



ABU'L-ḤOSAYN BAŞRĪ

ABU'L-ḤOSAYN MOḤAMMAD B. 'ALĪ B. AL-ṬAYYEB AL-BAŞRĪ, Mu'tazilite theologian and lawyer, d. 436/1044. Although he was born in Başra, he spent most of his life in Baghdad. His best-known theological work, *Ketāb taṣaffoḥ al-adella*, was a critical investigation of the various arguments and proofs presented in the writings of earlier Mu'tazilites. His best-known work on jurisprudence is *Ketāb al-mo'tamad fī oṣūl al-feqh* (ed. M. Hamidullah, Damascus, 1965). Since neither the *Taṣaffoḥ* nor the other theological treatises of Abu'l-Ḥosayn have survived, it is impossible to attempt a reconstruction of his thought except on the basis of later sources, especially those of his disciple, Maḥmūd b. al-Malāḥemī. The information presented below is drawn from three works: *al-Fā'eq fī oṣūl al-dīn* by Ebn al-Malāḥemī (ms. Şaṇ'ā', Kalām 189), *Ketāb nehāyat al-'oqūl fī derāyat al-oṣūl* by Faḵr-al-dīn Rāzī (ms. Cairo, Dār al-kotob, Kalām 748), and *Ta'liq 'alā šarḥ al-emām al-mašhūr be Mānkdm* by the Zaydite author of 8th/11th century, Qāsem Moḥallī (ms. Milan, Ambrosiana, F 192).

Abu'l-Ḥosayn belonged to the Basran school of Mu'tazilites, which in the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries was heavily influenced by the thinking of its two most illustrious members, Abū 'Alī Jobbā'ī (d. 303/915) and Abū Hāšem (d. 321/933). Abu'l-Ḥosayn's own teacher, 'Abd-al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), was himself a prominent member of this school. Despite his identity with the Basran school, Abu'l-Ḥosayn must be considered a dissident, perhaps a heterodox member, for he disagreed with his masters on a number of significant issues.

On the question of *şefāt*, Abu'l-Ḥosayn especially objects to the distinction



made by Jobbā'ī's disciples between essence (the thing itself, *dāt al-šay'*) and existence (*wojūd*). For him, existence is not something superimposed on essence, or as Abū Hāšem puts it, a state (*ḥāl*) of his essence: essence and existence are merged (*wojūd al-šay' dātoho*) (*Fā'eq*, fol. 19b.8f.). This makes it impossible for him to adhere to the idea generally held by the Basran Mu'tazilites of the reality of the nonexistent, whereby essence is already constituted in its reality and endowed with its own attributes, even before existence. For Abu'l-Ḥosayn essence can not be in a state of nonexistence (*al-ma'dūm laysa be-dāt fī 'adameh*) (*Fā'eq*, fol. 37b.9ff.).

Parallel to this, Abu'l-Ḥosayn rejected all actual distinction between essence and attribute (*šefa*). Abū Hāšem held that essences differ from one another by virtue of something added to them (*amr zā'ed*) which is their essential attribute. Thus God differs from other essences not by virtue of His essence itself, but by virtue of a state belonging to His essence (*ḥāla dātīya*). Abu'l-Ḥosayn held, on the contrary, that it is by virtue of His essence itself, His *dāt maḳṣūša*, that God differs from other essences (*Fā'eq*, fol. 28b.10ff.; *Nehāyat* II, 47b.23ff.). Likewise, to say “powerful” does not signify, as Abū Hāšem would have it, that a state by virtue of which God is capable of acting has been added to His essence; rather, God possesses this characteristic (*ḥakm*)—“to be capable of acting”—as an intrinsic fact of His essence. The same thing would be true of all His other characteristics (*aḥkām*) signified by His various attributes, all resulting from His essence itself (*mūjaba 'an dāteh*) (*Fā'eq*, fols. 28b.12-15, 33a.14-16, 36a.10, 36b.11; *Nehāyat* I, fol. 128a.13, etc.). As a general rule every essence differs intrinsically from every other (*kollo dāt yokālefo ḡayrahā be-nafsehā*, *Fā'eq*, fol. 33a.6). The similarities and differences between essences are due to the essences themselves, not to something added to them (Moḥallī, fol. 76b.4f.; Šahrestānī, *al-Melal wa'l-neḥal*, ed. Badrān, Cairo, 1951, pp. 123-24, 131.4-5).

Abu'l-Ḥosayn thereby disagreed with both the Šefāfiya (Kollābīya, then the Ašḥ'arites), who held that every attribute (powerful, knower, etc.) implied an entity (*ma'nā*) added to an essence (power, knowledge, etc.), and the followers of Abū Hāšem, for whom these attributes implied states (*aḥwāl*) of this essence. For him, an attribute (*šefa*) is simply the expression of a characteristic (*ḥokm*) proper to any given essence. The term *ḥokm* (pl. *aḥwāl*), was central to Abu'l-Ḥosayn's thought (*Fā'eq*, fol. 14a.14-17; *Nehāyat* I, fols. 127a.16-19, 127b.17-18; II, fol. 41b.10-12).

Contrary to Abu'l-Ḥosayn, the Basran school, from Abū Hāšem on, developed



its ontology with reference to the concepts of *ma'nā* and *ḥāl*. For Abū Hāšem, everyone described as powerful (*qāder*) possesses a state by virtue of which he is capable of acting. In the case of God, this state has its source in another state which is the “essential state” of God. In the case of man, he possesses, as the reason for his being powerful, an entity (*ma'nā*) which is power (*qodra*) created by God in one or another part of his body. Abu'l-Ḥosayn rejects altogether the concept of *ma'nā* (cf. Rāzī, *E'teqādāt feraq al-moslemīn*, Cairo, 1978, p. 42.7; Moḥallī, fol. 30a.3-4); according to him, power is not an entity, it is simply a certain condition of the “structure” (*benya maḵṣūṣa*), i.e., the health of a body, due to a balanced mixture of the body's component elements (*Fā'eq*, fol. 85b.14ff.; Moḥallī, fol. 133b.18-21; *Nehāyat* I, fol. 161b.19-21). It is the same with “positions” (*akwān*); movement, immobility, union, separation, proximity, distance. For Jobbā'ī's disciples, each of these *akwān* is an “entity” by reason of which the substance considered is mobile, immobile, etc. For Abu'l-Ḥosayn, they are simply the substance's ways of being, i.e., its being mobile, immobile, etc. (*Fā'eq*, fol. 6a.3ff.; *Nehāyat* I, fol. 162a.24ff.; Šahrestānī, *Melal*, p. 131.3 [read here *akwān* instead of *alwān*]). Further, knowledge (*elm*) is not an entity the result of which is the knower knowing, it is the very fact of his knowing (*Fā'eq*, fol. 36b.3-6); and so forth (cf. again *Nehāyat* I, fols. 243b.7 to 244b.5).

Despite his reputation for having denied the concept of *ḥāl* (e.g., Šahrestānī, *Melal*, p. 131.1), Abu'l-Ḥosayn, curiously, invokes it when dealing with knowledge (Moḥallī, fol. 72a.9-12; Šahrestānī, *Nehāyat al-eqdām*, ed. A. Guillaume, Oxford, 1931, p. 221.9-12). Knowing, he says, represents for man a state (*ḥāla*) of the heart, for God a state of His particular essence (Moḥallī, fol. 63b.7-8). However, it seems that in this instance of utilizing the term *ḥāl/aḥwāl*, Abu'l-Ḥosayn had in mind the idea of change or variation which the root *ḥwl* allows. All knowledge implies the relationship (*ta'alloq*) of an essence with something other than itself. Abu'l-Ḥosayn defines this relationship as the fact of the knower's having full awareness of the known (*tabayyonoḥo le'l-ma'lūm*) (*Fā'eq*, fol. 33a.18-19; cf. *ibid.*, fols. 15a.18 and 28b.13). This relationship itself is what he calls *ḥāla* (*Fā'eq*, fol. 331.18-24). From this fact, the multiplicity of knowns occasions the multiplicity of acts of knowledge and therefore of the facts of possessing knowledge. For the appearance (*tajaddod*) of every new known, there exists a corresponding new state of the knower (Šahrestānī, *Nehāyat al-eqdām*, p. 221.10; *Nehāyat* II, fol. 46b.3-4; Moḥallī, fol. 76a.7-8).

Abu'l-Ḥosayn applies this schema to God Himself. Without really denying the



eternity of divine knowledge, he holds that God knows by two separate acts: first, by knowing that something will exist, and second, by knowing that it exists when it does exist (*Fā'eq*, fol. 36a.5-9; Moḥallī, fols. 75b.7-14, 76a.7ff., 172b.8-9). This explanation of God's knowledge led to Abu'l-Ḥosayn's being accused of restating in another guise Hešām b. al-Ḥakam's thesis that God knows things after having not known them (*Fā'eq*, fol. 36a.25ff.; Šahrestānī, *Melal*, p. 131.6-7; idem, *Nehāyat al-eqdām*, p. 221.9-10).

On several questions not specifically relevant to the theory of *şefāt* Abu'l-Ḥosayn adhered to views that differed from those held by Jobbā'ī's disciples. For example, on the proof of God's existence—"that every originated thing (*moḥdat*) must have an originator (*moḥdet*)"—he takes exception to the famous argument put forth by Abū Hāšem based on the analogy of God and man (*Fā'eq*, fol. 12a.16ff.; Moḥallī, fol. 49b.9ff.). On the theory of knowledge, he holds that reported knowledge (*kabar*) is acquired (*moktasab*) and not necessary (*zarūrī*) (*Fā'eq*, fol. 135a.8ff.). On the question of man's acts, he holds, contrary to the tradition of Jobbā'ī's disciples, that God has power over the very acts that man performs (*a'yān af'āl al-'ebād*) and not only over the same genre of acts. Therefore the same potential act can be dependent upon the power of two agents (*maqḍūr wāḥed bayna qāderayn*) (*Fā'eq*, fol. 34b.15ff.; *Nehāyat* I, fols. 105a.2-4, 135a.13-15, 137a.14-15, etc.).

The originality of Abu'l-Ḥosayn's theses concerning the nature of human action was emphasized, and possibly exaggerated, by Rāzī (cf. especially *Nehāyat* I, fol. 142b.13ff.). On the other hand, Abu'l-Ḥosayn holds that it is by necessary knowledge (*'elm zarūrī*) that we know man is the agent of his own acts and not, as 'Abd-al-Jabbār would have it, by demonstrable knowledge (*Fā'eq*, fol. 52a.2ff.; *Nehāyat* I, fol. 138a.6ff.). On the other hand, at least according to Rāzī, he affirms (pushing to an extreme the theory of motivations [*dawā'ī*] dear to Jobbā'ī's disciples) that every act necessarily implies a motivation and that once the motivation exists, the act inevitably follows (*Nehāyat* I, fols. 131b.7-11, 142b.13-16, 147b.11-13; II, fol. 67b.9-10). Rāzī says this is contradictory to the preceding thesis since it implies a deterministic conception of acts as the inevitable results of motivations which can be created only by God (on this point, cf. D. Gimaret, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane*, Paris, 1980, pp. 59-60).

Some authors, Rāzī included, affirm that the positions taken by Abu'l-Ḥosayn on various issues owe much to his study of the philosophers (he was a contemporary of Ebn Sīnā) and that he was in fact a *faylasūf* disguised as a



motakallem (cf. Šahrestānī, *Melal*, p. 131.8-9; idem, *Nehāyat al-eqdām*, p. 221.12; Ebn al-Qeṭṭī, *Ta'riḳ al-ḥokamā'*, ed. J. Lippert, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 293-94). Such an affirmation seems exaggerated, and certainly S. Stern's identification of him with a homonymous disciple of the philosopher Ebn al-Samḥ (*JRAS* 1956, pp. 33-41) is very doubtful.

In the domain of *feqh*, Abu'l-Ḥosayn belonged to the Hanafite school, as is evidenced by the fact that Ebn Abi'l-Wafā' Qorašī devoted an entry to him (*Ṭabaqāt al-ḥanafīya* II, Hyderabad, 1332/1914, pp. 93-94), and that at his funeral the celebrated Hanafite *qāzī* Abū 'Abdallāh Ṣaymarī led the prayers. His *al-Mo'tamad*, however is not a partisan work; it deals objectively with the views of both Šāfe'ī and Abū Ḥanīfa, which explains why Rāzī (in *al-Maḥsūl fī oṣūl al-feqh*) and Āmedī (in *Eḥkām al-ḥokkām fī oṣūl al-aḥkām* [Cairo, 1347/1928-9]) found it such a rich source and drew upon it freely.

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See also *Ta'riḳ Baḡdād* III, p. 100.

Ḥākem Jošamī, *Šarḥ al-'oyūn*, in *Faḏl al-e'tezāl*, ed. F. Sayyed, Tunis, 1974, p. 387.

Ebn Ḳallekān (Beirut) IV, p. 271.

Ebn al-Mortažā, *Ṭabaqāt*, pp. 118-19.

A chapter of *al-Mo'tamad* has been translated and commented upon by M. Bernard, *L'accord unanime de la communauté comme fondement des statuts légaux de l'Islam d'après Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī*, Paris, 1970.