

# al-Juwaynī

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## Abstract

Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī is considered as the last important representative of so-called “early” (or “classical”) Ash‘arism, a school of Sunni “rational theology” (*kalām*). He was the teacher of the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, with whom Ash‘arism entered a new phase and increasingly came under the influence of Avicennian philosophy. Yet the introduction of “philosophical” ideas into the doctrinal system of Ash‘arism was to some extent anticipated by al-Juwaynī: not only did he engage with the ideas of his opponents in *kalām* theology, but also with those of the *falāsifa*.

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## Life and Works

Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī was born in 1028 in the region of Nīshāpūr. He studied “rational theology” (*kalām*) and Shāfi‘ite law with his father, who had already played a role in Khurāsānian Ash‘arism. After his father’s death, al-Juwaynī followed him as teacher in Nīshāpūr. Yet with the Seljuq conquest of the city in 1037, Ash‘arites like al-Juwaynī faced growing hostility: the vizier Tughril Beg (d. 1063) implemented an anti-Shāfi‘ite and anti-Ash‘arite policy and denounced the practice of *kalām* theology as an illegitimate innovation. In order to escape from persecution, al-Juwaynī fled with other scholars inclined towards Ash‘arism – like the mystic Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), one of Nīshāpūr’s leading scholars – to Baghdad. Later, he spent 4 years in the Ḥijāz and taught at Mecca and Medina – wherefore he earned his honorific title of “the Imam of the two sacred cities” (*imām al-ḥaramayn*). When the vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (d. 1092) eventually came to power the Seldjuqs’ attitude towards Ash‘arism radically changed: the vizier became a patron of Ash‘arism and founded a series of colleges in Iraq, the Arabian Peninsula, and Persia – specifically Khurāsān – to promote their teachings. He invited al-Juwaynī to return to Nīshāpūr and to teach at a *madrasa* that was built specifically for him.

Some of al-Juwaynī’s writings in *kalām* have survived – either partially or in their entirety – and provide substantial information about his thought. The longest is a supercommentary on a work by the eponym of Ash‘arism, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī’s (d.

935-6) *al-Luma'*. Al-Juwaynī's work is entitled *al-Shāmīl fī uṣūl al-dīn*, and it is based on a commentary by Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013), another major figure of Ash'arism. The *Shāmīl* has not survived in its entirety and its largest parts have not been rediscovered. A second text, entitled *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tiqād*, is much shorter than the *Shāmīl* but complete. Allard (1965) argued that the length of al-Juwaynī's works most likely decreased over the course of their relative chronology. The *Shāmīl* and the *Irshād* would then have been followed by *Luma' al-adilla fī qawā'id ahl al-sunna* and finally *al-Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*, a short work dedicated to the vizier Nizām al-Mulk.

Al-Juwaynī died in 1085 near Nīshāpūr. He is often considered as the last important representative of so-called "early" or "classical" Ash'arism. The school then entered a new phase that was marked by an increasing engagement with Avicennian philosophy. It was al-Juwaynī's student, the famous Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who played a significant role in stimulating this transition. Yet the introduction of "philosophical" ideas into the doctrinal system of Ash'arism had already started earlier – this is in fact visible in al-Juwaynī's own thought. Two other students of al-Juwaynī, al-Kiyā' al-Harrāsī (d. 1010–11) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 1118) followed the doctrines of their teacher much closer than al-Ghazālī. Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī has two major works that draw on his teacher's *al-Irshād*: one is explicitly called a "commentary" (*Sharḥ al-Irshād*), the other is entitled *al-Ghunya fī l-kalām*. Al-Juwaynī's *al-Irshād* was furthermore very popular in the Islamic west with numerous commentaries that were devoted to it.

## Teaching

Al-Juwaynī's works and the accounts of later Ash'arite theologians bear witness to a number of revisions and changes in his doctrinal positions and argumentations. Consequently, he did not follow a consistent teaching throughout his life. This reflects perhaps a character trait portrayed by biographers, who describe al-Juwaynī as someone in constant quest for the truth behind the theological and metaphysical problems of his time.

## The Theory of *ḥāl*

One of such problems was the question of the ontological status of the properties of beings. It shall serve here as a first example for providing some insight into al-Juwaynī's views, specifically because this issue had implications on various levels of his teaching, including metaphysics, epistemology, and theology in a narrower sense. The question of the ontological status of the properties of beings concerned on the one hand the qualifications of objects in this world and on the other hand God's attributes. Al-Juwaynī addressed the issue by adopting the so-called theory of *ḥāl* (literally "state," pl. *aḥwāl*). After Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, he was the second major representative of Ash'arism (there were others, less well-known, though) to endorse this theory. Originally the *kalām* notion of *ḥāl* was developed by opponents of Ash'arism, namely, the Mu'tazilite Abū Ḥāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 933) and his followers. The theory of *ḥāl* built upon the assumption that the properties of things have a metaphysical reality. Previ-

ously, *kalām* theologians considered that only entities (i.e. only that which is qualified by properties) possess a reality. The proponents of the *ḥāl* believed, however, that unlike entities a *ḥāl* is metaphysically real without being described by either existence or non-existence. Proponents and opponents of *aḥwāl* divided over the question whether or not we really need to affirm their reality alongside entities which constitute the basic elements of their ontology. According to *kalām* ontology, entities comprise God, atoms, and accidents. Al-Juwaynī's definition of *aḥwāl* departs from dividing them into two groups: the "grounded" or "caused" (*mu'allal*) and the "ungrounded/uncaused" (*ghayr mu'allal*). In the context of *kalām* theology, the Arabic term *mu'allal* always means "caused" by something distinct from the affected object (that is, saying that something is *mu'allal* by itself would be self-contradictory). The "caused/grounded" *ḥāl* is therefore understood by al-Juwaynī as the effect of an entity that resides in another entity and causes it to have a property. This can be realized in two possible ways: the first case applies to an accident that inheres in an atom and causes its locus of inherence to have a property; the second case applies to God in whom reside entitative attributes (*ṣifāt*) which cause him to possess such properties as "knowing," "powerful," or "living." "Ungrounded/uncaused" *aḥwāl* are in turn those qualities that things possess by virtue of themselves, that is, that which is predicated whenever we describe their very nature. In the case of atoms, for example, such qualifications include descriptions like "being an atom," "being existent," and "occupying space." There were essentially three major concerns for al-Juwaynī that lead him to posit in some of his works the reality of the *ḥāl*. The first argument is that the *aḥwāl* are necessary to account for why distinct things may share some common features despite their distinctiveness. In his view, such accidents as the colors black and white are distinguished by their "blackness" and "whiteness," but they both share a common feature: namely, their "being color." If "blackness," "whiteness" and "being color" were not ontologically real, al-Juwaynī argued, we were not able to establish what they have in common and what distinguishes them. This claim is related to al-Juwaynī's second argument, namely, that without affirming the notion of *ḥāl* we would fail to draw definitions of things. The reasoning behind this is that definitions consist in identifying what all defined items have in common and what distinguishes them from other objects. Al-Juwaynī's third argument finally highlights the theological dimension of positing the *ḥāl*. He claims that a central Ash'arite doctrine actually presupposes the reality of the *ḥāl*. Ash'arites posited that God's co-eternal attributes are entities that subsist in Him. This doctrine was criticized by other schools of *kalām* as a fundamental violation of monotheism: they argued that there cannot be more than one eternal being. The Ash'arites countered this objection by positing that if man is knowing by virtue of an entity of knowledge, the same must be true for God. Yet for al-Juwaynī, this analogy can only be valid if the common feature "knowing" has a reality distinct from entitative knowledge. Otherwise, he argues, the reasoning would result into an attempt to prove the existence of God's entitative knowledge by itself. Al-Juwaynī's adoption of the notion of *ḥāl* is found in his two longer works, the *Irshād* and the *Shāmil*. In contrast, al-Juwaynī's *Luma'* and his *al-ʿAqida al-Nizāmiyya* no longer appeal to the theory (Allard 1965; Gimaret 1970; Frank 2004; Benevich 2016).

## The Proof of God

Al-Juwaynī did not only engage with the theories of his detractors within the field of *kalām* theology. As previously mentioned, he also felt the challenge posed by the views and arguments advanced by the *falāsifa*, that is, the “philosophers” who draw on the Hellenic tradition. This challenge had become even more acute with the rise of the Avicennian system in the eleventh century. There were profound divergences between the *falāsifa* and *kalām* theologians, including the controversy over the “philosophers” doctrine of the eternity of the world – a topos that was rejected by their opponents as heretical. Despite these differences, al-Juwaynī acknowledged that some arguments of the *falāsifa* made a good point and could be adopted by *kalām* theology. This was, for example, the case with their demonstration of God’s existence. Whether or not al-Juwaynī’s proof was directly influenced by Avicenna (as claimed, for example, by Davidson 1987; Rudolph 1997) is not entirely clear. Madelung has proposed an alternative scenario, whose starting point is the observation that al-Juwaynī’s argument has significant parallels with that of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 1044). Abū l-Ḥusayn was a Mu‘tazilite theologian from Baghdad, who had lived too early for there to be a possible influence of Avicenna’s theories on his thought. He was, however, trained by Christian philosophers in Baghdad and therefore familiar with *falsafa* teachings (Madelung 2006). Al-Juwaynī’s starting point in revising the proof for God’s existence concerned its central premiss: the traditional argument in *kalām* built on the assumption that the world is created. In order to prove this assumption, it was claimed that bodies, which make up the world, necessarily carry accidents that have a temporal existence. It was then reasoned that bodies must also have temporal existence. However, this argumentation falls short of the possibility of an infinite series of created accidents. Yet the upshot of this assumption would have been that an eternal body could possess an infinite number of accidents, an idea that completely undermined the argument for creation. This deficiency of the traditional proof was already identified by Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. Al-Juwaynī took these reflections into consideration and therefore demonstrated that whatever is created has “a first.” He thereby neutralized the argument of an infinite series of accidents inhering in an eternal body (Davidson 1987; Madelung 2006). A second version of al-Juwaynī’s revised proof for God’s existence eventually got along without the necessity of positing accidents at all. As mentioned, the existence of accidents was traditionally affirmed to prove that a particular body must be created. It was then concluded that the temporal existence of bodies requires a creator, who must be God. This conclusion was drawn by way of analogy with our worldly experience that any such works as manufacture, writing need a manufacturer, writer, etc. In this second version of the proof, al-Juwaynī no longer appeals to the case of a particular body and rather considers the creation of the world as a whole: he claims that the world, instead of being existent, could also be non-existent or come into existence at different times. This, he went on to argue, implies its being possibly existent, which, as he says, self-evidently implies that there must be an agent by virtue of whose arbitrary choice the world comes into existence at a given time instead of continuing in a state of non-existence or of coming into existence at some other time. This agent and creator of the world, he concludes, cannot be other than God. Al-Juwaynī denotes God’s choosing by the verb “to particularize” (*ikhtaṣṣa*), and, therefore, the proof is also known as

“particularization argument.” The central assumption that underlies the argument is an idea formulated by Avicenna, namely, that the existence of the world is contingent (*mumkin al-wujūd*) and that God is necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*). Referring to the world, al-Juwaynī in turn uses the formulations *jā’iz al-wujūd* or *wujūd mumkin*. Yet the core of al-Juwaynī’s line of reasoning is already found in Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s teaching, who uses, however, another (less Avicennian) terminology (Davidson 1987; Rudolph 1997; Madelung 2006).

## Human Acts

With regard to the free will problem, the Ash‘arites were determinists. The doctrine of divine determinism was for them a logical corollary of God’s omnipotence, which cannot be restricted in any way. They therefore believed that whatever happens in this world depends on Him, including human actions. Nonetheless, the Ash‘arites had to provide an explanation how man can be held morally responsible in the absence of freedom of action. The school’s founder al-Ash‘arī therefore developed a theory that distinguishes between two types of acts: appealing to our intuition, he claimed that such motions of the body as walking on the one hand, and trembling on the other hand do not occur in the same way. Trembling implies our “weakness” and occur “necessarily,” whereas this is not the case with our walking from A to B. While both acts are determined by God, they are still distinct because our walking occurs voluntarily and our trembling not. Therefore, we would never be held responsible for our trembling, but we are accountable for our voluntary acts. Now if “necessary” acts involve our weakness, the opposite must be true for voluntary acts: they involve our “power” (which means an accident of “power” (*qudra* or *quwwa*) in the agent). Al-Ash‘arī’s theory proposed an alternative to the doctrine of freedom of action in order to account for our moral responsibility, but he fell short of providing solutions to some problems, and so it was up to his later followers to resolve them. One of these questions was the precise function of “power.” Al-Ash‘arī posited that this “power” is conjoined to man’s voluntary acts but has no effect whatsoever. In the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī follows this idea, and he consequently failed to explain why one should posit the existence of “power” if it is not correlated in any way to man’s acts. Later, however, in *al-Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*, al-Juwaynī develops an original theory of human acts that departs from the assumption that man’s power *must* be effective. His central argument is that otherwise God’s imposing duties and obligations was no longer a tenable idea. In order to resolve this theological dilemma, he affirmed that man’s acting is caused by his power. He could consequently argue that whatever we do is controlled by our very own selves. By this line of reasoning, he provided an explanation why we are rightly rewarded or punished for our acts. Nonetheless, al-Juwaynī did not give up the central Ash‘arite idea that all happenings in the world originate in God: he maintained the claim of God being the all-encompassing Creator by reasoning that man’s power is only an intermediate cause, which in turn is created by God. This theory was not uncontroversial. Al-Juwaynī was later blamed because his reasoning recalls to some extent the notion of emanation supported by the *falāsifa* – that is the idea of God being the first cause from which all other causal relations proceed. Irrespective of whether or not al-Juwaynī was really inspired by the idea of emanation, this is at least not entirely

excluded: as we have seen, he was actually acquainted with, and even adopted, ideas developed by the *falāsifa* (Gimaret 1980).

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