exact definition of that vision in hadiths that reject outright any form of *ta'wīl*: "As you see the moon shining in the sky."<sup>53</sup> Thus the material vision of God, which the Mu'tazilites removed from its immediate literal sense by a spiritual interpretation of the text, remained a point of sharpest contention between their party, joined by other theologians infected with Mu'tazilite scruples, and the party of conservative orthodoxy, joined, in these matters, by people who held an intermediate position of rationalist compromise—about whom we shall hear more.

7. In the questions under the category of *tawḥīd*, the profession of faith in God's unity, the Mu'tazilites rose to an even higher general viewpoint by posing the question of divine attributes in a comprehensive fashion. Is it at all possible to ascribe attributes to God without tarnishing belief in God's indivisible, immutable unity?

Attempts to answer this question occasioned a great display of hair-splitting dialectics, both on the side of the various Mu'tazilite schools of thought—for in the various definitions of their doctrines the Mu'tazilites present no united front—and on the side of those who attempted to mediate between the Mu'tazilite and the orthodox positions. For already here we must anticipate something to which we shall soon return: from the beginning of the tenth century there arose mediating tendencies that allowed drops of rationalism to trickle into the oil of orthodoxy, in order to defend the old formulas against unrestrained rationalist doubts. These elaborations of doctrine in which orthodox dogma is diluted by a few rationalistic flourishes, and which essentially represent a return to traditional orthodoxy, are associated with the names of Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-

kind of *ta'wīl*, such as *Tafsīr sūrat al-ikhhlās* (Cairo, A.H. 1323), pp. 71ff.; "Risālat al-ikhhl fī'l-mutashābih wa'l-ta'wīl," in *Rasā'il*, II, 2ff.

<sup>53</sup> Tabarī, *Tafsīr*, commentary to Sura 45, vss. 27-28 (Cairo, A.H. 1323-1329, XXV, 85 bottom).

Ash'arī (d. 324/935 in Baghdad) and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944 in Samarkand). Al-Ash'arī's system came to prevail in the central provinces of the Islamic world; al-Māturīdī's found acceptance farther east, in Central Asia.<sup>6</sup> There are no essential differences between the two schools. Such as there are hinge mostly on petty disputes, of whose scope we may form a reasonable idea by looking, for example, at the following controversy: may a Muslim use the phrase "I am a Muslim, if God wills"? The students of al-Ash'arī and of al-Māturīdī give conflicting answers to this question, supporting their views with dozens of subtle theological arguments. On the whole, the position of the Māturīdites is more liberal than that of their Ash'arite colleagues. They are a shade closer to the Mu'tazilites than the Ash'arites are. I will cite as a single example the different answers to the question: what is the basis for man's obligation to know God?

The Mu'tazilites answer: reason. The Ash'arites: it is written that we must know God. The Māturīdites: the obligation to know God is based on the divine commandment, but that commandment is grasped by reason. In this view, reason is not the source but the instrument of the knowledge of God.

This example illustrates the scholastic methodology, in general, of theological disputes in Islam. When we immerse ourselves in the ingeniously contrived definitions relating to the problem of divine attributes, we are prompted to recall the battles Byzantine theologians fought over single words, indeed letters, about *homoousia* and *homoiousia*. Can we ascribe attributes to God? To do so would, after all, introduce multiplicity into His one and indivisible being. And even if we think of these attributes (as, given the nature of God, we must) as being in no way distinct from God's essence, as being inherent in His essence from all eternity and not superadded to it—even then the mere positing of such existents, eternal even though inseparably joined to God's essence, would imply the admission of eternal entities besides the one eternal God. But that is *shirk*, "association." *Tawḥīd*, the pure belief in God's unity, therefore demands that one reject the supposition that God has attributes, whether eternal and inherent, or additional to his essence. This consideration had to lead to the denial of divine attributes; to the view that God is all-knowing but not by a knowledge, all-powerful but not by a power, living but not by a

<sup>6</sup> On the theological schools of al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī, see the article "Ash'ariyya" in *IEP* (by W. Montgomery Watt); L. Gardet and M. M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane*, and the general works by Gibb and Laoust, cited above.



life. There is no distinct knowledge, power, and life in God; all those things that strike us as attributes are indivisibly one, and not distinct from God Himself. To say that God is knowing is no different from saying "God is powerful" or "God is living." Were we to multiply such statements to infinity, we would still not be saying anything but "God is."

There can be no doubt that these considerations served the cause of letting the monotheistic idea in Islam shine forth in greater purity than in the tarnished conceptions of literal-minded popular belief. But to the orthodox this purification must have appeared as *ta'fīl*, stripping the concept of God of its contents; as pure *kenôsis*. "What the talk of these people amounts to is that there is in heaven no God at all."<sup>54</sup> This is how, at the beginning of the dogmatic controversy, a traditional orthodox writer in complete naiveté characterizes the doctrines of his rationalist opponents. The Absolute cannot be approached; it cannot be cognized. Were God identical with His attributes comprehended in a unity, could one not pray "O knowledge have mercy on me!"? Moreover, the denial of attributes clashes at every step with clear Qur'ānic statements in which mention is made of God's knowledge, power, and so on. Therefore these attributes may—indeed must—be predicated of Him. To deny them is evident error, unbelief, and heresy.

It was the task of the mediators to reconcile, by means of acceptable formulas, the rigid negation of the rationalists with the traditional concept of the divine attributes. Those who took al-Ash'arī's intermediate position devised to this end the following formula: God knows by a knowledge that is not distinct from His essence. The additional clause is intended to effect a theological rescue of the possibility of attributes. But with this we are far from done with hair-splitting formulas. The Māturīdites, too, strove to mediate, to erect a bridge between orthodoxy and the Mu'tazila. In general they were content with the agnostic statement that God has attributes (for they are stated in the Qur'ān), but one cannot say either that the attributes are identical with God or that they are distinct from His essence. To some of them, the Ash'arite statement of the divine attributes seemed unworthy of the godhead. God, according to that statement, is knowing by an eternal knowledge. By (*bi*). Does the grammatical construction not suggest an instrument? Are then the workings of God's knowledge, might, will—all those divine powers that form the

<sup>54</sup> Abū Ma'mar al-Hudhālī (d. 236/850 in Baghdad), in Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-huffāz*, II, 56 [II, 472].

infinite plenitude of His being—not immediate? Is the conception of immediacy not destroyed by that short syllable *bi*, which has the grammatical function of indicating an instrument? Dreading that such grammar might be derogatory to God's majesty, the shaykhs of Samarkand found the ingenious expedient of stating the mediating formula in the following manner: He is knowing and has knowledge that is attributed to Him in an eternal sense, and so on.

It was not for nothing, we see, that the Muslim theologians in Syria and Mesopotamia lived next to the dialecticians of the conquered nations.

8. One of the weightiest subjects of dogmatic debate was the concept of the divine word. How is one to understand the attribution of speech to God? How is one to explain the operation of this attribute in the act of revelation embodied in the holy scriptures?

Although these questions belong in the context of the theory of attributes, they were treated as distinct and independent subjects of theological speculation. They also came early to form the subject of a controversy independent from that context.

Orthodoxy answers these questions so: speech is an eternal attribute of God, which as such is without beginning or intermission, exactly like His knowledge, His might, and other characteristics of His infinite being. Consequently revelation, the acknowledged manifestation of the speaking God—the Qur'ān being the revelation that claims the Muslim's chief interest—did not originate in time, by a specific act of God's creative will, but has existed from all eternity. The Qur'ān is uncreated. That to this day is the orthodox dogma.<sup>f</sup>

After the foregoing it will cause no surprise that in this notion too the Mu'tazilites saw a breach of pure monotheism. To ascribe to God the anthropomorphic attribute of speech, to admit an eternal entity besides God, was in their view nothing less than to destroy the unity of the godhead. In this instance, their opposition could be grasped by the man in the street, for it did not hinge on mere abstractions, as the general debate about attributes had. For once, a perfectly concrete thing was in the foreground of speculation. Once the question of the divine word had been separated from the controversy about attributes, in which it had had its first roots, the focus of the issue was: is the Qur'ān created or un-

<sup>f</sup> The burning problem of the preexistence or createdness of the Qur'ān has been discussed in a number of studies. See, for example, W. Madelung, "The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran," *Orientalia Hispanica*, edited by J. M. Baral (Leiden, 1974), I, i, 504-25.



created? So formulated, the question was bound to attract the interest of the simplest Muslim, even if the answer to the question hinged on a series of considerations to which he remained wholly indifferent.

To explain the notion of "the speaking God," the Mu'tazilites devised a singular mechanical theory, and in doing so exchanged one bundle of troubles for another. It cannot be the voice of God, they argued, that manifests itself to a prophet when he feels the divine revelation acting upon him through his sense of hearing. The sound is created. When God wishes to manifest Himself audibly, He causes, by a specific creative act, speech to occur in a material substratum. That is the speech which the prophet hears. It is not the immediate speech of God, but rather a speech created by God, manifested indirectly, and corresponding in its contents to the will of God. This theory offered a form into which they could fit their doctrine of the created Qur'ān, which they set against the orthodox dogma of the eternal and uncreated word of God.

No other Mu'tazilite innovation sparked such violent controversy, reaching beyond scholastic circles and making itself felt in public life. The caliph al-Ma'mūn took up the cause, and acting as a kind of high priest of the state, ordered his subjects, under pain of severe punishments, to adopt the belief in the created Qur'ān. His successor, al-Mu'taṣim, followed in his footsteps. Orthodox theologians and those who refused to make open declaration of their position were subjected to harassment, imprisonment, and torture. Docile *qādīs* and other religious authorities were ready to assume the office of inquisitors, in order to vex and persecute the stiff-necked supporters of the orthodox view, and also those who were not sufficiently unambivalent in declaring themselves for belief in the created Qur'ān, the sole belief in which salvation lay.

An American scholar, Walter M. Patton, published in 1897 an excellent work in which he illustrated the course of this rationalist inquisition by examining the case of one of its most eminent victims. This thoroughly documented study presents the vicissitudes of the *imām* Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the man whose name was to become in Islam the watchword of uncompromising belief.<sup>55</sup> I have said elsewhere, and may repeat here, that "the inquisitors of liberalism were, if possible, even more terrible than their literal-minded colleagues. In any case their fanaticism is more repugnant than that of their imprisoned and mistreated victims."<sup>56</sup>

It was only in the reign of the caliph al-Mutawakkil—an unappealing

<sup>55</sup> Aḥmed ibn Ḥanbal and the Miḥna (Leiden, 1897). Cf. ZDMG LII (1898), pp. 155ff.

<sup>56</sup> Muhammedanische Studien, II, 59 [= Muslim Studies, II, 65].

bigot who had no trouble combining theological orthodoxy with a life of drunkenness and the patronage of obscene literature—that adherents of the old dogma could again raise their heads in freedom. The persecuted now became persecutors, and they knew very well how to put into practice, to the greater glory of Allah, the old adage *vae victis*. This was also a time of political decline—and at such times obscurantists flourish. The range of the concept of the uncreated Qur'ān widened more and more. A general and elastically unclear formulation of the dogma that the Qur'ān is eternal and uncreated was no longer found adequate. What is the uncreated Qur'ān? God's thought, God's will expressed in this book? Is it the particular text that God revealed to the Prophet "in clear Arabic with nothing crooked in it"? As time passed, orthodoxy grew insatiable: "What is between the two covers of the book is the word of God." Thus the concept of being uncreated includes the written copy of the Qur'ān, with its letters written in ink and put on paper. Nor is that which is "read in the prayer niches," that is, the daily Qur'ān recitation as it emerges from the throats of the believers, distinct from God's eternal, uncreated word. The mediators, Ash'arites and Māturīdites, made some concessions that reason suggested. Concerning the principal issue, al-Ash'arī advanced the doctrine that God's speech (*kalām*) is eternal, but that this means only spiritual speech (*kalām nafsī*) which is an eternal attribute of God, without beginning or interruption. On the other hand, revelations received by prophets, and other manifestations of the divine word, are in each case exponents of the eternal, unceasing speech of God.<sup>57</sup> Al-Ash'arī then applied this conception to every material manifestation of revelation.

Let us listen to what al-Māturīdī has to say about the mediating position: "When the question is raised: 'What is it that is written in copies of the Qur'ān?' we say: 'It is the word of God, and so too what is recited in the niches of the mosques and produced in the throats (speech organs), is the speech of God, but the (written) letters and the sounds, melodies, and voices are created things.' Such is the definition established by the shaykhs of Samarkand. The Ash'arites say: 'What is written in a copy of the Qur'ān is not the word of God but only a communication of the word of God, a relation of what the word of God is.' Therefore they consider it permissible to burn a fragment of a written copy of the Qur'ān (for it is not in itself the word of God). To justify this view they argue

<sup>57</sup> Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milal wa'l-niḥal*, edited by William Cureton (London, 1842-1846), p. 68.



that the word of God is His attribute, that His attribute is not manifested separately from God; therefore, what appears in separate form, such as the contents of an inscribed sheet of paper, cannot be regarded as the speech of God. But we (the Māturīdites) say to this: 'This assertion of the Ash'arites has even less validity than the opinion of the Mu'tazila.'"

We see that those who sought an intermediate position could not agree among themselves. The orthodox proceeded all the more consistently to extend, out of all measure, the range of their concept of the uncreated Qur'ān. The formula *lafẓī bi'l-qur'ān makhlūq*, "my uttering of the Qur'ān is created" was in their view archheretical. A pious man like al-Bukhārī, whose collection of hadith is, next to the Qur'ān, the most sacred book known to orthodox Muslims, was exposed to harassment because he considered such formulas admissible.<sup>58</sup>

Al-Ash'arī's followers, as we have just seen, are said to have left themselves somewhat more freedom of maneuver in defining the word of God, but al-Ash'arī himself did not hold out for his rationalist formula. In the final, definitive, statement of his theological views he declares: "The Qur'ān is on the preserved (heavenly) tablet; it is in the heart of those who have been given knowledge; it is read by the tongue; it is written down in books in reality; it is recited by our tongues in reality; it is heard by us in reality, as it is written: 'If a polytheist seeks your protection, grant it to him so that he may hear the speech of Allah' (9:6)—thus what you say to him is Allah's own speech. This is to say: all of these are essentially identical with the uncreated divine word, which has been on the heavenly tablet from all eternity, in reality (*fī 'l-ḥaqīqa*), and not in some figurative sense, not in the sense that all these are copies, citations, or communications of a heavenly original. No; all these are identical with the heavenly original; what is true of the original is true of those spatial and temporal manifestations that ostensibly come into being through a human agency."<sup>59</sup>

9. All that we have learned so far about the nature of the Mu'tazilite movement confers on these religious philosophers the right to lay claim to the name of rationalists. I shall not dispute their right to the name. It is their merit to have raised reason to a source of religious knowledge for the first time in Islam, and furthermore, to have candidly admitted the usefulness of doubt as the first impulse to knowledge.

<sup>58</sup> "Zur Geschichte der ḥanbalitischen Bewegungen," p. 7 [= *Gesammelte Schriften*, V, 141].

<sup>59</sup> *Kitāb al-ibāna 'an uṣūl al-dīyāna* (Haydarabad, A.H. 1321), p. 41.

But is that enough for calling them liberal? That title we must certainly refuse them. They are in fact, with the formulas they directed against orthodox conceptions, the very founders of theological dogmatism in Islam. Those who wished to be saved must, in the Mu'tazilite view, put their belief in these, and no other, rigid formulas. With their definitions, it is true, they meant to bring reason and religion into harmony. But to a conservative traditionalism unencumbered with definitions they opposed rigid and narrow formulas, and engaged in endless disputations to maintain them. Moreover, they were intolerant in the extreme.<sup>6</sup> A tendency to intolerance lies in the nature of the endeavor to frame religious belief in dogma. During the reign of three 'Abbāsīd caliphs, when the Mu'tazilites were fortunate enough to have their doctrines recognized as state dogma, those doctrines were urged by means of inquisition, imprisonment, and terror until, before long, a counterreformation once again allowed those Muslims to breathe freely for whom religion was the sum of pious traditions, and not the result of dubious ratiocination.

A few Mu'tazilite statements will bear witness to the intolerant spirit that ruled the theologians of the movement. One of their doctors declares quite clearly: "Whoever is not a Mu'tazilite should not be called a believer." This is only one of the conclusions drawn from their more general doctrine that no one may be called a believer who does not seek to know God "in the way of speculation." The common people of simple, unreasoning belief did not, in this view, belong to the community of Muslims at all. There could be no belief without the exercise of reason. The issue of *takfīr al-'awāmm*, "proclaiming the masses as unbelievers," was ever alive for the Mu'tazilite science of religion. Therefore there was no lack of those who averred that one could not perform valid prayers

<sup>6</sup> In this passage Goldziher makes an important point concerning the Mu'tazila. While still willing to grant them the title of rationalists and even, to some extent, of freethinkers, he refuses to join earlier European writers on the subject in calling them liberals, and draws attention to their persecution, once they had achieved power, of those other theologians who refused to accept their doctrines. The notion of "liberal" as understood in Goldziher's day was incompatible with intolerance or repression. The Mu'tazila were innovators in two respects: first, in trying to formulate Islam in the form of a system of dogmas, and second, in trying to impose that system by force as a state-sponsored, official orthodoxy. They were largely unsuccessful in the first, and totally unsuccessful in the second. Though Mu'tazilite dogmas were finally rejected, and left virtually no trace on the intellectual history of Sunnī Islam, the practice of formulating dogmas remained and gave rise to a rich development of dogmatic theology. The notion of a state-imposed orthodoxy, however, remained alien to the spirit of Islam. There have been few attempts in Islamic history to formulate and impose such a doctrine, and all of them have failed.



behind a simple, unreasoning believer; to do so would be no better than having an impious believer for one's prayer leader. A famous representative of this school, Mu'ammār b. 'Abbād, regarded as unbelievers all who did not share his opinion on the attributes and the freedom of the will. Another devout Mu'tazilite, Abū Mūsā al-Murdār—whom we might mention as an example for the pietistic beginnings of this movement—assumed the same attitude, and proclaimed his own doctrines as the sole means of salvation, so that it could be argued against him that, from his exclusionary standpoint, only he himself and at most three of his students would be able to enter the Paradise of true believers.<sup>60</sup>

It was truly a piece of good fortune for Islam that state patronage of this mentality was limited to the time of those three caliphs. How far would the Mu'tazilites have gone if the instruments and power of the state had been longer at the disposal of their intellectual faith! How some of them envisioned matters appears, for instance, from the teaching of Hishām al-Fuwaṭī, one of the most radical opponents of the admissibility of divine attributes and predestination. "He considered it permissible to assassinate those who rejected his doctrines, and to lay hands on their property in violence or in secrecy; for they were unbelievers and their lives and goods were free for all to take."<sup>61</sup> These are naturally only theories from a schoolroom, but they were followed out to the conclusion that territories in which the Mu'tazilite beliefs did not prevail were to be regarded as *dār al-ḥarb*, "lands of war." Islamic geography divides the world into seven climatic zones, but there is a more trenchant division: the land of Islam and the land of war.<sup>62</sup> The second category includes all regions among whose inhabitants unbelief still rules although the summons (*da'wa*) to embrace Islam has been carried to them. It is the duty of the head of the Islamic state to levy war on such territories. That is *jihād*, the holy war ordered in the Qur'ān, one of the surest paths to martyrdom.<sup>h</sup> It was with these ideas in mind that some Mu'tazilites wished to proclaim as lands of war all regions in which Mu'tazilite

<sup>60</sup> For the relevant passages and further discussion, see ZDMG, LII (1898), 158n., and the introduction to *Le Livre de Mohammed ibn Toumert* (Algiers, 1903), pp. 61–63, 71–74.

<sup>61</sup> Shahrastānī, *Al-milal wa'l-nihāl*, p. 51 bottom line.

<sup>62</sup> Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-sultāniya*, edited by Maximilian Enger (Bonn, 1853), pp. 61ff. Imam Shāfi'ī does not distinguish between the two zones, *dār al-islām* and *dār al-ḥarb*. This produces, in secondary issues, differences from the other schools. Cf. Abū Zayd al-Dabbūsī, *Ta'sīs al-naẓar* (Cairo, n.d.), p. 58.

<sup>h</sup> For a brief account of Muslim teachings concerning the holy war, see the article "Djihād" in *EI*<sup>2</sup> (by E. Tyan).

dogma did not have the ascendancy. Against these one must draw the sword, as against unbelievers and idolaters.<sup>63</sup>

This was no doubt an extremely vigorous rationalism. But those whose teachings were the starting point and seedbed of such fanaticism cannot be celebrated as men of liberal and tolerant views.<sup>i</sup> Unfortunately this is not always kept in mind when historical assessments of the Mu'tazila are made. Authors of sophistic fantasies about hypothetical developments in Islam at times draw pictures of how salutary it would have been to the evolution of Islam if the Mu'tazila had successfully risen to spiritual dominance. In view of the foregoing, it is difficult to credit such suggestions. We cannot deny the Mu'tazilites one salutary consequence of their work: they were the ones who brought *'aql*, reason, to bear upon questions of belief. That is their indisputable and far-reaching merit, which assures them an important place in the history of Islam and Islamic civilization. Moreover, in consequence of the battles they had fought, and despite all obstacles and refusals, the rights of reason were in larger or smaller measure also recognized in orthodox Islam. Reason could no longer be lightly dismissed.

10. We have mentioned repeatedly the names of the two *imāms*, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, the one active in the center of the caliphate and the other in Central Asia, who smoothed the controversies of theology by mediating formulas that came to be recognized as tenets of orthodox Islamic belief. It would be profitless to study in detail the minuscule differences between their two closely related systems. Historical significance was attained by the first. Its founder had himself been a disciple of the Mu'tazilites, who suddenly deserted that school—in the legend, the Prophet moved him to the change, appearing

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Al-Milal wa'l-nihāl*, pp. 44:12, 57:5 [= *Ṭabaqāt al-mu'tazila*, pp. 77, 96].

<sup>i</sup> Goldziher is here arguing against the somewhat idealized picture of the Mu'tazila and their role in Islam first set forth by Heinrich Steiner in his book *Die Mu'taziliten, oder die Freidenker im Islam* (Leipzig, 1865) and adopted by some other late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century writers. These views are now generally abandoned (with the exception of a few romantic and apologetic popularizers). Steiner and his successors believed that the Mu'tazila were rationalists, freethinkers, and liberals, and that their continued success would have been more beneficial to Islam (that is, more congenial to nineteenth-century European liberal tastes) than the traditionalists who replaced them. Goldziher, while recognizing the achievement and importance of the Mu'tazila, was the first to attempt some correction of this romanticized picture of them, and to draw attention to some other features of their doctrines and of their methods of propagating them. The discovery and study after Goldziher's time of authentic Mu'tazilite sources enabled scholars for the first time to see them in their own terms and not those of hostile polemicists. This new evidence has in the main confirmed and, indeed, strengthened Goldziher's arguments.



in a dream—and made a public declaration of his return to the pale of orthodoxy. He, and even more his students, furnished orthodoxy with mediating formulas of a more or less orthodox character. Nonetheless, they too failed to suit the taste of the traditional conservatives. For a long time the Ash'arites could not venture to teach their theology in public. It was not taught as a formally acknowledged part of the system of orthodox theology until the middle of the eleventh century, when the famous vizier of the Seljuqs, Nizām al-Mulk, established in the great schools he had founded in Nishapur and Baghdad positions for the public teaching of the new theological ideas. The most famous representatives of the new theology occupied professorships at these institutions. These institutions are associated with the victory of the Ash'arite school over the Mu'tazila on the one side, and intransigent orthodoxy on the other. The work of these institutions marks, therefore, an important turning point not only in the history of Muslim education, but also in Islamic theology. We must now examine the Ash'arite movement more closely.

It is one thing to call al-Ash'arī a mediator, but quite another to assume indiscriminately that his theological orientation produced a mediatory position on all points of doctrine about which the struggle of conflicting opinions raged in the eighth and ninth centuries. He did, it is true, devise mediating formulas even in such matters as the freedom of the will and the nature of the Qur'ān. Nevertheless, what must be regarded as most characteristic of his theological attitude is the position he took on an issue more relevant than any other to the religious conceptions of the masses: his definition of how the anthropomorphic descriptions of God are to be understood.

His position on this issue cannot be called conciliatory. A compendium of theology has survived, luckily, from the pen of this greatest theological authority in orthodox Islam. In it he both presents his own doctrines in positive form and refutes polemically the contrasting views of the Mu'tazilites—not, we may add, without a fanatic fury. Until recently, this treatise<sup>64</sup> had been given up for lost, and was known only fragmentarily from quotations, but a few years ago it became accessible in a complete edition published in Hyderabad. It is one of the basic texts for anyone who wishes to work, in whatever fashion, on the history of Islamic theology. Even in the introduction, al-Ash'arī's attitude toward rationalism is rendered suspect by the following declaration: "The position

<sup>64</sup> The *Ibāna*, see n. 59 above.

we take and the religious views we profess are: to hold fast to the Book of our Lord and to the *sunna* of our Prophet and to what has been related on the authority of the Companions and the Followers and the *imāms* of hadith. In these we find our firm support. Moreover we profess what Abū 'Abdallāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal taught—may God cause his face to be radiant, elevate his rank, and make his reward abundant—and we contradict all who contradict his teachings; for he is the most excellent *imām* and the perfect chief, through whom God has brought to light truth and abolished error, made distinct the right path and conquered the fallacious innovations of the heretics . . . and the doubt of the doubters. May God have mercy on him; he is the *imām* of highest standing and the honored and admired friend."

Thus at the outset of his creed al-Ash'arī proclaims himself a Ḥanbalite. That does not augur a conciliatory position. Indeed, when he comes to speak of the anthropomorphist question, he heaps all his scorn on the rationalists who seek figurative explanations for the concrete terms of the holy scriptures. Not satisfied with the rigor of the orthodox theologian, he also shows himself a grammarian. God Himself says, after all, that He revealed the Qur'ān in "clear Arabic"; it follows that the Qur'ān can only be understood in the light of correct Arabic usage. But when in the world had any Arab ever used the word "hand" to mean "benevolence," and so on? What Arab has ever employed all those tricks of language that rationalist interpreters want to read into the clear text in order to despoil the idea of God of all content? "Abū 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī says: We seek right guidance from God, in Him is our sufficiency, and there is no might and no power except in God and He is the one upon whom we call for assistance. Now then: When we are asked: 'Do you say that God has a face?' we answer: 'That is what we say, in contradiction of the heretics, for it is written: *the face of your Lord endures, in glory and honor* (55:27).' When we are asked 'Do you say that God has hands?' we answer 'That is what we say, for it is written *His hand is above their hands* (48:10), and also *what I created with my two hands* (38:75). Moreover it is related that the Prophet said: *God passed His hand over Adam's back and extracted his progeny from it*, and that he said *Allah created Adam with His hand and created the garden of Eden with His hand, and planted the tree Tūbā in it with His hand, and wrote the Torah with His hand*. And it is written *His two hands are stretched forth* (5:64); and it says in the hadith *both His hands are right hands*. Literally so, and not otherwise.' "

To escape crass anthropomorphism, he does, to be sure, insert into his



creed the clause that by face, hand, foot, and so on, we are not to understand members of a human body, that all this is to be understood *bilā kayfa*, without asking how (Sec. 6 above). But to add this clause is not to mediate; for traditional orthodoxy had held the same view. This was no mediation between Ibn Ḥanbal and the Muʿtazila; this was—as we could see from al-Ashʿarī's prefatory declaration—the Muʿtazilite renegade's unconditional surrender to the standpoint of the traditionalists' inflexible *imām* and his followers. By his far-reaching concessions to popular belief, al-Ashʿarī caused the loss to the Muslims of important Muʿtazilite achievements.<sup>65</sup> His position left intact the belief in magic and witchcraft, not to speak of the miracles of saints. The Muʿtazilites had done away with all these.

11. The mediation that did play an important part in the history of Islamic theology, and the essentials of which may be regarded as a theological guideline sanctioned by consensus (*ijmāʿ*), must be associated not with the name of al-Ashʿarī himself but with the school that bears his name.

To begin with, it was now no longer possible, even while steering an orthodox course, to depose *ʿaql*, reason, as a source of religious knowledge. We have just seen the passage in al-Ashʿarī's creed in which he makes solemn declaration of his sources of religious knowledge. No mention is made of the right of reason, not even as a subsidiary means to ascertaining the truth. With his school, the case is different. If not as intransigently as the Muʿtazilites, they too affirmed that *naẓar*, the speculative cognition of God, was every person's duty, and condemned *taqlīd*, unthinking acquiescence in received opinion. Besides making this general demand, the principal leaders of the Ashʿarite school followed in several particulars the Muʿtazilite road, and remained faithful to a method which, as I have just showed, their *imām* attacked and persecuted with all the weapons in his dogmatic and philological arsenal. The Ashʿarite theologians paid no attention at all to their master's protest, but continued to make abundant use of the method of *taʾwīl* (Sec. 6 above). They could not otherwise have avoided *tajsīm*, anthropomorphism. The insistence that "Ashʿarite" and "Ḥanbalite" must be identical concepts simply could not match the facts. But what would al-Ashʿarī have said of the method that now came to prevail in the orthodox application of *taʾwīl*? All the tricks of artificial hermeneutics were mustered to conjure

<sup>65</sup> Martin Schreiner, "Zur Geschichte des Ašʿarīthums," *Actes du huitième Congrès International des Orientalistes* (Leiden, 1892-1893), II, Sec. 1A, 105.

away—that is the only way to put it—the anthropomorphic expressions from Qurʾān and hadith.

In the case of the Qurʾān, the Muʿtazilites had already accomplished the work, on the whole satisfactorily. About the hadith they cared less. The problem could always be solved by conveniently declaring the hadiths with objectionable statements to be inauthentic, so one did not need to bother one's head for an interpretation in harmony with reason. In this the orthodox theologians could not go along with the Muʿtazila. Thus their exegetical art now came to be focused on hadith texts; as well it might, for anthropomorphism had gained vast ground in the boundlessly expanding sphere of the hadith. Let us take an example from the hadith collection (*Musnad*) of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. "One morning the Prophet appeared among his companions in a cheerful mood, with a beaming face. When asked the reason, he said: 'Why should I not be cheerful? Last night, the Lord appeared to me in the most beautiful form and called to me and asked: 'What do you think the heavenly company are discussing just now?'"<sup>66</sup> I said: 'Lord, I do not know.' (This exchange is repeated twice more.) He laid both His hands on my shoulders so I felt their coolness even in my breast, and there was revealed to me all that is in heaven and earth.' " There follow various pieces of information about the theological conversations of the heavenly company.<sup>67</sup>

It would have been vain endeavor to counteract such flagrant anthropomorphisms through exegesis; nor did the rationally inclined theologians feel obliged to do so when faced with a text that, like the one just cited, had not been included in the canonical collections. They had a graver responsibility when faced with texts that had a place in the canonical corpus and were therefore recognized as normative by the entire community of believers. On such texts they practiced their arts. We read, for example, in the highly esteemed collection of Mālik b. Anas: "Our Lord descends every night to the lowest heaven (there are seven) when one-third of the night is still left, and says: 'Who has a prayer to address to me, that I may grant it? Who has a wish that I may fulfill it? Who asks my pardon for his sins that I may pardon him?'"<sup>68</sup> In this case the an-

<sup>66</sup> In rabbinic haggada, too, the opinion is expressed that questions of law are discussed in heaven as they are in the schools: Bab. *Pesahim*, 50a top; *Ḥagigā*, 15b bottom; *Gittin*, 6b bottom. God Himself ponders the divergent opinions of the scholars of the law; He Himself studies and investigates the law. This last idea is frequently expressed in the *Seder Eliyyāhū Rabbā* (edited by Meir Friedmann, Vienna, 1900), e.g., p. 61 last line but one.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, IV, 66.

<sup>68</sup> *Muwaffaʿ*, I, 385; Bukhārī, *Tawḥīd* no. 35. For other examples on which *taʾwīl* was prac-



thropomorphism was removed by means of a grammatical trick, made available by the nature of the old Arabic script, which does not contain any graphic expression of the vowels. Instead of *yanzilu*,<sup>69</sup> "he descends," they read the factitive form *yunzilu*, "he causes to descend," namely, the angels. Thus the text's statement about God's change of place vanishes; it is not God who descends, but He causes angels to descend, who sound these calls in God's name. Another example. From Genesis 1:27, Muslim tradition took the hadith "God created Adam in His form." But God has no form. The possessive *his* must refer to Adam: God created Adam in the form which he (Adam) received.<sup>70</sup> These examples demonstrate the very frequently applied method of using grammatical alterations to obviate theological difficulty.

Recourse was had quite as often to lexical stratagems, where the multiple meanings of Arabic words proved most serviceable. Here is an example. "Hell will not be full until the All-Powerful sets His foot on it (on hell); then it will say 'enough, enough.'" <sup>71</sup> This text was troublesome for a refined conception of God. Such versatility of ingenious thought went into its interpretation that it represents a complete sampler of the hermeneutical arts cherished by the Ash'arite school. First of all, they thought to find a purely external remedy in replacing in the text of the hadith the subject of the phrase "sets his foot" with a pronoun: "Hell will not be full until he sets his foot on it." Who *he* is is left obscure; but at least the concrete predicate is not linked to a subject that means "God" in the language. This is, of course, self-deception, and nothing is gained by it. Others hoped to remedy the situation by retaining the subject *al-jabbār*, the All-Powerful, as it stands in the text, but not referring the word to God. From the language of Qur'ān and hadith, they could easily prove that the word also means a stiff-necked, rebellious character. Thus

ticed, see *Die Zāhiriten*, p. 168 [= *The Zāhirīs*, pp. 154f.]. In Damascus, Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Ahwāzī (d. 446/1055) compiled a collection of hadiths to give support to the crudest anthropomorphism. Cf. Yāqūt, *Irshād al-arīb*, III, 153.

<sup>69</sup> A version in Ibn Sa'd, VI, 37:23, has *yahbiṭu* and ends: "until, at break of day, he ascends (*irtafa'a*)."

<sup>70</sup> Other interpretations were also attempted to explain away the anthropomorphism of this saying. They are listed in Abū Muḥammad ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī, *Al-Inṣāf fī'l-tanbīh*, edited by Aḥmad 'Umar al-Maḥmāsānī (Cairo, A.H. 1319), pp. 120f. This book is of great importance for the study of the questions discussed here. See also Muḥammad al-'Abdarī, *Kitāb madkhal al-shar' al-sharīf* (Alexandria, A.H. 1293), II 25ff., and further, Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II, 135:13.

<sup>71</sup> Bukhārī, *Tafsīr* no. 264 (to Sura 50, vs. 30), *Tawḥīd* no. 7; cf. also Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Nihāya fī gharīb al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, A.H. 1322), I, 142; *Lisān al-'arab*, V, 182, s.v. *jbr*.

it could be argued that the *jabbār* who would set his foot on hell was not God but some violent person, a man sent to hell, whose violent intervention would put an end to the peopling of hell. On serious scrutiny, however, this way out of the difficulty proved quite as slippery as the first, for the meaning of the hadith is put beyond doubt by a series of parallel versions. In the place of *jabbār*, many parallel texts explicitly say *Allah* or *Lord of majesty* (*Rabb al-'izza*). We have not escaped the difficulty; the subject must be God. But what will the theological exegete not attempt in his desperate ingenuity? His arts have foundered on the subject; he tries his luck with the object. He (the meaning is now unquestionably God) sets His foot, *qadamahu*. Must this word be understood to mean, of all things, "foot"? It is a homonym that means a variety of things. Among them, *qadam* can mean "a group of people who have been sent ahead," in our case to hell. It is these people and not His foot that God sets upon hell. But once again an authentic parallel is found which, unhappily, substitutes a synonym (*riḥlahu*) for *qadamahu*, and *riḥlahu* undoubtedly means "his foot." Not so; the Arabic lexicon knows no *undoubtedly*; one word can have so many meanings. *Rijl* can also mean *jamā'a*, "an assembly." It is such an assembly—of sinners, of course—that God sets down at the gate of hell, whereupon hell shrieks "enough, enough, enough!"

Thus it was not excessive on my part to call the efforts brought to bear on this short saying a sampler of exegetical violence. The theologians who made these efforts were not Mu'tazilites, however, but Ash'arites of the purest water. One can imagine the philological wrath the founder himself would have poured out on the heads of his followers.

12. If this rationalist activity of the Ash'arite school was welcomed as a way out of *tajsīm*, which all parties held in abhorrence, it was bound to arouse definite discomfort in all orthodox believers genuinely faithful to tradition. The matter is linked to a further circumstance. The Ash'arites' method gave offence to conservative theologians because of a doctrine that they shared with the Mu'tazila, and that is an essential principle of all *kalām*: that "a demonstration built on traditional elements furnishes no certain knowledge." In this view, knowledge supported only by traditional sources is uncertain, depending on components that can be of no more than relative value for ascertaining the facts: for instance, on interpretation that is at the discretion of individual judgment, or on the significance assigned to rhetorical peculiarities (tropes, metaphors, and so on). Such sources of knowledge can be assigned an absolute value only in questions of legal practice, and even there they leave room for differences



of opinion about the conclusions to be drawn. In questions of dogma they have only a subsidiary value. One must base oneself on rational proof; it alone furnishes certain knowledge.<sup>72</sup> Not long ago, the recently deceased Egyptian *mufti* Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905)<sup>1</sup> could still, in the same spirit, declare it as a principle of orthodox Islam that "when reason and tradition are in contradiction, the right of decision rests with reason." "This is a principle," he says, "which very few people oppose, and only people who are of no account."<sup>73</sup>

Although as a rule the Ash'arites employed their rational proofs in support of orthodox dogma, and, faithful to their master's principle, guarded against letting their syllogisms lead them to statements that deviated from the path of sound orthodoxy, it was unavoidable that their assertion of the preeminence of reason over tradition in theological proof should be an abomination in the eyes of the intransigent old school. And how much more of one in the eyes of the anthropomorphists, those slaves to the letter who would not hear of metaphors, tropes, and other rhetorical-exegetical dodges in connection with the scriptural attributes of God!

Consequently, for the adherents of the old traditionalist school, there was nothing to choose between Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite. The *kalām* itself, the very principle of it, was the enemy, and it was immaterial whether it led to orthodox or heretical results.<sup>74</sup> "Flee from *kalām*, no matter what form it takes, as you would flee from a lion," is their motto. Their sentiments are expressed in the wrathful words they ascribed to al-Shāfi'ī: "My verdict on the people of *kalām* is that they should be beaten with whips and the soles of sandals, and then paraded through all

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the peremptory formulation of this principle in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn*, Ch. II, 10 (Cairo, A.H. 1323, on the margin of the same author's *Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 9). After enumerating the subjective elements in any demonstration by means of tradition, he writes: "It follows from this that traditional proofs are productive only of suppositions (*ẓannīya*), while rational proofs are apodictic (*qaṭ'iya*), and suppositions cannot be set against apodictic knowledge." The basic principle of the *kalām* is always: *al-dalā'il al-naqlīya lā tufīd al-yaqīn*, "traditional proofs do not furnish certainty"; al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām*, with the Commentary of Jurjānī (Istanbul, A.H. 1239), p. 79.

<sup>1</sup> On Muḥammad 'Abduh, a major figure among modernist Muslim theologians, see the article devoted to him in *EI*<sup>1</sup> (by J. Schacht), and H.A.R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (Chicago, 1947). A number of more recent studies on Muḥammad 'Abduh have been concerned primarily with his political and legal doctrines.

<sup>73</sup> *Al-Islām u a'l-naṣrānīya ma'a'l-'ilm wa'l-madaniya* (Cairo, n.d., posthumously printed), p. 56.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Martin Schreiner, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der theologischen Bewegungen im Islam* (Leipzig, 1899), pp. 64-75 = *ZDMG*, LII (1898), 528-39.

tribes and encampments while it is proclaimed of them, 'Such is the reward of those who forsake the Qur'ān and *sunna* and give themselves up to the *kalām*.'"<sup>75</sup> In their opinion, *kalām* was a science that reaped no divine reward when it led its practitioner to sound views, but which could easily lead to error, and so to unbelief.<sup>76</sup> The true Muslim should not bend his knee to 'aql, reason. Reason is not required for the grasping of religious truth; that truth is comprised in Qur'ān and *sunna*.<sup>77</sup> There was, in this view, no difference between *kalām* and Aristotelian philosophy; both led to unbelief. They had no use for anything like *fides quaerens intellectum*. Belief is bound to the letter of the received texts, solely and exclusively. Reason should not be caught trespassing in this area.

Thus it may be said of the mediating theology of the Ash'arites that it fell between two stools. Such is the reward of those who vacillate between two sides and have a wink for each. Philosophers and Mu'tazilites turned up their noses at the Ash'arites, whom they considered obscurantists, muddled thinkers, superficial dilettantes, with whom it was impossible even to engage in earnest disputation. But such censure did not save the Ash'arites from the fanatical curses of the partisans of tradition. They got little thanks for the battles they fought in behalf of religion against Aristotelian philosophy.

13. Besides their theology proper, the Ash'arites' natural philosophy also deserves particular attention.<sup>k</sup> It may be called the prevalent conception of the physical world in orthodox Islam.

The philosophy of the *kalām* cannot be regarded as a closed system, but in general it may be said that its philosophical world view mainly follows the paths of the pre-Aristotelian philosophers of nature,<sup>78</sup> and in particular those of the atomists among them. From the first, even before the rise

<sup>75</sup> In Ibn Taymīya's "Al-'Aqida al-ḥamawīya al-kubrā," *Rasā'il*, I, 468 bottom.

<sup>76</sup> Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, 241:5.

<sup>77</sup> A famous traditionist, Abū Sulaymān al-Khaṭṭābī al-Bustī (d. 388/998), wrote a book under the title *Al-Ghunya* (not *al-ghayba* as in Abū'l-Mahāsīn ibn Taghrī Birdī, *Al-Nujūm al-zāhira*, edited by William Popper, Berkeley, 1909, II, 84:15) '*an al-kalām wa-ahlihi*, "The Dispensability of Kalām and of Those Who Practice It"; Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, II, 218:15.

<sup>k</sup> On this whole question see the important study by S. Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomenlehre* (Berlin, 1936), especially pp. 94ff., where further literature is cited. On later attempts to refute this doctrine, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and Its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London, 1958).

<sup>78</sup> On the sources of Mu'tazilite metaphysics and natural philosophy we should now note S. Horowitz's studies: *Über den Einfluss der griechischen Philosophie auf die Entwicklung des Kalām* (Breslau, 1909), and the review by M. Horten in *OLZ*, XII (1909), 391ff. On the philosophy of the *kalām* now see also M. Horten, *Die philosophischen Probleme der spekulativen Theologie im Islam* (Bonn, 1910; Renaissance und Philosophie, III).



of the Ash'arite school, the philosophers of *kalām* were reproached for not admitting that phenomena could be constant and subject to laws. Al-Jāhiz mentions the Aristotelians' objection, urged against his fellow-Mu'tazilites, that their method for proving the unity of God (*tawhīd*) could be maintained only at the cost of denying all the truths of nature.<sup>79</sup> Al-Nazzām, one of the boldest representatives of the school, could be reproached—by opponents ignorant of the deeper sense and coherence of his philosophical theories—with having denied the law of the impenetrability of bodies.<sup>80</sup> Such an opinion of his has in fact been related, and is demonstrably a consequence of his dependence on Stoic views of the physical world.<sup>81</sup>

Even though the Mu'tazila were at war with peripatetic philosophy, an occasional Mu'tazilite would clothe himself in an Aristotelian cloak, and attempt to make his theories more acceptable by decking them in philosophical flourishes—which, to be sure, did not much affect the philosophers' view of them. The philosophers looked with contempt upon the methods of the *kalām*, and did not consider the *mutakallimūn* opponents of equal rank, worthy of being engaged in disputation. They declared that they had no common ground with the *mutakallimūn*, and so a serious discussion with them was impossible. "The *mutakallimūn* allege that reason is the noblest source of knowledge. But what they call by that name is not in reality reason at all, and their methods of thought do not, in any philosophical sense, conform to the rules of reason. That which they call reason, and with which they pretend to operate rationally, is a mere web of fancies."

This judgment applies even more conclusively to the Ash'arites. The statements of the Aristotelians and Neoplatonists of the tenth to thirteenth centuries branding the natural philosophy of the *kalām* phantasmagorical and contrary to reason<sup>82</sup> are most pertinent to the case of the Ash'arites who, in the interest of their theological assumptions, resisted all views premised on the operation of laws in the physical world. They agreed with the Pyrrhonians in denying the reliability of sense perception, and left the widest room possible for the assumption that the senses deceive. They denied the law of causality, the "fountainhead and guiding star of all rational science" (Th. Gomperz). They held that nothing in the

<sup>79</sup> *Ḥayawān*, II, 48 [II, 134f.].

<sup>80</sup> *Ījī*, *Mawāqif*, p. 448.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. S. Horowitz, *Griechische Philosophie*, p. 12; M. Horten, "Die Lehre vom Kumūn bei Nazzām," *ZDMG*, LXIII (1909), 784ff.

<sup>82</sup> See notes 48 and 49 above.

world occurs according to inalterable laws, by real necessity: the event that precedes is not the cause of the event that follows. They harbored such fear of the concept of causality that they were reluctant to call God the "first cause," preferring the name of Maker (*fā'il*) of nature and its phenomena.<sup>83</sup> Consequently they admitted the possibility of occurrences contrary to nature. It might be possible to see things not within the observer's field of vision. It could be said of them sarcastically that they admitted the possibility of a blind man in China seeing a midge in Andalus.<sup>84</sup> They replaced the laws of nature with the concept of habit.

It is no law, but only a habit God has established in nature (*ijrā' al-'āda*) that certain events follow other events; they do not follow by necessity. It is not necessary for the lack of food and drink to cause hunger and thirst, but it habitually does. Hunger and thirst arise when the accident of being hungry and thirsty becomes attached to a substance. If this accident does not occur (and God can prevent it), hunger and thirst do not occur. The Nile rises and ebbs from habit, not as a result of the operation of cause and effect in nature. If the accident of rising fails to obtain, the water level will not budge an inch. The hypothesis that what seems to us a law of nature is but a habit in nature was used to explain anything and everything. God has established in nature the habit that certain constellations of stars correspond to the ensuing of certain events. Thus the astrologers may be right; but they express themselves fallaciously.<sup>85</sup> Each event that happens or fails to happen is the result of a particular creative act on God's part. God mostly allows natural events to take their habitual course, but not without exception. When God suspends the habit of natural phenomena, there occurs what we call a miracle, and what the Ash'arites called a breach of habit, *kharq al-'āda*. The continuation of a habit corresponds to ever-renewed acts of creation. We are accustomed to say that a shadow is attributable to the absence of sunlight from a certain place. Wrong! A shadow is not the consequence of the absence of sunlight; it is created and is something positive. This permits the *mutakallimūn* to explain the hadith that in Paradise there is a tree under whose shadow one can ride a hundred years and not come out of the shade. How is this conceivable, seeing that before the entry of the believers into Paradise the sun was already folded up (81:1)? After all, no sun, no

<sup>83</sup> Maimonides, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, I, Ch. 69, beginning.

<sup>84</sup> Jurjānī on *Mawāqif*, p. 512:3 from bottom.

<sup>85</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *Al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, p. 35.



shadow. Very well; shadow has nothing to do with sun; God creates the shadow, in a simple breach of natural habit.<sup>86</sup>

This view of nature pervades the Ash'arite theologians' whole conception of the world. Al-Ash'arī himself applied it widely. The doctrine is ascribed to him, for example, that it was by mere habit of nature that a person could not use his sense of vision to perceive smells and tastes. God could endow our sense of vision with a capacity for perceiving smells; but that is not the habit of nature.<sup>87</sup>

Thus orthodox Islamic theology, built on Ash'arite foundations, demands the rejection of the concept of causality, in any form whatever. The theologians not only denied that inalterable and eternal laws of nature caused all natural occurrences, but rejected formulations of causality that came nearer the standpoint of the *kalām*, as, for example, the suggestion that "causality is not eternal but originated in time, and God created in causes the power always to bring about the same consequences."<sup>88</sup>

This world view excluded the concept of an accidental event because it held that a determining intention is a necessary condition of an event. The exclusion of accident does not mean that an event was regarded as the inevitable consequence of a causality observable in the conformity of events to laws. Within this view of nature, all demands of dogmatic theology could be comfortably accommodated. We have seen with what ease a formula for miracles was found. Nor was it more difficult to accept all instances of the supernatural in which dogma requires a Muslim to believe. Since there is no law and no causality, there is also nothing miraculous and supernatural. When rotting bones are endowed with the accident of life, the Resurrection arrives. It is the result of a particular act, as indeed all natural events are the results of particular acts and not of constant laws.

In this fashion the *kalām*, accepted in its Ash'arite form by Islamic orthodoxy, opposed to Aristotelianism a method of thought well suited to

<sup>86</sup> In Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-sāda al-muttaqīn* (Cairo, A.H. 1311), X, 53.

<sup>87</sup> Ijī, *Mawāqif*, p. 506.

<sup>88</sup> The formulations, which are to be rejected, of the concept of causality are assembled by Sanūsī (end of fifteenth century), *Les Prolégomènes théologiques*, edited and translated by J. D. Luciani (Algiers, 1908), pp. 108-12. Sanūsī, whose compendia are considered fundamental works of orthodox theology, devoted a further dogmatic statement to the refutation of causality. In this book, listed among his works in Abū'l-Qāsim al-Hafnāwī, *Ta'rif al-khalaf bi-rijāl al-salaf* (Algiers, 1325/1907), I, 185, "he refutes, with compelling proofs, the operation of enduring causes."

support theological doctrines. Since the twelfth century it has been the dominant religious philosophy in Islam.

But these subtleties, too, were to have their sovereign value reduced by a counterpoise, by the intervention of a further element of religious history. We shall take it up in our next chapter.



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## INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY AND LAW

Ignaz Goldziher

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Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), a Hungarian scholar, was recognized as one of the outstanding European Islamicists of his time. Presented here for the first time in a scholarly and accurate English translation are six lectures he originally had planned to deliver in America in 1906. Although the lectures were never given, they were published in the original German in 1910 and were translated into many European languages. Since then, this classic work has served as an essential guide for serious students and scholars of Islam.

Based almost entirely on primary sources, the lectures are devoted to the following aspects of Muslim religion and culture: Mohammed and the *Qur'an*; the holy law of Islam; the principles of Muslim theology; asceticism and Sufism; Islamic sects; and developments in modern times.

In an introduction Bernard Lewis discusses the lectures as a product of their time. Supplementary notes have been provided to correct or clarify the author's remarks in the light of more recent research.

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