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Medieval Arabic Thought

Essays in Honour of Fritz Zimmermann

Edited by Rotraud Hansberger, M. Afifi al-Akiti
and Charles Burnett

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Al-Jāhīz on *Aṣḥāb al-Jahālāt* and the Jahmiyya

Patricia Crone

For Fritz,
esteemed colleague,
old friend, Eidbruder

In his book on animals al-Jāhīz frequently refers to al-Nazzām's doctrine of latency (*kumūn*), that is the idea that fire is hidden in the stone or wood from which it is produced.¹ In one passage on this question he depicts al-Nazzām as arguing against opponents who denied that there was any difference between good and bad seed, salty and sweet water, different types of soil, and suitable and unsuitable times of planting: the only difference lay in God's wish to create grain, grapes, olives and the like from them when they were combined, the result was not latent in the ingredients themselves. Al-Nazzām declared that anyone who held this to be true had agreed with the Jahmiyya, gone to *al-jahālāt*, and professed denial of the *ṭabā'i'* and the *ḥaqā'iq*.²

What is al-Nazzām referring to? *Jahālāt* means something like absurdities or nonsense, views revealing ignorance (*Ungereimtheiten*, as van Ess suggests in his translation of another passage).³ The absurdities relate to two denials associated with the followers of Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), the Transoxanian *mawlā* and rebel whose beliefs are viewed with disfavour in all surviving sources. The first denial is of the *ṭabā'i'*, the four elementary qualities which both al-Nazzām and al-Jāhīz himself saw as key constituents of the natural world. Jahm and/or the Jahmiyya denied that these entities generated anything, or even that they existed, as we read elsewhere in al-Jāhīz' animal book.⁴ The second denial is of the *ḥaqā'iq*, which Frank translates as 'essential characters' or 'essential natures', reading the word as largely synonymous with *ṭabā'i'*.⁵ Van Ess opts for the 'core of things' (*Wesenskern*) or 'the real powers of action' (*die realen Wirkkräfte*) and relates the statement to Jahm's denial of free will: God governed everything, humans were just marionettes in his hands.⁶

*This article owes its genesis to the kindness of Mairaj Syed, who gave me a print-out from al-waraq.com of all the passages on *al-jahālāt* in al-Jāhīz in connection with a graduate seminar I taught at Princeton University in 2006. I am also grateful to Michael Cook for helpful comments.

1. Al-Jāhīz, *K. al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'A.-S. M. Hārūn, Cairo, 7 vols, 1938–45, esp. V, pp. 6ff.; cf. *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, Leiden, 1960–2004 (henceforth *EI*), art. 'kumūn' (van Ess).

2. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), V, p. 93 (*wa-man qāla bi-dhālika ... qāla ka-qawl al-Jahmiyya fi jamī' al-maqālāt wa-ṣāra ilā l-jahālāt wa-qāla bi-inkār al-ṭabā'i' wa-l-ḥaqā'iq*).

3. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, Berlin and New York, 1991–7 (henceforth *TG*), VI, p. 31. References to *TG* alone are to van Ess's translations (which include philological discussion and further references); references to van Ess, *TG*, are to his analysis.

4. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), IV, p. 288, l. 6; V, p. 11, ll. 1–2; cf. also IV, p. 74, l. 4 where Jahm and Ḥafṣ al-Fard are contrasted with those who believe in the *ṭabā'i'*.

5. R. Frank, 'The Neoplatonism of Ḡahm b. Ṣafwān', *Le Muséon*, 78, 1965, pp. 395–424 (404–5).

6. Cf. van Ess, *TG*, II, p. 498; *TG*, VI, p. 31.

Other passages in al-Jāhīz, however, show that the *jahālāt* had to do with perceptions. Al-Jāhīz tells us that he had written a book against the Jahmiyya *fi l-idrāk wa-fi qawlihim fi l-jahālāt*, 'about perception and their doctrine concerning the *jahālāt*'.⁷ Here *al-jahālāt* seems to be used as a technical term, not simply as a term of abuse. In a more expansive vein, al-Jāhīz cites al-Nazzām as remarking, in polemics against Ḍirār b. 'Amr, that he who says that animals live without blood must also deny the *ṭabā'i*' and reject the *ḥaqā'iḳ* in accordance with Jahm b. Ṣafwān's doctrine about the heating of fire and cooling of snow, food and poison, and perception and sensory impressions (*al-idrāk wa-l-ḥiss*); but that, he says, is another chapter (*dhālika bāb ākhar*) *fi l-jahālāt*.⁸ Again, the *jahālāt* seems to be a technical term for a doctrine relating to perception, and here too the doctrine involves denial of the elementary qualities and the *ḥaqā'iḳ*, but this time the *jahālāt* are cast as the consequence of holding that animals live without blood. How could anyone make so strange a postulate? Ḍirār allegedly held that blood was only created when you saw it.⁹ Elsewhere al-Nazzām reiterates that whoever denies the doctrine of latency will eventually enter *fi bāb al-jahālāt*. Here he goes through a long sequence of *ilzām* (whoever says A must also say B and so also C, etc.) in order to show that whoever denies that there is fire in the stone thereby joins those who argue that there is no water in the water skin on the grounds that the water is only created when you touch its wetness, and who say the same about the sun, the moon, the stars and the mountains when they disappear from sight (i.e. that they cease to exist).¹⁰ Apparently, then, the Jahmite doctrine regarding perceptions and *jahālāt* against which al-Jāhīz had directed his book was to the effect that nothing exists until you perceive it, and that it only exists as long as you perceive it. Al-Nazzām's argument is that if, like Ḍirār, you deny that there is fire in the stone before you rub it, you have no option but to go with Jahm: you must also deny that there is blood in the bodies of animals before they bleed, that there is water in the skin before you touch it, and that the sun and the moon exist when you do not see them. In short, your only alternative to the doctrine of latency is so crazy that you have to agree with al-Nazzām.

Jahm's doctrine *fi l-jahālāt* should undoubtedly be related to his view of God. He famously held God to be wholly other, far beyond our senses and intellect, utterly removed from any conceptualization or description by us.¹¹ Since everything we are capable of thinking and saying is tied to the created world, we have no way to envisage him. We cannot even say that he is a *shay'*, a thing or something, for all

7. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), I, p. 10, l. 1. The text has *al-jihāt*, but the variant *al-jahālāt* is clearly to be preferred; cf. V, p. 7, ll. 1-3, where van Ess also emends *al-jihāt* to *al-jahālāt* (TG, VI, p. 29 and n. 16).

8. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), V, p. 11, l. 3 (TG, VI, pp. 31-2).

9. *Ibid.*, p. 10, l. 5 (TG, VI, p. 31).

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9 (TG, VI, pp. 29-30). For the *Konsequenzmacherei*, see van Ess, TG, III, p. 41.

11. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā l-Zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya* (transl. TG, V, p. 222); Khushaysh in al-Malaṭī, K. *al-Tanbih wa-l-radd 'alā ahl al-ahwā' wa-l-bida'*, ed. S. Dederling, Istanbul, 1936, p. 70; cf. TG, II, pp. 499ff.

things are his creation, and there is no thing like him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*, Q. 42:11).¹² Some thought that Jahm must have been an atheist, since his object of worship was an unknown entity.¹³ But in fact, God was everything to him, quite literally; for although his object of worship was wholly transcendent, he was also wholly immanent, mixed (*mumtazij*) in with his creation,¹⁴ pervading everything, without being in a particular place.¹⁵ Everything that happened in this world was his action, including everything we did ourselves. There was no causality, merely things coming in association.¹⁶ We would describe ourselves as the originators of our acts, but we were not, any more than the trees or the sun were the real agents when they were described as shaking in the wind or setting. In reality (*fī l-ḥaqīqa*), nobody apart from God did anything.¹⁷

The doctrine about *jahālāt* amounts to a further claim that apart from God, nothing really exists. We see the blood of animals, the sun and the moon, we feel the wetness of water, experience the cooling effect of snow, and the different effects of food and poison, but what we see, feel, hear, smell and taste exists only in relation to us, not as independent entities: take us away and they too disappear. They have no more reality than do our own acts, and no more effect: the mountains do not exist, nor do the sun and moon; fire does not heat, snow does not cool, food does not nourish us, poison does not kill us, and the elementary qualities account for nothing. In short, the world that we perceive through our senses does not include any *ḥaqā'iq*, things or acts endowed with objective existence. Only God exists, and of Him we can say nothing because our sensory and intellectual equipment is geared to the phenomenal world. In relation to Him all our ideas are mere imagination, mere *wahm*. Anyone who said that his *wahm* had reached God was an unbeliever, as Jahm is reported to have declared.¹⁸

To Richard Frank, Jahm came across as a Neoplatonist.¹⁹ Fritz Zimmermann was not persuaded, though he did grant that Jahm might have picked up a Neoplatonist commonplace or two.²⁰ One wonders if even the commonplaces should

12. Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā l-Zanādiqa wa-l-Jahmiyya* (transl. TG, V, p. 222); differently formulated in al-Maqdisī, *K. al-Bad' wa-l-ta'rīkh*, ed. G. Huart, Paris, 1899-1919, V, p. 146.

13. Cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Radd* (n.12 above), p. 32.

14. Khushaysh in Malaṭī, *Tanbīh* (n. 11 above), p. 6 (TG, V, p. 200); cf. van Ess, TG, II, pp. 501-2.

15. Thus the Jahmiyya in Malaṭī, *Tanbīh* (n. 11 above), p. 76 (TG, V, p. 220); al-Ḍārimī, *al-Radd 'alā-l-Jahmiyya*, ed. G. Vitestam, Lund and Leiden, 1960, pp. 17, 42, 59; cf. p. 96; Frank, 'Neoplatonism' (n. 5 above), pp. 403-4.

16. Ibn Taymiyya in Y. Qāḍī, *Maqālāt al-Jahm* [sic] b. Ṣaḥwān, Riyad, 2005, II, p. 724.

17. Al-Ash'arī, *K. Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1929-33, p. 279 (TG, V, p. 214); cf. van Ess, TG, II, pp. 498-9, rightly stressing that this was not a doctrine of predestination: there was no divine foreknowledge, and no plan.

18. M. Bernand, 'Le Kitāb al-radd 'alā l-bida' d'Abū Muṭī Makhḥūl al-Nasafī', *Annales Islamologiques*, 16, 1980, p. 105; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs al-Iblīs*, Cairo, n.d., pp. 20-21.

19. See the reference given above, n. 5.

20. F. W. Zimmermann, 'The Origins of the so-called Theology of Aristotle', in J. Kraye, W. F. Ryan, and C. B. Schmitt (eds), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages*, London, 1986, pp. 110-240 (135-6).

not be struck from the record. God does lie beyond human conceptualization in Neoplatonism, but the sublunar world of the Neoplatonists is not lacking in reality or reducible to a flow of short-lived and ultimately unreal sense impressions. Van Ess, although more taken with Frank's argument than Zimmermann, considered the possibility that we should look to Indian systems rather than Neoplatonism for the roots of Jahm's thought.²¹ This is surely right. Jahm is said to have come from Balkh, the capital of Ṭukhāristān (ancient Bactria), which was still predominantly Buddhist at the time,²² and he was based at Tirmidh, on the border between Ṭukhāristān and Sogdia, which also had a Buddhist presence.²³ He is said to have engaged in disputation with Buddhists (Sumaniyya), who induced such doubts in him that he stopped praying for forty days, saying that he would not pray to someone he did not know; then, according to Khushaysh b. Aṣram (d. 253/867), he 'derived this doctrine (*ishtaqaqa hādhā l-kalām*) from that of the Sumaniyya'.²⁴ In other sources the Sumanīs ask Jahm how he can know that God exists when he cannot perceive him with the senses and Jahm replies by asking them if they do not have a spirit which is equally inaccessible to the senses, which they admit. Here the Sumanīs are indistinguishable from the empiricist Dahrīs of Iraq,²⁵ and Jahm does not borrow anything from them. In Khushaysh's version the issue may be the unknowability rather than the existence of God, but it is still hard to see what Sumanī doctrine it could be that he borrowed. If we go by al-Jāhīz rather than Khushaysh, the most plausible answer, in so far as a mere Islamicist can judge, is a philosophical doctrine of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In the Abhidharma, a body of systematizing literature dated to between the third century BC and the first century AD, a distinction is made between two truths, one conventional, relating to the way things appear, the other ultimate,

21. Van Ess, *TG II*, pp. 499–500, 504.

22. Al-Sam'ānī, *al-Ansāb*, ed. M. I. Khān, Hyderabad, 1962–92, III, p. 437, s.v. 'al-Jahmī'; cf. van Ess, *TG II*, p. 494; H. Yang, Y. Jan, S. Iida and L. W. Preston (eds and trs), *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, Seoul, n.d., §25 (I owe my knowledge of this work to K. van Bladel, 'The Bactrian Background of the Barmakids', in A. Akasoy, C. Burnett and R. Yoeli-Tlalim [eds], *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, Farnham, 2011, pp. 43–88 (51–2).

23. Noted by Hsüan-tsang (d. 664) in S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, I, London, 1906, p. 39; cf. also P. Leriche, 'Termez antique et médiévale' in *La Bactriane au carrefour des routes et des civilisations de l'Asie Centrale: Termez et les villes de Bactriane-Tokharestan* (actes du colloque de Termez 1997), eds P. Leriche et al., Paris, 2001, p. 80; P. Leriche and S. Pidaev, 'Termez in Antiquity', in *After Alexander: Central Asia before Islam*, eds J. Cribb and G. Herrmann, Oxford, 2007, pp. 189–90.

24. Malaṭī, *Tanbīh* (n. 11 above), p. 77.

25. Cf. the summary and references in van Ess, *TG II*, p. 503–4 (one version replaces the Sumanīs with a Greek). Jahm defeats their question how he can know that God exists when He is not accessible to the senses with reference to their own possession of a spirit that they cannot see, hear, etc. Abū Ḥanīfa defeats a Dahrī with the same reply in H. Daiber, 'Rebellion gegen Gott. Formen atheistischen Denkens im frühen Islam', in F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta (eds), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, Wiesbaden, 1999, pp. 40–43. Compare Gregory of Nyssa (d. after 394), *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, transl. C. P. Roth, Crestwood NY, 2002, p. 44, where Macrina conversely dispels doubts about the existence of the soul with reference to the existence of God, who is not known by sense perceptions either.

relating to things 'as they really are', and an attempt is made to isolate the irreducible constituent elements of existence, known as *dharmas*. The *dharmas* were found to be momentary forces, either mental or physical, which rose in a continual stream and existed for a very short time, during which they had real existence, *svabhāva*, 'own-existence' or 'self-nature', an essence that distinguished them from one another. They could be described, in Skilton's words, as 'those unique, elemental forces which constitute, or underlie, the flow of the conventional world'.²⁶ The phenomena that we perceive as real in our everyday world were only 'conceptual' (or 'secondary') existents. They were 'empty' (*śūnya*), meaning devoid of self-existence, a quality which only the momentary forces possessed.²⁷

The 'Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*)' sūtras, which are among the earliest Mahāyāna works, criticized this view, postulating that even the *dharmas* lacked self-existence: all things were empty. This doctrine became the basis of Mahāyāna philosophy, generating two classical schools. One is the Madhyamaka, the 'Middle Way', founded by Nāgārjuna in the second century AD and still upheld by an order in Tibet today. Nāgārjuna accepted that nothing whatever had self-existence: all things were empty, not just the short-lived *dharmas* which had so far been understood as what the Muslims called *ḥaqā'iq*, but also *samsāra*, *nirvāṇa*, the Buddha, and emptiness itself.²⁸ Some Buddhists took this to mean that Nāgārjuna was a nihilist (in the ontological rather than the moral sense), others that he held ultimate reality to be beyond conceptualization, while a third interpretation is that he rejected the very idea of an ultimate truth as incoherent; he has also been understood as a sceptic and as guilty of philosophical error.²⁹ That his position amounted to nihilism was the view of the second school, the Yogācāra (alias Cittamātra, 'mind-only'), founded by Asaṅga and expounded by Vasubandhu in the fourth century AD. They postulated that something really did exist, namely mental things – streams of perception and emotion. There were no external objects. 'The contents of a sensory experience presents itself as an external object when no such object exists', Vasubandhu said; they were like the hair on the moon perceived by those with cataracts, the yellow colour seen by a jaundiced person looking at a white shell, or like things seen in a dream.³⁰ Certainly, mind was empty, but in the new sense that it was free of the duality between perceiving subject and perceived object.

26. A. Skilton, *A Concise History of Buddhism*, Birmingham, 1994, p. 89.

27. P. Williams and A. Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: a Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*, Abingdon and New York, 2000, pp. 87ff.

28. Williams and Tribe, *Buddhist Thought* (n. 27 above), pp. 131ff.; Skilton, *Concise History* (n. 26 above), pp. 115ff.; M. Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, Aldershot, 2007, ch. 9; J. L. Garfield, *Empty Words: Buddhist Philosophy and Cross-cultural Interpretation*, Oxford, 2002.

29. Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (n. 28 above), pp. 181ff.; Garfield, *Empty Words* (n. 28 above), chs 1, 5; D. Burton, *Emptiness Appraised: a Critical Study of Nāgārjuna's Philosophy*, Richmond (Surrey), 1999. The literature on him is enormous.

30. Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy* (n. 28 above), pp. 149ff.; cf. also the accounts in Williams and Tribe, *Buddhist Thought* (n. 27 above), pp. 152 ff.; Skilton, *Concise History* (n. 26 above), pp. 121ff. For a philosophical test of the position, see J. Feldman, 'Vasubandhu's Illusion Argument and the

What we are told about Jahm b. Ṣafwān could readily be understood as a Muslim reformulation of one or the other of these teachings. By his time, they are likely to have interacted both with each other and with local culture in eastern Iran, as they did in China, but the fact that his doctrine centered on perceptions suggests that the Yogācāra are of particular relevance. Jahm denied, not just that there was fire in the stone, blood in animals, or water in the water-skin, the three examples related to the doctrine of *kumūn*, but also that the sun, moon, stars and mountains had real existence: they were created (*yukhlaqu*) when they were seen. Actually, *yukhlaqu* is van Ess's emendation. The text twice uses the fifth form: *innamā huwa shay'un takhallaqa/tukhulliqa 'inda l-ru'ya*, 'it is only a thing which seems to be/which is forged when it is seen'; and *innamā takhallaqa/tukhulliqa 'inda ḥall ribāṭihā*, 'it merely feigns to be/is merely forged when its [the water-skin's] strings are untied'.³¹ It probably should not be emended. Jahm apparently held the sense impression to be an illusion: in Yogācāra terms, the mental image was real, but there was no object to produce it.

This throws some light on the so-called Sūfistā'iyya, the 'sophists' credited with sceptical views in terms so stereotyped that they sound like a mere heresiographical fossil. The Sūfistā'iyya claimed that 'all things follow imagination and conjecture (*inna l-ashyā' kullahā 'alā l-tawahhum wa-l-ḥisbān*), people only grasp things in accordance with their minds, in reality there is no truth (*lā ḥaqq fī l-ḥaqīqa*)'.³² It is often hard to tell whether this statement, cited time and again in slightly different versions, means that we cannot know the true nature of external reality (the world beyond our senses being closed to us) or that there is no such a thing as an external reality (the world we experience being an illusion); but mostly it is about the limits of knowledge.³³ There is an unusually clear example of the statement as a denial of external reality, however, in Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, who cites it as 'everything seen and sensed is devoid of truth/reality (*jamī' mā yurā wa-yuḥassu lā ḥaqīqa laḥā*); it is merely according to (*'alā ṭarīq*) imagination (*khaylūla*) and surmise (*ḥisbān*); we merely see and witness these things as we see them in a dream, there is no truth/reality to them, nor to ourselves, nor to anything that is seen or sensed, nor to anything in this world'.³⁴ A Yogācārin could probably have endorsed this formulation, provided that imagination and surmise were understood as erroneous assumptions about the existence of objects. But there cannot be much doubt that the wording of the

Parasitism of Illusion upon Veridical Experience', *Philosophy East and West*, 55, 2005, pp. 529–41.

31. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), V, p. 9, l. 7, p. 10, ll. 1–3; TG, VI, 29n, 30n.

32. Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, ed. A. A. Amīn, A. al-Zayn and I. al-Abyārī, Cairo, 1940–53, II, p. 407; cited by J. van Ess, 'Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought', *al-Abḥāth*, 21, 1968, pp. 1–18 (1); cf. id., *Die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḥudaddīn al-Īcī*, Wiesbaden, 1966, pp. 184ff., 221–36.

33. See for example al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, Istanbul, 1928, pp. 319–20 (with three different positions); Ibn al-Murtaqā, *al-Munya wa-l-amal fī sharḥ al-milal wa-l-niḥal*, ed. J. Mashkour, Damascus, 1990, p. 14 (with two).

34. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, ed. Ṣ. al-Ṣawī, Tehran, 1977, p. 150. The dream also figures in other versions, e.g. al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* (n. 17 above), p. 433; al-Māturīdī, *K. al-Tawḥīd*, ed. F. Kholeif, Beirut, 1970, p. 156; Maqdisī, *Bad'* (n. 12 above), I, p. 48; later references in van Ess, *Īcī* (n. 32 above), pp. 185–6.

stereotyped statement is Greek, for its core part sounds like an Arabic version of a statement in Epiphanius (d. 403) according to which the pre-Socratic Leucippus held that 'all things exist according to imagination and opinion, not according to the truth (κατὰ φαντασίαν δὲ καὶ δόκησιν τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ μηδὲν κατὰ ἀλήθειαν)'.³⁵ Whatever exactly Leucippus may have meant by this, he did not mean to deny the existence of objective reality (which in his view took the form of atoms). The same holds true of other Greek philosophers, whether pre-Socratic or later, who stressed the unreliability of our sense impressions: their point was not that objects do not exist, but rather that our perceptions are not a reliable guide to their true nature (we do not see them as atoms, for example). The Academic Sceptics only went so far as to profess themselves unable to say whether objects exist, and when Carneades adduced perceptions in dreams, his message was that there is no such thing as a criterion of truth, not that there is no such thing as an object.³⁶ It is similarly in illustration of our inability to know the nature of things that the dream is adduced by other Greek Sceptics.³⁷ But Vasubandhu knew for sure that objects do not exist, and it is in this vein that he adduces the comparison with the dream, which is a stock image in the *prajñāpāramitā* literature.³⁸ It also appears time and again in the Khotanese *Book of Zambasta*.³⁹ It would appear that a Buddhist affirmation of the non-existence of objects had travelled to Iraq, where its opponents assimilated it to Sceptical views of Greek origin regarding the limits of our knowledge and called it 'sophist'. Another example is the water which is just a mirage: Greek Sceptics do not seem to have used it, but it was commonplace in India, much used by the Yogācāra, and it is duly credited to a Sūfiṣṭāī in third/ninth-century Iraq.⁴⁰

Jahm undoubtedly held our sense impressions, like everything else, to be created by God. It is the obvious solution for a monotheist who denies that we can infer from sense impressions to objects: Berkeley, another idealist (again in the ontological rather than moral sense), also held our sensory images ('ideas') to occur in our minds because God caused them to do so. In short, al-Jāhīz' infor-

35. H. Diels (ed.), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 3rd ed., 2 vols, Berlin, 1912, II, A 33; Epiphanius, *Panarion*, transl. F. Williams, 2 vols, Leiden, 1987/1994, II, p. 647.

36. R. J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, London and New York, 1995, p. 16; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians*, i. 159, 403 (Loeb edition, ed. and transl. R. G. Bury, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1935).

37. See the references in van Ess, *Īcī*, (n. 32 above), p. 184; also Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians* (n. 36 above), i. 88, on Anaxarchus and Monimus (both 4th century BC); id., *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, i. 104 (the 4th mode of Scepticism) (Loeb edition, ed. and transl. R. G. Bury, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1933).

38. E. Conze, 'The Ontology of the Prajñāpāramitā', *Philosophy East and West*, 3, 1953, pp. 117–29 (124); cf. also I. C. Harris, *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Leiden, 1991, pp. 29, 46.

39. *The Book of Zambasta: a Khotanese Poem on Buddhism*, transl. R. E. Emmerick, London, 1968, ch. 2, §210; ch. 3, §§105, 107, 137; ch. 4, §89; ch. 6, §52 etc.

40. J. J. Makransky, *Buddhahood Embodied*, Albany, 1997, p. 81; J. Fück, 'Some Hitherto Unpublished Texts on the Mu'tazilite Movement from Ibn al-Nadīm's *Kitāb al-Fihrist*', in S. M. Abdullah (ed.), *Professor Muḥammad Shafī' Presentation Volume*, Lahore, 1955, pp. 70–71; cited in van Ess, 'Skepticism' (n. 32 above), pp. 1–2.

mation suggests that Khushaysh is right: Jahm did indeed owe something fundamental to the Buddhists. It could have been into an originally Buddhist family that he had been born.⁴¹

The afterlife

In another passage al-Jāhīz links the *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt* with the Dahrīs, elsewhere in his work characterized as empiricists who did not believe in God, prophets, life after death, or any other metaphysical postulate.⁴² Here he remarks that the Dahrīs denied the existence of demons, *jinn*, angels, veridical dreams and charms, and that in their view 'their matter will not be completed without the participation of the *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt*'.⁴³ It sounds like sarcasm. Maybe al-Jāhīz is simply linking the two as groups known for absurd denials of obviously real things, but we do hear of Jahmites who rejected the afterlife, claiming that the spirit died with the body, and who did not believe in veridical dreams.⁴⁴ Since al-Jāhīz is being so cryptic, however, I will not pursue the question further here.

The rational nature of all beings

In his chapter on the gecko al-Jāhīz tells us that certain *ḥadīths* about this animal are adduced by 'the *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt* and those who claim that all things are endowed with reason (*nāṭīqa*) and that they form nations whose course of affairs is like that of human beings (*umam majrāhum majrā l-nās*)'.⁴⁵ These people also adduced a barrage of Qur'ānic passages in which animals, birds, stones, mountains, heaven and earth speak or otherwise behave like human beings. Al-Jāhīz continues that 'the Jahmiyya and those who deny the causative power of the elementary qualities (*ījād al-ṭabā'i*) adopt a position (*dhahabat ... madhhaban*), and Ibn Ḥā'it and those who gather around his crowd from among the *aṣḥāb al-jahālāt* adopt a position, and some people who are not *mutakallims* adopt (a position), and follow

41. This poses the question how far Buddhism should be seen as playing a role in the formation of Ḍirār's doctrine too. Ḍirār, who was denounced as a Jahmite, denied that things had any substance: bodies were simply bundles of accidents, and some (but not all) of these accidents were created anew every moment (van Ess, *TG*, III, pp. 38–40). This places Ḍirār closer to the Buddhist doctrine of momentariness, which is also based on a denial of substance, than to the classical *kalām* doctrine, in which the atoms are bearers of the accidents (cf. A. von Rospatt, 'Einige Berührungspunkte zwischen der buddhistischen Augenblicklichkeitslehre und der Vorstellung von der Momentanheit der Akzidenzien (*araḍ, a'rāḍ*) in der islamischen Scholastik', in *Annäherung an das Fremde*, ed. H. Preissler and H. Stein, Stuttgart, 1998, pp. 523–30). When Fritz Zimmermann brought Ḍirār's doctrine to Sorabji's attention, the latter related it to the comparable idea of bodies as bundles of properties in Neoplatonism (R. Sorabji, *Matter, Space and Motion*, London, 1988, p. 57; taken up by van Ess, *TG*, III, pp. 42–4). The Neoplatonists do not seem to have cast the properties as momentary, however.

42. Cf. P. Crone, 'The Dahrīs according to al-Jāhīz', forthcoming in *Mélanges de l'Université de St Joseph*.

43. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), II, p. 139: *anna l-amr lā yatimmu lahum illā bi-mushārika ahl al-jihāt* (sic). For the emendation of *al-jihāt*, see above, n. 7).

44. Malaṭī, *Tanbīh* (n. 11 above), p. 77; transl. *TG*, V, p. 221.

45. Al-Jāhīz, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), IV, p. 287.

the literal meaning of Ḥadīth and poetry, claiming that stones think and reason (*ta'qīlu wa-tantīqu*), and that they have just been deprived of speech (*al-mantiq*), whereas birds and wild animals are as they used to be (*'alā mā kānat 'alayhi*). They say: bats, sparrow-hawks, and frogs are obedient and rewarded, while scorpions, snakes, kites, ravens, dogs and the like are disobedient and punished'.⁴⁶ Elsewhere he tells us that some people (probably Dahrīs and/or Zindīqs) found fault with the Qur'ānic story of Solomon and the hoopoe (*hudhud*) on the grounds that the hoopoe is presented as subject to reward and punishment: this, they argued, implied that some animals were subject to commands and prohibitions, reward and punishment, heaven and hell, which in turn implied that solidarity (*walāya*) with some animals and hostility (*'adāwa*) to others were required; and since the genus (*jins*) applied to all its members, this would be true of 'all of them', apparently meaning all animals, though everyone agreed (*'inda jamī' al-nās*) that the hoopoe had less knowledge than ants, lice, elephants, monkeys, pigs and pigeons, who formed nations and so had superiority in terms of knowledge, intelligence and prophets. And all this, they pointed out, was nonsense on a par with the superstitions of the pre-Islamic Arabs.⁴⁷ Al-Jāḥiẓ rejects their reading of the Qur'ānic story, adding that only the Manichaeans (*al-Māniyya*) and the *aşḥāb al-jahālāt* believed this kind of thing.⁴⁸

In the first passage the Jahmiyya are distinguished from the *aşḥāb al-jahālāt*, who are ranged with Ibn Ḥā'it̄ instead: elsewhere al-Jāḥiẓ links the latter with *juhḥāl al-şūfiyya*.⁴⁹ But both the Jahmiyya and Ibn Ḥā'it̄'s group, as well as some non-*mutakallims*, are reported to believe that all things around them, even stones, are endowed with reason and moral responsibility; and in the second passage al-Jāḥiẓ subsumes all three groups under the label of *aşḥāb al-jahālāt*, this time adding the Manichaeans.

Al-Jāḥiẓ seems to be the only source to associate the Jahmiyya with such beliefs, but Aḥmad b. Ḥā'it̄ (or Khābit̄) and his associates are well-known for them. Ibn Ḥā'it̄, a Basran and pupil of al-Nazzām like al-Jāḥiẓ himself, held that all living beings formed a single species endowed with reason and legal/moral responsibility (*taklif*), that all living beings had received prophets, even donkeys, birds, flees, and lice, and that moral responsibility rested on the spirit alone, not on bodies, which were mere forms (*qawālib*) that the spirit put on, wandering from one form to another: he believed in reincarnation, too.⁵⁰ One might have thought that he held donkeys, birds, flees, lice and so on to have received their

46. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 288.

47. *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 79–80.

48. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 81, ult.

49. *Ibid.*, V, p. 424; transl. TG, VI, p. 214.

50. Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna l-firaq*, ed. M. Badr, Cairo, 1910, pp. 255–6; Ibn Ḥazm, *K. al-Faṣl fī l-milal wa-l-ahwā' wa-l-niḥāl*, Cairo, 1317–21, I, p. 78; al-Maqdisī, *K. al-Bad' wa-l-ta'rīkh*, ed. C. Huart, 6 vols, Paris, 1899–1919, III, p. 8; van Ess, TG, III, pp. 430ff.

prophets as humans and to have been punished for their unbelief by reincarnation in lowly forms, but apparently he did not: he and other *juhāl al-ṣūfiyya* would adduce Q. 16:68 (*wa-awḥā rabbuka ilā l-naḥl*) as proof that bees had received prophets,⁵¹ and some sources explicitly tell us that he and other believers in reincarnation held the prophets to have been sent as animals to their own kind. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī mentions their use of the Qur'ānic story of the hoopoe, Solomon's ant and other passages, too.⁵² Nobody apart from al-Jāḥiẓ seems to say that Ibn Ḥā'it held even plants, stones and other inanimate things to be rational, nor is it documented for his pupil, Aḥmad b. Ayyūb b. Bānūsh or Mānūsh or the like (d. 258), who subscribed to much the same doctrines, including reincarnation, though he did not believe that animals were morally responsible.⁵³ But of the (third/ninth-century?) Mu'tazilite al-Qaḥṭabī we are told that he included heaven and earth among the spirits which had refused the primordial test from which angels, humans, and demons had emerged (according to Ibn Ḥā'it's myth), adducing Q. 33:72 ('We offered the trust (*amāna*) to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to take it on'); he too believed in reincarnation.⁵⁴ And of yet another pupil of al-Nazzām's, Faḍl al-Ḥadathī, we hear that he held animals, plants and inorganic things, even stones, to contain transformed spirits which were undergoing punishment.⁵⁵ Given that the mountains are mentioned along with the heavens and the earth in Q. 33:72, the verse adduced by al-Qaḥṭabī, one suspects that al-Qaḥṭabī, and quite possibly Ibn Ḥā'it too, shared his view. The verse is included in al-Jāḥiẓ' discussion of the believers in the rationality of all things, and Faḍl al-Ḥadathī also belonged to the *ṣūfiyyat al-mu'tazila*, or the *juhāl al-ṣūfiyya*, as al-Jāḥiẓ preferred to call them, refusing to recognize such people as Mu'tazilites.⁵⁶

The group identified as non-*mutakallims* in al-Jāḥiẓ' first passage may be or include the Khurramīs. They certainly saw all living beings and, in a late example, even the earth, as sentient, though we are not told that they saw them as rational; and they too believed in reincarnation, into humans and animals alike.⁵⁷ But the reference could also be to the Manichaeans, whom al-Jāḥiẓ explicitly mentions in

51. Al-Jāḥiẓ, *Ḥayawān* (n. 1 above), V, p. 424; transl. TG, VI, p. 214.

52. Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl* (n. 49 above), IV, p. 198; Abū Ya'lā Ibn al-Farrā', *al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. W. Z. Ḥaddād, Beirut, 1974, p. 110; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, Tehran, 1413, XII, p. 215, ad 6:38.

53. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq* (n. 49 above), pp. 258-9; transl. TG, VI, p. 220; Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl* (n. 49 above), IV, p. 198.

54. Al-Baghdādī, *Farq* (n. 49 above), pp. 255, 259 (wrongly al-Qaḥṭī); TG, III, pp. 443-4, VI, p. 221.

55. Abū Ya'lā, *Mu'tamad* (n. 51 above), p. 110; transl. TG, VI, p. 219.

56. Ps.-Nāshī', *K. Uṣūl al-niḥāl*, §83, in J. van Ess, *Frühe Mu'tazilitische Häresiographie*, Beirut, 1971, p. 50 (§83). Abū Ya'lā assigns him to the *ghulāt al-Rāfiqa* (*Mu'tamad* [n. 51 above], p. 110).

57. Ps.-Nāshī', *Uṣūl* (n. 56 above), §58; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist*, ed. R. Tajaddud, Tehran, 1971, p. 406, l. 4; transl. B. Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, New York and London 2 vols, 1970, II, p. 817; Maqdisī, *Bad'* (n. 12 above), IV, p. 31; W. Madelung, *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, Albany, 1988, p. 10; *EI2*, art. 'Khurramiyya'; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. E. Yarshater, London, 1982-, art. 'Korramiyya'.

the second passage, though their ranks did include *mutakallims*. Al-Jāḥiẓ is certainly right that they believed such things. They held that part of 'the divine nature permeates all things in heaven and earth and under the earth, that it is found in all bodies, dry and moist, in all kinds of flesh, and in all seeds of trees, herbs, men and animals ... bound, oppressed, polluted', as Augustine said; even the earth, wood, and stones had sense.⁵⁸ 'If a person walks upon the ground, he injures the earth; and if he moves his hand, he injures the air, for the air is the soul of humans and living creatures, both fowl and fish, and creeping things', as another opponent summarized their view,⁵⁹ again with perfect accuracy.⁶⁰ Muslim authors observe that the Manicheans had to avoid injuring animals, or all living things, occasionally mentioning plants, trees, water, and fire as well,⁶¹ but they never seem to include the earth or stones in their statements, just as they do not usually do so in connection with the Mu'tazilite Sufis. Only al-Jāḥiẓ mentions that the Manichaeans and the 'ignorant Sufis' alike held even solid things such as stones to be endowed with reason. Since he is right about the former and about at least some of the latter, he may well be right about all of them.

That everything is rational, even inanimate things, is an obvious way of thinking if one believes that God is immanent in everything, mixed with his creation. But if the starting point of the Jahmiyya was the Yogācāra doctrine that nothing exists except for Mind, we would have to postulate that they had understood this doctrine in the light of the Iranian conception of the universe as a mixture of light and darkness. The idea of the divine pervading the world is not prominent in the Zoroastrian books, though Ohrmazd is seen as having disseminated fire in all his creation,⁶² but the Manichaeans interpreted the mixture in what is called now a 'pan-psychist' (or 'animist') and now a 'pantheist' vein, and so too apparently did the Khurramīs: light was present in everything, and light was alive and sentient. The Jahmites seem to have envisaged Mind, the only real, self-existing entity of the Yogācāra, God in their parlance, along the same 'pantheist' lines, thereby endowing everything with reason. Yogācārin thought about Buddhahood could have played a role in it too. It certainly did in China,

58. Augustine in J. D. BeDuhn, *The Manichaean Body*, Baltimore, 2000, p. 77.

59. *Acts of Archelaos* 10, cited in BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body*, p. 79.

60. Cf. H.-J. Klimkeit, 'Manichäische und buddhistische Beichtformeln aus Turfan. Beobachtungen zur Beziehung zwischen Gnosis und Mahāyāna', *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, 29, 1977, pp. 193-228 (204-5), citing the book of confessions preserved in Uighur with further discussion. Ephrem knew the Manichaeans to hold trees, fields, and even the ground itself, to exude light (BeDuhn, *Manichaean Body* [n. 58 above], p. 167), and Bar Hebraeus knew them to hold even earth and water to have souls (A. V. W. Jackson, 'The Doctrine of Metempsychosis in Manichaeism', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 45, 1925, pp. 246-68 [261]).

61. Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist* (n. 57 above), p. 396; transl. II, p. 788; 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Tathbīt dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. 'A.-K. 'Uthmān, Beirut, 1966, p. 184; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqīya 'an al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. and transl. C. E. Sachau, Leipzig, 1923, London, 1879, p. 207, 1-3.

62. J. Duchesne-Guillemin, 'The Six Original Creations', in Sir J. J. Zarhoshti *Madressa Centenary Volume*, Bombay, 1967, pp. 7-8; *Greater Bundahishn*, ch. iii.8 in Zaehner, *Zurvan, a Zoroastrian Dilemma*, Oxford, 1955, pp. 322 (text), 334 (transl.).

where Buddhists contemporary with Jahm developed doctrines according to which the entire universe is but the revelation of the absolute spirit, that everything, even dust grains and blades of grass, contained the Buddha nature, and that Buddhahood was present from the start of one's spiritual career, making sudden enlightenment possible.⁶³ Postulating that Jahm, not just the Jahmiyya, thought along those lines would have the advantage of explaining how he could hold it possible to know about a God who was far beyond conceptualization and utterly removed from any *wahm* of ours: it would be sudden enlightenment that he understood as faith created by God without the believer having anything to do with it.⁶⁴ It would also make intellectual (as opposed to purely sociological) sense of his conviction that faith had nothing to do with verbal profession or observance of the law.⁶⁵ In any case, the Jahmites who held God to be mixed with his creation also agreed with other Iranians when they thought of the end of the world as a separation: God would remain mixed with his creatures till he caused them all to perish, they said, then he would be released from them and they from him. (What would happen to them is not stated.)⁶⁶

It is the same Iranian (or Irano-Christian) pan-psychism that reappears among the Mu'tazilite Sufis in Iraq, in the negative evaluation characteristic of the Manichaeans and other Gnostics: light was captured, the world was the result of a cosmic fall, and salvation required asceticism. It is familiar from later Sufism, too, and it almost always goes with belief in reincarnation. To those who hold that God is immanent in the whole world, in animals and in trees, and indeed in the inanimate world, which they call his universal appearance, the wandering of the spirits through reincarnation (*ḥulūl al-arwāḥ bi-l-taraddud*) is not problematic, as al-Bīrūnī said with reference to Sufis well before Ibn 'Arabī and his pupils had formulated the theory which came to be known as *waḥdat al-wujūd* and which was to provide new shelter for adherents of such views.⁶⁷ If al-Jāḥiẓ is right that the Jahmiyya saw everything as endowed with intelligence, one would have expected them also to believe in reincarnation, as the Manichaeans, Khurramīs and *juhḥāl al-ṣūfiyya* did, especially as it was also found in Buddhism. Maybe they did. Without al-Jāḥiẓ we would not have known that they were pan-psychists, and as it happens, his polemical target in the relevant passages does not include reincarnation, so he does not mention it at all. Unfortunately, no other source seems to mention or discuss reincarnation in connection with the Jahmites either.

63. K. K. S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964, pp. 306ff.; more briefly Skilton, *Concise History* (n. 26 above), pp. 168–71.

64. Cf. Abū Ya'lā, *Mu'tamad* (n. 51 above), p. 30, l. 6; transl. TG, V, p. 213.

65. Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* (n. 17 above), p. 279, l. 3, p. 477, l. 3; transl. TG, V, pp. 212–13; cf. van Ess, TG, II, pp. 496–7.

66. Malaṭī, *Tanbīh* (n. 11 above), p. 76; transl. TG V, p. 220 (f), where the last part of the statement is taken to refer to what happens when people die rather than the future annihilation; cf. also van Ess, TG, II, p. 506.

67. Al-Bīrūnī, *K. fī Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, ed. E. Sachau, London, 1887, p. 29; ed. Hyderabad, 1958, p. 44; transl. E. C. Sachau, *Alberuni's India*, 2 vols, London, 1910, I, pp. 57–8.

In sum, Jahmism was not Neoplatonist. What the *jahālāt* relating to the non-existence of objects and the rationality of all things suggest is rather that it was Buddhist doctrine filtered through Iranian thought. To clinch the case would require unearthing of some intermediary links, such as Sanskrit terms or examples wandering via Bactrian or Sogdian into Arabic texts on the Jahmiyya, or local handling of Yogācārin views on Mind, emptiness or Buddhahood foreshadowing Jahmite views; but at this point I must hand over to the experts in the languages and the Buddhist history of Central Asia. The conclusion would be that just as the Christians of Iraq seem to have interpreted the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness in a Greek vein, so Frank seems to have given us an *interpretatio graeca* of an Iranian doctrine of transcendence and immanence. But then the same would be true of the Iranians themselves: it clearly is not accidental that the Neoplatonist doctrine of the Universal Reason and the Universal Soul was to prove enormously popular among them.