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AL-MA'DŪM WAL-MAWJŪD

by

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the Non-Existent, the Existent, and the Possible in the Teaching of Abū Hāshim and his Followers*

From an early period in the development of Islamic theology the question of the nature and status of the possible and the non-existent (*al-ma'dūm*) was a topic of heated debate that not infrequently manifested itself in squalls of conflicting formulae.¹ The sense of the theses upheld and attacked, i.e., the participants'

* This article was prepared in 1973 for inclusion in a volume of studies whose appearance has proved impossible. Some of the problems here raised I have subsequently treated from a somewhat different perspective in my *Beings and their Attributes* (Albany, 1978) to which the reader may be referred for additional references.

The following abbreviations are used in the notes that follow:

- M*: 'Abd al-Jabbār: *al-Moghni fī abwāb al-tawhīd wal-'adl*, several editors, Cairo, 1958.
- Mas*: Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī, *Kitāb masā'il al-khilāf bayn al-Baṣṛiyyīn wal-Baghdādīyyīn*, Ms. Berlin 5125 = Glaser 12.
- Mas (B)*: The first part of the same work published by A. Biram, Berlin, 1902.
- MO*: 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Motashābih al-Qor'ān*, ed. M. Zarzour, 2 volumes, Cairo, n.d.
- Moh*: *al-Majmū' al-mohīṭ bil-taklīf*, ed. U. Azmi, Cairo, n.d.
- SU5*: *Sharh al-oṣūl al-khomsa*, ed. A. Ousman, Cairo, 1384/1965.
- ZS*: Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī, *Ziyādāt al-Sharḥ*, an extensive fragment of the first part of the work published by M. Abū Rida under the title *Fī l-tawhīd*, Cairo, 1969.

1. Cf. generally Joseph van Ess, *die Erkenntnislehre des 'Aḍudaddīn al-Ijī* (Wiesbaden, 1966), 192 ff. T.J. de Boer considered the discussions concerning the non-existent to be simple "dialectic quibbling"; cf. *The History of Philosophy in Islam* (London, 1903, reprinted N.Y., 1967), 55.

understanding of the issues under debate and expressed in their various formulations, is sometimes not altogether plain to see; because of the paucity and the doxographic character of much of the available data concerning many authorities, particularly those of the earliest period, any interpretation of the statements attributed to them must be in part conjectural, while for others the foundation of the understanding has not been fully laid; i.e., there has been no adequate study such as to set forth the theoretical systems that form the framework and context of the specific theses and arguments.

For the major schools of *kalām* in its classical period, viz., the "orthodox" schools of Abū l-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) and Abū Mansūr al-Mātorīdī (d. 333/944) and the Mo'tazilite traditions that follow Abū Hāshim al-Jobbā'ī (d. 321/933) and Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī (d. 319/931), as well as the Shi'ite theologues that are directly dependent upon these, the divergence of doctrine on the question of the non-existent is often defined in terms of the question of whether the "non-existent", i.e., the object of which "non-existent" is understood to be predicated, is or is not posited as a real, not merely mental, object, an entity ("something": *shay'*) and one finds the Mo'tazila for the most part affirming the proposition² and the Ash'arites on the whole, together with al-Mātorīdī, denying it categorically³ and insisting that to hold such a doctrine is, in effect, to hold that there are beings that are eternal along side and independantly of God⁴.

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2. Though the thesis is often attributed to the Mo'tazila without qualification, a number of them did not hold it; cf. van Ess, *loc. cit.* and also R. Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Being According to Abū l-Hodhayl al-'Allāf* (Istanbul, 1966), 48, n. 9. The position of al-Ka'bī offers some difficulty (pending a more thorough study of the matter) for though some authorities, e.g., al-Baghdādī (cf. *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Cairo, n.d., 179f.) imply quite clearly that he held the *ma'dūm* to be "something"; others, e.g., al-Jowaynī (cf. *al-Shāmīl*, ed. A. an-Nashār, Alexandria, 1969, 125) and al-Jorjānī (*Sharḥ al-mawāqif*, Cairo, 1325, vol. 2, 190; cf. also the lengthy discussion in the Imāmī work contained in Paris, ms. ar. 1252, foll. 7R^o ff.) say that he did not.
 3. Cf., e.g., al-Bāqillānī, *K. al-Tamhīd* (ed. R. McCarthy, Beyrouth, 1957), § 329 and al-Jowaynī, *op. cit.*, 124; cf. also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal* (Cairo, 1321) 3, 118.
 4. Cf., e.g., al-Jowaynī, *op. cit.*, 127f.; Fakhroddīn al-Rāzī, *K. al-Arba'in* (Hyderabad, 1353), 150ff. and *al-Moḥaṣṣal* (Cairo, 1323), 35, as well as al-Ṭūsī's comments *ibid.*, 38, n. I. Al-Mātorīdī makes the same charge in *K. al-Tawḥīd* (ed. F. Kholeif, Beyrouth, 1971), 86ff. and 242ff. as does also, for example, the Ḥanbalite Abū Muhammad al-Tamīmī in an *'aqīda* that has manifest Ash'arite leanings, in Ibn abī Ya'lā, *Tabaqāt al-Ḥanābila* (Cairo, 1371/1052) 2, 267, where he declares the thesis that the *ma'dūm* is "something" to be *kofr*.

In order to come to an understanding of the debate and the significance of the question for Islamic theology in general one must first have some clear grasp of the specific doctrines of the several schools and their leading authorities. Apart from this, the terms of the formulae of the polemics are but sound and fury without significance or meaning and the attempt to interpret them likely to produce a result more fancy than fact.⁵ Quite apart from divergences in the use of vocabulary, even careful and fulsome analysis of doctrines given in the works of their opponents are likely to be misleading, for any complete and formed theoretical system tends, by its own internal coherence, to exclude alien constructs of differing systems as such and "refutations" of opposing formulations and theses, though they may well (and most often, in fact, do) come to grips with the fundamental issue, do not necessarily touch the main point and intent of the opponent's assertions since these are inextricably bound into the whole system with its own peculiar ordering point of view and perspective.⁶ What I propose, therefore, to do in the following pages is to set forth in some detail the doctrine concerning the being of the possible among several of the most important masters of one of the major schools, namely that of the followers of Abū Hāshim in the Baṣrian tradition of the Mo'tazila, as these are given in the available works of the Qādī abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadānī (d. 415/1025) and his disciple Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī.⁷

5. It has been suggested, for example, that the source of the Mo'tazilite assertion that the non-existent is "something" lies in their failure to distinguish "being" and "essence" (cf. A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge, 1932, 166f.) or that the Mo'tazila really held that the world is eternal and simply sought to hide their real doctrine beneath the cloak of abstruse argumentation (A. Nader, cf. *le Système philosophique des Mo'tazila*, Beyrouth, 1956, 135f.) or that the *kalām* understanding of the *ma'dūm* reflects Platonic "ideas" concerning "ante mundane matter" somehow under the influence of Plotinus (cf. H.A. Wolfson, "The Kalam Problem of Non-Existence and Saadia's Second Theory of Creation", *JOR* 36 [1945-46], 381).
6. Thus, for example, Miskawayh, a follower of the doctrines of the *falāsifa*, observing the debate of the *motakallimīn* concerning the *ma'dūm* altogether from the outside (i.e., from a complete commitment to another and different speculative tradition) sees the whole thing as merely a naive failure "to affirm the reality of intelligible forms" (*al-ṣowar al-'aqliyya*); cf. *al-Hawāmil wal-Shawāmil*, ed. A. Amin and A. Saqar, Cairo, 1370/1951, 343-345.
7. We shall, in effect, focus quite narrowly on the treatment of the problem by these two authors for though not the direct disciples of Abū Hāshim they appear to follow his teaching concerning the ontology of the existent and the possible quite closely. That is (even aside from the fact that it is their works that are preserved and available!) it is clear that Abū Ishāq ibn 'Ayyāsh and Abū 'Abdallāh, his direct disciples and the masters of 'Abd al-

In that one says that a thing is “non-existent” (*ma’dūm*) “insofar as it is not existent” (*maujūd*),⁸ the expression *ma’dūm* (as also the verbal noun, ‘*adam*: “non-existence” or “being non-existent”’) is found used of “what existed (*wojida*) at one time and subsequently, at another, was non-existent” (*odima*),⁹ of “what has not come to be” (*lam yaḥdoth*),¹⁰ as well as for the non-existent whose existence is altogether impossible (*al-mostahīl wojudoho*) — whose non-existence is necessary (*wajaba ‘adamoho*)¹¹ — as, for example, something whose existence would entail a contradiction in terms (sc., whose existence

Jabbār, departed in some significant respects from the teaching Abū Hāshim in elaborating their understanding of these questions while ‘Abd al-Jabbār (closely followed by Abū Rashīd), because, it would seem, of some major difficulties generated in the specific innovations of his masters, returned to the fundamental teaching of Abū Hāshim. Whatever innovations, apart from the introduction of some new vocabulary, the Qāḍī may have made in the doctrine of Abū Hāshim is quite difficult to determine in the absence of any of the writings of Abū Hāshim himself. That neither ‘Abd al-Jabbār nor Abū Rashīd cite Abū Hāshim as holding any opinion contrary to their own concerning these questions would, in any event, indicate that they at least considered themselves to be thoroughly in agreement with his teaching. Again, it is quite difficult to say if there are any significant differences between ‘Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Rashīd in their treatment of these problems because of the nature of the sources, i.e., that one must cull and collect the evidences of their thought on the issues involved from various and scattered contexts that, for the most part, seldom concern themselves primarily with the problem of the ontology of the existent or the possible as such and particularly because the first sections of the *Moghni* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār which would contain extensive material that is not only parallel to but most likely the source for much of what is found in Abū Rashīd’s *Ziyādāt al-Sharḥ* and the first part of his *K. al-Masā’il* has apparently not survived.

The comparison of the doctrine of Abū Hāshim and his Baṣrian successors with those of the *falāsifa* is quite beyond the scope of the present study; it might be noted here, however, simply for the purpose of chronological orientation, that Abū Hāshim (277/890–321/933), though slightly younger, is a virtual contemporary of al-Fārābī who died a relatively old man in 339/950. while the *Moghni* of ‘Abd al-Jabbār, written over a twenty years period extending from A.H. 360 to 380 (cf. *M* 20/2, 257), was completed when Avicenna was ten years old.

8. *Min ḥaytho lam yakon maujūdān*: *M* 6/2, 77, 2; cf. also, e.g., *ibid.*, 135, 6f.; *M* 8, 74, 17 and 102, 17; and 4, 230, 11f.
9. E.g., *SU* 5, 176, 13f.
10. E.g., *M* 6/1, 9 ult. f. (where read *bi-’an lā yakūna* for *wa-’in lam yakon* and *taqūlūna* etc., for *yaqūlūna*, etc.; note also that there is apparently a lacuna in the preceding context, most probably by homoiotel. with *al-qabīḥ* in 1. 13).
11. *M* 6/2, 135, 8.

would entail its being other than what it is: *qalb al-jins*)¹² or a second eternal (= necessary) being along with God. Strictly, however, the expression *ma'dūm* is not applied so broadly; "it is defined as the known that is non-existent".¹³ That whose being is altogether impossible is not really an object of knowing (*ma'lūm*) but is purely imaginary and a knowledge of it is "a knowing that has no object" (*ilm lā ma'lūm laho*);¹⁴ i.e., it is "a knowing that has no object that can be properly said to have either non-existence or existence"¹⁵: a knowing "that is not correlated to any object that can be described as existent or non-existent".¹⁶ Thus for Abū Hāshim and his followers the *ma'dūm* is somehow a real individual object of knowing, something to which the knowing has a real (*fī l-ḥaqīqa*) relationship and conversely what is not "known", i.e., is not and cannot be properly an object of knowing, is not said to be *ma'dūm*.¹⁷ Again, in that the act of knowing, as a knowing of the known, "is related to it as it really is",¹⁸ the knowledge of the *ma'dūm* is not a knowledge simply of its existence (*wojūd*), i.e., of the actuality of its existence, potential or past (as it really was or

12. Cf., e.g., *M* 11, 452, 13f.

13. *Al-ma'lūm alladhī laysa bi-mawjūdīn*: *SU* 5, 176, 17; or as "the known that has not the attribute of existence" (or, more precisely within the terms of the system, "the attribute of being-existent"): *al-ma'lūm alladhī laysat laho šifat al-wojūd* (*Moh*, 356, 18f.). Note 'Abd al-Jabbār's rejection of '*al-montafī*' as a strict synonym of '*al-ma'dūm*' on the grounds that it is properly used only of what has once been and is no longer existent (*US* 5, 176). It should furthermore be noted that the expression *intafā*, according to his usage, is also applied to the "attributes" (*šifāt*), which, belonging to the category of "states" (*aḥwāl*), cannot be said properly to exist since they are the states of the existent (*v. infra*).

14. *M* 4, 247, 3f., citing al-Jabbā'ī and Abū Hāshim.

15. *Lā ma'lūma laho yoshār ilayhi bi-'adamin wa-lā wojūd*, *ibid.*, still citing "the Two Masters"; cf. also 248, 11.

16. *Ḡayra mota'alliqīn bi-ma'lūmin yūšaf bi-'annaho mawjūdīn aw-ma'dūm*: *Mas* fol. 174v° 5f. In having an imaginary object or content the act of knowing ('*ilm*') is said to have a "quasi correlation" to the imagined object, "to have the character of something that is correlated [to something else albeit strictly speaking it is not] (lit., to be *fī ḥokni l-mota'alliq*) (e.g., *M* 4, 248, 11; the same expression is used also, for example, of the motivation towards or the will to perform an impossible or unattainable action which, beyond the scope of the subject's power of causation, lacks possibility (*šihḥat al-wojūd*) and so is unreal. This is contrasted to "attributes that are not correlated to another in any way at all": *lā tata'allaq bi-ḡayrīn ašlan* [e.g., *M* 4, 248, 12; cf. *Mas* fol. 174v° 13 *alibī*] such as "life". The whole question of relation (*ta'alluq*) in the system requires study.).

17. Cf. *SU* 5, 176f.

18. *Yata'allaq al-'ilm bil-shay'i 'alā mā howa bihi*: cf. e.g., *M* 6/1, 188, 61; 11, 5, 6; 11, 159, & *alibi pass.*

would be as existent) but a knowledge of a non-existent entity as and insofar as it is non-existent “in the moment of its non-existence” (*fī ḥāl ‘admihi*).¹⁹ From one standpoint, therefore, the *ma’dūm* is the real that was and is no longer and may come to exist in the future.²⁰ Now, insofar as concerns the subject of the present inquiry, the status and reality of the once but now no more existent was a topic of scant concern for the theologians of the *kalām*; the problem was, rather, that of the possible and it would seem clear enough that in introducing into the Baṣrian School of the Mo‘tazila the thesis that “the non-existent is an entity” (*al-ma’dūm shay’*) Abū Ya‘qūb al-Shaḥḥām was solely concerned with the question of the possible.²¹ Accordingly, the later masters of the school identify the *ma’dūm* quite strictly with the possible. “There is no basis on which we can say of a thing that it is non-existent when it has never come to be at all save insofar as it has not come to be though its coming to be is possible” (*min ḥaytho lam yohdath ma’a jawāzi ḥodūthihi*).²² The possible—the *ma’dūm*—in this sense is not, however, understood simply as that which is now actually possible but, on the contrary, the “non-existent” embraces the totality of all possibles: “there is no non-existent but that its existence is possible or was possible”.²³ This includes both that which was possible and once existed as well as the non-existent possible that though once possible is now no longer possible (as, for example, the now no longer possibly existent contrary of the

19. Cf., e.g., *SU* 5, 554 f. (which is directed against the Ash‘arites) and *Mas* (B), 20 f.; see also below, n. 89.

20. Thus S. van den Bergh in *Averroes Tahafut al-Tahafut* (Oxford, 1954) 2, 4, ad 3, 6 and van Ess, *op. cit.*, 198.

21. Cf., e.g., al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn* (ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1929–30), 162 and my remarks in *Atti del III Congresso degli Studi arabi e islamici* (Ravello, 1966) (Naples, 1967), 324 f. Van Ess (*op. cit.*, 193) cf. also *die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī* [Born, 1961], 175) suggests that al-Shaḥḥām took his position as a compromise between that of a group whom al-Ash‘arī dubs *al-azaliyya* and that of Hishām b. al-Hakam (on which cf. also *le Muséon* 82 [1969], 467, n. 57).

22. *M* 4, 255, 17 f., i.e., though the possibility of its being (past or present) is posited; cf. also *ibid.*, 247, 12 f. and *ZS*, 193, 11 ff.

23. *Lā ma’dūma illā wa-yaṣiḥḥ wujūdoho ‘aw-kāna yaṣiḥḥ wujūdoho*; *Mas*, fol. 174 v° 16 f. (on which see below). Concerning the definition see also n. 85 below. It should be kept in mind that the Baṣrians in speaking about the possibles do not consider the question as merely one concerning possible, future instantiations of one or more classes of being, but rather in terms of single individuals that are known (posited) as particular individuals in God’s infinite knowledge.

possible that came to be).²⁴

Before proceeding to discuss the question of the ground of the possibility of the possible and the ontological status and character of the *ma'dūm* as non-existent it is necessary to outline briefly the ontology of the existent (*mawjūd*) and its various attributes (*ṣifāt*) and characteristics (*aḥkām*) and the nature and role of existence (*al-wojūd*) itself as these are understood in the analysis of Abū Hāshim and his followers.²⁵

Though the expressions *mawjūd* (existent) and *wojūd* (existence), etc., are frequently used in the texts with the sense simply of factually "being found" (*wojūda*) present in or to something, as of a material body's being concretely present or at hand in the world or of an accident's concrete, entitative presence as inhering in its material subject or substrate, the notion of being or existence as signified by the expression *al-wojūd* is the subject of an elaborate ontological analysis within the Baṣrian tradition. According to 'Abd al-Jabbār, the term *mawjūd* (existent) cannot be defined by any expression that is clearer "since we have, in the presence of perceivable reality, an immediate even if only general knowledge of the existent".²⁶ Thus, for material beings, "the sense of this expression [sc., '*mawjūd*'] is that [the entity so described] is characterised by a state having which the conditions of the actuality of those characteristics [*aḥkām*] that specifically characterise the existent are realised, e.g., the possibility of its being seen or its being related to another,²⁷ its being inherent in a substrate or its being a substrate of inherence, etc."²⁸ Elsewhere he describes it as "that which is specifically characterised by an attribute given which [its] attributes

24. Cf., e.g., *M* 8, 102, 14–16.

25. In order to be fully complete the discussion of the nature of "existence" (*al-wojūd*) as conceived by Abū Hāshim and his successors would have to be elaborated in the context of a full discussion of their understanding of the nature of attributes (*ṣifāt*) as such and the conception of "states" (*aḥwāl*) in general (note that *hāl* is a categorial expression covering *ṣifāt* and *aḥkām*), something that is beyond the scope of the present writing. For a general outline of the matter see my *Beings and their Attributes*, Albany, 1978.

26. *Moh.* 139, 2f.; it is thus that he rejects the definition of Abū 'Abdallāh on the grounds that the terms of the definition are more obscure than the term defined (and anyhow are not used by him in that sense!): *SU* 5, 175f.

27. *Ta'alloqoho bi-ghayrihi*; note in regard to the above discussion of the real relation of knowing to its object even when this is *ma'dūm* that the latter is not said to be *mota'alliq bil-'ilm* but rather *mota'allaq bihi*.

28. *M* 5, 232, 3–5. See also my *Beings and their Attributes*, pp. 58ff. *et alibi*.

and characteristics are manifested”;²⁹ that is, it is specifically characterised by the attribute of existence (*ṣifāt al-wojūd*). Our grasp of the specific attributes is given in the actuality of the thing’s existence and vice-versa; neither are the specifically characteristic attributes given to our knowledge and understanding apart from the actuality of the thing’s existence wherein they become manifest (*taẓhar*) nor is its existence known and available to understanding apart from the grasp of the characteristic attributes that are manifested through it.³⁰

Existence is the “ground (*aṣl*) of [the actuality of] all other attributes in any being (*dhāt*)”;³¹ it is their “condition” (*shart*): the condition that is the ground of their actuality (*al-moṣaḥḥih*). It is the ground of the actuality (*hoṣūl*) and the manifestation (*ẓohūr*) in being of the “essential attributes” of every being, sc., of those attributes that it has—that belong to it (are *min haqqihi*)—“by virtue of the way it is in itself” (*li-mā howa ‘alayhi fī dhātihi/naṣsihi*), “that are entailed by ‘the Attribute of the Essence’” (*al-moqtaḍāt ‘an ṣifati l-dhāt*) and “flow immediately from it” *al-ṣādirāt ‘anhā*.³² “The attribute of existence is that through which the manifestation (*ẓohūr*) of the essential attributes is realised so that the former is the condition of the actuality (*al-mosaḥḥih*) of the latter... and thus in the case of every existent it is by virtue of its existence (*li-aqli wojūdihi*) that the attribute that is entailed by the Attribute of the Essence is manifest and it is by virtue of its existence [sc., of the existent] that we know how it is in itself

29. *Hadd al-mawjūd annaho l-mokhtaṣṣ bi-ṣifātīn taẓhar ‘indahā l-ṣifāt wal-aḥkām*: *SU* 5, 176, 5 f. (This definition and the whole passage *SU* 5, 175 f. are found repeated almost verbatim in the text of al-Farzadhī published by Abū Rīda in the appendix to *ZS*, pp. 571 f.) “Characteristic” is maybe not an altogether felicitous rendering of *hokm* (p. *aḥkām*) in this usage; it does, however, render the sense quite accurately for most contexts and I can at this point think of no better English equivalent.

30. Cf. *M* 7, 153, 3–6. See also *Bings and their Attributes* p. 62.

31. *ZS*, 46, 1.

32. Regarding the technical terminology see *Beings and their Attributes*, p. 80, n. 1. It will be sufficient here to note that there is some fluctuation and betimes apparent inconsistency in the use of some expressions to denote the “Essential attributes”, (sc., those that are *li-mā howa ‘alayhi fī dhātihi/naṣsihi* = *al-moqtaḍāt ‘ammā howa ‘alayhi.../‘ani l-dhāt, l-naṣs* = *al-ṣādirāt ‘ammā...*, & c.) as for these one finds not infrequently the shorter or abbreviated expression *al-ṣifāt al-naṣsiyya* (originally a quite strict equivalent and *al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyya* as well as *ṣifāt al-dhāt/l-naṣs*, even though *ṣifāt al-dhāt* (sometimes *al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyya*) is formally distinguished as the “Attribute of the Essence”. In what follows I have rendered the former as “essential attribute(s)” and the latter as the “Attribute of the Essence”. On the distinction as well as the sense of the term *dhāt*, see below.

(*mā howa 'alayhi fī dhātihī*)".³³ Thus, to cite the most frequently employed example, the "essential attribute" of the atom (*al-jawhar*) is "to occupy space" (*al-taḥayyoz*) and it is through and by virtue of its existence (*wojūd*) that this attribute is realised and becomes manifest;³⁴ its existence is inseparable from the actuality of this attribute³⁵ and it is by this that it is known, identified, and defined (sc., as that which, when it exists, occupies space).³⁶ Similarly, God's "essential attributes", according to Abū Hāshim and his followers, are entailed by His "Attribute of the Essence" and belong to him "by virtue of the way He is in Himself"³⁷ so that in the ontological analysis of the school, in God too the actuality of the "essential attributes" by which His being is distinct and distinguished from all other being may be said to be grounded in His existence. "There is no class of being but that when it exists it has some attribute by which it is distinguished from others."³⁸ Existence (*al-wojūd*), thus, is a univocal concept for the Baṣrian Mo'tazila of the classical period; "the attribute of existence is a single attribute in existent beings."³⁹

These attributes (viz., the "essential attributes") which a thing has "by virtue of the way it is in itself" (*li-mā howa 'alayhi fī dhātihī*) are those by which it is distinguished and so are the immediate ground of its being-similar (*tamāthol*) to another or its being-different (*ikhtilāf*) from it and by which, consequently, it is known as being that which it is. As was indicated in the citation above, however, these attributes arise from the "Attribute of the Essence" (*ṣifat al-dhāt*)—are entailed (*moqtadā*) by it given the existence of the "Essence"/ thing-itself" (*dhāt*).⁴⁰ The "essential attributes", thus, and the "Attribute of the

33. *Moh*, 142, 12 ff.

34. Cf., e.g., *M* 12, 61, 10 ff.; *Moh*, 142, 15 f. (*q.v.* generally).

35. Cf., e.g., *SU* 5, 112, 7 f. = 538, 5 ff.; this frequently repeated formulation is attributed to Abū Hāshim in *ZS*, 76, 1-3.

36. Cf., e.g., *M* 5, 219, 17 f.

37. Cf., e.g., the citation of Abū Hāshim in *Moh*, 172, 4-6, *SU* 5, 182, 15 and below concerning God's existence (*wojūd*) as an "essential attribute". See also *Beings and their Attributes*, p. 82, n. 17.

38. *Lā jinsa illā wa-taḥṣol laho 'inda l-wojūd ṣifa bāna bihā min ghayrih*: *M* 8, 22, 17.

39. *Moh*, 141, 24 f. (*q.v.* & *sqq.*) and *Mas* (*B*), 13, 5 f. (cf. also n. 54 below).

40. "Essence"/thing-itself: *dhāt*; the fundamental meaning of the term may be built up out of the context of the discussion. Though "thing-itself" or "essence" may be quite accurate equivalents of *dhāt* in most contexts one should beware of specific overtones that they may carry over from their long and varied use in the philosophical systems of the Western

Essence” are ontologically distinct.⁴¹ In the case of the atom, for example, to occupy space, i.e., the attribute of occupying space: “its being occupying-space” (*kawnoho motahayyizan*), is distinct from its being an atom (*kawnoho jawharan*). Abū Hāshim and the Masters of the Baṣra School who follow his teaching closely do not look upon this as a purely logical distinction. That the atom occupy space is, as was noted above, conditioned by the actuality of its existence and as conditioned depends upon the realisation of the condition (viz., existence: *al-wojūd* as *moṣaḥḥih*). The atom’s being an atom, however, is not so conditioned. Abū Hāshim’s formulation is significant; he speaks not of the “essence”/thing-itself (*dhāt*) simply but of the “Attribute of the Essence” (*ṣifat al-dhāt*): the thing-itself’s being as it is in itself (*mā howa ‘alayhi fī dhātihī*); that is to say, its being itself identical with itself in itself—its predicability of itself as being itself. This attribute is not grounded in something else but is irreducible.⁴² It is the ground

tradition. *Al-dhāt* is most strictly the “thing-itself” or the “self (of the thing)” (wherefore in most contexts it is practically interchangeable with *al-nafs* as “self”) and so is employed for the thing’s “self” as it is in itself and what it is in itself in being itself (thus “essence”, if you will), as also it may be used simply for the thing in its being “an entity” (*tóde ti = shay’*; cf. below, n. 47): a single unitary being that is itself the subject of knowing and predication as a single or unitary being or entity. The term, thus, is used often loosely of any proper subject of proper attribution or predication (e.g., a living being insofar as it is a single “totality”: *jomla*) but is strictly applied (in the realm of created beings) to the atoms (*al-jawāhir*) and accidents (*al-a’rād*) (thus the *ma’dūm* is said to fall under two categories, sc., atoms and accidents: *Mas (B)*, 21 f.) for within the system these alone (apart from god) are truly said to be entities as unitary beings. All else (viz., bodies—*ajsām*—with their various properties and among them living bodies) is composite, made up of atoms and their inherent accidents. Living bodies as such have a kind of unity of being and are qualified by some states in their wholeness as totalities but this unity is not a true unity; they have, rather, simply the character of being one thing (not being so in the strict sense: *fī l-ḥaqīqa*: they are, that is, *fī ḥokmi l-shay’i l-wāḥid* (e.g., *M* 11, 334 & *alibi*), *bi-manzilati l-shay’i l-wāḥid* (e.g., *ibid.*, 302 & *alibi*) and “have a character in some respects like that of a thing-itself” (*fī l-ḥokmi kal-dhāt*: *M* 4, 312, 19). For the detailed examination of this question see *Being and their Attributes* pp. 43 and 10ff.

41. For the explicit statement of the distinction, which originates in the teaching of Abū Hāshim, cf., e.g., *Moh*, 107, 23ff. and 172, 2ff.; *M* 4, 250, 14ff.; *ZS*, 489, 12ff. (where read *thābita* for *thāniya*, 1. 12); *Mas (B)*, 13, 2ff. (where read *li-‘adami ma’nan* for *li-‘adamin ‘alā wajhi*); *Moh*, 142, 14f. (cited above n. 33) and *SU* 5, 93, 6f. Note that the formula *mā howa ‘alayhi fī dhātihī* by implication indicates a “state” (sc., *kawnoho ‘alā ḥalin fī dhātihī*); regarding this, see below.
42. It is not ‘an shay’in’ (*ZS*, 489, 12f.) and one can validly assign no ground for it (cf. *ibid.*, 287, 11f., cited below n. 94). For the example of the “atom” cf. generally *Mas (B)*, 12ff.

(*aṣl*) of whatever other attributes it may have. "The atom's being an atom cannot be by virtue of the way it is in itself because there is here no other attribute to which one may point and say that on its account it is an atom, for what we mean [by the atom's being an atom] is the ground of its attributes."⁴³

Again, the sole ground of the intelligibility of a thing-itself—i.e., the ground of its intelligibility for us—is the "Attribute of the Essence": its being itself identical with itself,⁴⁴ for it is the ground of the "essential attributes" which constitute the mode of the manifestation of the thing-itself in the actuality of its existence and, consequently, its accessibility to perception and knowledge through and in the actuality of its existence (*wojūd*). "The thing-itself must perforce be characterised by some attribute by which it is distinct (*tatamayyaz*)⁴⁵ from others and this attribute must perforce have some characteristic [sc., the "essential attribute (s)"] through which it becomes manifest (*tazhar*). Now this characteristic is, so to speak, its "true nature" (*kal-ḥaqīqati lahā*) and must have the condition of existence."⁴⁶ Although it is the thing-itself that we know (it is defined as "that which may be known and of which predications may

Note that all attributes or states (*ṣifa*, strictly, is a *ḥāl*) are properly rendered in the form *kawn al-shay'...* "the thing's being thus or so." The act of knowing is not an attribute (*ṣifa*) in the terms of Abū Hāshim and his followers; rather it is, in the corporeal knower, an entitative accident (*'araḍ*) that, inhering in the subject, is the reason or cause (*ma'nā*, 'illa) of the actuality of the attribute (*ṣifa*) which is the knower's being knowing (*kawn al-'ālimi 'āliman*). The "state" (*ahwāl*) are ontologically real as states or modalities of the being of the existent and their predication of it (of the existent "thing-itself" or living totality) is a statement of the way it concretely and really is as so qualified (*mawṣūf*). It should be noted, however, that for the authors with whom we are here concerned, the expression *kawn/kā'in* in this usage (and so also *thobūt/thābit*, which 'Abd al-Jabbār takes sometimes as synonymous, cf. e.g., *SU* 5, 176) does not necessarily denote or imply the actuality of a true state of being, i.e., that the subject is ontically real as having existence being really in such a state. Thus, though Abū Hāshim will say that "the atom is an atom even when it is non-existent" (*al-jawhar yakūn jawharan fī ḥāl 'adamīhi: Mas (B)*, 12, 6f.; cf. also *ibid.*, 18, 19ff. cited in the following note) the use of the expression *yakūn* (is) implies no real state of being as existence or existent.

43. *Mas (B)*, 18, 19ff.; cf. also *Moh*, 61, 8ff.

44. Cf. *SU* 5, 108, 10f. The non-existent is not directly accessible to human knowing cf. n. 84 below.

45. Sc., the "Attribute of the Essence". On this "distinctiveness" see below.

46. *Mas* fol. 17V° 17-19. "True nature": *al-ḥaqīqa* were more accurately paraphrased as "what it really is", that is, that which we most fundamentally and essentially understand and refer to when we name the thing.

be made"⁴⁷), it is known through and in terms of the manifest "essential attributes" that are entailed by (*moqtadiya 'an*) the "Attribute of the Essence." The "Attribute of the Essence", however, remains undissolved in its self-identity and so inaccessible in itself as it presents no analysable terms. It is itself itself. Thus the "Attribute of the Essence" is said to be "restricted" (*maqṣūra*) to the "essence"/thing-itself⁴⁸ because the thing-itself in itself is not predicable of anything other than itself. Only as existent, with and in the actuality and manifestation of its "essential attributes", does it become thus and so and thereby, in existence (*'inda l-wojūd*), directly accessible to our knowing and possessed of attributes (*ṣifāt, awṣāf*) which may be predicated of it as true states (*aḥwāl*) of its being.

As the "Attribute of the Essence" is prior to the "essential attributes" of which it is the ground, so also it is prior to existence: the thing-itself's being existent. The actuality of the "essential attributes" and their manifestation are conditional (*mashrūt*) in that they depend upon the actuality of the existence of the thing-itself (*wojūd al-dhāt*) as the "condition of their actuality" (*moṣaḥḥih*), but the thing-itself's being itself identical with itself is not grounded in something else or conditioned by anything, for it is impossible that the thing cease to be identical with itself.⁴⁹ The identity of the thing-itself with itself—its predicability of itself—remains true even in its non-existence: when it is *ma'dūm*.⁵⁰

The "Attribute of the Essence" is the absolute or unconditioned ground of all other attributes that a thing may have in being that which it is. The "essential attributes" that flow immediately and necessarily from the "Attribute of the Essence" when the thing-itself is existent are necessitated as such not by the condition of their actuality (sc., by existence as *moṣaḥḥih*) but in "by the thing-itself's being as it is in itself" (*li-mā howa 'alayhi fī dhātīhi/nafsihi*). The "Attribute of the Essence" is "that whose effect is greater and stronger than the effect of conditions (*shorūt*) and factors that fulfill the condition of actuality (*toṣaḥḥih*),

47. *Al-dhāt mā yaṣīḥh 'an yo'lama wa-yokhbara 'anho*: e.g., *Mas* (B), 19, 12 f. Attributes (*ṣifāt*) as states (*aḥwāl*), though we may speak of their characteristics (*aḥkām*), are not properly speaking objects of our knowing and our predication; rather it is the thing (*shay' = dhāt*) which we know as being in such or such a state that may, thus, be predicated of it. See also below n. 85.

48. Cf., e.g., *Moh*, 61, 9 and 197, 3; *Mas* (B), 19, 5-9 and 21, 5-8 and the following note.

49. *Ḥorūj dhāt 'an ṣifātihā l-maqṣūrati 'alayhā idhā lam takon mashrūtatin bi-sharṭin lā yaṣīḥh*: *Moh*, 197, 2 f.; cf. also *SU* 5, 108, 9-14 and generally *ZS*, 192 ff. Cf. also n. 42 above.

50. Cf. *ZS. loc. cit.* and the discussion in *Mas* (B), 12 ff. On the character of this reality of the thing *fī 'adamīhi* and that it is not a state (*ḥāl*) of the *ma'dūm* see below.

i.e., [it is] that which effects the attribute by way of necessity (*to'althir fī l-ṣifati bi-tarīqati l-ijāb*), so that the atom, by virtue of the way it is [in itself] effects its occupying space when it exists and so similarly with black;⁵¹ for this reason that which is entailed [*al-moqtadā*, sc., that which is entailed by the "Attribute of the Essence" given existence] differs specifically [from the characteristic, manifest attribute(s) of another thing] not because of any difference specific to existence itself."⁵² As the condition may (as is the case with all created beings) arise (*tajaddada*) and be present at one time and disappear and be absent (*zāla*, *intafā*) at another, so these attributes whose actuality is conditional upon its presence may contingently appear at one time and be absent at another. The "Attribute of the Essence", however, which is not so conditioned, is not subject to this contingency.⁵³

Existence (*al-wojūd*) is univocal: "the attribute of existence is the same in all existent beings."⁵⁴ "Existence" can be neither more nor less⁵⁵ and God, insofar as He is considered simply in His being-existent (i.e., as *mawjūd*), shares this attribute with all other existents.⁵⁶ Existence as the condition of the actuality of a being's "essential attributes" is only analogously the ground of their being (*yajrī majrā l-aṣli fīhā*).⁵⁷ It is the "Attribute of the Essence" that is the absolute ground of whatever attributes and characteristics a thing may have including the manner in which it belongs to it to exist when it exists: *wajho stiḥqāqīhi lil-wojūd*. That is, it is "the way the thing is in itself" that determines the possibility of the possible (*jawāz/ṣiḥḥat al-wojūd*): that it may exist and may not exist, its existence being contingent upon the action of an agent (*fā'il*) who effects its existence, and the necessity of the necessarily existent (*wojūb al-wojūd*): the

51. For the example see, e.g., *Moh*, 107, 8 ff., 188 f., & *alibi pass.*

52. *Moh*, 142, 18–20 cf. also *Moh*, 206, 6 ff. and the argument in *ZS*, 177 f.

53. Cf., e.g., *Mas (B)*, 21, 1 ff. (where read *motajaddida* for *mthddh* in 11, 9 f., 16 and 19), *ibid.*, 13, 5–7 and the text cited in the previous note. On the use of the expression *tajaddada* and its distinction from *ḥodūth* and *wojūd* see my "Abū Hāshim's Theory of 'States'" pp. 93 f.

54. *Ṣifat al-wojūd wāḥidaton fī l-dhawāti l-mawjūda*: *Moh*, 141, 24 f.; cf. generally *ibid.*, 142, 11–20 and also *Mas (B)*, 13, 5 f.; *M 4*, 84, 1 ff.; 7, 87, 17 ff., & *alibi pass.* and note especially *Moh*, 143, 11–17. On the predication of *mawjūd* of God cf. also *M 5*, 292 ff.

55. *Al-wojūd lā yaṣiḥḥ fīhi tazāyod*: *M 9*, 116, 1 f.

56. Cf. *ZS*, 546 f.: *al-qadīm yoshārik sā'ira l-mawjūdāti fī l-wojūd*; and *M 11*, 433, 5 f.

57. Cf., e.g., *Moh*, 147, 12 f. It is in this sense that one may say that to be contingent (i.e., possible: not necessary) and to be eternal (i.e., necessary) are modalities of existence and so are "posterior to existence" (*al-ḥodūth wal-qidam yatba'āni l-wojūd*: *M 7*, 153, 4).

unconditioned necessity of that whose non-existence is impossible.⁵⁸ Thus, according to the analysis of Abū Hāshim and his followers, that the eternal (*al-qadīm* = God) exist (i.e., its being-existent: *kawnoho maujūdan*) is an “essential attribute”: it is existent “because of the way it is in itself” (*li-mā howa ‘alayhi fī dhātihi*);⁵⁹ but the way it is in itself (sc., the eternal’s being eternal), as the “Attribute of the Essence”,⁶⁰ “is unconditioned by anything else” (*ghayr mashrūṭ-atin bi-‘amrin siwāhā*). The “Attribute of the Essence” sc., “to be eternal, is existence itself” (*kawnoho qadīman naḥs al-wojūd*),⁶¹ i.e., is to exist necessarily. God’s existence is absolutely unconditioned in its necessity.

That the *ma’dūm* is identified with the possible has been noted above (nn. 21 f.). The possibility of the possible is the possibility of existence (*jawāz/ṣiḥḥat al-wojūd*): the possibility of the thing-itself which is non-existent (*al-dhāt al-ma’dūma*) to exist and existing to manifest “by virtue of the way it is in itself,” its essential attributes and properties. There is no intermediate between existence and non-existence; the thing-itself is either existent (*maujūda*), manifesting its “essential attributes”, or it is non-existent (*ma’dūma*).⁶² The system does not recognize any becoming according to which a thing-itself may be said to be in one respect and in another not to be. Change (*al-taghayyor*) is predicated only of composites (sc., bodies: *ajsām*, including the living in their quasi unity as *jomal*: totalities) whose change is, in reality, a becoming-other (*taḡhāyor*) as some of their constituent elements cease to exist (*zāla, intafā, ‘odima*) and are replaced by others with the consequent alteration (alternation) of particular states, either of the material substrate (*maḥall*) as such or, in some instances of the living “totality” as a whole.⁶³ Again, since the ontologically real components

58. Cf. *M* 11, 433, 2–9.

59. Cf., e.g., *M* 11, 423, 14 f.; *SU* 5, 182, 12–15 (where the reference to “the four attributes” is to the primary “essential attributes”: existent, living, *qādir*, and knowing); *ZS*, 459 f. (where ‘*an al-sifati dhātiyya* is to be understood after *moqtadan* in the 2d line from the bottom of p. 459) and particularly 195, 9 ff.

60. Cf., e.g., *M* 4, 250, 14 ff.; 7, 84, 15 f. (where read *fa-mā* for *mimmā*); *SU* 5, 107, 7 ff. On the identification of the eternal as the necessary cf. my “Philosophy and the kalām, a Perspective from one Problem” in *Islamic Philosophical Theology* (ed. P. Morewedge, N.Y., forthcoming).

61. Cf. *Moh*, 61, 8 ff.

62. Cf., e.g., *M* 6/1, 10, 11 f.

63. Cf., e.g., *ZS* 567, 7 ff.; *M* 6/2, 107, 7 ff. and 199, 4 ff. (where read *al-taghayyor* for *al-taḡhyr* in 11, 6 and 9); and 11, 427 f. The attributes (*ṣifāt*) and characteristics (*aḥkām*) may be

of material being consist exclusively in the atoms (*jawāhir*) and the accidents (*a'rād*) that inhere in them, both of which as entitative realities (i.e., things-themselves) either exist, manifesting their "essential attributes" or are non-existent, one can speak of the possibility of existence only in two respects. That is, of the three modes of potentiality commonly recognized in medieval thought, viz., the thing's potentiality in the potentiality of matter: that the matter is capable of receiving the perfection (whether as an accidental form or as a substantial form), its potentiality in the power of the agent (*in virtute agentis*) to produce it, and its potentiality in itself (*quia termini non sunt discohaerentes = potentia in intellectu*), the Baṣrian tradition of the Mo'tazila recognizes only the last two: the intrinsic possibility of the *ma'dūm* to become existent and the power of the autonomous agent to cause it to exist.

The sole cause of the existence (*wojūd*) of beings whose being is possible, sc., of things-themselves (*dhawāt*) whose existence is not necessary, is, according to the Baṣrian School, the power of efficient causality (*qodra*) of the autonomous agent (*al-qādir = katexousios*).⁶⁴ Accordingly, the *ma'dūm*, as that whose existence is possible (*mā yaṣihh/yajūz wojūdoho*) is identified with the *maqḍūr* [*alayhi*]: the object of the autonomous agent's power of efficient causation or, more properly speaking in the strict terms of the analysis, that which is related as its object to the state (*hal*) of the autonomous agent in his having the power of efficient causality to effect its existence (*kawnoho qādiran 'alayhi*, i.e., '*alā ijādihī*). "There is no way to assert the reality of the non-existent [i.e., that a thing-itself is, in fact, *ma'dūm*] save as that which is correlated to the state of the autonomous agent."⁶⁵

said to be possible as one may speak of the possibility of their becoming or arising (*tajaddod*) or their actuality (*hoṣūl*), but this is reduced to the possibility of the being of things-themselves (*dhawāt*) (sc., to the possibility of the existence (*wojūd*) either of the things-themselves as the immediate ground of their "essential attributes" or of the accidents [*a'rād*] as *ma'ānī*, i.e., insofar as by their inherence in the atoms [*jawāhir*] as substrate [*maḥall*] they are the causes of the attributes and characteristics as states (*aḥwāl*) of the subject whether the material substrate alone or of the living *jomla*) and of the agent's action.

64. On the forms of causality recognized by the school and that of the autonomous agent (*al-fā'il al-qādir*) in particular see my "Philosophy and the Kalām." The equivalence *exousia = qodra* and *istiḥā'a* is found also in the translation literature; cf., e.g., the Arabic version of Alexander of Aphrodisias *Peri tou 'eph' 'emīn* (*Scripta Minora II/1: de Anima*, pp. 172-4) in A. Badawī, *Commentaires sur Aristote perdu en grec et autres épîtres*, Beyrouth, 1971, pp. 80-82.

65. *Lā ṭarīqa li-'ithbātī l-ma'dūmi 'illā mā yata'allaq bi-hāli l-qādir*: Moḥ, 117, 11 f. Thus "it

God's power of efficient causality is infinite and unrestricted in itself and so extends to an infinite number of classes of beings ('*ajnās*)⁶⁶ and to an infinity of individuals in each and every class.⁶⁷ It is the ultimate ground of the possibility of all possibles (*maqḍūrāt*) as such (i.e., of their being *maqḍūrāt*), for the possibility of the realisation of the act of any created agent, whether man, jinnī, or angel, derives from God's having created in him the power of autonomous action and causation (*iqḍāroho laho*), a gratuitous act whose possibility and actuality are grounded in God's autonomous power ('*exousia*). Again, it is the nature of the autonomous agent's power of efficient causality (*al-qodra: kawṇ al-qādirī qādiran*) that it does not necessitate the existence of its object⁶⁸—i.e., it is not determined to a single object—but extends to the contrary and an indeterminate number of individuals in whatever class (*jins*) of beings.⁶⁹ It is, thus the ground of alternati-

belongs to that which is not subject to the agent's power of causation that its existence is impossible just as it belongs to what is subject to the agent's power of causation that its existence is possible": *M* 8, 116. For the definition of the *maqḍūr* as that to which the agent's power of efficient causality is correlated (i.e., it is possible that he effect its existence: *wojūd*) cf., e.g., *M* 8, 75, 16f. (where read *tajaddod* for *ḥidd* in 1. 12); 9, 80, 1f.; 15, 197, 9; and *Moh*, 356, 23. The definition of the autonomous agent is reciprocal; "it belongs to the autonomous agent that to effect the existence of the object of his power of efficient causality (*ijād maqḍūrīhi*) is possible on his part without his having any relationship to it beyond his being *qādir 'alayhi*" (*M* 9, 22, 8ff.) (the sense of the reference to "no other relationship beyond his being *qādir 'alayhi*" is that even though other states [e.g., those involved in the acts of willing, intending, or knowing] may indeed be correlated to and determinant of the manner or mode of the occurrence/coming-to-be of the act [*wajh woqū'ihī/hidūthihī*] and so determinant of some real aspects or modalities of the act or the being that is made to exist, nonetheless the occurrence/coming-to-be [*woqū' /hodūth = tajaddod al-wojūd*] as such and in itself is correlated to and depends exclusively upon the agent's being-*qādir*, so that the function and efficacy of any other state is grounded in and is subordinate to that of his being-*qādir*); cf. also, e.g., *M* 4, 306, 15ff., 331, 3-5; 8, 109, 3ff.; 9, 134, 23f.; *Moh*, 161, 9f. and 359, 2f.; & *alibi*.

66. *M* 1, 50; *M* 6/1, 129 *ult.* f. Note that although the English word "genus" is correct to render Arabic *jins* as this word is used in the literature of the *falsafa* it would be quite misleading to render it thus in the *kalām* literature.
67. Cf., e.g., *M* 4, 277ff.; 6/1, 162ff.; 11, 453f.; 7, 55, 3ff.; *SU* 5, 155f. and 317, 1ff.; *Moh*, 115, 1ff.; *Mas* fol. 183 V^o; *ZS*, 256ff. and 268; & *alibi iass*. The thesis, insofar as it insists that at any instant God has the "power" (*qodra*) to create more than He has, sc., an indeterminate number at any instant (cf., e.g., *M* 6/1, 136, 4f.), is directed in part, at least, against the position of Abū l-Hodhayl, on which cf. *le Muséon* 82 (1969), 473ff.
68. Cf., e.g., *M* 9, 50, 4 and generally my "Philosophy and the Kalām".
69. Cf. reference above. We need not, for the purposes of the present study, enter into the question of the specific restrictions of the created agent's power of efficient causality

ves in the action of the agent (and so the ground of his freedom and autonomy) and so of the infinitude of alternatives in the unrestricted power of the eternal agent (apart from which one could not speak of the possible but rather only of the necessary and the impossible); it is the ultimate ground of the possibility of the possible insofar as its possibility is the possibility on the part of the autonomous agent that it be made to exist. Besides the possibility of what will be (sc., what the eternal agent knows will come to be through the efficacious power of His unnecessitated act), it is the ground of the possibility of what has not come to be and is now excluded from actual possibility through the factic necessity of what has been and what is.⁷⁰ It is the ground of the possibility of creation as such: of its possibility and its non-necessity — that it can and in fact does exist but need not have existed at all — and that no individual creature need exist or have existed; it is possible (God might have: it lies within His Allmight) that He have created nothing at all⁷¹ or that he have created a different universe (e.g., it is possible that it consist of a greater quantity of matter: *jawāhir*;⁷² any given event [action or existent] might have taken place earlier or later or in another place;⁷³ mankind might have been created initially in the state and place of the blessed of the life to come and there have been, therefore, no obligation involving reward and punishment: no *taklīf*;⁷⁴ the revealed law need not be specifically as it is;⁷⁵ God could increase His benefits and graces towards mankind⁷⁶). So

(*tajānus maqdūrātī l-qodar*; on this see *Beings and their Attributes*, p. 164, n. 8).

70. Cf., e.g., *M* 9, 119; the thing remains *ma'dūm* as having been possible (*jā'iz al-wojūd* and *maqdūr*); cf. above nn. 23 f. and the following references. Similarly, that a thing's being made to exist be impossible as precluded (*mamnū'*) by some "impediment" (*man'*) relative to it (i.e., to the *maqdūr* as such) does not imply its being thereby excluded from its relation to the agent in his having the power of efficient causality to produce it; he remains *qādir 'alayhi* (cf., e.g., *M* 4, 330 ff. and *Moh*, 195). The thing remains, thus, possible in itself and possible in the power of the autonomous agent. In this way even though material creation ("bodies") cannot exist *ab aeterno* for reasons intrinsic to the nature of material being as such, its possibility nonetheless is eternal in God's eternally having, by virtue of the way He is in Himself, an unrestricted and unconditioned power of efficient causality (cf., e.g., *M* 4, *loc. cit.*) and in that its possibility as possible in itself is also unconditioned and perpetual.
71. Cf., e.g., *M* 11, 99, 7 f., 112 ff.; 14, 110 ff. and my "Philosophy and the Kalām".
72. E.g., *ZS*, 257, 1 ff.
73. Cf. *M* 8, 112 11 ff. (where insert *aḥad* after *fa'l* in l. 10).
74. E.g., *M* 14, 137 ff.
75. E.g., *M* 15, 137 f.
76. Cf., e.g., *M* 11, 154, 5 ff., 256, 12 ff.; & *alibi pass.* This is directed against the teaching of the *falāsifa* and that of Bishr b. al-Mo'tamir (cf., e.g., *M* 6/2, 2, 11 f.) and Abū l-Qāsim al-

also it is the ground of the possibility of the possible that will not ever come to be: that which God knows He will never bring to be⁷⁷ and that which cannot under any circumstances come to be, e.g., that act which, if God were to perform it, would be morally wrong: injustice or lying or the like on His part, for though His performing such an act is in fact impossible (*lā yajūz*) because of His wisdom and His *aitárkeia* (*ghinā*), it is nevertheless possible (*yaṣihh wajūdoho*) in that it falls within His power of efficient causality, for the thing itself is not impossible in itself and God's power of efficient causality, in itself, is unrestricted.⁷⁸

The infinite and indeterminate power of God, thus, is the ground of the possibility of whatever is possible (*maqḍūr*). Logically, however, the intrinsic possibility of the thing-itself considered in itself—that its terms are not incompatible with its existence—is prior to its possibility in the power of the agent. “The possibility of the realisation of existence is prior to the possibility of the autonomous agent's having the power to effect its existence, so that the im-

Ka'bī (cf., e.g., *M* 14, 55 and *ZS* 269 f.) and generally the “*aṣḥāb al-'aṣlah*” (sc., those who hold that God must and can only do that which is absolutely “for the best” in respect of His creatures, in whose doctrines the Baṣrians see not merely a restriction of God's power but the implication of the inherent necessity and determinism in His action.

77. Cf., e.g., *M* 11, 4 ff. (where read *anna 'ilma l-'ālim* for *anna l-'ālim* p. 5, 1. 5) and 6/2, 205 ff. Note however that God's foreknowledge as such does not exclude the possibility (*sihha*) of what will not be nor necessitate the being of what will be (cf., e.g., *M* 11, 70, 14 ff., 159, 11 ff., 277, 10 ff., and the references above).

In this general context one may raise the question of the autonomous action of the created agent (whose possible act likewise includes what he will not do) in that the system categorically refuses to subordinate the autonomous act of the human agent directly to God's act—i.e., to make the action or inaction of the created agent directly dependent upon God's action or will—so that they do hold, in a sense, that there are two sources of the autonomous or free initiation of action and being (*iḥdāth*) against the Ash'arite conception of the created or contingent power of efficient causality (*al-qodra l-moḥdatha*) which is fully coordinated to and coherent with the latter's notion of continuous creation); however, even though the created agent's power of efficient causality is relatively autonomous in the agent, being the ground of his freedom, it yet exists (*tūjad*, i.e., the separate quanta of power—*qodar*—have entitative existence as accidents materially present in the corporeal agent) only through God's having created it so and consequently the ultimate ground of the possibility of the possibles whose possibility is immediately grounded in their relation to the power of the created agent lies in God's being-*qādir* by virtue of the way He is in Himself.

78. Cf., e.g., *M* 6/1, 129 ff., 135 ff., and 149 f.; 15, 176, 11 ff.; 16, 59 ff.; *Moh*, 220, 24 ff. and 247. Cf. also *le Muséon* 82 (1969), 486 f. (where read “we know” for “He knows” p. 486, l. 28).

possibility of the former renders the latter impossible".⁷⁹ "The thing's being made to exist through the action of the autonomous agent is, as it were, derivative of the possibility of its existence in itself" (*kal-far'i 'alā ṣiḥḥati wojudihi fī nafsihi*).⁸⁰ This insistence upon the priority of the thing-itself as possible in itself is frequent enough in the texts.⁸¹ It remains, therefore, to examine what they have to say about this priority, i.e., concerning the nature and status of the thing-itself (*dhāt*) as *ma'dūm* and as, in itself, it is related to the power of the autonomous agent.

We have noted above that the thing-itself (*al-dhāt*) in the "Attribute of the Essence" (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) is prior to the actuality of its existence as the ontological ground of the characteristic and essential attributes that are realised and manifested when it exists: those that, given the existence of the thing-itself, flow immediately from the "Attribute of the Essence" — from the "Essence"/thing-itself because of the way it is in itself. The thing-itself, considered in this respect, is essentially prior to the action of the agent who causes its existence (*al-mūjid*, *al-moḥdith*), for the agent's power of efficient causation is only to bring the thing to existence (*iḥdātho*): to effect its existence = make it existent (*iḥdātho*).⁸²

79. *Ṣiḥḥat al-ḥodūthi tatba'ohā ṣiḥḥat kawni l-qādiri qādiran 'alayhi fa-stiḥālatoho dhālika*: M 8, 72, 5f.

80. M 11, 94, 15 ff.

81. Cf. also, e.g., M 8, 68, 14f. and 109, 3f.; 9, 134, 21 ff.; *Moh*, 356, 23 f., & *alibi*.

82. Note that within the system this thesis, sc., that the power of efficient causality is the power to realise the existence of something (*al-qodra 'alā l-iḥdāth*) and this alone (cf., e.g., M 8, 63 ff.) has as its corollary that the power of causation cannot be a power of causing non-existence: the power of annihilation (*al-qodra 'alā l-i'dām/al-ifnā'*) (cf. generally, e.g., M 8, *loc. cit.* and especially 65 ff. and 74 ff.—where read *tatajaddad* for *thidd* on p. 75, 12). Since the school holds no doctrine of continuous creation (i.e., of God's continually maintaining in existence the being that continue to exist after the moment of their initial coming to be), neither after the manner of Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bi of the Baghdad School of the Mo'tazilla nor after that of the Ash'arites, the possibility of the non-existence of matter (i.e., the atoms) once it has come to exist, that is, if and how God can cause it to cease to exist, becomes a major subject of discussion and debate. The solution offered is that the atom must have some contrary (*didd*) which God can create and which created would cause the annihilation of all matter (since it cannot be specific to a particular substrate); cf. generally M 11, 442–451 and *Mas (B)*, 69 ff. and 74 ff. This position, that beings whose nature it is to continue in existence (*min haqqihā 'an tabqā*), once made to exist, are independant of the agent who caused them to exist so that the continuation of the world in existence requires no action on God's part, fits consistently and coherently with their notion that the action of the created agent in generating the being of his own acts is fully independant of God's action (*v. supra* n. 77).

and is not the power to determine and make it be that which it is.⁸³ The essential identity of the thing-itself with itself in being that which it is (e.g., that black be black or that the atom be an atom, to cite the most common examples) and consequently also the essential and characteristic attributes that, upon existence, derive immediately and necessarily from the way it is in itself, are not determinable by the agent. The non-existent (*al-ma'dūm*) which is the thing-itself that in itself may exist is thus "something" (*shay'* = *tóde tí*), for in that it is a specific thing-itself that in itself may be made to exist and that, as such, has a real correlation to the autonomous agent's power of efficient causality, there is no circumstance under which it is not true that "it may be known⁸⁴ and that true predications may be made of it;" it is "something", that is to say, a (particular) entity that is a true correlate (*mota'allaq bihi*) of our knowing!⁸⁵ As a thing-itself (*dhāt*), the *ma'dūm* is known not simply in general ('*alā jomla*) but specifically ('*alā l-tafṣīl*) in its proper characteristics.⁸⁶ It is known and distinguishable (*motamayyiz*) in its otherness (that it is *ghayr*) from what is other as in its similarity and difference in relation to what is similar and different,⁸⁷ so also the possibles in their specific identity as possibles are distinguishable (*motamayyiz*) from and different (*mokhālif*) from God⁸⁸ and as possibles they are distinguishable from that whose existence is not possible at all.⁸⁹

83. Cf., e.g., *M* 8, 63 ff. (esp. 68 ff.) (where read *al-a'rād* for *ighr'd*: 64, 16; *khabaran* for *jbr'*: 66, 13; *bi-motajaddid* for *bothdd*: 67, 7; *al-tahayyoz* for *'ltkhyr*: 68, 19; *yatahayyaz* for *ytkhyr*: 68, 20; *motahayyizan* for *mtkhyr*: 68, 21; *al-'arād* for *'lghrd*: 68, 19-21; and *khabaran* for *jbr'*: 70, 3); *ZS*, 50 ff., 201 ff. and 320 ff.; *Moh*, 64, 1 ff.; & *alibi pass.*

84. It is known to God whose knowing embraces all knowables and can be known by us, though we have no knowledge of future contingents (cf., e.g., *M* 11, 161, 11 ff.; 15, 57, 14 ff.; and 13, 337, 14 f.) and consequently no direct knowledge of the *ma'dūm* (sc., the particular possible) (cf., e.g., *M* 8, 7, 14 f. and 75, 8 f.).

85. The terms *dhāt*, thus, and *shay'* are defined by precisely the same formula (on whose stoic origins cf. van den Bergh, *op.cit.*, 2, 4, *ad* 3, 6 cf. also Sibawayh, *al-Kitāb*, ed. A. Harun, Cairo, 1385/1966, 1, 22 = *Būlāq* p. 7); cf., e.g., *M* 5, 251, 3 f. (where read *al-kalām* for *'lkl'*, 1, 3) and *Mas (B)*, 19, 11-13 (cited above n. 47); cf. also *SU* 5, 108 (cited above n. 44) and concerning *ta'alloq al-'ilmi bihi*; see also above.

86. Cf., e.g., *ZS*, 191 f.; *Mas (B)*, 21, 15-20 and *Mas* fol. 174 V°, 16 ff. (cited above nn. 23 and 46).

87. For the use of these terms to describe the *ma'dūm* see, e.g., *Mas (B)*, 21; *M* 7, 128, 11 f. (where insert *lā* after *sā'iri mā*, 1. 12); 8, 268; *ZS*, 226 f., & *alibi*.

88. Cf. *Mas (B)*, 21, 9-14.

89. Cf., e.g., *ZS*, 193, 11-13. It is thus that 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Rashid insist against Ibn

The *ma'dūm* as such — insofar as it is *ma'dūm* — is simply possible; both its existence and its non-existence are equally possible; i.e., neither is necessary and neither impossible. The non-existents (*al-ma'dūmāt*) “whatever their individual and specific dissimilarity [among themselves as thing-themselves] all have in common that their existence is possible and their non-existence is possible.”⁹⁰ Though the coming-to-be (*ḥodūth*) and existence (*wojūd*) of the non-existent are conditioned, i.e., contingent upon the action of the autonomous agent (*al-qādir*), its non-existence (*'adam*) — i.e., its continued non-existence: *istimrār 'adamīhi* — as such, is not derived or conditioned (*mashrūt*).⁹¹ Of itself the possible “remains non-existent” (*baqiya/istamarra ma'dūman*) so long as it is not made to exist through the autonomous agent's power of efficient causation.⁹² “The thing-itself entails the possibility of existence and this alone.”⁹³ That the thing-itself be itself and itself that which it is irreducible and unconditioned; that is, the “Attribute of the Essence,” “the way a thing-itself is in itself must be absolute and no ground for it can be validly assigned.”⁹⁴ One cannot ask why a thing is what it is.

But what is the reality of the thing-itself as a non-existent possible? Non-existence (*al-'adam*), i.e., “the non-existent's being non-existent” (*kawn al-ma'dūmi ma'dūman*) is not a state (*ḥāl*) or attribute (*ṣifa*) of the thing-itself. That is, to say that the *ma'dūm* is non-existent is not to assert that the thing-itself is actually and in fact in any state of being or is qualified by an attribute as is the case when we say that a thing is existent (*mawjūd*), i.e., that it has actually and in fact the state or attribute of being-existent (*kawnoho mawjūdan*), for non-existence is not in actuality and fact a state or attribute (it is not *ṣifa thābita*) but

'Ayyāsh that even though our knowledge of non-existence and the non-existent derives from a knowledge of the existent (v. below), our knowledge of the thing-itself that it is non-existent and possible is not a knowledge of it as it would or may or will exist (a knowledge of “an expected attribute”, thus) but of it as non-existent in its non-existence; cf. *SU* 5, 554 f.; *Mas* (B), 12 and 20 f.; and *ZS*, 191 f.

90. *ZS*, 227, 1 f.; cf. also *Mas* (B), 65, 7; *M* 6/2, 135, 8.

91. Cf. *ZS*, 193, 14–16; *SU* 5, 343, 11 ff. (where read *al-'adam* for *al-qidam* in I. 11) and *Mas* fol. 52 V°.

92. Cf. *M* 4, 255, 3 f. and *Mas* (B), 65, 6 ff. (on which page read *al-ma'ānī* for *'lmgh'ny* in I. 4; *yothbat* for *ythyt* and *ba'd* for *bo'd* in I. 16).

93. *M* 4, 270, 13 f.: *al-ladhī taqtaḍīhi l-dhāt ṣiḥḥat al-wojūdi faqat*.

94. *ZS*, 287, 11 f.: *'inna mā howa 'alayhi l-shay' fī dhātīhi yajib lā li-wajhin bal bi-'ayyi shay'in 'ollila fasad*.

is simply "the absence of the attribute of being-existent" (*zawāl šifati l-wojūd*).⁹⁵ To say that a thing is non-existent is the negation (*naḡy*) of a state or attribute (viz., that of being-existent); it does not imply that there is in fact (*thobūt*) a contrary state (as, by contrast, to say that a body is-not in motion implies that it is in fact in the state of being-at-rest).⁹⁶ Similarly, "its being subject to the power of an agent that can effect its existence" (*kawnoho maqdūran 'alayhi*) does not imply or require that there is in fact some state or attribute by which it is specifically qualified and which (since non-existence is the negation of existence and the agent's power of efficient causation is the power to effect the existence of the non-existent that is the correlative object of his power) would be the contrary (*didd*) of existence (*wojūd*).⁹⁷ The meaning of the statement that a thing-itself is non-existent is given only in the understanding of the absence of the state of being-existent;⁹⁸ i.e., the non-existent is not distinguishable from the existent as having an attribute but rather by the fact that the existent has a state of being in virtue of which it is distinguishable from the non-existent, sc., its being existent,⁹⁹ a state that is given to our immediate apprehension as and in the manifest actuality of the "essential attributes." The reality of the non-existent

95. Cf. *Moh*, 353, 18f. and *ZS*, 228, 10–19 (citing 'Abd al-Jabbār), and the references below.

96. Cf. *M* 6/1, 9f. (on which cf. n. 10 above); 5, 74f.; *ZS*, 245; and *Mas* (B), 72, 1ff. and 74f.

97. Cf. *M* 8, 75, 14ff. Abū Rashīd argues (*Mas* (B), 71, 6ff.) that if the non-existent, as such, had a state (*hāl*) in being non-existent the state would have to be "Essential" (*li-dhātihī*), i.e., would belong to the "essence"/thing-itself as such, since the possible is non-existent *ab aeterno* (*fī mā lam yazal*) in itself as possible; thus, since the eternal as such is unconditionally necessary, non-existence as a real state of the thing-itself would be necessary as eternal and consequently the existence of the *ma'dūm* would be altogether impossible. The thesis that non-existence (*al-'adam*) is not a state is, again, bound to the thesis that the power of efficient causality is not a power of making something non-existence (*'alā l-'i'dām*) for it is only a power to effect the actualisation of "a contingent accident" (*šifa motajaddida*), sc., coming-to-be (*al-ḥodūth = tajaddod al-wojūd*); cf. generally n. 82 above and references there cited. *Al-'adam* is sometimes loosely referred to as *šifa motajaddida* (e.g., *Mas*, fol. 52 V^o) as one says of that which having been existent ceased to be existent that it has passed from being-existent to being-nonexistent, but strictly speaking it is not such; cf., e.g., *Moh*, 353, 18ff.

98. Cf. *M* 4, 230, 11–14; cf. also *M* 8, 74f. Thus the knowledge of existence (what it is to be existent) is the basis (*aṣl*) of that of non-existence (*al-'adam*): *Mas* (B), 71, 17f.; cp. also 'Abd al-Jabbār's definition of the non-existent cited above; see also n. 89.

99. *Fa'amma mofāraqat al-ma'dūmi lil-mawjūdi fa-li-'anna lil-mawjūdi ḥālam bi-kawnihī mawjūdan kāna bi-hā minā l-ma'dūmi wa-'in lam yakon lil-ma'dūmi bi-kawnihī ma'dūman ḥālon*: *M* 6/1 54, 12f. (on which page read *al-binya* for *'ltubh* in l. 10); cf. also *M* 6/2, 135, 6f. and 5, 230, 11ff., as well as n. 38 above.

(*al-ma'dūm*) is, thus, the reality or fact of its possibility (*thobūt al-jawāz*).¹⁰⁰ "The thing-itself entails the possibility of existence and this alone." In the "Attribute of the Essence" the thing-itself that is-not existent can only be predicated of itself but not as itself being in any way. As and insofar as it is non-existent it is-not (*laysa*) and 'is-not' is the denial of an attribute or state. Non-existence, thus, is a negation (*nafy*) but not, as the Ash'arites would have it, a pure negation (*nafy širf*), for the possibility of the possible is in fact real (*thābit*) and for this reason it is distinguishable from the purely imaginary as something (*tóde ti*) that is really and in fact correlated to the agent's power of efficient causation and, thereby, a real object of knowing.¹⁰¹ The individual non-existent is posited as an entity only as it is known to be *maqđūr 'alayhi*.

The possible considered in itself is absolute; its essential identity with itself (sc., the "Attribute of the Essence"), as the unconditioned ground of its possibility, is absolute. It is inconceivable that the thing cease to be the possible that it is in itself.¹⁰² The language of the masters of the Bašrian Mo'tazila may appear often (and it is this that so agitated some of their opponents) to set the "things-themselves" (i.e., the possible *dhawāt*) up as realities, i.e., as somehow concretely having in their being possibles a being of their own along side and independantly of God's being, as for example Abū Rashīd will say that the non-existent (*al-ma'dūm*) in its "Attribute of the Essence"—its predicability of itself as it is identical with itself—is perpetual (*abadan*)¹⁰³ as he will say that God's power of efficient causality is perpetual.¹⁰⁴ The possibility of the thing-itself is, as was noted above, logically prior to its possibility in the agent's power of efficient causation but as regards the real possibility of the thing's coming to exist—its being actually and in fact possible that it comes to be existent—the two are coordinate and reciprocal; the impossibility of the agent's causing it to exist (the impossibility of its being made to exist on the part of the autonomous agent) entails the impossibility that it exists at all as conversely the impossibility of its

100. Cf. *SU* 5, 209, 19 ff. (where read *mūjīdin* for *mawjūdīn*, l. 19 and *al-mūjīd* for *al-mawjūd* in the last line). The formula *al-ma'dūm thābit* I have not found used by any of the Bašrian Mo'tazilites.

101. Cf., e.g., *M* 4, 247, 13 f. and *Moh* 117, 11 f., cited above. Non-existence is, thus, a kind of "stéresis viewed as something positive" as van den Bergh suggests (*op. cit.*, 2, 47, ad 61, 7) but the masters of the Bašrian Mo'tazila would find the formulation there altogether intolerable in its implications.

102. Cf., e.g., *ZS*, 194, 5 ff., 195, 4 ff., 287, and above.

103. Cf., e.g., *ZS*, 194, 9 (and generally 193 ff.); v. also n. 70 above.

104. Cf., e.g., *ZS*, 268, 10.

existence in itself entails the impossibility of its existence at all.¹⁰⁵ Thus Abū Rashīd explicitly refuses to ground the possibility of the possible as it is possible in itself in the agent's power of efficient causality;¹⁰⁶ nor, within the terms of the system, can it be grounded in God's knowledge, for the essential identity of the possible with itself in itself, as the unconditioned ground of its possibility, is the prior condition of its relationship (*ta'alloq*) to knowing as an object of knowing: an object that can be said to exist or to be non-existent. To say, however, that the non-existent possible is "an entity" (*shay'*) is not for Abū Hāshim and his followers, an affirmation of its being a concrete reality;¹⁰⁷ as we noted above what is "real" as being a fact or "really the case" (*thābit*) is simply its possibility. In its being non-existent it has, of itself, properly speaking, no being (no *ṣifa*, no *ḥāl* whatsoever); insofar as it is *ma'dūm* one can say properly only that the thing-itself is-not existent (*laysa bi-mawjūd*) and that it is possible that it be existent. But this fact: that its coming-to-be, its becoming existent, is possible is given only as one knows that it is in fact the potential object of the agent's power of efficient causation; "there is no way to assert the reality of the non-existent save as that which is correlated to the state of the autonomous agent."¹⁰⁸ According to the analysis of the system, as we have seen, one says of a thing that it is non-existent only insofar as it is-not existent though its existence is possible. It is, therefore, only insofar as a thing-itself's coming to be and being existent are possible, not logically and ideally only but really and in fact, that our predication of it as non-existent is other than merely ideal or imaginary. It is only insofar as its existence is really and in fact possible (*thābit al-jawāz*) that the non-existent is other than a purely imaginary object of our knowledge and predication and only, therefore, thus that it can properly be said to be "an entity" (*shay'*) and a "thing-itself" (*dhāt*). In the realm of the real, the possible is the *maqḍūr 'alayhi* and the reality of its possibility consists in its correlation to the state of the autonomous agent in his being *qādir 'alayhi*; the non-existence (*'adam*) of the agent entails the impossibility of the relation (*yoḥīl al-ta'alloq*)¹⁰⁹ and consequently "if one could not imagine the existence of some autonomous

105. Cf., e.g., *M* 4, 331, 5–11 and above.

106. Cf., *ZS*, 287, 6ff.; the argument for the counter position is set forth more fully on p. 284.

107. "Our saying *shay'* [entity] is not an assertion of existence (*laysa bi-'ithāt* for it is used of the non-existent just as it is of the existent": *M* 5, 251, 3f. (on which see n. 85 above).

108. *M* 4, 247, 13f. and the references above nn. 22 and 65.

109. Cf., e.g., *SU* 5, 177, 15ff. and *Moh*, 139f. as well as *Mas* fol. 139R°, 14ff.

agent it would not be possible to describe anything as possibly existent."¹¹⁰

Such, in sum, is the basic analysis of Abū Hāshim and his followers in the Baṣrian School of the Mo'tazila concerning the nature of the non-existent possible. A number of important questions remain to be raised, including the general implications of their teaching within the larger contexts of their theology, that of other *kalām* systems and of Islamic philosophical thought generally. It is hoped that the present outline will, at any rate, serve somewhat to enlighten the continuing discussion and investigation of these issues.

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110. *Moh*, 365, 13f.: *law lam yotaṣawwar wojūd qādirin mina l-qādirin la-mā ṣaḥḥa wasf shay'in mina l-'ashyā'i bi-ṣiḥḥati l-ḥodūth.*

Al-Ma'dūm wal-Mawjūd

Le non-existant, l'existant et le possible
dans l'enseignement d'Abū Hāshim
et de ses successeurs

“Non-existant” (*ma'dūm*) peut-il être le prédicat de quelque chose de réel et non purement imaginaire? Les ash'arites sont unanimes à le refuser, et al-Mātorīdī avec eux. Au contraire, les mo'atazilites dans la tradition de Baṣra ont en général une position affirmative, identifiant en fait le *ma'dūm* avec le “possible”. — Pour saisir l'enjeu du débat, il est proposé de suivre en détail la doctrine concernant l'ontologie de l'existant (*mawjūd*) et du possible (*ma'dūm*) dans l'enseignement d'Abū Hāshim et de ses successeurs, tel qu'il nous est transmis dans les ouvrages du Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār et de son disciple Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī. — Le *ma'dūm*, ni nécessaire ni impossible, inconditionné dans sa non-existence, contient la possibilité d'exister et cela seulement. Quelle est alors la réalité de cette chose elle-même en tant que non-existant possible? La non-existence n'est pas un fait, un état ou un attribut, mais seulement l'absence de l'attribut d'être existant. — La non-existence est donc bien une négation, mais non comme le soutenaient les ash'arites une pure négation, car la possibilité du possible est en fait réelle. Pour cette raison, le *ma'dūm* se distingue du purement imaginaire comme quelque chose qui est en relation réelle avec le pouvoir d'un agent de causation efficiente, et qui, par là, est un réel objet de connaissance.