Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī's (d. 321/933) Theory of 'States' (*aḥwāl*) and its Adaption by Ash'arite Theologians

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Abstract

This chapter discusses the notion of 'states' (*aḥwāl*) in Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theology. The concept was borrowed from linguistics by the Mu'tazilite theologian Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933). It helped him to explain the nature of God's attributes without asserting the existence of co-eternal beings in God. The conception of attributes as 'states' became a central doctrine among Abū Hāshim's followers, the so-called Bahshamiyya school. The theory of *aḥwāl* was first rejected by Ash'arite theologians. With Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), however, an important representative of the school eventually came to use the term within the framework of his theory of attributes. Later, Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085–6) also followed al-Bāqillānī in adopting the notion of *ḥāl*.

Keywords

ḥāl, attributes, Mu'tazila, Ash'ariyya, Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī, Bahshamiyya, al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī

The notion of 'states' (*aḥwāl*, sing. *ḥāl*) was introduced into Mu'tazilite theology by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī. By adopting this concept, he intended to solve a fundamental problem that had challenged theologians for several generations. The principal question which Muslim theologians posed was: How can we conceive of God as one and, at the same time, describe Him by a multitude of qualities? With the concept of *ḥāl*, Abū Hāshim provided a category alongside the nature of mere things or entities (*ashyā'*, sing. *shay'*). Because only things were believed to be either existent or non-existent, Abū Hāshim's definition of God's multiple qualities as 'states' helped him to avoid asserting the existence of other beings within God.

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None of Abū Hāshim's own writings are any longer extant and we therefore do not have access to his original formulation of this theory. Consequently, his teachings can only be reconstructed on the basis of later sources. In his study of Abū Hāshim's theory of attributes, Richard Frank was the first modern scholar to rely extensively on the writings of the later adherents of Abū Hāshim's school, which was named after him as Bahshamiyya. Frank's interpretation was later fundamentally questioned by Ahmed Alami. On the basis of recently explored Bahshamī primary sources, Alami's critique is, however, no longer tenable. These sources actually confirm Frank's results and, furthermore, allow scholars to refine his understanding of the theory. The concept of 'states' was first rejected by Ash'arite theologians. With Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), however, an important representative of the school eventually came to use the term within the framework of his theory of attributes. Later, Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085–6) also followed al-Bāqillānī in adopting the notion of *ḥāl*.

I. The Problem of Divine Attributes

Discussions on the characteristics of beings, and in particular God's attributes, have always been of central concern to Muslim theologians. Essentially, these discussions arose from two principal assumptions about the nature of God that are, from a logical standpoint, difficult to reconcile. Appealing to divine revelation, theologians argued for a strict understanding of monotheism and negated any multiplicity in God. However, the Qur'ān does not only stress that God is one. It equally characterizes God by a plurality of properties, reflected in His 'most beautiful names' (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*). It was, therefore, necessary for theologians to explain the precise sense in which predications such as 'God knows' reflect His reality. They could then ask to what such predications like God's knowing refer. The answer to this problem was exceptionally difficult. On the one hand, to affirm that God possesses eternal knowledge could be interpreted as positing the reality of something distinct from God that, like Him, is also eternal. In the opinion of some theologians, such an affirmation would fundamentally violate the notion of monotheism. On the other hand, however, there were theologians who pointed out that to affirm that God *is* knowledge undermines divine transcendence. If neither of these two solutions were satisfactory, how then could the Qur'ānic description of a knowing God be true?

According to reports by later authors, the earliest speculation on God's attributes emerged towards the end of the second/eighth century. It appears that earlier Muslim theologians who applied rational argumentation were initially more concerned with issues other than those centred on resolving the problem of God's attributes. The Mu'tazilite Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. c. 200/815) is said to have formulated a negative theology when interpreting the epithets of God found in the Qur'ān. According to his position, the statement 'God is knowing' merely means that He is not ignorant. Like any other form of negative theology, this approach attempted to do justice to God's nature on the linguistic level, since His reality was actually believed to be beyond what can be expressed through language. In

the specific case of ʿAmr, the theory's aim was to preserve God's absolute transcendence by avoiding the postulation of any multiplicity within God that undermines His oneness. This negative theology was, however, unsatisfactory because it was not entirely consistent with the Qur'ānic text, which usually expresses God's characteristics by way of affirmation rather than negation (van Ess 1991: iii. 37–8).

The first theologian to analyse systematically what the Qur'ān means when it predicates something of God was the Mu'tazilite Abū l-Hudhayl (d. 227/841–2). He was not convinced by his older contemporary's negative theology and therefore maintained that such properties as 'knowing' do refer to a reality, namely the act of knowing. It is possible that Abū l-Hudhayl believed his position was supported by Qur'ānic references to actual attributes, for example 'Say: The knowledge is with God' (*qul: innamā l-ʿilm ʿinda Llāh*, Q 67: 26) or 'My Lord embraces all things in His knowledge' (*innamā ʿilmuhā ʿinda rabbī*, Q 6: 80). Abū l-Hudhayl therefore argued that it was valid to infer from statements like 'God is knowing' the presence of knowledge (*ʿilm*) by which God is knowing. Nevertheless, in interpreting such references he was always conscious that he had to avoid positing the reality of distinct knowledge or power in God at all costs, since this would violate the idea of God's absolute oneness. Abū l-Hudhayl therefore affirmed the identity between God and His knowledge, His power, and so forth (van Ess 1991: iii. 272–6, iv. 441–2).

Abū l-Hudhayl's exegetical approach was a turning point in the theological discussion on divine attributes and marked the end of the negative theology of earlier thinkers. His conclusions were, however, received with scepticism; he had not resolved the fundamental problem, which arose in relation to the principle of monotheism when a plurality of attributes in God was affirmed. In addition, Abū l-Hudhayl's theory raised new questions. His formulation suggested that asserting that God knows, creates etc. still refers to one and the same reality, namely, God Himself. Assuming this is the case, why then should the act of knowing be distinguished from the act of creating if, according to Abū l-Hudhayl, each of these acts is identical with God? Consequently, should we not conclude that God in Himself is an act of knowledge and of creating and that, therefore, knowing and creating have exactly the same meaning when applied to God?

It was specifically in reaction to such problems raised by Abū l-Hudhayl's theory that his younger contemporary, al-Nazzām (d. between 220/835 and 230/845), completely rejected the idea that God is knowing by an act of knowledge or creating by an act of creation. To solve the problem of attributes, he sought categorically to avoid positing entitative knowledge or power when speaking about the ontological ground of God's attributes. Al-Nazzām's solution was to argue that God's knowing, creating, etc. refer to God Himself (*ithbāt dhātihī*), rather than to an act of knowledge or creation, since He is knowing and creating by virtue of Himself (*ʿālim/qādir bi-nafsihī*) (van Ess 1991: iii. 399f.). With al-Nazzām's overturning of Abū l-Hudhayl's thesis, a major step was taken in the discussion of the problem of attributes. The later Baṣran tradition of the Mu'tazila adopted the same formulation, which they took as their point of departure for further reflection on this topic. Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915), the first of

‘the two masters’ of Baṣran Mu‘tazilism, used al-Nazzām’s label ‘*li-nafsihi*’ whenever referring to attributes that describe objects as what they are in themselves. With his adaption of the notion, Abū ‘Alī went beyond al-Nazzām’s original idea, since he discussed the issue of God’s attributes within the broader context of the nature of both created and uncreated being. He maintained that if the affirmation ‘God is eternal’ (*Allāh qadīm*) refers to the reality of the described object, the same applies when we say that ‘black is black’ (*al-sawād sawād*): both predications express that by which an object is called by virtue of itself (*li-nafsihi*). This specific type of predication constitutes only one among several categories of attributes, including attributes that are not grounded in the described object itself but, for example, in another entity (*li-illa*) that is distinct from the qualified object (Frank 1982a: 261f.).

II. The Origin and Significance of Abū Hāshim’s Concept of ‘States’

Following al-Nazzām’s reasoning, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī argued against Abū l-Hudhayl that a description of God as being knowing cannot possibly refer to entitative knowledge. Abū ‘Alī agreed with al-Nazzām’s critique of Abū l-Hudhayl’s thesis that divine knowledge was identical with God. For both theologians, Abū l-Hudhayl’s thesis did not satisfactorily resolve the problem of attributes. They consequently argued that the predication ‘God is knowing’ refers to nothing but God himself.

The logical corollary of this theory is that predications such as ‘he is knowing’ reflect different ontological realities when affirmed of God and human beings. The meaning of ‘being knowing’ was, according to Abū ‘Alī, the same whether applied to God or man—it simply negates ignorance in the subject of predication. However, that which ‘being knowing’ refers to is not identical when applied to God and created bodies: unlike God, a body’s ‘being knowing’ always refers to something distinct from the knower, namely an entity of knowledge that is the ground of its being so. However, for Abū ‘Alī the descriptive term (or attribute: *ṣifa*) itself has no extralinguistic reality in either case. He simply regarded the *ṣifa* as identical with the act of description or attribution (*wasf*). Consequently, it was impossible in the context of Abū ‘Alī’s theory to explain or even talk about the qualities of beings without referring to their specific grounds. Abū ‘Alī’s theory thus failed to provide a framework within which to conceive of attributes as such (Frank 1978: 15–19; Frank 1982a: 259).

Within the Baṣran Mu‘tazilite tradition, Abū ‘Alī’s son Abū Hāshim was the first to provide a theoretical foundation for the ontological nature of attributes, one which was consistent with his understanding of beings, and of God in particular. He built on his father’s theory by introducing a new category into the conception of the reality of beings and thereby avoided the limitations set by an ontology that only conceived of either existent or non-existent categories. According to the Baṣran tradition, the world consists of things or entities (pl. *ashyā’/dhawāt*,

sing. *shay'*/*dhāt*). These things can be the subject in a predicative sentence and can be described by specific qualities, which *a fortiori* implies that they become objects of knowledge. 'Things' are subdivided into God, whose existence is eternal and necessary, and created things, whose existence is only temporal and possible. The Baṣran Mu'tazilites believed the created world to be composed of atoms (pl. *jawāhir*, sing. *jawhar*), i.e. indivisible particles of which bodies are made up, and accidents (pl. *a'rad*, sing. *'arad*), which are considered as the grounds of the changing qualities of atoms and bodies, including their annihilation, and also of location, motion, colours etc. (Dhanani 1993: 15–20, 29–33; Thiele 2013: 59–74). Following intense internal debate within the early Mu'tazilite tradition, the Baṣran school ultimately settled on a controversial position regarding the non-existence of created beings. They claimed that the non-existent is also a *shay'*/*dhāt*, that is, that existence is not required for things to become objects of knowledge and of predication (Frank 1980). According to the Baṣrans, if the non-existent is not a 'thing' then this also entails that it cannot be an object of knowledge. This position would consequently lead to the inescapable but unacceptable conclusion that God could not be eternally omniscient—since omniscience necessarily implies that God knows His creatures before He creates them. The upshot of this line of reasoning is that without antecedent knowledge of His creatures, God would be unable to create them. Some Baṣran theologians put forward the ancillary argument that if the non-existent cannot be known, man himself would then be unaware of any action he performed in the past, since after having been performed such actions of course no longer existed.

Abū Hāshim added to the three aforementioned subcategories of 'things' (God, atoms, and accidents) a new ontological category that is neither existent nor non-existent. To conceive of and express this new category he adopted the concept of 'states' (*ahwāl*, sing. *hāl*) developed in the field of grammar and transferred it to the ontology of attributes. In Arabic grammar, *hāl* denotes the function of indefinite accusative nouns that describe the circumstances of the subject or the object in a verbal sentence. This so-called 'accusative of state' is also required for predicates of the verb *kāna*/*yakūnu* ('to be'). It seems that Abū Hāshim's analysis of the verb *kāna* was adopted from the grammarians of Baṣra. They distinguished between the use of *kāna*, *yakūnu* as a 'complete verb' (*fi'l tamm*) in the meaning of 'to exist' on the one hand, and an 'incomplete' (*nāqiṣa*) verb on the other hand. Whereas the 'complete' *kāna* together with its subject forms a self-contained sentence, the 'incomplete' *kāna* is transitive and requires an accusative object. However, some syntactical constructions with *kāna* followed by an accusative noun only appear to be transitive on the surface. In fact, the presumed complement has to be interpreted as a *hāl* by which the subject of the 'complete', intransitive *kāna* is characterized. In such cases, the predicate must not be understood as an equivalent to the subject, but rather expresses a manner of being or circumstance of the subject. Abū Hāshim applied this grammatical analysis to predications about things and interpreted the properties attributed to a subject as a 'state' (*hāl*). By adopting this line of reasoning, Abū Hāshim and his followers consistently avoided speaking of 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*), 'will' (*irāda*), etc. whenever referring to the attributes of things as such. The characteristics

of beings were instead expressed by way of an accusative of state, for example by such formulations as *kawnuhu ʿāliman* ('his being knowing'), *kawnuhu murīdan* ('his being willing'), etc. (Frank 1978: 20–2; Frank 1982b: 344f.). When the Bahshamīs used the nouns 'knowledge' (*ʿilm*) or 'will' (*irāda*), they exclusively denoted accidents, that is distinctly existing grounds of a body's 'being knowing' or 'being willing'.

With his conception of attributes as 'states', Abū Hāshim assigned an ontological reality to the attributes and thereby diverged significantly from his father's position. According to Abū ʿAlī, only the grounds of the properties of beings have any reality in the qualified subject, whereas attributes (*ṣifāt*) merely denote the act of describing a subject. In principle, the Bahshamīs also applied the notion of *ṣifa* to the act of describing itself. The extant literature reflects, however, a more flexible use of the term *ṣifa*, with theologians tending to use it as a synonym of *ḥāl*. Consequently, affirming the same ontological reality for the *ṣifa* that was posited for the *ḥāl* became widely accepted. In their terminology, the Bahshamīs described the reality of the *ḥāl* (or *ṣifa*) by the term *thubūt* (or *thabata/yathbutu*) as opposed to the existence (*wujūd*) of things or entities.

As previously outlined, only entities can be known when considered in isolation. In contrast, attributes (whether referred to as *ḥāl* or *ṣifa*) cannot be objects of knowledge. They are rather 'intelligible' (*maʿqūl* or *ʿuqila*), so that a thing is known as being in the state by which it is qualified. Stating that someone is living (*kawnuhu hayyan*) consequently means that I know the subject referred to as being living. It does not, however, entail that that subject *is* life, while similarly, if it is affirmed as living, this of itself does not account for why the subject is living. The conceptual distinction between the reality of the *ḥāl* and that of its ontological ground allowed for a univocal understanding of two subjects' being living, irrespective of whether or not they are alive for the same reason. This Bahshamī conception was made possible because knowledge of the ontological ground of a property was no longer regarded as a prerequisite for understanding the specific property of a subject (Frank 1978: 22–4).

III. The Typologies of Attributes in Bahshamī Theology

In assigning to attributes a reality by way of a *ḥāl*—i.e. a reality that is conceived independently of the *ḥāl*'s ontological root—the identification of an attribute's specific ground was thereby deferred and left to a higher level of theological analysis. The reasoning behind this is that we become aware of an object being qualified by a property *before* we even understand anything about how it is qualified by this property. For example, we would usually become aware *that* a specific object actually exists before we understand *why* it exists. In order to ascertain the ground of the object's existence, we then have to consider further factors. Whenever an object comes into existence at a given moment in time and later ceases to exist, we have to conclude that its existence is contingent and therefore depends on

an act of creation. If, however, the object in question exists eternally, it must necessarily have an eternal ground that causes it to exist. It was, therefore, only a logical further step to classify attributes according to the manner or modality (*kayfiyya*) by which they become actual (*thabata*). Richard Frank was the first to make a comprehensive attempt to reconstruct this classification on the basis of Bahshamī sources from the fourth/tenth to early fifth/eleventh centuries (Frank 1978; Frank 1982b: 345f.).

Since Abū Hāshim's own writings are no longer extant, his original typology of attributes cannot be securely established. It appears, however, quite likely that he distinguished between various types of attributes according to their causes, since this is a common feature of later accounts of the theory. This picture is also confirmed by Ash'arite discussions of the Bahshamī theory of attributes (Gimaret 1970). Nonetheless, any attempt to reconstruct Abū Hāshim's original thought remains speculative and therefore controversial, because the extant literature composed by his later followers does not provide a unified picture of the classification of attributes.

In a more recent interpretation of Abū Hāshim's theory of *aḥwāl*, Ahmed Alami fundamentally questioned whether the manner by which attributes become actual represented a criterion for Abū Hāshim and his school's classification of attributes. Rather, Alami interprets Abū Hāshim's notion of *ḥāl* as constituting a central element of a new ontology of immanence, which is founded on three 'modes'. According to Alami, each of these 'modes' has the same meaning when applied to God and His creatures. Based on this assumption, Alami detects in Abū Hāshim's theory an 'ontology of univocity' between divine and created beings, that radically broke with the transcendentalism of earlier thinkers (Alami 2001). New Bahshamī sources have come to light since Alami's publication, including treatises that deal with the theory of attributes in a much more comprehensive fashion than the texts explored by him and Frank. In the light of these findings, both Alami's rejection of the classification of attributes according to causal criteria and his immanentist reading of the notion of *ḥāl* appear highly problematic. The texts rather confirm the overall understanding of the theory as outlined by Frank, but also allow further refinement of his analysis (Thiele 2013: 131–200).

In relation to the classification of attributes, there appears to be much common ground in the Bahshamī sources. Aside from some categories that are central to the theory, there are variations in some definitions of specific categories and also in their precise number. These variations probably emerged according to developments in different periods and regions, which were the natural result of the spread of Bahshamī teachings over a wide geographic area and continuing refinements within the school tradition over several centuries.

- (1) A category of attributes that consistently figures in Bahshamī accounts, called *al-ṣifa al-dhātīyya*, *ṣifat al-dhāt*, or *al-ṣifa al-naḥsiyya*, is commonly rendered in modern studies as the 'attribute of the essence'. This type of attribute describes or defines what a thing is in itself. It identifies specific objects in such expressions as 'the atom's being an atom' (*kawn al-jawhar*

jawharan). In other words, qualifying something as an atom distinguishes it from other objects that are not atoms, such as, for example, God or the colour black.

Since a qualification expressed by the ‘attribute of the essence’ describes what an object fundamentally is, it is not grounded in or conditioned by any other entity. An atom is only described as being an atom because it is what it is. There is nothing outside this object that necessarily causes it either to be or to eventually become an atom.

Since the identity of an object finds its expression in the ‘attribute of the essence’, the Bahshamīs regard this attribute as the ground or basis on which something is intelligible and thereby becomes an object of knowledge (*maʿlūm*). Two different things, such as the accidents of the colours black and white, are distinguishable because they do not share their ‘attribute of the essence’. Accordingly, the Bahshamīs spoke of similarity between any two things whenever their ‘attribute of the essence’ was interchangeable.

Unlike any other category of attributes, the ‘attribute of the essence’ has an eternal and necessary reality, irrespective of whether or not the qualified object actually exists. This theory allowed the Bahshamīs to account for how the actual existent can be known and also the non-existent or the possible. Furthermore, it also gave them a firm basis on which to argue that God is eternally omniscient, that is, that He also knows His creatures before they come into existence.

The ‘attributes of the essence’ of created things were, as a rule, derived from the terms that denote particular objects—such as the atom’s being an atom (*kawn al-jawhar jawharan*) or the colour black’s being black (*kawn al-sawād sawādan*). In contrast, when applied to God the ‘attribute of the essence’ was defined by various Bahshamī theologians in different terms. It appears that most of the earlier texts identified the ‘attribute of the essence’ with God’s ‘being eternal’ (*kawnuhu qadīman*)—a position that was adopted from Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbāʾī (Gimaret 1970: 73f.; Frank 1978: 53, 68, 86 n. 57). In particular, Zaydī scholars inclined to Bahshamī teachings—including the Persian al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) and scholars belonging to the Yemeni strand founded in the sixth/twelfth century such as al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ (d. 584/1188)—preferred instead to speak of ‘God’s most characteristic attribute’ (*ṣifat Allāh al-akhaṣṣ*) (Thiele 2013: 164f.). Although the sources are silent about this inconsistency in identifying God’s ‘attribute of the essence’, a reasonable argument for the latter choice may have been that the idea of God’s eternity was too closely related, if not tantamount, to His being eternally existent. As will be seen, God’s attribute of existence—or more precisely ‘His being eternally existent’ (*kawnuhu mawjūdan fīmā lam yazal*)—was, however, considered an attribute belonging to the following category of attributes, that is one of those four attributes entailed by God’s ‘attribute of the essence’.

- (2) The second category of attributes constitutes a fundamental pillar of Abū Hāshim’s solution to the problem of attributes. By affirming the *ḥāl* as an ontological reality, Abū Hāshim introduced a new concept that had not been considered by earlier Muʿtazilites as a potential ground for

the attributes of beings. He did not conceive of the reality of the *ḥāl* as an existing entity that is distinct from the qualified being but instead understood it as a manner of being. Consequently, Abū Hāshim was able to explain the foundation of specific properties, distinct from the description of things in themselves, without having to posit any other entity as the ground of the property in question. For example, the Bahshamīs reasoned that any existing atom must occupy space (*taḥayyaza*). However, affirming that an atom occupies space is not, according to the Bahshamīs, a description or definition of the atom as such. The only property an atom possesses by virtue of itself is ‘its being an atom’ (*kawnuhu jawharan*), that is, its ‘attribute of the essence’. Nevertheless, simply describing something as an atom already implies that it occupies space when it is brought into existence. The Bahshamīs therefore argued that the ground for an atom occupying space must be its ‘attribute of the essence’, that is, a *ḥāl*, and that the *ḥāl* is effective once the atom exists. The idea that one attribute could effect another was only conceivable because according to Abū Hāshim’s theory of *aḥwāl* the attribute was no longer regarded as a pure utterance, but instead was considered to be ontologically real.

The same reasoning was applied to God’s eternal attributes. Since it is in the very nature of God that He is necessarily existent, capable of creating the world, omniscient, and living, the Bahshamīs regarded these properties as entailed by His ‘attribute of the essence’. Unlike al-Nazzām or Abū ‘Alī, the Bahshamīs thereby rejected that these attributes are directly grounded in God as He is in Himself (*li-naḥsihi/li-dhātihī*), since none of the four aforementioned eternal properties expresses the fullness of His being. Consequently, predicating that He is God has to be distinguished from predicating that He is eternally powerful, knowing, living or existing. For the Bahshamīs, He is characterized by these properties *because* He is God. From a reverse perspective, the knowledge that He is God (i.e. that what He is in Himself) is inferred from the knowledge that He is eternally powerful, knowing, living, and existent.

As is the case with the four characteristics God necessarily has, attributes that are in turn effected by other attributes can have eternal reality. Unlike the ‘attributes of the essence’, however, they are not eternal by themselves. Rather, they are eternal because the conditions for attributes like God’s being powerful, knowing, living, and existing are eternally fulfilled: God’s ‘attribute of the essence’ unconditionally effects His being existent, which is the only prerequisite for His being living, and in turn being living is the condition for His being powerful and knowing. It has to be noted that the hierarchical order between these four attributes is a mere logical dependence and that none of them temporally follows another.

Moreover, attributes of this category that stand apart from God’s eternal attributes have a temporal reality, since they are conditioned by the temporal existence of the object they qualify. An atom’s occupying space is, for example, only a necessary property of an atom during the limited period of its existence.

The Bahshamīs employed the verb *iqṭadā* (‘to entail’) to describe the way in which one attribute causes another attribute. The effective attribute was therefore denoted by the active participle (*al-muqṭadī*) and the effected attribute as *al-ṣifa al-muqṭadāt*. In Bahshamī texts, we find a narrow and a broader definition of what can be termed as belonging to the category of ‘entailed attributes’. In particular, the earlier extant works restrict the *ṣifāt muqṭadāt* to those attributes that become actual by virtue of the ‘attribute of the essence’ whenever a thing comes into existence—such as the atom’s occupying space or God’s four eternal attributes. Occasionally, these sources speak of *al-ṣifa al-muqṭadāt ‘an ṣifat al-dhāt* (i.e. ‘the attribute entailed by the “attribute of the essence”’). Later Bahshamī theologians from the late fifth/eleventh century onwards, and primarily their Yemeni representatives, tended to broaden the definition of the *ṣifāt muqṭadāt* to any kind of attribute that is grounded in another attribute (Thiele 2013: 146f.).

In his analysis of the Bahshamī theory of attributes, Richard Frank only deals with the narrow definition of the *ṣifāt muqṭadāt* for which he suggests the translation ‘essential attributes’. In fact, the attributes entailed by the ‘attribute of the essence’ do not describe things as what they are in themselves, but they sometimes reveal the distinctiveness of the ‘attribute of the essence’ by which they are effected. The reasoning behind this was that some attributes can only be entailed by a specific ‘attribute of the essence’. For example, something described as occupying space can only be identified as an atom, because no other class of being can occupy space. Therefore, the attribute of ‘occupying space’ (*kawnuhu mutahayyiz*) must necessarily be entailed by the atom’s ‘attribute of the essence’ (*kawnuhu jawharan*), so that ‘the atom’s being an atom’ becomes manifest through ‘its occupying space’ (= the *ṣifa muqṭadāt*). Although Frank’s translation of *ṣifa muqṭadāt* by ‘essential attribute’ makes sense in this context, it does not sufficiently clarify the central distinction in the Bahshamī theory between *ṣifat al-dhāt* (i.e. the first category in the typology of attributes) and *ṣifa muqṭadāt*. In some cases, the translation ‘essential attribute’ is even inappropriate, because it is not applicable to the broader understanding of *ṣifa muqṭadāt* and does not render the exact sense of the Arabic term.

- (3) The category of the attributes effected by an agent (*al-ṣifāt bi-l-fā’il/al-mustaḥaqqa bi-l-fā’il/al-ḥāsila bi-l-fā’il*) has to be understood in the framework of the Bahshamī theory of existence. According to this theory, not only the existent but also the non-existent is considered as a potential object of knowledge. The Bahshamīs therefore strictly distinguished between the attribute that describes a thing in itself and its attribute of existence. Consequently, predicating that an object is an atom has a different meaning than asserting that the atom exists. Whereas the former predication merely expresses that I know the object as being an atom, the latter asserts that I know the atom as being existent. Things can therefore be known irrespective of whether or not they actually exist. Existence is thus a supplemental quality, and in the case of created beings, it is only temporal and possible, as opposed to the eternal reality of the ‘attribute of the essence’ by virtue of which all things are knowable.

Bahshamī theologians argued that the existence of created beings cannot be grounded in the qualified being itself. Instead, their possible existence must be founded on an exterior reason that is not necessarily effective. According to the Bahshamī theory of causation, only autonomous agents (*fāʿil*) are effective in such a way that they could refrain equally from producing their effect and vice versa: agents never act necessarily, since their ability to perform an act always implies the ability to do the opposite. The Muʿtazilite school regarded God and human beings as autonomous agents, each of which has different capacities: since God is omnipotent, He is able to bring atoms and accidents into existence, while human abilities are restricted to the creation of certain accidents only.

The temporal attribute of existence is not the only attribute that was considered as belonging to the category of attributes effected by agents. The Bahshamīs also included further qualities derived from an object’s coming into existence. If, for example, an act of creation is motivated by specific intentions, the created object is further qualified by additional attributes that are correlated to the agent’s will. The act then occurs ‘in a specific manner’ (*ʿalā wajh*): depending on the intentions of the agent, speech can, for example, be uttered as a command, a statement or a question.

- (4) The Bahshamīs agreed with a predominant theory among theologians that was used to explain the changing properties of bodies. They claimed that such contingent properties are grounded in accidents that inhere in the discrete parts of bodies. According to this idea, a moving (*mutaḥarrik*) body is the substrate of accidents of motion (*ḥaraka*), a resting (*sākin*) body is inhered by accidents of rest (*sukūn*), etc. In the Bahshamī terminology, such accidents are called *ʿilla* or *maʿnā*. These terms gave their name to the category of attributes caused by an accident: they are called *ṣifāt maʿnawiyya*, *li-maʿnā* or *li-ʿilla*. Like attributes effected by an agent, these ‘accidental’ properties are grounded in an entity other than the qualified object.

Within the classical ontology of *kalām*, accidents belong to the group of created beings and have, by definition, possible existence. This explains why the attributes grounded in accidents are temporal and possible, since their reality depends on the existence of accidents: a moving body only moves as long as it is a substrate of accidents of movement; it still continues to exist when it stops moving and even could exist without ever having moved.

The Bahshamī notion of ‘accidental attributes’ also includes such attributes as men’s being knowing, capable of action and living. As opposed to God, these attributes do not necessarily qualify the human body: some people are unable to perform certain acts which others are able to perform, human knowledge is restricted, and humankind’s life limited. Ontologically, human imperfection was interpreted as a non-presence of such accidents by virtue of which he would be knowing or able to perform certain acts; and death, too, was conceived as the absence of an accident of life.

- (5) A fifth category of attributes is frequently mentioned in the writings

of the prominent fourth/tenth-century theologian ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) and his students, but is increasingly absent in later Bahshamī sources. This group of attributes is said to be grounded neither in the qualified object nor in another entity (*lā li-l-nafs wa-lā li-ma’ḥū*), and applied to the attribute of being perceiving (*kawnuhu mudrikan*). Against his father’s position, Abū Hāshim maintained that perception is not an accident like the will or human knowledge. He argued that living beings are perceiving whenever an object of perception exists, unless they suffer from physical defects. Consequently, God is not eternally perceiving, although He possesses all necessary prerequisites: since His creation is only temporal, He cannot perceive it from pre-eternity. Abū Hāshim therefore claimed that the attribute of being perceiving is effected by the attribute of being living, provided that all conditions are fulfilled.

While Bahshamī theologians agreed that beings are perceiving by virtue of an attribute, and so neither by the perceiver himself (*li-l-nafs*) nor by another entity (*li-ma’ḥū*), they differed about the necessity of positing a category in its own right for the attribute of perception. Towards the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, the Ḥanafī Bahshamī scholar al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī (d. 494/1101) appears to have been one of the first to omit the fifth category. In his ‘Book on the effect and the effector’ (*Kitāb al-Ta’thīr wa-l-mu’aththir*), he cites the attribute of perception as an example of an attribute ‘entailed’ (*muqtadā*) by another attribute and apparently concluded it to be considered as analogous to the atom’s occupying space or God’s eternal attributes (Thiele 2012: 308). Nevertheless, al-Ḥākim al-Jishumī’s position was inconsistent. In other theological works, he stuck to the concept of attributes that are neither grounded in the qualified object nor in another entity and associated it with the attribute of perception. It was only among later Yemeni Zaydīs inclined to Bahshamī doctrines that the quadripartite classification became the predominant doctrine. By adopting a broader understanding of the *ṣifāt muqtadāt* and defining them as any attribute entailed by another attribute, the fifth category of attributes eventually became obsolete: the attribute of perception then fulfils all conditions for classification as an ‘entailed attribute’ (Thiele 2013: 146f., 167f.).

The most comprehensive and systematic account of the theory of attributes we possess is relatively late. It was written by the sixth/twelfth century Zaydī theologian al-Ḥasan al-Raṣṣāṣ, who belonged to the founding generation of a new Bahshamī school in Yemen. His treatise on attributes exhibits some features of later conceptual developments, e.g. a consistent reduction of the formerly five to four categories. In addition, al-Raṣṣāṣ adopts a genuine approach that provides insightful perspectives on how the classification outlined above could be used in theological reflections and argumentations.

Al-Raṣṣāṣ addresses the topic of attributes in a manner that could be characterized as an epistemological approach. Bearing in mind that in Bahshamī teaching, attributes or ‘states’ are not conceived as objects of knowledge, but as that by which ‘things’ (*ashyā’/dhawāt*) are known, al-Raṣṣāṣ’ intention was to explore systematically what each category of attributes reveals about things. The ques-

tion arose since a number of predications that were made of God were equally made of created beings. Moreover, the Bahshamīs maintained that whenever a property is predicated of various subjects, the affirmed *ḥāl* is univocal. Being able to act (*kawnuhu qādiran*) has one and the same meaning for all beings capable of autonomous actions: it entails the possibility that a subject performs an act and that an act occurs by virtue of the agent’s capability. In this sense, affirming that God is able to act is tantamount to predicating the same about human beings, although God is necessarily capable of actions while human abilities are only possible ones. Necessity and possibility are, however, only modalities (*kayfiyyāt*) of the same *ḥāl* (Frank 1978: 66–72; Alami 2001: 101–39).

Nonetheless, the Bahshamīs certainly did not intend to claim that two subjects with a common attribute are necessarily alike. In order to avoid any anthropomorphic misinterpretations of their thought, they had to answer an essential theological question: how can it be true that God is knowing in the same sense as humans are, without undermining God’s absolute transcendence? It was precisely this issue to which al-Raṣṣāṣ responded through his epistemological approach. For each category of attributes, he establishes a set of criteria to analyse whether a common attribute shared by two things reveals a similarity between the qualified beings or between that in which the common attribute is grounded. As explained by al-Raṣṣāṣ, attributes caused by the presence of an accident (*al-ṣifāt al-maḥwīyya*) and attributes entailed by another attribute (*al-ṣifāt al-muqḍāt*) are, for example, not by themselves a sufficient indication as to the identity of the qualified being. An attribute like being living can be a possible or a necessary property. Whenever a being is contingently living, it is so by virtue of an accident that inheres in a created body, whereas the necessarily living refers to God, who is living by virtue of His ‘attribute of the essence’. The fact that God and His creatures share the attribute of being living, however, neither means that they are living for the same reason, nor that they resemble each other in any way. Therefore, ‘accidental attributes’ and attributes grounded in other attributes are not by themselves an indication of the identity of all beings described by the same predicate.

Through an additional feature, al-Raṣṣāṣ’ analysis further expands the perspective encountered in other sources: he also takes into consideration the so-called *aḥkām* (sing. *ḥukm*), i.e. ‘characteristics’, that are ontologically distinct from attributes or *aḥwāl*. The notion of *ḥukm* already occurs in our earliest Bahshamī sources, but the concept remains rather obscure. It appears that the Bahshamī understanding of the term *ḥukm* was only elaborated under the impact of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044). Abū l-Ḥusayn was a student of the eminent *qāḍī* ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, but he had also been trained in medicine and philosophy. His education awakened him to new perspectives, leading him to criticize some principles of Bahshamī theology in an attempt to defend Muʿtazilite teachings against their opponents. He was, therefore, harshly attacked by his Bahshamī fellows.

Abū l-Ḥusayn’s theological teaching is mainly known through the works of his later follower, Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141). It is in Ibn al-Malāḥimī’s writings that we find the earliest account of a clear conceptual dis-

inction between *ṣifa* and *ḥukm*. His definition of the two terms is subsequently quoted in Bahshamī sources from Yemen, namely in the writings of al-Raṣṣāṣ and later Zaydī scholars, who generally tend to reject Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī's and Ibn al-Malāḥimī's teachings. According to this understanding, *ṣifāt* and *aḥkām* differ in the manner in which things are known through them. Unlike attributes, we have to consider two objects qualified by the same *ḥukm* to infer knowledge about a thing. In contrast, it suffices to consider only one subject qualified by the attribute of living to know the subject as being living. In analogy to the attributes, al-Raṣṣāṣ establishes three categories of *aḥkām*: a first category effected by an autonomous agent (*al-aḥkām al-mustaḥaqqā bi-l-fā'il*), a second grounded in an accident (*al-aḥkām al-ma'nawīyya*) and a third category of *aḥkām* entailed by an attribute (*al-aḥkām al-muqtadāt*). Following the pattern of exploring the attributes, al-Raṣṣāṣ also establishes for the three categories of *aḥkām* whether they reveal a similarity of what they qualify (Thiele 2013: 131–200).

The case of al-Raṣṣāṣ brings to our attention the fact that Bahshamī theologians developed, on the basis of Abū Hāshim's concept of *ḥāl*, different perspectives on, and approaches to, the classification of attributes. The Bahshamī theory of attributes was, consequently, not transmitted as a static system, but rather underwent continuous modifications and diachronic developments.

IV. The Adaption of the Concept of *ḥāl* by Ash'arite Theologians

The story of al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935), the eponym of the Ash'ariyya school, is well known. He belonged to the circle of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī's students and followed Mu'tazilite teachings until he abandoned his teacher's school at the age of about 40. Instead of adopting the pure scripturalist doctrine of the Mu'tazilites' opponents, he sought to find a compromise between rationalism and traditionalism—an approach that had already been sketched out by the third/ninth century theologian Ibn Kullāb (d. c. 240/854).

Al-Ash'arī's teaching on God's attributes appears to have followed the major axioms of Ibn Kullāb's theory. Consequently, it differed significantly from the Mu'tazilite interpretation: al-Ash'arī affirms that God's attributes are real entities (*ma'ānī*), and that knowledge (*ilm*), life (*ḥayāt*), power (*qudra*), etc. 'subsist' (*taqūmu*) in Him. These entities are denoted by al-Ash'arī as *ṣifāt*, and he posits that they actually exist. The notion of *ṣifa* is, in this sense, analogous to the accidents (*a'wāḍ*) of created bodies: both are termed *ma'ānī*, that is entities, whose presence necessitates a qualification of the object to which the *ma'ānā* belongs.

According to al-Ash'arī, the descriptive term has, unlike its entitative ground, no reality: for him, affirming that God is knowing (*ʿālim*) refers to His entitative knowledge (*ilm*), while he identified the descriptive term 'knowing' (*ʿālim*) with the act of attribution (*wasf*), that is a pure utterance without any extralinguistic reality (in this respect, his position was nearer to that of Abū 'Alī than that of Abū Hāshim). It has, however, to be noted that in his extant writings, al-Ash'arī did

not consistently distinguish between *ṣifa* and *wasf*. In a predication such as ‘God is knowing’ (*Allāh ʿālim*), *ṣifa* can, consequently, refer to His entitative knowledge (*ʿilm*) and to the descriptive term ‘knowing’ (*ʿālim*) (Gimaret 1990: 235–43).

Considering the central concern of monotheism to Muslim theologians, al-Ashʿarī’s conception of God’s attributes inevitably raised a fundamental question: if entitative knowledge, power, life, will, etc. eternally exist in Him, how then could it be true that He is one and free from multiplicity of any kind? Al-Ashʿarī countered the problem by affirming that the *ṣifāt*, that is God’s entitative attributes, are neither identical with, nor other than Him (Gimaret 1990: 276–81).

The theories of al-Ashʿarī and his contemporary Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī were opposed to each other in a complex manner, in particular because the two theologians did not apply their terminology in the same way. In al-Ashʿarī’s teaching, the *ṣifāt* denote entities that are not identical with God Himself, by virtue of which He is described by eternal properties. From the Muʿtazilite standpoint, positing the existence of eternal entities in God was unacceptable for the reasons previously explained. Therefore, the Muʿtazilites often faced the reproach of negating the *ṣifāt*. This objection is, however, not entirely correct, as far as Abū Hāshim and his followers are concerned: Bahshamī theologians did affirm the ontological reality of *ṣifāt*, but not in the same sense al-Ashʿarī affirmed it. For the Bahshamīs, *ṣifāt* are not conceived as entitative grounds of predications about God, but rather as a ‘manner of being’, a *ḥāl*. Al-Ashʿarī, in turn, rejected the idea that properties which are predicated of beings have, unlike their entitative grounds, a reality. In this respect, al-Ashʿarī agreed with his and Abū Hāshim’s teacher Abū ʿAlī, for whom an affirmation that God is knowing or living is only an act of predication (*wasf*), i.e. nothing but words.

The rejection of the concept of *ḥāl* still prevailed among the first followers of al-Ashʿarī. It was only two generations after the school’s founder that a major representative of the Ashʿariyya, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, adopted the concept. Al-Bāqillānī’s position on the notion of *ḥāl* was, however, not consistent. In his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, he devotes a whole chapter to refuting Abū Hāshim’s concept. Nonetheless, it is well known from the writings of later Ashʿarites that al-Bāqillānī eventually came to approve of the notion of *ḥāl* and that he maintained it in his *magnum opus*, the *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*. His change in opinion can be explained, as has been convincingly argued, by the chronology of al-Bāqillānī’s works: the *Tamhīd* was in fact one of al-Bāqillānī’s earliest works and merely represents a compilation of his masters’ teachings, rather than his independent thought (Gimaret 1970: 76f.; Gimaret 1980: 94f.). Not surprisingly, al-Bāqillānī’s framing of the divine attributes in the *Tamhīd* merely follows al-Ashʿarī’s position. His main concern appears to have been to arrange al-Ashʿarī’s teachings in a coherent line of argumentation by employing a systematized terminology (Allard 1965: 299–312). Al-Bāqillānī’s approval of the concept of *ḥāl* must consequently have been a revision of his early position, possibly developed under the impact of his debates with Muʿtazilite scholars.

For long, modern scholarship had to rely on later accounts of al-Bāqillānī’s adoption of the notion of *ḥāl*, such as the writings of Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī, who equally approved it. Since al-Juwaynī’s teaching was significantly shaped

by philosophical notions and theories, we have to be careful about identifying his position with that of al-Bāqillānī. Only the recent manuscript discoveries of substantial parts of the *Hidāya* provide a sound basis for an examination of al-Bāqillānī's original theory (Gimaret 2009; Schmidtke 2011).

As has already been observed for al-Juwaynī, al-Bāqillānī did not insist on an unconditional subscription to the theory of *ahwāl*. Both theologians were less categorical, possibly because they were aware that the theory encountered much reservation among Ash'arite theologians. Therefore al-Bāqillānī often presents in his *Hidāya* two alternative lines of argumentation whenever discussing questions related to attributes, and so his audience was able to follow his reasoning irrespective of whether or not they approved the notion of *ḥāl* (Gimaret 1970: 78; Thiele forthcoming).

Considering some obvious analogies with the Bahshamī concept, there is no doubt that al-Bāqillānī's notion of *ḥāl* was borrowed from his theological adversaries. Following Abū Hāshim's original reasoning, he revised his earlier understanding of the ontological reality expressed through predications about things. Against his position in the *Tamhīd*, that was in fact in accordance with that of al-Ash'arī, al-Bāqillānī assigned in his *Hidāya* a reality to such properties that cannot be described by the dichotomy of existence and non-existence (Thiele forthcoming). The same position was also later adopted by al-Juwaynī (Gimaret 1970: 79). When al-Bāqillānī introduced the notion of *ḥāl*, he did not use it as an alternative to the concept of entitative attributes, which was in fact Abū Hāshim's primary preoccupation. Al-Bāqillānī rather combines the traditional Ash'arite understanding of *ṣifa* with the notion of *ḥāl*. As is developed in the *Hidāya*, a *ḥāl* like God's 'being knowing' (*kawnuhu 'āliman*) is founded in an actually existing 'knowledge' (*'ilm*), which is termed a *ṣifa* or an entitative ground (*ma'nā*) for His being so. Al-Bāqillānī explains his reasoning by referring to al-Ash'arī's principle that a specific predication has always the same sense or expresses the same truth (*ḥaqīqa*): if we posit a *ma'nā*, that is an entity of knowledge (*'ilm*) as necessarily belonging to a human being described as knowing, the same holds true for God, so that He equally cannot be knowing but by virtue of a *ma'nā* (Thiele forthcoming). Similarly, al-Ash'arī held that that which expressions like 'being knowing' (*'ālim*) refer to must always be the same: therefore, 'being knowing' cannot refer in one case to the object of predication (*nafs*) and in another case to a distinct entity (*ma'nā*). Instead, *'ālim* has always the same meaning (*ḥaqīqa*) in that it is equivalent to asserting an entity of knowledge that belongs to the object qualified as knowing (*lahu 'ilm*) (Frank 1982a: 270). Al-Bāqillānī's adoption of the concept of *ḥāl* did not replace the theory of his predecessors but rather expanded its conceptual framework.

Consequently, al-Bāqillānī and later al-Juwaynī had to adjust the concept of *ḥāl* to the doctrinal frame of the Ash'arite school. A major modification of the original Bahshamī notion concerned a point of criticism al-Bāqillānī had made to substantiate his earlier rejection of the concept of *ḥāl* as a whole. In the *Tamhīd*, he argues that the Bahshamī position was, in itself, contradictory, in that it posited that (1) an agent who is capable of performing a certain act (*qādir*) must be distinguished from somebody incapable of the same act by a feature which has, by

way of a *ḥāl*, an ontological reality; and (2) that, by definition, a *ḥāl* as a non-entity cannot be known. How then, al-Bāqillānī argues, can the *ḥāl* be established as a differentiating and ontologically real feature, if there is no way for it to be known? When al-Bāqillānī later approved the reality of the *ḥāl*, he took his earlier objection into consideration and argued that a *ḥāl* must necessarily be knowable (*ma'lūm*) even though it is not an entity (*dhāt*). The reasoning behind this was that if two things are qualified by the same *ḥāl*, we are able to detect their identity, and so we can distinguish it from a different *ḥāl*—as, for example, when we differentiate between ‘living’ and ‘knowing’ (Thiele forthcoming).

Even more important is, however, that al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī no longer used the concept of *ḥāl* for the same purposes as the Bahshamīs did in their metaphysics. As was previously explained, the *aḥwāl* served in Bahshamī theology to reconcile God’s oneness with the plurality of His properties. In this context, the *ḥāl* fulfils a crucial purpose in that it is conceived as having a non-entitative reality and thereby acts as a neither existent nor non-existent ground for entailing (*iqṭadā*) other predications. In the Ash‘arite context, however, the original Bahshamī notion of *iqṭidā*’ is not taken over. Consequently, al-Juwaynī’s classification of the *aḥwāl* does not include a category of attributes caused by other attributes that would be comparable to the Bahshamī category *ṣifāt muqṭadāt*.

In fact, the Ash‘arite teaching on the non-existent and the possible rendered the Bahshamī distinction between the ‘attribute of the essence’ and the attributes ‘entailed’ by the ‘attribute of the essence’ of existent things obsolete. Whereas the Bahshamīs affirmed the reality of the ‘attribute of the essence’ of even non-existent things, the non-existent lacks, according to the Ash‘arites, any positive qualification. For them, it has no reality and is not considered a thing (*laysa bi-shay*’) (Frank 2000). Accordingly, predications that describe things as what they are in themselves (such as ‘the atom is an atom’, ‘the colour black is black’, etc.) and those specific qualifications that things necessarily have when they exist (such as the atom’s occupying space) are both inseparably linked to existence. Sticking to the example of the atom, the traditional Ash‘arite teaching posited that atoms cannot possibly be conceived as atoms unless they actually exist. In addition, an existing atom cannot be imagined but as occupying space and vice versa. Therefore, being an atom, being an entity, being existent and occupying space are, ontologically speaking, tantamount to each other in that each of these qualities affirms the reality of an atom. Essentially, these predications are founded in the atom itself and they are therefore only distinguished from a logical point of view.

Accordingly, al-Juwaynī only distinguishes between two classes of predicates in his classification of the *aḥwāl*: one category that is grounded in a distinctly existing entity (*mu‘allal*), and another category of which this is not the case (*ghayr mu‘allal*). Alternatively, al-Juwaynī also refers to these categories as those attributes affirming the reality of the qualified thing itself (*ṣifāt ithbāt li-dhāt qā’ima bihā* or *ṣifa nafsīyya*, i.e. the latter ‘non-grounded’ attributes) and those affirming the existence of a *ma’nā*, that is an entity subsisting in the qualified being by virtue of which the *ḥāl* becomes actual (*thābit li-l-dhāt ‘an ma’nā* or *ṣifa ma’nawīyya*) (Frank 2004: 771–7).

Despite its terminological similarity, the Ash‘arite concept of the *ṣifa nafsīyya* is sharply distinguished from its homologue in the Bahshamī theory. Whereas the

Bahshamīs identified a single predicate that expresses the fullness of its being for each entity, the Ash‘arites established a set of properties to frame the distinctiveness of any individual class of beings. For the reasons previously explained, they regarded the totality of these properties as defining a thing as such. It is in this particular context that the translation of *ḥāl* by ‘states’ has been problematized.

The inappropriateness of the translation ‘state’ can be exemplified by the case of the atom: the Ash‘arites explicitly denied that, ontologically speaking, the existence of atoms can be distinguished from their ‘being an atom’, and so they claimed with regard to all other attributes affirming the atom itself (or the ‘essential attributes’, i.e. the *ṣifāt naḥsiyya*). Unlike the Bahshamīs, the Ash‘arites consequently did not conceive of existence and non-existence as two different conditions or circumstances under which atoms have reality. Nor did they agree with the Bahshamī theory, that atoms do not necessarily occupy space unless they actually exist. For that reason, such predications as ‘the atom exists’ or ‘the atom occupies space’ cannot be considered as changing states because they are necessarily implied by the meaning expressed by describing something as an atom. According to the Ash‘arites, predicating that the atom is an atom, that it exists and occupies space, denote various aspects which, in their totality, describe the atom as what it is in itself. Therefore, it was recently suggested by Richard Frank to translate *ḥāl* in the Ash‘arite context as ‘feature’. Beyond the *ṣifāt naḥsiyya*, the problematic of translating *ḥāl* as ‘state’ equally applies to God’s ‘grounded attributes’ (*ṣifāt ma‘nawīyya* or *mu‘allala*), since, according to classical Ash‘arite teaching, the entitative grounds (*ma‘ānī*) for such predications as God’s ‘being powerful’ and His ‘being knowing’ are neither identical with, nor other than, Him. In other words, the necessary presence of power and knowledge in God does not, according to the Ash‘arites, entail any multiplicity in Him, although He is not power and knowledge. Consequently, God’s existence is inconceivable unless power, knowledge etc. subsist in Him and so it is impossible to affirm God’s reality without affirming that He is powerful, knowing etc. In this respect, God’s ‘grounded attributes’ are similar to the *ṣifāt naḥsiyya* in that they denote distinct features that a subject necessarily has (Frank 2004: 771–6).

When Ash‘arite theologians started adopting the concept of *ḥāl*, they came to use the term *ḥukm* frequently when referring to the properties of beings. By doing so, it appears that al-Bāqillānī and later supporters of the theory of *aḥwāl* strove to resolve a terminological ambiguity with regard to the term *ṣifa*. In the classical Ash‘arite vocabulary, *ṣifa* was applied to God’s entitative knowledge, power, and so forth (*‘ilm*, *qudra*, etc.), that is, the so-called *ma‘ānī* in which some of His properties are founded. Because the Mu‘tazilites negated the existence of eternal entitative attributes, they were blamed by the Ash‘arites for denying the *ṣifāt*, although this reproach was polemical if not inappropriate, in particular when it comes to the Bahshamī theory of *aḥwāl*. When Ash‘arite scholars eventually incorporated the concept of *ḥāl* in their theological system, they affirmed the ontological reality of both the entitative grounds of predications and the properties which they predicated. When applied to God, the term *ṣifa* was, however, coined in classical Ash‘arite terminology to denote the *ma‘ānī*, that is the entitative grounds (*‘ilm*, *qudra*...) for such predications as ‘He is knowing’, ‘He is powerful’ etc. (*kawnuhu ‘ālī-*

man, qādiran...). It was therefore necessary to distinguish terminologically between the ground (i.e. the *ṣifa* in its traditional meaning of *maḥā*) and the effect (i.e. the *ḥāl* or the *ṣifa muʿallala* as it termed by al-Juwaynī). Therefore, al-Bāqillānī and later Ashʿarites avoid using *ṣifa* whenever referring to ontologically real properties (i.e. the *aḥwāl*) and tend to employ the term *ḥukm* as a synonym for *ḥāl* (Frank 2004).

V. Conclusion

The theory of *aḥwāl* was formulated in response to the problem how God's oneness can be reconciled with the idea that He is qualified by a multitude of eternal qualities. The question had been debated over several generations of theologians before Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī suggested a solution by borrowing from the grammarians a new ontological category: he conceived of attributes as neither existing nor non-existing 'states' (*aḥwāl*) and thereby avoided ascribing to them an entitative reality. Abū Hāshim's theory was highly successful in that it became a central pillar in the theological system of his followers for many centuries. Over the course of this time, the theory of *aḥwāl* was modified and elaborated in various aspects, so that theologians applied it with different focuses of interest, including merely epistemological approaches.

The impact of Abū Hāshim's theory was not confined to the theological tradition that was named after him as Bahshamiyya. With al-Bāqillānī, the concept of *ḥāl* was also introduced into and adapted to the framework of Ashʿarite theology. Al-Bāqillānī's adoption of the theory of *aḥwāl* was also approved by later Ashʿarites, including the outstanding *imām al-ḥaramayn* Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī and even later by less well-known scholars from the Islamic west, the Maghrib. Ashʿarite theologians used the concept of *ḥāl* in a different way from their Bahshamī opponents: in the Ashʿarite context, the *aḥwāl* were rather understood as distinguishable features of beings, which can be known although they do not exist. The adoption of the concept of *aḥwāl* is one of the many historical examples for the flexibility of the Ashʿarite school in integrating specific notions from other scholarly traditions and reinterpreting them for their own theological purposes. It is among the oddities of the history of Muslim theology that Ashʿarite scholars relied on the concept of *ḥāl* to argue for the existence of God's entitative attributes, a hypothesis the Bahshamīs originally sought to disprove by introducing the *ḥāl* into the ontology of *kalām* (Gimaret 1970: 79f.).

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