

❖ Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī: The Defender of Ash'arism

Abdul Muthalib

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

muthalibsamad@yahoo.ca

Abstract: *This paper deals with Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī's Ash'arite theological perspective. He chose to adopt Ash'arism because he believes that God chose certain figures to safeguard religion and the most important one among them is Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī from whom correct theology spread from one generation of disciples to another. His education at Nidhamiyya College and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's tutorship might also be responsible for his preference for Ash'arism. However, even though he was al-Ghazali's student, he was not attracted by Sufism, instead keeping his focus on theology. He objected to Sufism for two defects he perceived it to possess. First is Sufis' references to fake Hadiths and second the Sufi practice of self-mortification. As a devoted Ash'arite, he consistently opposes the anthropomorphic interpretation of God's nature espoused by the Hanbalites and the Dhahirite.*

Keywords: *Theology, Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, Ash'arism, Mu'tazilite*

Abstrak: *Tulisan ini membahas perspektif Ashariyah yang dianut oleh Abu Bakar Ibn Arabi. Pilihannya kepada Madhab Kalam Ashariya adalah karena dia berkeyakinan bahwa Tuhan memilih orang-orang tertentu untuk memelihara agama Islam. Menurutnya, tokoh yang paling penting yang dipilih adalah Abu Hasan al'As'ari yang daripadanyalah teologi yang benar disebarkan dari satu generasi ke generasi berikutnya. Latar belakang pendidikannya dari universitas Nidhamiyya dan dibawah bimbingan Abu Hamid al-Ghazali mungkin menjadi penyebab kecenderungannya pada aliran kalām Asariyah. Kendatipun dia belajar dengan al-Ghazali, dia tidak tertarik pada tasawwuf. Menurutnya, tasawwuf punya dua kelemahan. Pertama karena penggunaan hadis-hadis palsu dan kedua karena penyiksaan diri yang dipraktikkan kaum sufi. Sebagai penganut Ashariyah yang taat, Abu Bakar Ibn Arabi sangat menentang pemahaman antropomorfik tentang Tuhan yang dianut kaum Hanbaliyyah dan Zahiriyyah.*

Kata Kunci: *Teologi (Kalam), Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, Asariyah, Mu'tazilah*

Introduction

Despite the major significance of Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (468/1076-543/1148) role as the champion of Ash‘arism in Spain, until now there has been very little attention given to exploring his contribution to Islamic theological discourse, especially with regards to Ash‘arism. Indeed, there does not appear to be a single study in English focusing on the theological thought of this scholar. This paper intends to address this disparity in the literature. My research is mostly based on al-‘Arabī’s work *al-‘Awāṣim min al-Qawāṣim*. This book is not only rich in theological discussions but also contains many autobiographical details from which we learn about his dynamic intellectual life. To limit our scope, however, I focus here on his polemic against theologians who embrace a literalist understanding of religious texts.

Studying Critically with al-Ghazālī

Al-‘Arabī tells that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450/1058-505/1111) was among his important teachers. His great admiration for al-Ghazālī is reflected in his description of him as a full moon that lights up the heavens and states in relation to him that he really met one of the greatest men of the age.¹ While it is not clear whether or not he spent a long period of time with al-Ghazālī, it appears that he met him during his sojourn at *al-Madrasa al-Nidhāmīya* (Nidhamiyya College) in Baghdad as well as in Tus where he may have studied some of al-Ghazālī’s works with al-Ghazālī himself.²

Nidhamiyya College was established in 1065. In 484/1091, Nizām al-Mulk appointed the 33-year old al-Ghazālī as a professor in the school. In 488/1095, he withdrew from that position and retreated from worldly affairs.³ Al-‘Arabī met him in 490/1097 at Nidhamiyya College, just two years after his self-imposed seclusion.⁴ However, it is impossible that he only studied with al-Ghazālī for several months because after finishing his mystical travels and seclusion in 489/1096, al-Ghazālī only stayed several months in Baghdad. He then came back to his birthplace Tus where he would stay for almost ten years. It is thus quite possible that al-‘Arabī studied with al-Ghazālī during his time in Tus. However, it is quite unlikely that he followed al-Ghazālī to Nishapur because al-Ghazālī moved to Nishapur almost a decade later in 499/1105 at the request of Fakhr al-Mulk, the minister of the Sultan of Sanjar, for him to resume his teaching there. But in 500/1107, al-Ghazālī finally permanently retired and returned to Tus where he died in 505/1111.⁵

Al-‘Arabī relates that he read several of al-Ghazālī’s books while he was studying with him but does not provide their titles. On another page he

mentions that he read *Tabāfut al-Falāsifah*, *al-Qistas*, and *Mi'yār al-'Ilm*, but does not state whether he read them alone or with al-Ghazālī.⁶ We are not sure whether he had already read the whole of al-Ghazālī's masterpiece *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by the time he wrote *al-'Awāsim*. He merely states that he "heard" (*sami'tu*) about it. From such language (i.e. "heard"), it might be inferred that he heard it recited directly from al-Ghazālī himself or from his colleagues or that he was merely aware of some of its content. The latter seems more likely if we consider that *Iḥyā'* was written just after al-Ghazālī's first period of seclusion. Moreover, it is improbable that he heard al-Ghazālī recite the entire *Iḥyā'* if we assume that he only met al-Ghazālī at Nidhamiyya College for a short time. For these reasons, if we assume that al-'Arabī only met al-Ghazālī during his sojourn at Nidhamiyya College, as well as the fact that he seems to misunderstand al-Ghazālī's mystical teaching on the practice of self-mortification, we may reject Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī's suggestion that al-'Arabī studied *Iḥyā'* thoroughly with al-Ghazālī.⁷ On the contrary, if we assume that al-'Arabī had also studied with al-Ghazālī in Tus, it is probable that he read the whole of *Iḥyā'* under the direction of al-Ghazālī.

It is clear from *al-'Awāsim* that al-'Arabī was familiar with al-Ghazālī's life history. However, he states that al-Ghazālī had already decided to choose the Sufi path and make his retreat in 486, two years earlier than the date we mentioned above. He also explains that this period of seclusion lasted five years.⁸ We might suppose that he retrieved this information from his direct interaction with al-Ghazālī, from students enrolled in Nidhamiyya College, or from al-Ghazālī's autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*.

Although al-'Arabī read many of al-Ghazālī's works, Sufism is not his main interest. The distance he maintains from it is evident in how he criticizes al-Ghazālī's adoption of certain Sufi tendencies in the works that he claims to have read mentioned above. Al-'Arabī asserts that regardless of how important those books are for weakening the philosophers' positions, al-Ghazālī is still at fault for his Sufi tendencies. He even charges that they contain "extreme" mystical elements.⁹ He explains in more detail in other parts of *al-'Awāsim* that there are two extreme Sufi tendencies that he disapproves of. The first is an extreme Sufism in which fake Hadiths are invented or statements of the philosophers are attributed to the Prophet.¹⁰ He blames this kind of Sufism for embodying the attitudes of the Batinites. Meanwhile, the second is the tendency among Sufis toward extreme asceticism. Al-'Arabī argues that this is unrealistic because it involves self-mortification. In his opinion, a man is always a man and thus one cannot escape his attachment to worldly life as long as he is still alive.

The view held by some ascetics that a man must completely purify his heart from his physical attachments is impossible as long as there is still breath in his body.¹¹

The first criticism of the Sufis indeed may certainly be applied to al-Ghazālī for his free and reckless citation of Hadiths.¹² However, the second one does not seem to contradict with al-Ghazālī's view of asceticism. Al-Ghazālī also insists that one must not ignore one's physical body because it is one's vehicle for one's journey to God. He makes clear in *Ihyā* that the denial of the real existence of the physical body as a constituent of the human being is not a Sufi teaching: "Nobody can make a journey to God if he does not have a physical body and does not dwell in this phenomenal world, because the phenomenal world is in fact the seedbed for the life to come in the Hereafter".¹³ One must not abandon this world because not all of one's activity in it is useless for either the present or the future life. He further explains that human activity in this world can be divided into two kinds: that which is praiseworthy and that which is blameworthy.¹⁴ Man should abandon the latter and maintain the former. Clearly, then, al-'Arabī was unaware of this important position that al-Ghazālī held. We thus might not be wrong in our contention that al-'Arabī had not yet read all of *Ihyā*' while writing *al-'Awāṣim*. Rejecting the real existence of a body is not, in fact, the position of Ghazali, it was Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām (d.220-230/835-845), a Mu'tazilite leader, who rejected the real existence of the physical body as a constituent of man. This idea was sharply rejected by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (260/874-324/936) who stated in his masterpiece *Mujarrad Maqālāt* that the definition of a human being must also include his real physical body.¹⁵

With respect to theology, al-'Arabī explicitly states his strict preference for Ash'arism. In this respect, he holds the opinion that God chose certain figures to safeguard religion and claims that the first figure he selected was al-Ash'arī, from whom correct theology spread from one generation of disciples to another.¹⁶ It is safe to assume that al-'Arabī preferred Ash'arism because of his academic activities at Nidhamiyya College. From his own account, we learn that the Ash'arite theological works were used and published there and that the College was subsidized by government financial support amounting to ten thousand dinars by the minister of Muayyid Daula Abū al-Qāsim Ismā'il Ibn 'Abbād (326/938-385/995). However, al-'Arabī laments that a fire accidentally broke out there and burned most of the books. Fortunately, though, he tells, he found the work of Abū Bakr Ibn Fūrak (330/941-406/1015).¹⁷ Although he does not specify which of Ibn Fūrak's books he found there, we may suppose

that one of them was written not by Ibn Fūrak but rather by al-Ashʿarī. Daniel Gimaret explains that al-Ashʿarī's book *Mujarrad Maqālāt* is his own work and that Ibn Fūrak was only the copier. Ibn Fūrak was the most significant figure to transmit al-Ashʿarī's works by copying them out by hand.

Al-ʿArabī's Intellectual Milieu: Dialogue with Other Theological Schools

Despite his commitment to Ashʿarism, from his own account we learn that al-ʿArabī was an open-minded man and happy to build intellectual dialogue with certain other theological schools, namely the Qadarites and the Muʿtazilites. He refused, however, to make dialogue with those who followed the Mushabbiha and Batinite schools. The main reason behind this attitude was that he could agree with the Qadarites and Muʿtazilites on certain points but not at all with either the Mushabbiha or the Batinites. He accuses these latter two of being ignorant and thus there being no need to discourse with them.¹⁸

We might not be wrong to suggest that al-Ghazālī had an influence on al-ʿArabī's intolerance of the Batinites. On various occasions, al-Ghazālī strongly criticizes this group.¹⁹ There are two main reasons why al-ʿArabī detests the Baṭīnites. The first is because of their doctrine of the infallibility of their Imams and that God manifested in them. Al-Ghazālī likewise attacked them for this view.²⁰ It is probable, however, that what Ibn al-ʿArabī disapproved of more was not the concept of the infallibility of their imams, since most Shiʿites espouse a similar opinion about this issue,²¹ but rather the idea of the manifestation of God in their imams. The second is for their terrorist activities, and perhaps this is the most detestable thing that makes Ibn al-ʿArabī oppose this group. Al-ʿArabī mentions that the minister Niẓām al-Mulk, known for his support for Nidhamiyya College, was one of their victims. This is why, explains al-ʿArabī, al-Ghazālī was asked by the king to write something to counter this group. He then wrote two books for that purpose, namely *Hujjat al-Ḥaqq fī al-Radd ʿalā al-Bāṭinīyah* and *Fadāʾih al-Bāṭinīya wa Fadāʾil al-Mustazhirīya*.²²

It is apparent that al-ʿArabī only avoided mingling with the Baṭīnites and not with the Shiʿites. He tells us that he frequently participated in debates with them, which he found quite entertaining. He also admits that to some extent he could gain positive intellectual feedback from them. Finally, he reports that some Shiʿite imamate figures whom he encountered had a strong tendency towards Muʿtazilite doctrines.²³ A new tendency among Shiʿites towards Muʿtazilism was introduced by al-Sheikh al-Mufid (948-1022).²⁴ Given that the latter died just fifty years before the birth of al-ʿArabī, we may suppose that among al-ʿArabī's contemporaneous Shiʿite scholars whom he encountered

in Baghdad were the immediate disciples of al-Sheikh al-Mufīd. It thus understandable that he enjoyed his debates with them.

We learn from al-‘Arabī that he also enjoyed mingling with Hanafites. We would assume that he encountered them mostly around Baghdad since the city must have had a large number of Hanafites at that time due to the Hanafite college there that competed with Nidhamiyya College.²⁵ Interestingly, he tells that most of the Hanafite scholars he saw in Khurasan and Iraq were Mu’tazilites.²⁶ He met one important Hanafite figure, whom he calls “Qāḍī Ḥāmid al-Mu’tazilī al-Ḥanafī,” in Palestine. He was a Mu’tazilite and had many friends who belonged to various groups, such as the Shi’ites, the Qadarites, and the Sunnites. They all enjoyed mingling with him because of his intellectual achievements. Al-‘Arabī seems to have liked him not only for his intellectual prowess, but also for his respectful attitude in refraining from anathematizing al-Ash‘arī for his opinion that man can have a vision of God.²⁷

Al-‘Arabī’s report that he encountered many Hanafites who embrace Mu’tazilite theology is certainly surprising to us because Abū Ḥanīfa himself is sometimes accused of being a Murji’ite. Unlike the founders of other Sunni schools who insist that the strength or weakness of one’s faith is determined by one’s actions,²⁸ Abū Ḥanīfa holds that faith is merely the action of the heart and that all Muslims have the same degree of it; they differ only in their actions which, themselves, whether good or bad, do not affect one’s faith.²⁹ In my opinion, it is only with respect to this topic that Abu Ḥanīfa’s view is closer to that of the Murji’ites. Whereas the Mu’tazilites insist that those who commit big sins are neither believers nor unbelievers and will eternally be in hellfire unless they repent before dying,³⁰ the Murji’ites are much more flexible in maintaining that only faith is important.

If Abū Ḥanīfa was really a Murji’ite, then why was Mu’tazilite theology so interesting to the Hanafites whom al-‘Arabī met? To answer this question, let us discuss in a bit more detail about whether Abū Ḥanīfa really was a Murji’ite or not. He was labeled as one by at least two scholars. One of them was al-Ash‘arī who contended that Abū Ḥanīfa in fact sympathized with the Murji’ites for their strict insistence on faith instead of religious practice.³¹ Another was the Murji’ite theologian Ghassān al-Kūfī who claimed that Abū Ḥanīfa belonged to the Murji’ites.³² However, this latter claim seems to have no grounds since Abū Ḥanīfa himself denied it and considered it an insult launched by his opponents. He maintained that he is a Sunni (among the *Ahl as-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘at*).³³ Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī also argues that Ghassān’s assertion is unfounded. He explains that it is nearly impossible that Abū Ḥanīfa belonged to the

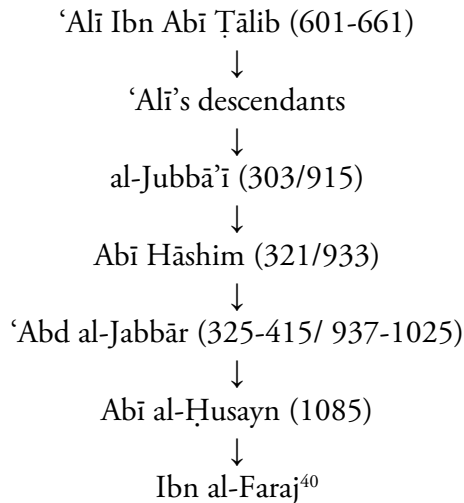
Murji'ites because, as a founder of a school of religious law, he would never have espoused the flexible approach to religious practice that the Murji'ites do.³⁴

Abu Ḥanīfa's theology also differs from that of the Murji'ites in that the latter does not admit the existence of a punishment in the Hereafter while the former does. As to the Murji'ites' view, Hanbalite Abū Ya'la' ibn al-Farrā' relates that most Murji'ites believe that anybody who simply declares that he believes in God and the Prophet Muhammad will not be punished for committing any sins.³⁵ Furthermore, Hanafite theologian Muḥammad al-Nasafi explains that the Murji'ites assert that there is not at all any punishment in hellfire as such but rather that the life of those sent to hell is analogous to that of a fish in water. Therefore, whereas Muslim believers will enter paradise where they will enjoy the pleasure of eating and drinking, the non-believers will enter hell but will not be punished with any kind of pain there. From this account, it is apparent that not only do the Murji'ites deny the existence of a punishment for Muslim sinners but also for unbelievers. Al-Nasafi completely rejects this view and insists that there will be a real punishment in hell because the Quran clearly relates that there is.³⁶

Despite the agreement between Abū Ḥanīfa and the Murji'ites that one's faith is not altered when he/she commits a big sin, the Murji'ites proceed much farther in denying the reality of a punishment in the Hereafter. In contrast, Abū Ḥanīfa emphasizes the existence of a physical and mental punishment in the afterlife. He even accuses those who deny the existence of a punishment in the grave of belonging to the "disgusting Jahmite group".³⁷ Thus, the position of Abū Ḥanīfa is not similar to that of the Murji'ites.³⁸ Furthermore, that man is responsible for the sins that he commits is not rejected by Abū Ḥanīfa.³⁹ His insistence on the importance of believing in the existence of a punishment in the afterlife is also close to the view of the Mu'tazilites on this issue. Ibn al-'Arabī's claim that some Hanafite scholars embrace Mu'tazilite doctrines is thus not totally surprising. Furthermore, another reason why they were attracted to the Mu'tazilites may be the rational approach that the latter utilize. Indeed, a rationalist tendency is known to be stronger among Hanafites than among adherents of other schools. It is thus understandable that from the Hanafites emerged another Sunnite school of theology established by Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (853-944) who tends to be even more rational than al-Ash'arī.

Concerning Ibn al-'Arabī's engagement with his contemporaneous Mu'tazilite scholars, whom he praises for their intellectual capacities that he says he could benefit from, he mentions Abū Maṣṣūr Sātīkīn, Abū Muḥammad

‘Abd al-‘Azīz (the chief jurist in Baskarah), Ibn al-Mannānī and others. He tells that the latter tried to convert him to the Mu’tazilite school. In his effort to convince him of its accuracy, al-Mannānī assured him that the school’s authority can be traced back to the Prophet Muhammad. He explained that the Prophet’s authority was passed down consecutively in the following order:



From this chain, the importance of ‘Alī is clear from how he is the first to receive the Prophet’s authority. This a true reflection of the Mu’tazilites’ preference for ‘Alī over the other three companions among the Rightly Guided caliphs, a sentiment they share with Shi‘ites and Qadarites.⁴¹ As an extension of their preference for ‘Alī, his descendants also play a prominent role in the transmission of Mu’tazilite doctrines in passing them on to al-Jubbā’ī. While it would be very interesting if these descendants could be identified, it may also be nearly impossible to do so due to the great number of people who belong to ‘Alī’s family. In any case, we cannot attend to that task in this paper. However, we might suggest that most of ‘Alī’s descendants became important Shi‘ite leaders. Many Mu’tazilites, in sharing with the Shi‘ites a predilection for ‘Alī and his descendants, are called moderate Mu’tazilites. They only differ from the Shi‘ites in refusing to venerate them in the extreme manner they do so.⁴²

From the chain just described, we may note two further interesting points concerning the Mu’tazilites. First, since it depicts the Mu’tazilites as claiming religious authority from the Prophet through ‘Alī and his descendants, an assumption may arise that the Shi‘ites inspired the Mu’tazilites. However, there is a problem of finding historical proof for this assumption. Both Shi‘ites and Sunnis offer their own historical accounts of the early formative period of

Islam which both could be dubious to some extent. According to Sunni al-Shahrastānī, interaction between 'Alī's descendants (the Shi'ite figures) with the Mu'tazilites seemed to start with the great grandson of 'Ali and founder of the Zaydites, namely Zayd ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.740) who himself became the student of Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā'(700-748).⁴³ If we accept this, we might want to conclude that the Mu'tazilites inspired the Shi'ites. However, to seek a fair judgment, we must also look at the comments of Zaydite Shi'ites on this issue, namely those of Imām Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā (d. 840/1437). He claims that Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' learned Islamic theology from a son of 'Alī named Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafiah (15-81/636-700).⁴⁴ However, this account appears to be dubious because Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafiah had already died by the time was born. It is thus likely that it was rather Muḥammad ibn Ḥanafiah's son, Abū Hāshim, who Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' studied with. Abū Hāshim admitted that Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' reached the highest level of knowledge in theology and suggested others to study with him.⁴⁵ Since this account is narrated by a Zaydite leader, it is likely that Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' held a special place in the heart of Zaydite Shi'ites. Thus, al-Shahrastānī's statement that the first Zaydite imam studied with Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' seems to be true. Therefore, it is right to assume that there was mutual influence between the Shi'ites and the Mu'tazilites, thus offering some credibility to this chain of transmission. In any case, the influence of Mu'tazilite doctrines on Zaydism is very evident.⁴⁶

The second interesting point about this chain of transmission is that it shows us that in presenting it the Mu'tazilites tried to imitate the Sufi orders (*ṭarīqa*) that have also employed such chains reaching back to the Prophet to earn recognition. The Mu'tazilites seem to be aware that a reference to the Prophet is necessary for gaining credibility. In fact, most Muslim sects refer to the Prophet to legitimize their doctrines. The Mu'tazilites also cite a Hadith of the Prophet intended to back the authenticity of their beliefs. It is presented by Aḥmad Yaḥyā ibn al-Murtaḍā and says: "My community will be split but the best and most reliable are the Mu'tazilites."⁴⁷ However, this Hadith could certainly be fake just as it could for other Islamic sects who may invent Hadiths to support their views. It thus appears that the Mu'tazilites not only attempted to convert people to their school through rational argumentation but also emotional indoctrination and persuasion. But despite the efforts of Ibn Mannānī to convert al-'Arabī to Mu'tazilism using the latter method, he could not shake his allegiance to Ash'arism. Presumably, then, al-'Arabī was in doubt that this chain of transmission extending back to the Prophet was reliable.

Because of his direct engagement with the Mu'tazilites, it is natural that their focus on rational arguments also influenced al-'Arabī. This can be seen from the method that he employs to support his argument for the absolute transcendence of God. He asserts that since God is purely transcendent, everything which is impossible to occur in Him must be negated. In this way his view accords with that of the Mu'tazilites (which was also adopted by later Ash'arites) that not all Quranic verses must be understood literally. Any verses that describe Him with anthropomorphic features must be interpreted with the recognition of His absolute divine transcendence in mind.

Considering what we have just discussed above concerning his readiness to mingle with non-Ash'arites such as Mu'tazilites, Qadirites, and Shiites, it is obvious that al-'Arabī is not fanatic with the Ash'arite theological school he belongs to. He explicitly refers his open-minded attitude in quoting a statement he made during a debate with a Shi'ite scholar: "Since you know that I belong to Ash'arism, how do you accuse me of following him blindly?"⁴⁸

Criticism of the Zahirites and Hanbalites

There are two Sunni groups al-'Arabī frequently criticizes for their anthropomorphism, namely the Zahirites and Hanbalites. His criticism of the former, however, is confined to its reviver, Ibn Ḥazm (348-459/994-1064).⁴⁹ His attack on these two groups is somewhat understandable if we consider that al-Shahrastānī also depicts them as being close to the Mushabbiha and says they belong to the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. Al-Shahrastānī mentions two important members of this latter group: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Dawūd 'Alī al-Iṣfahānī. However, he does not accuse them of deviating from orthodoxy because they avoid espousing an absolute anthropomorphism adopted by other Mushabbiha groups. He even confirms that they are among those who will get salvation. However, whereas in this way al-Shahrastānī somewhat tolerates them because of their limited anthropomorphism,⁵⁰ al-'Arabī accuses them of being misleading.

One indication of al-'Arabī's objection to the Zahirites' anthropomorphism is his rejection of Ibn Ḥazm's literal interpretation of Quran 39:4, which reads: "If God had wanted to take a son He could have chosen anyone He wished to from among His creation." Al-'Arabī insists that any literal interpretation of this verse must be avoided because it could lead to anthropomorphism. He thus disagrees with Ibn Ḥazm who in describing that God has unlimited power to create anything He wants, including a son for Himself or another God, makes precisely such an interpretation. In al-'Arabī's view, while certainly the absoluteness of God's power must be accepted, it must

be understood in accordance with the principle of His absolute transcendence. Thus, Ibn Hazm's opinion that God can make a son and another God is completely wrong because such an action contradicts with His transcendence and leads to absolute anthropomorphism. Al-'Arabī argues that it is completely unimaginable that God could create something which contradicts with His being as the one and only God or, in other words, with the principle of unity (*tawḥīd*).⁵¹ His rejection of Ibn Ḥazm's interpretation is perhaps also the result of reading al-Ghazālī's works. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*,⁵² al-Ghazālī emphasizes that God must not be described with any immanent features. Meanwhile, in *al-Iqtisād fī al-'Tṭiqād* al-Ghazālī insists that no partner shares in God's eternity and that he is indivisibly one.⁵³

Al-'Arabī's depiction of Ibn Ḥazm's anthropomorphism may be accurate if he is judging from the perspective of the later Ash'arite position he espouses. As a Zahirite, Ibn Ḥazm disapproves of metaphorical interpretations of ambiguous portions of religious texts that the later Ash'arites made. According to al-Shahrastānī, this attitude is why the Zahirites were classified among anthropomorphic groups. It is also why they are somewhat similar to the literalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), namely the Hanbalites and some Malikites.

In reality, Ibn Ḥazm's theological approach is totally unique. It can neither be compared to that of the rationalists nor that of the literalists. Its uniqueness lies in his insistence on four points that must be accepted concerning the power of God. First, it is eternal. Second, God can do something impossible. Third, He can do something that He never does. And fourth, His power is unlimited.⁵⁴

In his famous theological work *al-Faṣl fī al-Mīlāl wa al-Aḥwā' wa al-Niḥāl*, Ibn Ḥazm argues that because God is absolutely powerful, He has no limits.⁵⁵ For this reason, he rejects the view of the Mu'tazilites that God cannot be said to do things that He does not do. Such a view, he says, denies the absolute power of God. Therefore, God can do anything He wants, even unjust, a liar or have a son.⁵⁶ Al-'Arabī, then, seems to be familiar with this unique view of Ibn Ḥazm from *al-Faṣl fī al-Mīlāl wa al-Aḥwā' wa al-Niḥāl*.⁵⁷

Concerning al-'Arabī's reaction to the anthropomorphic tendency of the Hanbalites, he rejects the literal interpretation of Abū Ya'lā ibn al-Farrā' (380-458/ 990-1066) of a famous Hadith that tells that Adam was created in accordance with God's form. He declares that al-Farrā's interpretation asserting that Adam was truly created in the same form as God, excepting Adam's beard and genitals, is completely misleading. In al-'Arabī's opinion, this ambiguous Hadith must be interpreted as saying that Adam was created in the form of a

human being and not in the form of God because God is completely transcendent and formless.⁵⁸ Clearly, al-'Arabī's account of al-Farrā's anthropomorphic interpretation allows us to categorize it as identical to that of the Mujassimah group.⁵⁹ However, the views expressed by al-Farrā himself do not seem to support al-'Arabī's understanding of his position. He is consistent with the Hanbalite theological approach which rejects neither literal nor metaphorical interpretations of figurative religious texts. In *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, he vehemently attacks the Mujassimah for their anthropomorphism. He even does not hesitate to accuse one who believes that God has a body with limbs just like those of human beings or other contingent beings of being an infidel.⁶⁰ In terms of Quranic verses mentioning God's face, although he does believe that God really has a face and considers it to be a divine attribute super-added onto His essence, he insists that it is beyond figurative explanation. He even clearly refutes the opinion of the Mujassimah that God's face is identical to that of a human.⁶¹ Therefore, al-'Arabī's accusation that al-Farrā believes that Adam's form is similar to God's seems incorrect. In fact, there are perhaps two reasons why he makes such a claim. The first is that it may be the result of an overreaction on the part of the Ash'arites towards al-Farrā's criticism of the Ash'arites' metaphorical approach to interpretation.⁶² The second is that it is perhaps because of a theological inconsistency al-Farrā displays in his writings. However, to prove this latter possibility, we face the difficulty of ascertaining the chronological order in which his works were composed.

We might ask here whether al-'Arabī generalizes in asserting that all Hanbalites make rigid anthropomorphic interpretations of certain Quranic verses. This question is not easy to answer because what the majority of Hanbalites espouse is in fact closer to what the earlier Ash'arites did who considered that ambiguous portions of religious texts which contain or suggest anthropomorphic elements must be understood neither literally nor metaphorically; rather, they stand beyond explanation.⁶³ Al-'Arabī seems to be aware of this. For example, when he discusses Quran 5:64, 39:67, and 38:75, which state that God has a hand, he admits that the earlier Ash'arites believed that a hand is one of the divine attributes of God. Of course, they made it clear that they were not supposing that His hand could be compared to anything in the temporal world but rather that it must be said to be beyond description (*bilā kayfā*). Al-'Arabī then explains that this interpretation was abandoned by the later Ash'arites who chose to understand seeming anthropomorphic verses metaphorically. The "hand" of God thus came to be understood by them as a

metaphor for God's power,⁶⁴ an interpretation which is almost similar to that of the Mu'tazilites.⁶⁵ Al-Ash'arī himself clearly did not adopt such an approach. In *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, he states that the Sunnis and the literalists share the view that although God neither has a body nor resembles anything, all descriptions of God in the Quran and Hadiths that depict him as having hands or a face, or that he is light or sits on a throne, must be understood as they are set forth, but neither in a literal nor metaphorical sense.⁶⁶ As such, we may assume that al-'Arabī might have been aware that the position on anthropomorphism in scripture of the earlier Ash'arites that had already been abandoned by the later ones is similar to that of the Hanbalites. Therefore, we can conclude that he does not generalize and assert that all Hanbalites espouse unconditional anthropomorphic interpretations of scripture as the Mujassimah do.

Another Hanbalite view that al-'Arabī sharply criticizes is that of the nature of the Quran. Theologians of different schools have had different opinions on the matter. The debate surrounding it has continued on into our times and has always seemed to polarize the Ash'arites and Hanbalites. However, the two groups are in agreement over one aspect of the topic. They both hold that the Quran and other Abrahamic scriptures were not created by God but rather exist eternally in Him as His attributes. With this contention they differ completely from the Mu'tazilites who believe that the Quran was created by God. Otherwise, however, the Hanbalites and Ash'arites disagree on other aspects concerning the nature of the Quran. The Hanbalites are known for their literal understanding that the Quran is the real Word of God which is made up of Arabic letters and sounds. This position has been criticized by both Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. For his part, al-'Arabī criticizes it by insisting that the Quran contains neither letters nor sounds but rather a meaning which exists in the essence of God.⁶⁷ This view is clearly in line with that of al-Ash'arī. The latter states in *Mujarrad Maqālāt* that the Word of God is not contained in letters and sounds because it is one of the divine attributes of God co-eternal with His essence.⁶⁸

For al-Ash'arī, it is better to describe the Quran as the divine speech of God which only occurs in His mind, thus being completely transcendent and free from any temporal elements. The Quran as the Word of God is then not created and only exists within Him (*Kalām Nafsī*). It has no connection with the phenomenal world nor any contingent being. Sounds and letters being temporal,⁶⁹ His divine speech does not contain them and so is beyond all languages. Therefore, when God's speech manifests in certain languages such as

Arabic in the case of the Quran or Hebrew in the case of the Torah, this does not mean that God speaks in such languages but rather that He creates the expression of His speech in them. His speech itself cannot be expressed in these languages because it is His eternal attribute. Thus, such expression is the creation of God; it does not constitute His eternal divine attribute of speech but rather exists among contingent beings.⁷⁰ In the same way, when the Quran, for instance, is regarded as the Prophet Muhammad's miracle, it is not because it is the speech of God per se but rather because of the recitation of the Quran that the Prophet Muhammad acquired without learning from anybody.⁷¹

This view allows al-Ash'arī to further assert that God's speech never ceases, becomes mute or silent, and has no defect. Only God Himself can hear it through his eternal attribute of hearing. While for al-Māturīdī God's speech (*kalām nafsi*) cannot be heard by any contingent beings, al-Ash'arī maintains that in its originality (i.e. its ultimate transcendence) it can if God allows it to be.⁷² Of course, such a possibility is not open to just anyone, but rather only to whom God chooses to have that experience. Al-Ash'arī mentions Moses and Muhammad as among those chosen. Moses heard God's speech without mediation, neither through recitation nor any kind of expression. God allowed him to hear His speech in its original form as His attribute of speaking. Similarly, during his ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*), the Prophet Muhammad listened directly to God's speech without any mediation. He even insists that because God chose to endow Muhammad with the greatest capacities which surpass those of all other prophets, he could not only hear and speak with God directly then but also see Him directly. This view differs from that of the Mu'tazilites who reject the possibility of such capabilities. They claim that if Moses could not speak with and see God directly, then all other Prophets would also never be able to do so, both in this present life and in the Hereafter. The impossibility of these actions is due to their contention that God is bodiless and formless.⁷³

Ordinary people indeed can hear the Quran, al-Ash'arī insists, but what they hear is not the Quran as the speech of God existing in Him as *kalām nafsi* but rather the Quran expressed in Arabic containing letters and sounds belonging to the temporal world, all being the creation of God. The difference between how God hears His speech and how ordinary believers do is that while the former hears it through His absolute eternal attribute of hearing, the latter hear it by means of their faculty of hearing created by God.⁷⁴ Therefore, the written or recited Quran is not the real Quran that is the divine attribute of

God but rather the creation of God that is created at the moment when it is written or recited.

The debate among Muslim theologians surrounding this topic is extremely heated. Both the Hanbalites and Ash'arites attack and accuse each other of deviating from orthodoxy. While the former accuse the latter of imitating Ibn al-Kulab (d. 242/855),⁷⁵ the Ash'arites, as represented here by al-'Arabī, charge the Hanbalites with following the Qadarites' view of the nature of the Quran. Al-'Arabī seems to see that the Hanbalites and Qadarites agree that the Quran is made up of letters and sounds. However, the differences between their standpoints on the matter are very considerable. While the Qadarites affirm that the letters and sounds of the Quran were created by God, the Hanbalites view them as His eternal attribute. Similarly, while for the Hanbalites God spoke with Moses through His eternal speech consisting of letters and sounds, for the Qadarite God spoke with him by creating His divine speech in a tree which upon regarding it Moses could understand what He was saying. The Qadarites cite this event to prove that God's speech is not one of his attributes but rather is His creation.

Al-'Arabī suggests that in their belief that the written and recited Quran is the real Quran, the Hanbalites may have been influenced by the Qadarites. However, he does not classify them in the same category as the latter whom he explicitly declares as infidels for their conviction that the Quran is entirely created. This could be for two reasons. First, the Hanbalites never assert that the Quran is created whereas the Qadarites do. Second, there appears to have existed a certain level of mutual respect between the Hanbalites and Ash'arites that restrained them from anathematizing one another. An instance of this attitude is al-Shahrastānī's attitude in tolerating the anthropomorphism of the Hanbalites and the Zahirites.⁷⁶ What they frequently use as a reference point in judging one another is religious orthodoxy. It is not a surprise, then, that Al-'Arabī also avoids designating the Hanbalites as infidels. He even does not employ the term *bid'ah* used to refer to a deviation from orthodoxy. He merely accuses them of being irrational: "I think that those who affirm that the Quran is created are infidels. But those who affirm that the real Quran contains letters and sounds and believe that these letters and sounds are eternal are irrational."⁷⁷

Al-'Arabī is thus clearly more tolerant towards the Hanbalite figurative understanding of the nature of the Quran than the Qadarites' belief in its createdness, for which he believed they deserved to be called infidels. This attitude is less sympathetic than that of al-Ghazālī who was more careful to avoid accusing any groups who disagree with his positions of disbelief. In *al-*

Munqidh min al-Dalāl, al-Ghazālī contends that the espousal of only three views can merit someone the charge of infidelity: 1) rejecting bodily resurrection in the Hereafter; 2) declaring that God only knows universals, not particulars; and 3) believing in the eternity of the world, with respect to both its past and future.⁷⁸ Certainly by this criteria there are some Muslims that would be considered unbelievers, especially Muslim philosophers. In *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa*, however, al-Ghazālī insists that one can only be deemed an infidel by rejecting three articles of faith, namely the oneness of God, Muhammad's prophethood, and the Last Day.⁷⁹ By this measure, not a single Muslim could be considered an infidel regardless of his or her affiliation with one of various Muslim groups. We must therefore agree with Sherman Jackson's conclusion that al-Ghazālī is in fact an ecumenical Muslim scholar.⁸⁰

By deeming the Qadarites unbelievers for their belief in the createdness of the Quran, al-'Arabī clearly does not embrace al-Ghazālī's criteria for determining who is an infidel but rather that of Imām Mālik ibn Anas who proposes a harsh punishment for the Qadarites.⁸¹ The influence of Imām Mālik ibn Anas and his legal school in Spain was huge⁸² and thus it is understandable if al-'Arabī was influenced by him. However, since al-'Arabī still seeks to maintain relative harmony with the Hanbalites, his attitude must be a reflection of the mutual respect that has existed between these two Sunni groups for centuries. It is also possible that his attitude is one common to alumni of Nidhamiyya College.

Understanding Ambiguous Hadiths Metaphorically

As mentioned earlier, al-'Arabī believes that a metaphorical interpretation of ambiguous religious texts is necessary. Without it, one may fall into making claims for anthropomorphism. He certainly supports the move of later Ash'arites to replace the somewhat anthropomorphic views of the early Ash'arites with a new approach that might be described as pure non-anthropomorphic interpretation. We have already discussed how he metaphorically interprets God's hand referred to in some Quranic verses as His power. Now, let us consider his metaphorical interpretations of the religious texts secondary to the Quran, namely Hadiths. In trying to understand ambiguous Hadiths that seem to contradict the principle of God's absolute transcendence, al-'Arabī again decided to follow the example of the later Ash'arites. For him, in order to preserve this principle, any seemingly anthropomorphic descriptions of God must be interpreted according to it.

As we pointed out above, al-'Arabī is critical about the authenticity of Hadiths. Clearly, he must have some knowledge about how to determine their reliability, as indicated by his habit of explaining the degree of a Hadith's authenticity and reliability before introducing it. His most frequent reference when citing Hadiths is to Bukhārī and Muslim.⁸³ His disapproval of the Sufis' recklessness in selecting Hadiths is proof that he does not tolerate the efforts of any group to invent a Hadith. He expressly selects certain Hadiths he considers reliable and criticizes others he does not believe are authentic or which sound illogical. He thus judges Hadiths not only by the level of their reliability and authenticity but also by their content. If a Hadith's content does not make sense, he attempts to deal with it in two ways. First, he tries to interpret it according to religious principles, considering whether it is consistent with them. Second, he employs a rational approach. He insists that the use of reason is absolutely necessary and that reason and religion cannot be separated. Reason's role is to purify religion from any absurd understandings that might be arrived at.⁸⁴ Therefore, if the content of a Hadith contradicts reason, especially regarding the attributes of God, a metaphorical approach to interpreting it must be adopted.

Let us begin examining al-'Arabī's metaphorical interpretation of Hadiths by looking at one in which the Prophet counts the heavens up until the seventh one. He also designates the location of the Throne above these heavens and God above the Throne. According to al-'Arabī, the Prophet's description of God stationed on the Throne must be understood metaphorically to imply that God is great and almighty. He criticizes the literalist interpretation of Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Zayd (d. 389/ 998) who believed that God with his divine essence is truly situated above the Throne. He explains that this understanding is incorrect because it posits God existing in space and time which completely contradicts His absolute transcendence. He insists that this latter principle concerning God's nature be honored and thus that nothing belonging to the temporal world may be attributed to His being. He claims that God never describes Himself in terms contradicting the boundaries of religion and reason. He says: "We know with certainty that God has existed for all eternity before He created all worlds. He is forever different from what He creates. Neither His divine attributes nor His essence have changed, neither before nor after His act of creation."⁸⁵ It is not clear, however, why he does not think this Hadith is sound (*ṣahīh*). Perhaps it is because of what he might consider to be its irrational message.

Another Hadith al-‘Arabī uses a metaphorical approach to interpret states: “Our God descends to the earth’s atmosphere every night.” Again, for al-‘Arabī it is impossible to understand this Hadith literally because it contradicts God’s absolute transcendence. He notes that the verb “descend” used in this Hadith has two meanings. First, it may denote a physical movement. Second, it may refer to the God’s grace and blessings. He believes that only the latter sense of the word is appropriate in the context of this Hadith.⁸⁶ If it were the first, that would be completely misleading, for God, being beyond space and time, cannot make any physical movement. This interpretation certainly differs from that of al-Ash‘arī who suggested that this Hadith be understood as asserting that God really descends to this world, but that His descent cannot be compared to that of anything belonging to the temporal world.⁸⁷

For al-‘Arabī, the many Hadiths explicitly describing God with human behavior or attributes must also be understood metaphorically. He tells that when debating with the anthropomorphic groups, he found their arguments absurd and inconsistent. He presented at least two famous ambiguous Hadiths to them to challenge them. In one of them, God is depicted as laughing and happy. Whereas the anthropomorphic groups interpret it literally, al-‘Arabī argues that although it is reliable, its content is ambiguous if considered by the principle of God’s transcendence. Neither laughter nor happiness can be deemed attributes of God. Thus, these two terms must be understood in this context as referring to His divine grace and gifts. To test the consistency of the anthropomorphists’ with their literalist approach, al-‘Arabī presents a second Hadith describing God as hungry, thirsty, sick, and naked. When asked whether they also believe that God has such attributes, they replied that this Hadith cannot be interpreted literally because that would lead to the wrong understanding that God has such defects as hunger, thirst, sickness, and nakedness.⁸⁸ For al-‘Arabī, however, *no* anthropomorphic descriptions mentioned in Hadiths, whether of positive or negative qualities, can be understood literally. Moreover, similar ambiguous assertions concerning God mentioned in Hadiths must not be understood literally, such as that “the earth belongs to God”, “Paradise is the house of God”, or the “Ka’ba is the house of God”. These expressions cannot be describing God literally because He does not need a place; He is completely beyond space and time.

Al-‘Arabī thus tries to demonstrate that these anthropomorphic groups are not really consistent in their rejection of metaphorical interpretation of religious texts. They seem to have a double standard in interpreting the ambiguous Hadiths. They understand literally statements found in Hadiths

describing God with positive human features, such as the feeling of happiness and the ability to walk and descend down to the world, and designate them as His real attributes. However, when they portray God with a defective human or corporeal quality, such as sickness, hunger, or nakedness, they refrain from deeming them His attributes. Al-'Arabī therefore explains that the best argument that may be employed to counter their anthropomorphic views asserts that all qualities God is depicted as having in the two Hadiths discussed above cannot in fact be attributed to Him because they imply physical movement on His part.⁸⁹

Conclusion

As a defender of Ash'arite theology, Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī is certainly still in agreement with Ḥasan al-Ash'arī in his view on the nature of the Quran. However, in terms of interpreting ambiguous religious texts, he adopts the metaphorical approach of later Ash'arism. His harsh critique of the literal interpretation of such texts is not only addressed to the Hanbalites, but also to the Zahirites and the earlier Ash'arites who followed the Hanbalites' literalist method. In any case, he appears to be an independent scholar who never hesitates to express his own ideas, even if that means challenging the views of his own master.

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Endnote:

¹ Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, *Qānūn al-Ta'wil, dirāsāt wa taḥqīq* by Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī (Damascus: Dār al-Qiblat li-thaqāfat al-Islāmīya, 1986), 61-2.

² Abū Bakr Ibn al-'Arabī, *al-Awāsim min al-Qawāsim*, ed. 'Ammār Ṭālibī (Cairo: Maktabah Dār al-Ṭurāth, 1997), 24 and 72.

³ Mustapha Hogga, *Orthodoxie, subversion et réforme en islam: gazālī et les seljūqides* (Paris: librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1993), 178.

⁴ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 72.

⁵ For a brief chronicle of the life of al-Ghazālī, see Henri Laost, *Les schismes dans l’islam* (Paris: Payot, 1965), 202.

⁶ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 78.

⁷ Al-‘Arabī, *Qānūn*, 61.

⁸ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 24.

⁹ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 78.

¹⁰ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 14.

¹¹ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 29.

¹² Although this criticism is frequently addressed to al-Ghazālī within Islamic scholarship, some reconsiderations have been made to defend al-Ghazālī’s approach which lead to the conclusion that al-Ghazālī was in fact aware of the principle of scrutiny in selecting Hadiths but intentionally built up his own method of selecting them. See Muhammad ‘Aqil Ibn ‘Ali al-Muhdālī, *al-Imām al-Ghazālī wa ‘Im al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1998), 81-86.

¹³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, ed. Sayyid ‘Imrān (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1992), vol. 3, 7.

¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *ibid*, 280.

¹⁵ See Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1987), 215-6.

¹⁶ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 71.

¹⁷ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 72.

¹⁸ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 211.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī uses strong language in discussing the Batinites, mentioning their “vices”, “scandals”, “bad actions”, “perversions”, “monstrosities”, and “impertinence and insolence”. According to Mustapha Hogga, al-Ghazālī’s language is even harsher when speaking of the Batinites than when he addresses the Mu’tazilites. See Hogga, *Orthodoxie*, 81.

²⁰ See A.J. Wensinck, *La pensée de Ghazzali* (Paris: Adrian-Maisonnette, 1940), 106.

²¹ For the Twelver Shiites, as al-Sheikh al-Mufid explains, the twelve imams are not only infallible but also have greater spiritual quality than the prophets and messengers of God (who came before the Prophet Muhammad) as well as all angels. He states: “The opinion of the Imamite school is that the Imams belonging to the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad (the 12 Imams) have more spiritual quality than the prophets and messengers of God (except the Prophet Muhammad). See al-Imām al-Sheikh al-Mufid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin al-Nu’mān Ibn al-Mu’allim Abī ‘Abd Allāh al-‘Ukbrī al-Baghdādī, *Awā’il al-Maqālāt*, ed. Al-Sheikh Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (Mahar: al-Mu’tamar al-‘Ālamī li-Alfiyah al-Sheikh al-Mufid, 1413 hijriah), 65, 70-73.

²² Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 47 and 54-57.

²³ Al-‘Arabī, *al-‘Awāšim*, 54.

²⁴ Heinz Halm, *Die Schia* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchges, 1988), 62-3.

²⁵ The foundation of the madrasa of Abu Ḥanīfa was supported by the minister Tāj al-Mulk, the minister of sultan Saljuk Mālik Shāh. However, unlike Nidhamiyya College which

was named after its founder Niẓām al-Mulk, this madrasa was named after the founder of the madhhab it endorsed. Thus, it was called madrasa Abū Ḥanīfa or Mashād Abū Ḥanīfa, or Masjid Abū Ḥanīfa. See George Makdisi, *l'Islam hanbalisant* (Paris: Paul Guthner, 1983), 32-33.

²⁶ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 212. The predilection of Hanafite scholars for Mu'tazilism is also confirmed by some scholars, such as Daniel Gimaret in his masterpiece *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1980), 171.

²⁷ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 33.

²⁸ According to Mālik ibn Anas, no sin can cause one to become an infidel except associating God with partners (*shirk*). He also held that faith must include action. According to al-Ash'arī, while faith itself is the affirmation of the heart, actions are the foundation of faith. Sinners, however, are still believers. See al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 151-154.

²⁹ Ṣabrī Khidmatī, *Al-'Aqīda wa al-Furuq al-Islāmiya* (Algiers: Dīwān al-Maṭbū'āt al-Jāmi'iyyah, 1994), 258.

³⁰ See Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Adnān Muḥammad Zarzūr (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), Vol I, 345-6. The Mu'tazilites believe that to avoid committing big sins is a part of faith. Thus, believers who commit them and do not repent before they die will go to hell forever. See Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-Dīn*, edited by Hans Peter Linss (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabīya, 1963), 131 and 146.

³¹ Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, 138. However, according to Maturidite theologian Muḥammad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Bazdawī, only some Murji'ites hold that believers who commit both big and small sins would not be sentenced to the hellfire, such as Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. Other Murji'ites, however, maintain the same position as Sunnis that God has total freedom to punish someone or refrain from doing so regardless of whether he/she is a sinner or not. See al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb*, 132.

³² Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Abī Muḥammad bin Farīd (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Tawfiqiya, n.d.), vol. 1, 150-151.

³³ He makes this clear in a letter to his student 'Uthmān al-Bāṭī. See Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Maturidi Und Die Sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 26-29.

³⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, *ibid.* Montgomery Watt has helped to clarify the dispute between Hanbalites and Hanafites on the relation of action to faith. The former insist that faith must include action, which means that one's faith can increase and decrease. In contrast, the latter hold that faith does not include action, meaning that one's faith does not change as a result of one's action. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985), 58.

³⁵ Abū Ya'lā ibn al-Farrā', *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Wadī' Zaydan al-Haddād (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1974), 209.

³⁶ Quranic verses that affirm the existence of a punishment in hellfire include 35:37 ("Therein they will cry aloud [for assistance]: "Our Lord! Bring us out") and 65:9 ("Then they tasted the evil result of their conduct"). Maymūn bin Muḥammad al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, ed. Walī al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Farfūr (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Farfūr, 2000), 173.

³⁷ Naṣr ibn Muḥammad Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *The Islamic Concept of Belief in the 4th/10th Century: Abū al-Laith as Samarqandī's Commentary on Abū Ḥanīfa (died 150/767) al-Fiqh al-absaṭ*, ed. Hans Daiber (Tokyo: ILCAA, 1995), 129-130.

³⁸ Abū Ḥanīfa states: "We do not consider any one to be an infidel on account of sin; nor do we deny his faith". See Mustafa Ceric, *Root of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)* (Kuala Lumpur: Istac, 1995), 202.

³⁹ Al-Samarqandī, *The Islamic*, 130.

⁴⁰ Al-‘Arabī, *al-Awāṣim*, 212.

⁴¹ Indeed, they all say that ‘Alī is the best human being after the Prophet. In contrast, Sunnis believe that Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq was the greatest human being after the Prophet and all other prophets and messengers, then ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and finally ‘Alī. See al-Bazdawī, *Kitāb*, 193.

⁴² See Cheikh Buamrane, *Le probleme de la liberte humaine dans la pensee musulmane* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1978), 26-27.

⁴³ Al-Shahrastānī, *ibid*, 163. See also Moojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi‘ism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 49.

⁴⁴ Imām Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā, *al-Munīyya wa al-Āmil fī Sharḥ al-Mīlal wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1979), 131.

⁴⁵ Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Munīya*, 131.

⁴⁶ We can mention here at least three points to support this contention. First, as explained by Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Murtaḍā, Zaydites believe that God is restricted by the principal of justice with respect to the actions of human beings. One’s performance of good or bad actions is his own doing; God does not involve. Thus, one is responsible for one’s deeds. If one is forced by God to do a good deed, he must not be rewarded because he does not do out by his own will. In the same way, if God forces somebody to do a bad deed, He would be unjust to punish him for it. Second, the Zaydites also hold that God is restricted by a certain morality in terms of His actions towards His creation. He is obliged to do only good things, not bad ones. For the Ash‘arites, in contrast, God’s actions do not possess any inherent good or bad value. Thus, God could do something bad as judged so by human values while that action is not bad with respect to His own values. Lastly, the Zaydites share with the Mu’tazilites the view that Muslims who commit big sins will be sentence to the hellfire for all eternity. See al-Imām Yaḥyā ibn Hamza al-‘Alawī, *Iqd al-Lālī fī al-Radd ‘Alā Abī Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: al-Afaq al-‘Arabīya, 2002), 41 and 170-1. See also al-Murtaḍā, *al-Manīya*, 130.

⁴⁷ Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Manīya*, 124.

⁴⁸ Al-‘Arabī, *al-Awāṣim*, 55.

⁴⁹ The Zahirites emerged to counter the Batinites and the Mu’tazilites. The school was founded by Dāwud bin ‘Alī al-Iṣfahānī in Iraq in the third/ninth century. Ibn Hazm later revived it in Andalusia as a reaction against corruption in the political and judicial fields. See Muhammad Amin Abdul Samad, "Ibn Ḥazm’s Concept of *Ijmā‘*," (Montreal: McGill University, 1978), 20-21.

⁵⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, *ibid*, Vol. 1, 116-17.

⁵¹ Al-‘Arabī, *al-Awāṣim*, 259.

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā*, Vol. 1, 145.

53 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-'Iṭiqād* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Miṣrīya, 1902), 36-7.

54 See Mahdī Ṭāhā Makkī, *Allāh wa 'Ālam 'inda Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ulūm al-'Arabīya, 2013), 173-74.

55 Mahdī Ṭāhā Makkī, *Allāh*, 173-74.

56 'Alī ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa al-Aḥwā' wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1986), Vol. 2, 182-3.

57 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, Vol. 2, 182-3.

58 Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 226-7.

59 The Mujassimah are those who claim that God has a body. According to Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, positing a body for God is wrong because a body must have a physical structure and organs. Thus atoms and accidents would have to be present in His body, which contradicts the notion of His *tauḥīd*. See Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tambīd fī al-Radd 'alā al-Mulḥidah al-Mu'aṭṭilah wa al-Rāfiḍah wa al-Khawārij wa al-Mu'tazilah*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khaḍīrī and Muhammad 'Abbād al-Hādī Abū Rīḍā (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1947), 147-152.

60 Abū Ya'lā Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-Farrā', *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Wadī' Zaydān Ḥaddād (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1974), 271.

61 See Al-Farrā', *Kitāb*, 51.

62 Wadi. Z. Haddad tells in his introduction to al-Farrā's *Kitāb al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-Dīn* which he edited that after al-Farrā' wrote *Ibtāl al-ta'wīlāt li akhbār al-ṣifāt* circa 432/1040, he was harshly attacked harshly by the Ash'arites. See al-Farrā', *Kitāb*, 25.

63 W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic*, 83.

64 Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 220.

65 Al-Ash'arī relates that the Mu'tazilites deny that God literally has a hand or eyes as stated in the Quran. Some of them reject that He can be said to have either, while others hold that He has both but interpret His "hand" as His grace and His "eye" as His knowledge and His desire for knowledge. See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, Vol. 1, 195.

66 See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 211.

67 Al-'Arabī, *Maqālāt*, 218.

68 Al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 59.

69 Al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 59.

70 Al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 60.

71 Al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 62.

72 Maḥmūd Qāsim, *Manābij al-Adilla fī 'Aqāid al-Milla li Ibn Rushd* (Cairo: Al-Anjli al-Miṣrīya, 1955), 126.

73 See al-Jabbār, *Mutashābih*, Vol. 1, 296-7.

74 Al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 60.

75 Muḥammad ibn Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *Khalq af'āl al-'ibād wa al-radd 'alā al-Jahmiyah wa aṣḥāb al-ta'ṭīl*, ed. Fahd ibn Sulaymān al-Fahīd (Riyad: Dār Aṭlas al-Khaḍrā', 2005), Vol. 1, 222-3.

76 Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, Vol. 1, 116-17.

77 Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 217-18.

⁷⁸ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, translated by R.J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), 10-11.

⁷⁹ Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafrīqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47.

⁸⁰ Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 44.

⁸¹ According to Ibn Taymiyya, the Malikites, including Mālik ibn Anas himself, prescribed execution for the Qadarites, while the Shafi'ites and Hanbalites maintain that it is wrong to punish those who make innovations concerning the Quran and the Sunnah through execution. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Le traité de droit public d'ibn taimiyya* (Beirut: Institut Français de Damas, 1948), 118.

⁸² Muhammad Amin Abdul Samad, "Ibn Ḥazm's," 12 and 42.

⁸³ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 273.

⁸⁴ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 231.

⁸⁵ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 215-16.

⁸⁶ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 216-17.

⁸⁷ Al-Ash'arī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 211.

⁸⁸ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 225.

⁸⁹ Al-'Arabī, *al-'Awāṣim*, 224.