

Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr

The Emergence and Consolidation of Ash‘arism

(Fourth–Fifth/Tenth–Eleventh Century)

Jan Thiele

Abstract

This chapter discusses the history of Ash‘arism in the fourth to fifth/tenth to eleventh centuries. Ash‘arism was, besides Māturīdism, the most important school of Sunni *kalām*. After the decline of Mu‘tazilism, it became the predominant theological school, primarily among the adherents of the Shāfi‘ite and the Mālikite school of law. There is a wide scholarly consensus that Ash‘arism entered a new phase in the sixth/twelfth century, marked by an increasing influence of Avicennan philosophy, a transition generally associated with the prominent thinker Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. This chapter focuses on theologians that preceded this methodological shift. It first charts the rise of Ash‘arism, highlighting the contributions of three key figures to the elaboration and broader dissemination of the school’s teachings: Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā‘īnī, and Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī. It concludes with an assessment of Ash‘arism under the patronage of Nizām al-Mulk.

Keywords

Ash‘arism, Sunni *kalām*, Avicennan philosophy, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā‘īnī, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, Shāfi‘ites, Mālikites

Ash‘arism was, besides Māturīdism, the most important school of Sunni *kalām*. After the decline of Mu‘tazilism, it became the predominant theological school, primarily among the adherents of the Shāfi‘ite and the Mālikite school of law. The influence of Ash‘arite teaching can still be felt in modern thought. This chapter intends to give an outline of approximately the first two centuries of the school’s history. There is a wide scholarly consensus that during the next, that is the sixth/twelfth century, Ash‘arism entered a new phase that was marked by an increasing influence of Avicennan philosophy. The transition to this new phase is generally associated with the prominent thinker Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

(d. 505/1111). This periodization of the development of Ash‘arism has also a long tradition in Muslim historiography: it was the famous North African scholar Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406) who referred to the pre- and post-Ghazālīan theologians as ‘the earlier ones’ (*al-mutaqaddimūn*) and ‘the later ones’ (*al-muta‘akhkhirūn*). It is roughly with Ibn Khaldūn’s ‘earlier’ representatives of Ash‘arism that we are concerned in this chapter. A number of modern scholars have referred to this period as that of ‘classical Ash‘arism’ (e.g. Frank 1989a; Frank 1992: 18; Frank 2000; Frank 2004; Shihadeh 2012). Yet the representatives of this period did not propagate a homogeneous set of doctrines: a number of case studies have shown that Ash‘arite teachings were subject to constant developments and revisions, and that the introduction of philosophical ideas, a shift generally identified with al-Ghazālī, even started with earlier theologians.

I. The Rise of Ash‘arism

If we can trust historical reports, the history of Ash‘arism began with a memorable symbolic act. Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935–6), a Mu‘tazilite theologian with high renown, is said to have publicly broken with the doctrines of his school on a Friday in the Great Mosque of Basra. It is hardly possible to authenticate the vivid reports about al-Ash‘arī’s ‘conversion’ and to answer the question whether they reliably reflect the historical details. The little we know about the biography of the founder of Ash‘arism widely relies on accounts with a strong hagiographical flavour.¹

Al-Ash‘arī was born *c.* 260/874 in Basra. The city was one of the oldest centres of *kalām* and, more particularly, of Mu‘tazilite teaching. Mu‘tazilism was the dominant doctrine during al-Ash‘arī’s lifetime. He became a talented student of one of the leading Mu‘tazilite theologians of that era, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 303/915). With Abū ‘Alī as his master, al-Ash‘arī experienced a crucial phase in the evolution of the discipline of *kalām*. Down to the third/ninth century, Mu‘tazilite teaching was merely an intellectual endeavour of individual thinkers. With Abū ‘Alī and his counterpart Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī al-Balkhī (d. 319/931), however, two representatives of a new generation of theologians formulated systematic doctrinal frameworks and thereby laid the foundation for the emergence of the Basran and the Baghdadi school of the Mu‘tazila. Al-Ash‘arī was consequently still highly familiar with the earlier phase of *kalām* and its theological discussions. His doxography on the ‘Doctrines of the Muslims’ (*Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*) is therefore the most comprehensive and reliable source on this era that has come down to us (al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*).

When al-Ash‘arī broke with Mu‘tazilite teaching, he was about 40 years old. Despite the expectable hostilities from his former fellows, he went on living in Basra, before he eventually settled in Baghdad, where he remained for the rest of

¹The most important historical accounts of Ash‘arism and its theologians are Ibn ‘Asākir’s (d. 571/1176) *Tabyīn kadhīb al-muftarī* (Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn*) and al-Subkī’s (d. 771/1370) *Tabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā* (al-Subkī, *Tabaqāt*); both authors lived in Damascus. The Andalusī Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Lablī also compiled a collection of bibliographies of Ash‘arite theologians (al-Lablī, *Fihrist*).

his life (Allard 1965: 25–47; Gimaret 1997b; van Ess 2011: i. 454–501).

After his rupture with Muʿtazilism, al-Ashʿarī adopted the major tenets of the opposing doctrinal camp, the Sunni Traditionalists. However, despite many doctrinal overlaps they divided over a very central issue. Essentially, they irreconcilably disagreed over the question of whether human reason is a means of knowing theological truths: whereas the Traditionalists completely rejected rational speculation, al-Ashʿarī distinguished between two major fields of knowledge and claimed that each of them requires its own epistemological method.

On the one hand, he approved of the Traditionalists’ rejection of the Muʿtazilites’ ethical objectivism. In other words, he agreed that man has no intellectual capacity to distinguish between good and evil. As a proponent of ethical subjectivism, he posited that the morally good is whatever God commands and that the evil is whatever He forbids. The upshot of this theory was that since morality is not based on rationalized principles, man depends on divine instruction by way of revelation in order to know God’s obligations and prohibitions and to act in a morally good way (Frank 1983a: 207–10; Gimaret 1990: 444–5).

Beyond the question of knowing man’s obligations, however, al-Ashʿarī approved of dialectical reasoning on theological questions: he affirmed that knowledge of God can only be gained by rational reflection. In this respect, he agreed with Muʿtazilite teaching. This legitimization of the methodology of *kalām* was in fundamental contradiction to the principles of the Sunni Traditionalists. Al-Ashʿarī even posited that individual reflection about God is man’s first religious obligation. However, it is crucially important to understand how al-Ashʿarī defended this theory: he argued that man’s duty to reflect about God is made known by revelation, just as is the case with all divine commandments. In this sense, al-Ashʿarī still maintained the primacy of revelation over rational reflection (Frank 1989a: 44–6; Gimaret 1990: 211–18; Rudolph 1992: 73–8).²

Despite al-Ashʿarī’s agreement with the Sunni Traditionalists on many doctrines, they consequently strongly disapproved of his method. Now since the Muʿtazilites severely criticized his theological positions, al-Ashʿarī came under attack from two diametrically opposed sides. This is aptly illustrated by al-Ashʿarī’s

²The question whether al-Ashʿarī remained after his ‘conversion’ a real *mutakallim* was subject to some discussion in modern scholarship. G. Makdisi (1962; 1963) argued that the doctrinal traditionalism expressed in al-Ashʿarī’s *al-Ibāna ‘an uṣūl al-dīyāna* is in no way consistent with the manifesto for the practice of *kalām* as found in *al-Haṭṭh ‘alā l-baḥṭh* (alternatively entitled *Istihṣān al-khawḍ fī ‘ilm al-kalām*; see Frank 1988), which is equally attributed to al-Ashʿarī. He concluded that the image of al-Ashʿarī as the founder of a new school of *kalām* is anachronistic and merely the product of the school’s later narrative. Consequently, such works as Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Tabyīn al-muṭlarī* and al-Subkī’s *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi‘iyya al-kubrā*—which both present al-Ashʿarī as a defender of traditionalist doctrines via rational argumentation—should be read as attempts to advocate the practice of *kalām* and to seek legitimization within the Sunni mainstream, primarily among the adherents of the Shāfi‘ite school of law. Makdisi therefore doubted the authenticity of *al-Haṭṭh* and suggested that the text cannot be earlier than al-Subkī. Against Makdisi, R. M. Frank (1991) claimed that *al-Haṭṭh* is authentic. He argues that the difference between *al-Ibāna* and *al-Haṭṭh* is one of form rather than of incoherent doctrinal positions. Consequently, the two texts are not in conflict with each other, nor with al-Ashʿarī’s other texts—most importantly his *Luma’*, an undisputedly authentic *kalām* work. Today, Frank’s position represents the wide scholarly consensus. More recently, Zahrī (2013) argued that it is in fact the *Ibāna* that cannot be authentic.

understanding of God's attributes: on the one hand, he strove to interpret the Qur'ān as literally and faithfully as possible. This also had significant implications for his interpretation of predication made about God: if the revelation speaks of God's knowledge, power etc., al-Ash'arī infers that God really *has* knowledge, power etc. Accordingly, he conceives of these attributes as co-eternal entities that subsist in God.

This was in line with the position of the Traditionalists, but raised much objections amongst the Mu'tazilites. They criticized that his teaching was tantamount to claiming the existence of eternal beings apart from God; in their eyes, this undermined the very principle of monotheism. As a *mutakallim*, al-Ash'arī did, however, not refrain from providing a rational explanation to resolve such logical problems. After all, he was convinced that God's revelation can be explained by human reason. In other words, he rejected the Traditionalists' so-called *bi-lā kayf*-approach, that is their dismissal of any attempt to rationalize why their doctrinal claims should be true. Al-Ash'arī's solution to the Mu'tazilites' objection was to claim that God's eternal attributes are neither identical, nor other than Him (Gimaret 1990: 276–81). In order to prove that God actually has eternal entitative attributes, he went on arguing that predication like 'x knows' or 'x is powerful' always refer to the same reality or truth (*ḥaqīqa*): if human beings described as knowing or powerful merit such descriptions by virtue of an entity (*ma'nā*) of knowledge or power, the same must be true for God (Frank 1982a: 270).

Another well-known example of al-Ash'arī's controversial approach was his theory of human acts. Again, his reflections departed from a supposition he shared with the Traditionalists: both claimed that God's omnipotence cannot be restricted in any way, and so whatever happens in the world depends on Him. Consequently, human actions—which belong to these worldly events—must be created and controlled by God (Gimaret 1990: 378–9; Perler and Rudolph 2000: 51–6). For the Mu'tazilites, this line of reasoning makes nonsense of the fundamental idea that man is individually responsible for his acts. Yet al-Ash'arī countered this objection by developing an alternative conception of human self-determination that does not depend on the veracity of freedom of action.

A central element of al-Ash'arī's solution to the problem consisted in his distinction between two types of human acts. We have a clear awareness, he says, of the fact that we cannot refrain from performing such motions as trembling: consequently, we all know that specific acts occur necessarily (*idtirāran*). He then goes on to argue that we intuitively distinguish other motions, like, for example, our walking. Since necessary acts imply our weakness (*ʿajz*), all other acts must involve our 'power' (*quwwa* or *qudra*). Al-Ash'arī labelled these non-necessary acts with the term 'acquisition' (*kasb/iktisāb*), a notion that had already been used by some earlier theologians. According to al-Ash'arī, it is precisely for these 'acquired' acts that we are accountable, even if we have no power to act otherwise than we do. It would seem that al-Ash'arī justified man's moral responsibility in the absence of freedom by the claim that we act according to our willing and wanting whenever we perform an 'acquired' act (Gimaret 1980: 80–1; Gimaret 1990: 131, 387–96; Thiele in press).

Only a handful of al-Ash'arī's writings have survived while most of the more

than 100 titles he wrote are missing (Gimaret 1985a).³ Therefore, modern research on al-Ash‘arī’s theology largely depends on second-hand information from later sources, the most important being Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak’s (d. 406/1015) *Mujarrad maqālāt al-Ash‘arī* (‘Excerpts (?) from al-Ash‘arī’s doctrines’) (Gimaret 1985b). Consequently, some caution is required when interpreting al-Ash‘arī’s original thought and a number of questions cannot be satisfactorily answered.

II. Dissemination and Consolidation

According to present knowledge, the generation after the school’s eponym did not bring forth any prominent scholar who significantly advanced the school’s teachings. Yet its transmission eastwards began as early as with a number of al-Ash‘arī’s own students: since many of them hailed from Nīsābūr, the economic and intellectual centre of Khurāsān, they returned back home after their teacher’s death and laid the foundation for the city’s Ash‘arite community (Allard 1965: 314).

During the following generation, however, three towering theologians of the later fourth/tenth century made outstanding contributions to the elaboration and broader dissemination of the school’s teachings: their names were Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā‘īnī (d. 411/1020), and Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013). All three theologians studied *kalām* with al-Ash‘arī’s former student Abū l-Ḥasan al-Bāhilī (d. c. 370/980) and became instrumental in the scholastic consolidation of Ash‘arite thought. Since each one of them developed his own approach, partly under the influence of regional traditions, their teachings laid the foundations for an increasing diversity within Ash‘arism.

At the beginning of his scholarly career Ibn Fūrak lived in Iraq and studied in Baghdad. Then, after having spent some time in Rayy, the Samanid governor Nāṣir al-Dawla (d. 357–8/968–9) established a *madrasa* for Ibn Fūrak in Nīsābūr. We know a number of works he wrote in the field of theology, and some of them have even survived to the present day: Ibn Fūrak composed a commentary upon al-Ash‘arī’s *al-Luma‘* (lost), a collection of definitions of technical terms in *kalām* and legal methodology, entitled *al-Ḥudūd fī l-uṣūl* (Abdel-Haleem 1991; Ibn Fūrak, *Ḥudūd*), the above-mentioned account of al-Ash‘arī’s doctrines (Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*), and some additional works that are still in manuscript form. Yet, Ibn Fūrak is particularly known for a book entitled *Kūtāb (Ta‘wīl) Mushkil al-ḥadīth* (Ibn Fūrak, *Mushkil*). In this text, Ibn Fūrak discusses anthropomorphic expressions found in prophetic traditions and attempts to interpret these texts allegorically. It would seem that Ibn Fūrak wrote this work in the context of his polemical encounters with the Karrāmiyya, a sect with some influence in Nīsābūr. They considered God as a substrate (*maḥall*) of accidents and therefore claimed that He is a ‘substance’ (*jawhar*) or body (*jism*). As a result, they were widely blamed as anthropomorphists (see Chapter 15). Hence, Ibn Fūrak’s *Mushkil al-ḥadīth* may be read in the light of this specific conflict (Allard 1965: 326–9). The treatise opens with

³The most important surviving *kalām* treatise composed by al-Ash‘arī himself is his *Kūtāb al-Luma‘*; a critical edition and English translation of this text is found in McCarthy (1953).

some chapters that are related to the more narrow topics of *kalām*, including God's oneness and singularity, or the meaning of His names and attributes (Allard 1965: 314–15; Montgomery Watt 1978; Brown 2007: 190–1).

Ibn Fūrak's contemporary Abū Ishāq al-Isfārā'īnī hailed from Isfārā'īn. He spent many years studying in Baghdad, before he returned to his home city, where he taught for some time. Like Ibn Fūrak, he eventually received an invitation from scholars of Nisābūr to teach at a *madrassa* specifically built for him. Reportedly, al-Isfārā'īnī's teachings were sometimes fairly close to Mu'tazilite positions: in this context, secondary sources refer to such topics as his theory of knowledge, prophethood, the nature of the Qur'ān or human acts. Yet our sources about his theology are very limited: apart from a short creed (*ʿaqīda*) al-Isfārā'īnī's legal and theological writings are no longer extant (Frank 1989b). However, his teachings are often quoted in the later Ash'arite literature—a number of his works are even known by title, including *al-Ĵāmiʿ fī uṣūl al-dīn wa-l-radd ʿalā l-mulḥidīn* ('A compendium of the principles of religion and a refutation of the atheists'), *Kitāb al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt* ('Book of the (divine) names and attributes'), and *Mukhtaṣar fī l-radd ʿalā ahl al-iʿtizāl wa-l-qadar* ('Brief refutation of the Mu'tazila and the proponents of human free will'). These frequent quotations are an indication for al-Isfārā'īnī's popularity and his lasting influence among later generations of theologians (Madelung 1978; Frank 1989b; Brown 2007: 189–90; Brodersen 2008).

In later sources, al-Isfārā'īnī's positions were often contrasted with those of al-Bāqillānī. Usually, the latter is presented as rather inclined towards the traditionalism of the school's founding father. As an intellectual, al-Bāqillānī must have been appreciated beyond the mere Sunni mainstream: he was even invited to join the court of the Būyids in Baghdad, who were Shīʿites. His patron, ʿAḍud al-Dawlā appointed him judge and even sent him on a diplomatic mission to the Byzantine court (Allard 1965: 290–5; Ibish 1965).

Among the three theologians of his generation, al-Bāqillānī's theological teaching is the best known. Comparatively much of his work has survived to the present date. These texts include a comprehensive manual of the theological polemics, entitled *Kitāb al-Tamhīd fī l-radd ʿalā l-mulḥida al-muʿaṭṭila wa-l-rāfiḍa wa-l-khawārij wa-l-muʿtazila*.⁴ It bears witness to al-Bāqillānī's attempt to systematically compile and coherently organize the teachings of his predecessors (Eichner 2009: 160–4). It has been convincingly argued that this book was in fact one of al-Bāqillānī's early works, possibly written around 360/970 (Gimaret 1970: 76–7; Gimaret 1980: 94–5; Gimaret 2009: 259). A shorter theological treatise that focuses on disputed questions between Ash'arism and the Mu'tazila circulated under two titles, *al-Risāla al-Hurra* and *al-Inṣāf fī mā yajibu ʿiqāduhu wa-lā yajūzu l-jahl bihi* (al-Bāqillānī, *Inṣāf*). Much more important and comprehensive in length is his main work in theology entitled *Hidāyat al-mustarshidīn*. Originally, the

⁴Al-Bāqillānī's *Tamhīd* was first published in 1947 (al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*¹); this edition is based on only one manuscript that happens to be incomplete. Later, R. J. McCarthy critically edited the text on the basis of additional manuscripts (al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*²), but he omitted almost the whole section on the imamate. On the basis of these two editions, I. D. A. Ḥaydar published the complete work (al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*³). Nonetheless, the earlier incomplete editions remain the standard references in modern scholarship.

Hidāya must have been a monumental work, comprising at least sixteen volumes, but only four have as yet been rediscovered. It is in this text that al-Bāqillānī expounded his original teachings and sometimes revised or further developed a number of al-Ash‘arī’s positions, including some he had still defended in earlier works (Gimaret 2009; Schmidtke 2011).

Since the beginnings of Ash‘arite studies, modern scholars have highlighted al-Bāqillānī’s central role in the consolidation of the school. This perception was significantly shaped by Ibn Khaldūn’s account of the history of Ash‘arism in his *Muqaddima*. Although Ibn Khaldūn’s report includes some imprecisions, it is beyond any doubt that al-Bāqillānī significantly contributed to the evolution of the school’s teachings by broadening its conceptual framework and by further developing ideas of the school’s founder. In the *Hidāya*, for example, al-Bāqillānī applies to God the term of the ‘necessarily existent’ (*wājib al-wujūd*).⁵ The phrase is primarily known as a central notion in Avicenna’s metaphysics—as the counterpart of *mumkin al-wujūd*, which refers to the contingent world—but the term already appeared in the philosophical milieu of fourth/tenth-century Baghdad, where al-Bāqillānī might possibly have become familiar with it.

A famous example for how al-Bāqillānī further developed Ash‘arite teaching by borrowing concepts from other, including rival, schools is his adaption of the Mu‘tazilite theory of ‘state’ (*ḥāl*). Al-Bāqillānī’s opinion with regard to the notion of *ḥāl* was not consistent. In his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, he still refutes the concept. Yet in his later *magnum opus* in theology, the *Hidāya*, he revised his earlier position. The reason behind this was that he apparently felt that the traditional Ash‘arite teaching on attributes was, in some respect, incoherent.

It would seem that al-Bāqillānī was concerned with what he identified as a weakness in al-Ash‘arī’s proof for God’s entitative attributes, such as knowledge, power, etc. As mentioned before, al-Ash‘arī’s argument was based on the claim that such expressions as ‘he is knowing’ always express the same meaning or truth (*ḥaqīqa*): if man is knowing by virtue of an entity (*maḥwā*) of knowledge, the same must be true for God. Al-Bāqillānī drew on this line of reasoning and went on arguing that there must be a correlation (*ta‘alluq*) between that which is expressed by our predicating ‘x is knowing’ and the entity of knowledge. Against al-Ash‘arī, however, al-Bāqillānī came to the conclusion that the predication ‘being knowing’ (*kawnuhu ‘āliman*) cannot refer to the same as the noun ‘knowledge’ (*‘ilm*). For if ‘being knowing’ referred to an entity of knowledge and not to a reality distinct from this entity, one would attempt to prove the existence of entitative knowledge by itself. Al-Bāqillānī therefore concludes that such predications as ‘being knowing’ refer to a *ḥāl*. According to his understanding, this *ḥāl* is grounded in, and, at the same time, evidence for, the existence of an entity of knowledge. Al-Bāqillānī consequently relied on the concept to prove the existence of entitative attributes

⁵See Ms. St Petersburg, The Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, C329, fos. 32b–33a, where al-Bāqillānī describes God’s existence as ‘His being eternal [and] necessarily existent, for ever and always’ (*kawnuhu qadīmān wājib al-wujūd abadan wa-dā‘īmān*); and Ms. Tashkent, al-Biruni Institute of Oriental Studies, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 3296, fo. 20b: ‘the Eternal’s existence is necessary under all circumstances’ (*al-qadīm wājib wujūdihi fi kull ḥāl*).

in God that, like Him, are eternal. Furthermore, al-Bāqillānī's adoption of the notion of *ḥāl* had also implications for his metaphysical conception of the created world, since he also applied it to predication we make about created beings (see Chapter 22).

Al-Bāqillānī furthermore attempted to achieve greater coherency with regard to the Ash'arite teaching on human acts, the framework of which was laid down by al-Ash'arī's theory of 'acquisition' (*kasb*). Al-Bāqillānī revised some aspects of the theory by addressing, primarily in the *Hidāya*, a number of questions that seem to have been unresolved by the school's founder. However, he stuck to al-Ash'arī's central claim: man's moral accountability does not depend on freedom of action being true. Yet against al-Ash'arī, al-Bāqillānī explicitly rejects the assumption that our acting intentionally, that is our 'acquiring' specific acts, depends in any way on our will being involved. For him, this claim is established by the fact that we sometimes fail to exercise our will—which is always the case with 'compelled acts'. As a logical corollary, he goes on to argue, that our incapacity to do what we want reveals a lack of power. Consequently, the opposite must be true for all other acts: they occur by virtue of man's power.

Beyond al-Ash'arī's reasoning, al-Bāqillānī asked, however, about the precise function of man's power in our performing 'acquired' acts. While al-Ash'arī contented himself to affirm that 'acquired' acts are merely conjoined by an accident of power in the agent's body, al-Bāqillānī formulated the theory that man's power really *has* an effect (*taṭhīr*). He actually proposes different approaches to explain how our power affects our acting. His first explanation as to the effectiveness of human power is in line with his conception of the reality that underlies our predication about beings: as mentioned above, he believed that they reflect a *ḥāl*—in the case of agents of 'acquired' acts the feature of 'being powerful' (*kawnuhu qādiran*). The *ḥāl* is, according to al-Bāqillānī, caused by the agent's power, and it is precisely this feature that distinguishes him from compelled agents, who have no power and are consequently not responsible for their doing.

The mere distinction between powerful agents and others who are not did not, by itself, sufficiently explain why acts created by God should be considered as ours. Al-Bāqillānī addressed this issue by claiming that it is by virtue of their power that agents are related (*yata'allaqu*) to their 'acquired' acts. Drawing a parallel to the relation between sensual perception and objects perceived, he argued that acts do not have to be created by man himself in order to suppose a relation between his power and his acts. Finally, al-Bāqillānī adds a further explanation as to how man's power affects his acting. In this approach, he specifically addresses the question of man's individual accountability. He appears to be aware of the logical problem that man can hardly be held responsible for the *existence* of acts if he does not create them himself. Al-Bāqillānī therefore proposes an alternative solution as to what is subject to moral assessment in our acting. He suggests that man determines an attribute of his 'acquired' acts by virtue of his power, and that it is to this very attribute that God's command, prohibition, reward, and punishment relate (Thiele in press).

While al-Bāqillānī was primarily active in Baghdad, the centre of the Abbasid caliphate, Ash'arite doctrines were simultaneously promoted in the east-

ern lands by his two towering contemporaries: with Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfarāʿīnī, Khurāsān, and specifically the city of Nīsābūr, became an important centre of Ashʿarite teaching. Yet al-Bāqillānī significantly contributed to the transmission of Ashʿarism towards the Islamic west, at least indirectly. In the Maghrib, the first local tradition of Ashʿarite teaching arose in Kairouan, one of the earliest and most important intellectual hubs in the region. It would seem that one of the major reasons behind the wider approval of Ashʿarism was al-Bāqillānī's adherence to Mālikism, the predominant school of law in the western Islamic lands. His writings were transmitted by his own students, including Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Azdī und Abū ʿImrān al-Fāsī, who settled in the North African city. Alongside al-Bāqillānī's theological works, Ibn Fūrak's *Mushkil al-ḥadīth* is known to have been transmitted to Kairouan by representatives of this generation (Idris 1953; Idris 1954; Zahrī 2011).

While the dissemination of Ashʿarite doctrines was very successful, none of the school's representatives of this generation achieved the same reputation as al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Fūrak, or al-Isfarāʿīnī. However, two comprehensive theological compendia composed at that time have come down to us and provide some insight into Ashʿarite teaching in this historical phase. The first work was written by Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāʿīnī's student ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (429/1037)—the later teacher of the famous mystic Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074)—who hailed from Nīsābūr: al-Baghdādī's *Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn* (al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl*) appears to be rather conservative in the sense that he primarily relies on such early authorities as al-Ashʿarī himself, or even the pre-Ashʿarite Ibn Kullāb (d. c. 240/854) (Allard 1965: 316; Madelung 1987: 331).

The author of the second work is Abū Jaʿfar al-Simnānī (d. 444/1052). He was al-Bāqillānī's disciple and, incidentally, a Ḥanafite. This is quite unusual, since Ḥanafites rather tended to be critical of Ashʿarism. Al-Simnānī completed his studies in Baghdad before he was appointed Qāḍī of Aleppo and later of Mosul. The above-mentioned theological *summa* from his pen is entitled *al-Bayān ʿan uṣūl al-īmān wa-l-kashf ʿan tamwīhāt ahl al-tughyān* (al-Simnānī, *Bayān*; see also Gilmaret 1997a). It is the only work by al-Simnānī that is known to have survived. The famous Andalusī Zāhirī scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) extensively quotes from another, apparently comprehensive, theological work, that he only calls ʿal-Simnānī's book' (*Kitāb al-Simnānī*). The book is lost, but it would seem from Ibn Ḥazm's quotation that it was not identical with the *Bayān* (Schmidtke 2013: 384). Al-Simnānī's theological teaching is regarded as being close to that of his teacher al-Bāqillānī.

A number of al-Simnānī's students are known by name. The most prominent was Abū l-Walīd al-Bājī (d. 474/1081), who hailed from al-Andalus. Al-Bājī received his early education in the city of Cordoba. Most of his teachers in this city were trained in Kairouan and some of them had even a background in Ashʿarite theology. At the age of about 21, al-Bājī left his homeland to seek further instruction in the Islamic east. He spent several years in the Ḥijāz and Baghdad, studying with Ibn Fūrak's disciple Abū Bakr al-Muṭṭawāʿī and the prominent specialist in Shāfiʿite legal methodology, Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAlī al-Shirāzī (d. 476/1083), who had also studied with al-Bāqillānī. Al-Bājī spent one year in Mosul attend-

ing al-Simnānī's study circle, where he was trained in Ash'arite theology, before he continued travelling to Aleppo. There he was appointed judge, an office he exercised for a period of one year, before he eventually returned to al-Andalus (Turki 1973: 59–70; Fierro 2004).

Our extant sources do not allow us to draw a detailed picture of al-Bājī's theological teaching. Yet he must have played a central role in the dissemination of Ash'arism in Islamic Spain. Indeed, Ash'arite works already circulated before al-Bājī, but he appears to have significantly increased the amount of available texts. In addition, he contributed to the establishment of *kalām*, which was by his time a rather insignificant discipline in al-Andalus (Fórneas Besteiro 1977; Fórneas Besteiro 1978; A'rāb 1987: 192–3; Lagardère 1994).

III. Ash'arism under the Patronage of Nizām al-Mulk

A younger contemporary of al-Bājī was the famous theologian Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). He was born 419/1028 in the region of Nīsābūr. His father had already played a role in Khurāsānian Ash'arism. After his father's death, al-Juwaynī followed him as teacher in Nīsābūr. Yet with the Seljuq conquest of the city in 428/1037, the Ash'arites faced growing hostility: the vizier Tughril Beg (d. 455/1063) implemented an anti-Shāfi'ite policy and denounced Ash'arite doctrines as an illegitimate innovation (Madelung 1971: 124–30). Together with other scholars inclined towards Ash'arism—like the famous mystic Abū l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (Frank 1982b; Frank 1983b; Nguyen 2012)—al-Juwaynī fled from Nīsābūr to Baghdad. Later, in 450/1058, he travelled to 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*). The Seldjuqs' attitude towards Ash'arism radically changed with the vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092): he 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 also invited al-Juwaynī to return to Nīsābūr and to teach at a *madrasa* that was built specifically for him. Nizām al-Mulk also promoted other prominent Ash'arite scholars like, for example, Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Fūrakī (d. 478/1085), a grandson of Ibn Fūrak, who taught at the Nizāmiyya college in Baghdad and wrote an exposition of Ash'arite theology entitled *al-Nizāmī fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Nguyen 2013).

Among al-Juwaynī's theological writings, two works are of particular significance. He wrote a supercommentary on al-Ash'arī's *Luma'*, which is based on al-Bāqillānī's lost commentary. This work, entitled *al-Shāmīl fī uṣūl al-dīn*, has not survived in its entirety and its largest parts have not been rediscovered.⁶ The sec-

⁶The portions of al-Juwaynī's *al-Shāmīl*, that have as yet been discovered, have been published in three partial critical editions: the first was prepared in 1959 by H. Klopfer (Juwaynī, *Shāmīl*¹) and incompletely reproduces the text contained in a manuscript that was eventually published in its entirety by 'A. S. al-Nashshār in 1969 (Juwaynī, *Shāmīl*²). Additional portions were critically edited by R. M. Frank in 1981 (Juwaynī, *Shāmīl*³) on the basis of another manuscript from Tehran; this manuscript partly overlaps with the text in al-Nashshār's edition and so Frank decided to omit from his edition

ond text, *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi‘ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-‘itiqād*, is much shorter than the *Shāmil* but complete (al-Juwaynī, *Irshād*). Allard (1965: 380) argued that the length of al-Juwaynī’s works most likely decreased over the course of their relative chronology. The *Shāmil* and the *Irshād* would then have been followed by *Luma‘ al-adilla fī qawā‘id ahl al-summa* (Allard 1968) and finally *al-Aqida al-Nizāmiyya* (al-Juwaynī, *Aqida*).

As was the case with al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī did not follow a consistent teaching throughout his life. His works and the accounts of later Ash‘arite theologians bear witness to a number of revisions and changes in al-Juwaynī’s doctrinal positions and argumentations. At some point in his career, for example, he followed al-Bāqillānī in adopting the concept of *aḥwāl* and applied it to his ontological understanding of predications about God and created beings. His two longer works, the *Irshād* and the *Shāmil*, contain sections with his approval of the notion of *ḥāl*. In contrast, al-Juwaynī’s *Luma‘* and his *al-Aqida al-Nizāmiyya* no longer appeal to the theory (Allard 1965: 389–91; Gimaret 1970: 77–9; Frank 2004: 770–7).

Further contradictory positions were formulated by al-Juwaynī with regard to the function of man’s ‘power’ (*qudra*) in the framework of the theory of human acts. Just like other school representatives before him, he struggled with the question of whether the power that accompanies man’s acts has any effect or not. While in the *Irshād* al-Juwaynī completely rejects any such effectiveness, he develops in *al-Aqida al-Nizāmiyya* an original theory of human acts that departs from the assumption that man’s power *must* be effective. Al-Juwaynī’s central argument is that otherwise God’s imposing duties and obligations (that is the notion of *tak-līf*) were 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 (Gimaret 1980: 120–3).

On the surface, al-Juwaynī’s theory has some similarity with two non-Ash‘arite concepts; however, there is no clear evidence that his reasoning really depends on them. On the one hand, Mu‘tazilite theologians posited a form of acting that produces an effect outside the agent by way of an intermediate cause. The question whether or not this pattern also applies to God was subject to inner-Mu‘tazilite debate. On the other hand, al-Juwaynī’s theory also recalls to some extent the notion of emanation supported by hellenizing philosophers—that is the idea of God being the first cause from which all other causal relations proceed. It was precisely this alleged influence for which al-Juwaynī was blamed by the later Ash‘arite al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) (Gimaret 1980: 127). Irrespective of whether or not al-Juwaynī was really inspired by the idea of emanation, we know that he was actually acquainted with, and even adopted, ideas developed by the *falāsifa*—as in the case of his proof for God’s existence. While several modern

the parallel sections found in the two surviving manuscripts.

studies have suggested a direct Avicennan influence (Davidson 1987; Rudolph 1997), Madelung has recently found significant parallels with Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī's (d. 426/1044) argumentation (Madelung 2006). 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 their teachings (see Chapter 9).

Al-Juwaynī's starting point in revising the proof for God's existence concerned its central premiss: the traditional argument 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. For long, however, theologians did not provide any rational proof against the possibility of an infinite series of created accidents: however, the upshot of this assumption would have been that an eternal body could be conjoined by an infinite number of accidents, an idea that would have 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: 144–6; Madelung 2006: 277).

The second part of al-Juwaynī's revision concerned the more narrow part of the proof for God's existence. Traditionally, it was argued that the createdness of bodies requires a creator (*muhdith*), who must be God. This conclusion was drawn by way of analogy with our worldly experience that any such works as manufacture, writing, etc. need a manufacturer, writer, etc. Yet al-Juwaynī considered in his proof the creation of the world as a whole: he claimed 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. The agent, 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 Avicennan) terminology (Davidson 1987: 161–2; Rudolph 1997: 344–6; Madelung 2006: 275, 279).

From al-Juwaynī's time, we also possess a short *kalām* compendium written by his contemporary Abū Sa'd 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ma'mūn al-Mutawallī (d. 478/1086). Al-Mutawallī was born in Nisābūr in 426 or 427/1035 or 1036 and studied *fiqh* in Marw, Bukhāra, and Marw al-Rūdh. He eventually moved to

Baghdad. On the death of the Shāfiʿite master Abū Ishāq al-Shīrāzī, al-Mutawallī succeeded him as teacher at the city’s Nizāmiyya. His theological treatise was first edited under the title *al-Mughnī* and only a little later under that of *al-Ghunya*. The work heavily depends on al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād* (al-Mutawallī, *Mughnī*; Bernand 1984; Gimaret 1993).

Al-Juwaynī is considered as the last important representative of Ashʿarism before the methodological shift of Ashʿarism during the sixth/twelfth century. Yet the teaching of some later theologians remained largely unaffected by these developments: these scholars include al-Kiyā’ al-Ḥarrāsī (d. 504/1010–11), Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 512/1118), or Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Makkī (d. 559/1163–4) (Shihadeh 2012: 434). It was in particular the works of al-Juwaynī and al-Bāqillānī that continued to be studied for several centuries. An important number of commentaries on such works as the *Irshād* and to lesser extent the *Tamhīd* provide clear evidence for the ongoing impact of these two thinkers. These works include the *Sharḥ al-Irshād* by al-Juwaynī’s own student Abū l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, a most valuable source for the study of Ashʿarism (Gilliot 2009). Many other commentaries on al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād* were composed by theologians from the Maghrib and al-Andalus, such as Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Māzarī (d. 530/1136), ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Fazārī (d. 552/1157 or 557/1162), and Ibrāhīm b. Yūsuf Ibn Mar’a (611/1214–15) (Shihadeh 2012: 476–7).

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