AL-A<u>SH</u>'ARĪ'S DISCUSSION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL

PROBLEM OF FREE WILL AND PREDESTINATION

BY

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Mohammed Yusoff bin Hussain.

SUMMARY

"Al-Ash‘arī's Discussion of the Philosophi-
cal Problem of Free Will and Predestination" is designed
to explore the discussion of one of the controversial
issues in Islamic theology and philosophy. The problem
of Free Will and Predestination, without doubt, poses
contradictory positions in Islamic thought. The up-
holders of the concept of Free Will will surely be able
to maintain the justice of God, but will face the pro-
blem of the absoluteness of God. Whereas, the upholders
of the concept of Predestination will surely be able to
establish the sovereignty of God but will face the pro-
blem of the justice of God. The important question
emerging from this contradiction is that of the human
share of responsibility for what has been done. It is
to be believed that man will be punished in the life
hereafter for his wrong doings and he will be rewarded
for his good works. This study will try to introduce
one of the solutions given by a medieval Muslim scholar,
al-Ash‘arī, who was trying to reconcile these contra-
dictory positions through a theory which he developed,
that is, 'the theory of acquisition'.

The study is presented by producing various
chapters which are relevant to the problem concerned

and under which this problem is treated. Through this study, we shall not only discuss al-Ash'arī's arguments and positions, but we shall also see the comparison between al-Ash'arī and various scholars from the upholders of Free Will (the Mu'tazilites) as well as the upholders of Predestination (the Jabarites).

In the introduction to the study, we shall introduce al-Ash'arī as an orthodox middle path scholar who valued highly the use of philosophical arguments, but in addition, prized even highly the revelation of the Holy Book, al-Qur'ān. Al-Ash'arī was at first a follower of the Mu'tazilites, but finally turned to orthodoxy. This study will only touch on al-Ash'arī's position when he became the orthodox middle path scholar.

The remaining five chapters will directly deal with the problem of Free Will and Predestination. In the chapter concerning the knowledge of God, al-Ash'-arī holds that the knowledge of God is eternal in the sense that He knows the past, present and future. He also holds that God knows by knowledge which entails that the knowledge of God is not identical with His essence. However, al-Ash'arī believes that the knowledge of God is not distinct from God Himself. This means

that God's knowledge is not distinct from Him, whether
as a quality apart from God's essence or as an attri-
bute distinct from God.

In chapter three, the discussion of the crea-
tedness of human action, it will be shown that al-Ash⁶-
arī proves that human actions are created by God as
they really are. This is in direct opposition to the
position of the Mu⁶tazilites who hold that men are
free to act. We discuss several opinions from the
Mu⁶tazilites scholars regarding this problem. Al-
Ash⁶arī, then proves that God is the true and effi-
cient creator of all actions of man whether they are
compulsory or voluntary. Moreover, he said that the
compulsory and voluntary actions are alike in creation.

The discussion in chapter three will face
the problem of the creation of evil. This chapter is
introduced to analyse the problem in which al-Ash⁶arī
maintains that God is the creator of evil in the sense
that He creates evil to be bad and vain. From the so-
lution given by al-Ash⁶arī, we learn that al-Ash⁶arī
believes that the creation of evil by God is ultima-
tely the evil of another being distinct from God Him-
self. At the end of the chapter, we elaborate the con-
cept of the justice of God in relation to the creation
of evil.

Another problem which is of interest and
relevant to the discussion of human action is the ques-
tion of human capacity. This will be discussed in
chapter five of the study. Al-Ash'arī claims that ca-
pacity is created by God. Capacity is with the act
and for the act, that is, the capacity is with a cer-
tain action and for that certain action, not for an-
other action. This means that the man for whom God
does not create a capacity cannot acquire anything.

After exploring various topics which are
relevant to the main problem of this study, in the
final chapter we discuss al-Ash'arī's interpretation
of the theory of acquisition which ties up every pro-
lem discussed before. The theory of acquisition is
regarded as the theory in which al-Ash'arī tracks a
middle path position between the two extreme schools.
It is to be understood that the theory of acquisition
was not new to the Muslims during al-Ash'arī's time,
but had been introduced by other scholars long before.
However, the interpretation introduced by al-Ash'arī
makes this theory more reasonable and understandable.
Through this theory and with the help of the previous
discussions, al-Ash'arī claims that the concept of the
human share of responsibility is not inconsistent with

the concept of the foreknowledge of God, God's omni-

potence and the concept of God's Will.

Finally, it is hoped that this study will give an introduction to the study of al-Ash'arī's ideas in the circle of Islamic thought.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In this study we shall concentrate on one
particular problem that is, the problem of Free Will and
Predestination. We shall deal with it by examining the
position of the Muʿtazilites and also the refutation of
their position by al-Ashʿarī. The problem of Free Will
and Predestination illustrates two extreme positions:
first, there is the position of the Muʿtazilites who
maintained that man has full power over everything inclu-
ding the human will and human actions and has complete
freedom of choice. Second, there is the position of the
Jabarites who claimed that man has no part in determining
his own actions: all comes from God. Between these two
extremes, al-Ashʿarī tried to hold an intermediate posi-
tion.

We shall begin this study with a brief outline of the rise of these two extreme schools in Islam. Before al-Ash'arī, Muslim theologians and scholars were divided into different schools and groups. Historically, Muslims were united during the lifetime of the Prophet. All problems were referred to him and he was regarded as the religious leader as well as the political ruler. But, when the fourth authentic, or "rightly-guided" caliph, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalib (656-661 A.D) was sworn in, he was opposed by an able contender, Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān. This struggle caused the battle of Siffīn (657 A.D), resulting in the defeat of 'Alī at the hand of Mu'āwiyah. It is reported as follows:

> "Just as 'Alī was about to snatch the fruit. of victory in a battle at Siffīn in 657, Mu'āwiyah tricked him into calling off the fighting and consenting to arbitration, which eventually resulted in 'Alī's downfall."1

This arbitration marked the beginning of Islamic political differences which developed later into the theological differences. From it, Muslims were confronted with the question of who was right and who was wrong in this battle. It developed into the more theological question of 'who is a Muslim' and 'is a Muslim still be a Muslim if he has com-

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1. M. Fakhry, <u>A History of Islamic Philosophy,</u> (New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 52.

mitted a grave sin'? These are among the questions which arose at that time. The Shī'ites, who gave unquestioned support to 'Alī, claimed that:

> "The Prophet had conferred the Imāmate [Caliphate] on 'Alī and nominated him as his successor. Thus 'Alī was the first Imām by ordinance."2

Moreover, they claimed that the Imāms or caliphs are sinless and they also claimed that 'Alī and his successors are the only lawful caliphs.

> "The imām is impeccable, i.e., free from all sins, great or small. He is immune from error. Everything that he says or does is inviolate."3

This position was strongly contested by another group of theologians called the Khārijites. This group emerged at the same time and were the supporters of 'Alī in that battle, but abandoned the camp of 'Alī due to their disagreement with his decision to attend the meeting at the end of that battle. This group maintained that 'Alī also committed a grave sin because he looked to an arbitrator to solve the problem rather than God.

> "'Alī also committed, according to them, a major sin when he accepted the 'arbitration' or 'one besides God'."4

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2. Abu'l A'lā Maudoodi, 'Political Thought In Early Islam', in A History of Muslim Philosophy, Vol. 1., edited by M.M. Sharif, (Weisbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), pp. 656 - 672 (p. 667).

3. Ibid., p. 667.

4. Ibid., p. 668.

Another group which was neutral between the
two extremes was the Murji'ites. They came into existence
when discussion of the problem of the consequences of the
battle of Siffīn took place, claiming that the outcome
should have been left in the hands of God.

> "He alone would tell, on the Day of Judgement,
> which of them struggled for the right cause
> and which for the wrong."5

From their view that the struggle between ʿAlī and Muʿāwiyah
should have been left to God to make a decision on the Day
of Judgement comes their name 'Murji'ites', which means
the "those who postpone".

These three groups may be regarded as the begin-
ning of divisions among Muslims. They emerged due to the
political differences, but, in maintaining their political
positions, they employed theological arguments to add sup-
port to their claim. This in turn brought about theologi-
cal differences.

These three groups gained many followers and
scholars. What is significant for the purpose of our pre-
sent study is the group of Khārijites and Murji'ites.
"The Khārijite position contains the germ of the leading

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5. Ibid., p. 669.

idea of the Qadarites, [who] were the heralds of the Mu'-tazilites."[6] As for the murji'ite group, "They were to a great extent the forerunners of orthodoxy."[7] According to al-Ash'arī, Jahm b. Safwān, the great determinist and his followers belonged in the group of the Murji'ites.[8] They were called the pure 'Jabarites'.

Mu'tazilites is the name given to a group of theologians who were also called 'the Seceders'. The existence of this school, in its first development is not purely political. However, their theological arguments were used to justify the political ends of rulers or to refute those who were opposed to the rulers, especially during the reign of the Abbasid caliphs. With regard to the problem of a Muslim who committed a sin, they held the middle position between the Khārijites and the Murji'ites. They said: "A sinful Muslim was neither a believer nor an unbeliever, but one in the middling state."[9] This was the position of Wāsil b. 'Atā' (died 748 A.D) as he presented

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6. A.J. Wensinck, The Muslim Creed, (London, Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 37.

7. W. M. Watt, Free Will and Predestination In Early Islam, (London, Luzac & Company Ltd, 1948), p. 42.

8. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-Musallīn, Vol. 1., Edited by Hellmut Ritter, (Istanbul, 1929), p. 132.

9. Abu'l A'lā Maudoodi, op cit., p. 671.

it to his master, Hasan al-Basrī. Hasan al-Basrī was an

outstanding theologian and scholar of that time, but Wāsil

b. ʿAtaʾ disagreed with him regarding the problem of the

Muslim who had committed grave sin. Therefore, Wāsil broke

away from Hasan al-Basrī and established his own position.

These two positions, then form the basis of the Muʿtazilites.

The name 'Muʿtazilite' was the name given to them by others.

They called themselves as 'ahl al-Tawhīd wa'l-ʿadl' (The

People of Unity and Justice), for the following reasons:

> "By justice they imply that it is incumbent on God
> to requite the obedient for their good deeds and
> punish the sinners for their misdeeds. By unity
> they imply the denial of the divine attributes."[10]

Based on these two theses, the Muʿtazilites developed their

system of theological interpretation. In contrast to the

orthodox method, the Muʿtazilites relied more on reason

than revelation. They used reason to justify revelation.

Historically, this school was very popular in

teh reign of the Abbasid caliphs, especially under the

reign of Ma'mūn (died 833 A.D), who introduced Greek phi-

losophy into Islam by his initiative in the translation

movement. During his reign, he encouraged translators to

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10. Mir Valiuddin, 'Muʿtazilism', in A History of Muslim
    Philosophy, Vol. 1., edited by M.M. Sharif, (Weisbaden,
    Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), pp. 199 - 219 (p. 200).

translate Greek works into Arabic. He was the famous

Abbasid caliph in the intellectual movement during this

dynasty and he also set up an academy called 'Bayt al-

Hikma' (House of Wisdom) in 830 A.D. With regard to his

attitude toward the theological schools of his day, it is

reported that he was a supporter of the Mu'tazilites.

> "In fact, it was perhaps his very interest in
> theological discussions that led by degrees
> to not only the promotion of a popular interest
> in theology, but also to the support of the
> cause of a theological party (the Mu'tazilite)
> that had sought to apply the categories of
> Greek thought to Muslim dogmas and the use of
> the decisive resources of the state in the de-
> fense and consolidation of this position."11

The Mu'tazilites employed Greek philosophy to

produce a highly rational form of theology. While this

gained for them the support of the Abbasid caliphs and

the people at large, the orthodox school of Muslims re-

garded them as heretics.

Before proceeding to the main discussion of the

problem of Free Will and Predestination we shall give a

short introduction to al-Ash'ari's life and his writings.

During his youth, al-Ash'ari was a pupil of his stepfather

al-Jubba'i (died 915 A.D), who was a leader of the Mu'ta-

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11. M. Fakhry, op cit., p. 23.

zilites. But in 912 A.D, when he was forty, al-Ash'arī

suddenly abandoned the camp of the Mu'tazilite, especially

the teaching of al-Jubbā'ī. This sudden change is reported

to have occurred when al-Ash'arī went to the Mosque of Bas-

rah and declared:

> "He who knows me, knows me; and he who knows me not,
> let him know that I am so and so, the son of so
> and so. I have maintained the creation of the
> Qur'ān and that God will not be seen in the world
> to come with the eyes, and that creatures create
> their actions. Lo, I repent that I have been a
> Mu'tazilite and turn to opposition to them."[12]

This historical event is said to have come about

for one of two reasons. Firstly, the change took place

after he had some directions in his dreams. Secondly, his

disagreement with the answer given by his master, al-Jubbā'ī,

regarding the problem of faith and reward in the life here-

after.

As to the first cause, it is reported that one

night in the month of Ramadān, the Prophet appeared to him

three times in his dream. The Prophet asked him to seek

truth in al-Qur'ān and the Traditions rather than his vain

kalām. Such a story would be regarded as legend by modern

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12. D. B. Macdonald, <u>Development of Muslim Theology,
Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory</u>, (London,
George Routledge & Sons Limited, 1903), p. 188.

scholars, but it is a traditional device of ancient Arab

historians to use a dream to mark a dramatic turning point.

For example, there is a story of the dream of al-Ma'mūn,

the Abbasid caliph, in which Aristotle appeared to al-Ma'-

mūn and discussed the problem of good and the nature of

God. The similarity of these two stories is quite obvious,

though fortunately to investigate the truth of these sto-

ries lies outside the field of our discussion. But what

is more significant is that the change in al-Ashʿarī marked

the turning point in the history of Islamic thought. The

second report of this change which is of more interest is

that al-Ashʿarī debated with his master, al-Jubbā'ī con-

cerning the problem of three brothers who are in different

positions; the first one was a believer, the second was a

unbeliever and the third one died as a child. The question

concerns the status of these three brothers in the life here-

after. Al-Jubbā'ī replied that the believer was in heaven,

the unbeliever in hell and the child in a place of safety.

Then another question was asked by al-Ashʿarī of al-Jubbā'ī:

> "But if the third said, 'Lord, Thou mightest have
> granted me life, and then I would have been pious
> and entered Paradise like my brother,' what then?".
> Al-Jubbā'ī replied, 'God would say, 'I knew that
> if thou wert granted life thou wouldst be godless
> and unbelieving and enter Hell'. Then al-Ashʿarī
> drew his noose, 'But what if the second said,
> 'Lord, why didst thou not make me die as a child?
> Then had I escaped Hell'. Al-Jubbā'ī was silenced,

and al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī went away in triumph."13

This story, however, is somewhat similar to the story of
the change which happened to Wāsil b. ʿAtāʾ the founder
of the Muʿtazilite school. Wāsil asked Hasan al-Basrī
about the problem of the grave sinner. Hasan al-Basrī
failed to give a satisfactory answer to the question and
Wāsil left the teaching of Hasan al-Basrī, that is the
early orthodox, and formed his position which later be-
came known as the Muʿtazilite.

After this change, al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī wrote many books
in order to develop his orthodox middle path position,
using philosophical arguments confirmed by proof from
passages of a -Qurʾān and the Traditions. As the hammer
of the Muʿtazilites, he used rational arguments as a weapon
to condemn the Muʿtazilite position. According to the an-
cient authorities, the works of al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī numbered nearly
three hundred. "After the change he wrote a number of books
and Ibn Fūrak says that the number amounted to three hun-
dred. Ibn ʿAsākir Dima<u>sh</u>qi has given the titles of ninety-
three of them."14 W. C. Klein stated that: "a number

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13. Ibid., pp. 189 - 190.

14. M. Abdul Hye, 'A<u>sh</u>ʿarism', in A History of Muslim
    Philosophy, Vol. 1, edited by M.M. Sharif (Weisba-
    den, Otto Harrazzowitz, 1963), pp. 220 - 243,
    (p. 223).

given by several authorities is fifty-five. The Fihrist
assigns him only six."[15] The following works of al-Ash'-
arī are given by W. C. Klein. (1) Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn
Wa' khtilāf al-Musallīn. In this work, al-Ash'arī dis-
cussed the hereditary of the different schools, the or-
thodox creed as well as different views on philosophical
question. (2) Kitāb al-Luma', translated as 'Book of
Aphorism'. There are ten chapters in this work dealing
respectively the Qur'ān, God's Will, His Visibility, The
Qadar, the Istitā'a (Capacity), The Ta'dīl and Tajwīr
(Accounting just and accounting unjust), Faith, The
Particular and The Universe, The Promise and The Threat,
and The Imāmate. (3) Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, transla-
ted as 'The Elucidation of Islām's foundation'. (4) Ri-
sāla Fi'istihsān al-Khawd Fi'l-Kalām, translated as 'Tract
in Favour of The Free Use Of The Kalām'. (5) Risāla al-
Īmān, translated as 'The Tract of Faith'. This work is
used to defend the uncreatedness of fatih. (6) Risāla
Kataba bihā ilā Ahl at-Tajr Bi Bāb al-Abwād. (7) Qawl
Jumlat Ashāb al-Hadīth Wa ahl-Sunnah Fi'l-i'tiqād.[16]
The First three are employed in our present study espe-

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15. W.C. Klein, In his introduction to his translation
    of Al-Ash'arī's Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, (New Ha-
    ven, Connecticut, American Oriental Society, 1940),
    p. 28.

16. Ibid., pp. 29 - 30.

cially with regard to his philosophical arguments.

As an orthodox philosophical theologian, al-Ash⁶arī makes use of both orthodox kalām and dialectical method. He used ·the former in order to oppose the rationalist Mu⁶tazilites and he used the dialectic method to oppose the extreme Traditionists or the early orthodox. For this reason, he was the most distinguished and distinctive scholar of his time₀ With regard to his attitude towards the two extreme positions, that is the Mu⁶tazilites and the early orthodox or Traditionists, al-Ash⁶arī is reported to have had a close relationship to the early orthodox. In the following paragraphs we shall illustrate this. Accoding to al-Shahrastānī's account elaborated by G. Makdisi, al-Ash⁶arī's position regarding the problem of the divine attributes is similar to the position of one section of the early orthodox.

As far as the problem of divine attributes is concerned, there were two extreme positions before al-Ash⁶-arī. The first·is the Mu⁶tazilite position which disassociated God from any attributes. Their position was then called 'ta⁶tīl' (divesting). The second position.is that of the early orthodox who held a doctrine of the divine attributes. They were then called the 'Sifatites' (Attri-

butists). Among the early orthodox there was a section
who had an anthropomorphic conception of the divine attri-
butes. They were called the "Mushabbihīn (Comparers)".
It is clear that there was a wide divergence between the
Muᶜtazilites, the upholders of the concept of 'taᶜṭīl'
(divesting) and the upholders of 'tashbīh' (comparison)
which held divine attributes in their human forms. Bet-
ween these two extreme positions, there came another group
of early orthodox, who were then called the middle path
orthodox. This group believed in the concept of the di-
vine attributes but not in the idea of 'tashbīh' (compa-
rison). They affirmed the divine attributes by the con-
cept of 'tafwīd' (leaving the interpretation to God).
This means that they accept the divine attributes as
found in al-Qur'ān and leave their interpretation to God.
This according to al-Shahrastānī is the position of al-
Ashᶜarī. He was following the orthodox middle path po-
sition, as exemplified by Mālik b. Anas and Ibn Hanbal.
'Tafwīd' is one of al-Ashᶜarī's position. The other one,
according to al-Shahrastānī, is that of 'ta'wīl' (Meta-
phorical interpretation). For this reason, it is quite
clear that al-Ashᶜarī follows two different roads: the
first road was called the 'road of salvation', which is
closely related to the early orthodox and secondly the
'road of wisdom', which is more philosophical and uses

rational argumentation. Both methods are employed by al-Ash‘arī in his theological works.[17]

The aim of this study is to describe al-Ash‘arī's philosophical arguments which have been so influential in the history of Islamic thought, especially regarding the question of Free Will and Predestination. Since this present study is a philosophical work, we shall pay more attention to the 'road of wisdom' (tarīq al-Hikma) rather than the 'road of salvation' (tarīq al-Salāma). The road of wisdom is regarded as his philosophical method in solving religious problems, whereas the road of salvation is regarded as his dogmatic method.

The problem of Free Will and Predestination is said to have been the first controversial issue to occur in Islamic thought. It was first discussed as the works of Ma‘bad al-Juhānī (died 699 A.D), Ghailān al-Dimashqī (died before 743 A.D), Wāsil b. ‘Atā' (died 748 A.D). It is not our purpose to investigate the origins of the problem of Free Will and Predestination, for much has been said by modern scholars to this subject. There is,

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17. G. Makdisi, "Ash‘arī and The Ash‘arites In Islamic Religious History," 1., STUDIA ISLAMICA, Vol. 17, (1962), pp. 51 - 52.

for example, the excellent research of Prof. W. M. Watt
especially in his treatment of political interference in-
to the development of this problem. What is of interest
here is to examine the fundamental differences among the
schools with whom al-Ash'arī carried on his debates. This,
however, will lead to study of different sects as well as
individual scholars among whom the controversies have flou-
rished.

Muslim scholars are unanimous that any interpre-
tation of theological as well as philosophical problems
must refer to al-Qur'ān and the Traditions of the Prophet.
Or at least, it must not go against positions which are
plainly stated in these sacred sources. The problem of
Free Will and Predestination is regarded as a theological
and philosophical one, and therefore, it must be discussed
within the context of al-Qur'ān and the Traditions. How-
ever, with reference to the passages in al-Qur'ān, there
are many passages which firmly maintain the omnipotence
of God and the sovereignty of God in the universe. There
are also several passages which clearly state that man is
free with respect to his own deeds. For this reason, it
is clear that in al-Qur'ān there is nothing definite to
suggest any philosophical doctrine on this subject. This
does not mean that al-Qur'ān does not deal with this prob-

lem. Al-Qur'ān has given the general answer to this prob-

lem, although the answer still requires interpretation.

With regard to the statement of God's absolute

power and sovereignty in the universe, al-Qur'ān stated:

> "That is God, your Lord!
> There is no god but He,
> The Creator of all things:
>
> Then worship ye Him:
> And He hath power
> To dispose of all affairs." (6 : 102)[18]
>
> "There is no moving creature
> On earth but its sustenance
> Dependeth on God: He knoweth
> The time and space and its
> Temporal deposit:
> All is in a clear Record." (11 : 6)[19]

These passages concern the power of God towards His crea-

tures in the universe. They describe His sovereignty over

all the creatures in the universe and as such are not of

our concern. But, with regard to God's power over human

actions, which was soon to be a controversial issue in

Islam, there are statements or passages in al-Qur'ān sup-

porting contradictory positions. Firstly, there are pas-

sages which affirm absolute predestination:

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18. All quotation are taken from the translation by A.
     Yusuf 'Alī, The Glorious Qur'ān, Translation and
     Commentary, (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation,
     1978), p. 319.

19. Ibid., p. 515.

"No soul can believe, except
By the Will of God,
And He will place Doubt
(Or obscurity) on those
Who will not understand." (10 : 100)[20]

"Those whom God (in His Plan)
Willeth to guide, — He openeth
Their breast to Islam;
Those whom He willeth
To leave straying, — He maketh
Their breath close and constricted," (6 : 125)[21]

Secondly there are passages which affirm complete freedom

of human actions:

"Say, 'The Truth is
From your Lord':
Let him who will,
Believe, and let him
Who will, reject." (18 : 29)[22]

"It is those who believe not
In the signs of God,
That forge falsehood;
It is they who lie!" (16 : 105)[23]

Despite the fact that al-Qur'ān gives no definite answer

to the problem of Free Will and Predestination, there are

several passages of the Traditions of the Prophet which

favour predestination. Among those are:

"God wrote down the decrees, regarding the created
world fifty thousand years before He created the
heavans and the earth, while His throne was on

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20. Ibid., p. 510.

21. Ibid., p. 326.

22. Ibid., p. 738.

23. Ibid., p. 685.

the water."[24]

> "The Prophet said: Verily, one of you is gathered
> together in his mother's womb forty days, then
> he is a clot of blood the same time, then an an-
> gel is sent to him and four things are ordained:
> his sustenance, his term, whether he is to be
> miserable or happy (and his work)."[25]

The Qur'ānic passages and the Traditions which refer to predestination are sometimes interpreted as expounding a fatalistic position. And yet there are clear references in al-Qur'ān and Traditions in favour of the freedom of human actions and the reward and punishments of man in the life hereafter. For these resons, the problem remained as a controversial issue in Islamic theology. During the lifetime of the Prophet Muslims were discouraged from discussing this problem and asked to spend their time in the practical teaching of religion. The Prophet clearly disapproved of such debates.

As history went on, the problem became a major area of discussion among the different schools as well as individuals in Islamic thought. Among those were the two extremes of the Muʿtazilites and the determinists or com-

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24. Muslim, Qadar, Tradition 16, quoted from A. J. Wensinck, Muslim Creed, p. 54.

25. Al-Bukhārī, Qadar, b. 1, trad. 1 quoted from W. M. Watt, Free Will and Predestination In Early Islam, p. 18.

pulsionists, often called in Islam the Jabarites. The
Mu'tazilites are the upholders of the doctrine of Free
Will which depends on the establishment of the justice
of God. On the other hand, the Jabarites are the up-
holders of the doctrine of Predestination. The word
'Jabarite' is not the name of a school but the name of
the person who maintains the absolute preordination of
human actions. The Jabarite position is to maintain
the absolute sovereignty and omnipotence of God in the
universe.

As has been mentioned before the Mu'tazilites
were the forerunners of the Qadarites who also had a
close relationship with the Khārijites in the matter of
ideas. The Mu'tazilites imported philosophical argumen-
tation into their doctrines, especially from Greek works
which were made available to them through the translation
movement. The Jabarites, in contrast to the Mu'tazilites
held that human actions are predestinated by God. One of
the most popular scholars of this group was Jahm b. Safwān
(died 745 A.D), and his followers were called the Jahmites.
In al-Ash'arī's work, Jahm was classified as 'Murji'ite'.[26]

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26. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-Musal-
    līn, Vol. 1., p. 132.

Regarding the term 'Jabarite', al-Shahrastānī reported

that:

> "Compulsion (jabr) is the denial that actions
> really come from man, and the attribution of
> them to God. The Jabarīya consist of several
> groups. The pure Jabarīya are those who do
> not assert any act at all to be man's or any
> power for action. The moderate Jabarīya as-
> sert that man has a power which does not have
> any influence at all."27

As far as Jahm's doctrine is concerned, he was regarded

as a pure Jabarite, believing that all human action is

determined by God.[28]

In 912 A.D. al-Ashʿarī separated from the Muʿ-

tazilites and emerged in the orthodox middle path position

trying to reconcile the conflict between the positions of

the Muʿtazilites and the Jabarites. Though al-Ashʿarī

also dealt with the position of the Jabarite, we shall not

be concerned with it in this study. We shall discuss his

reply to the Muʿtazilites where he used philosophical ar-

guments as weapons against them.

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27. Al-Shahrastānī, <u>Kitāb al-Milal Wa'l-Niḥal</u>, Vol. 1.,
     quoted from W. M. Watt, <u>Free Will and Predestination
     In Early Islam</u>, p. 96.

28. M. Abdul Hye, op cit., p. 226.

CHAPTER   TWO

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

The questions relating to God's attributes and
His unity are regarded as controversial areas in Islamic
theology. Indeed, these problems of the relationship bet-
ween God's attributes and God's absolute unity became one
of the main theological and philosophical issues in early
Islam.

This problem becomes more complicated when we
consider the references in al-Qur'ān to the attributes and
the oneness of God. The following are some translations
of the great many verses regarding these two questions.
Firstly, verses which describe the attributes of God:

"Send not away those
 Who call on their Lord
 Morning and evening,
 Seeking His face." (6 : 52)[1]

"Say: 'Who is it in whose
 Hands is the governance
 Of all Things, — who protects
 (All), but is not protected
 (Of any)? (Say) if ye know." (23 : 88)[2]

"Throw (the child)
 Into the chest,' and throw
 (the chest) into the river:
 The river will cast him
 Up on the bank, and he
 Will be taken up by one
 Who is an enemy to Me
 And an enemy to him':
 But I cast (the garment
 Of) love over thee from Me:
 And (this) in order that
 Thou mayest be reared
 Under Mine eye." (20 : 39)[3]

The first verse is speaking of God's face, the
second is of God's hand the third verse refers to the eye
of God. These are among a number of verses which are re-
garded as illustrating a pure anthropomorphic concept of
God. These anthropomorphic attributes can be described
as 'physical', and are not of interest in this present

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1. All quotations are taken from the translation by A.
    Yusuf 'Alī, The Glorious Qur'ān: Translation and
    Commentary, (Leicester, The Islamic Foundation,
    1978), p. 302.

2. Ibid., p. 889.

3. Ibid., p. 796.

study. What we are much more concerned with is the attri-
bute which is regarded as that of 'quality'. To illustrate
we may quote several translations of al-Qur'ān mentioning
these attributes:

> "Say: 'Whether ye hide
> What is in your hearts
> Or reveal it,
> He knows what is all:
> He knows what is
> In the heavens,
> And what is on earth,
> And God has power
> Over all things." (3 : 29)[4]

> "God! There is no god
> But He, —— the Living,
> The Self-subsisting, Eternal.
> No slumber can seize Him
> Nor sleep." (2 : 255)[5]

> "No soul can believe, except
> By the Will of God,
> And He will place Doubt
> (Or obscurity) on those
> Who will not understand." (10 : 100)[6]

> "Offspring, one of the other:
> And God heareth
> And knoweth all things." (3 : 34)[7]

> "If they do, they are in right guidance,
> But if they turn back,
> Thy duty is to convey the message:
> And in God's sight
> Are (all) His servants." (3 : 20)[8]

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4. Ibid., p. 130.

5. Ibid , p. 102.

6. Ibid., p. 510.

7. Ibid., p. 131.

8. Ibid., p. 127.

Based on these verses, early theologians interpreted the
attributes of God and divided into different sects and
schools. We shall not be concerned with the problem of
the attributes of God in general, or the interpretation
of these verses, because this would lead into a broad
field of study which would be outside the area of our
discussion. For the purpose of our present study we
shall concentrate on the problem of the knowledge of God.

Despite the fact that al-Qur'ān proclaims the
many attributes of God, there are several passages which
firmly proclaim the concept of the unity of God and the
oneness of God, as in the translations below:

> "Say: He is God,
> The One and Only;
> God the Eternal, Absolute;
> He begetheth not,
> Nor is He begotten;
> And there is none
> Like unto Him." (122 : 1 - 4)[9]

> "And your God
> Is One God:
> There is no god
> But He,
> Most Gracious,
> Most Merciful." (2 : 163)[10]

The unity of God has been the earliest and most

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9. Ibid., p. 1806.

10. Ibid., pp. 63 - 64.

fundamental issue in Islamic thought. The concern has

been to maintain the monotheistic conception of God which

displaced polytheistic and henotheistic conceptions of

Arab paganism, often referred to as 'the age of Jāhiliyya

(Ignorance)'. From this arose several problems. For

example, if these attributes or qualities are regarded

as parts of God, does that not involve a return to a po-

lytheistic conception or is it inconsistent with the con-

cept of the Unity of God?. For such reasons some of the

Mu'tazilites and other sects of theologians denied the

divine attributes in order to maintain the Unity of God.

The Mu'tazilites are those who were regarded as divesting

God of all essential attributes and proclaimed themselves

as "ahl al-Tawhīd" (People of Unity). This problem will

be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

Al-Ash'arī agreed with all Muslim scholars that,

according to al-Qur'ān, "God knows". However, its question

of how this should be interpreted remains. In al-Ash'arī's

philosophical discussions of the knowledge of God and its

relation to God's essence, the following questions were

dealt with. If God really knows, is His knowledge eternal

or created?. If it is eternal, does He know through His

essence which is He?. The first question is the question

about the nature of God's knowledge, whether it is eternal

or created. Whereas, the second question is the most sig-
nificant question, for it describes the nature of that know-
ledge as well as its relation to the essence of God Himself.
From these questions, lead a great many inquiries. Al-Ash‘-
arī dealt with these questions with orthodox middle path
attitudes which will be clearly seen at the end of this
chapter.

1. The Eternity Of The Knowledge Of God.

Al-Ash‘arī believed in the eternity of the know-
ledge of God. It is not created as the compulsionist Jahm
b. Safwān (died 746 A.D) and his followers (the Jahmites)
claimed. Jahm b. Safwān died in 746 A.D., but the Jahmites
were very active in the time of al-Ash‘arī. For this reason,
in his discussion of the uncreatedness of the words of God
(al-Qur'ān) entitled 'Kalām on the doctrine That the Qur'-
ān is the Uncreated Word of God' in his work Al-Ibāna ‘An
Usūl al-Diyāna, there are two sections containing his reply
to the Jahmiyya (Jahmites).[11] This was in addition to his
criticism of the Mu‘tazilites, but in this section we shall

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11. Al-Ash‘arī, Al-Ibāna ‘An Usūl al-Diyāna, translated
    by W. C. Klein, American Oriental Series, Vol. 19,
    (New Haven, Connecticut, 1940), pp. 73 - 75.

deal with Jahm's arguments of the createdness of the know-
ledge of God and al-Ash'arī's reply to them.

Firstly, Jahm described   the relationship of
God, His knowledge and all things known to Him. It is re-
ported as follows:

> "God cannot know of things before He has actually
> created them. In other words, He knows them
> after He has created them."12

The reason he put forward is that, if God knew things be-
fore He created them, it would entail the supposition that
His knowledge of the things would either, (a) remain as
it was before the creation of the things, or (b) it would
not remain the same. If (a) is the case, it is impossible,
because the knowledge of things before their existence is
distinct from the knowledge of them after their existence.
If (b) is the case, then the knowledge of God must be va-
riable, in the sense that His knowledge of things before
they exist is different from the knowledge of these same
things after they exist. This is certainly true because
whatever is variable must be changeable. And if it is
changeable, it cannot be eternal. Both suppositions (a)
and (b) lead to the conclusion that God's knowledge is

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12. Abdul Subhan, 'Al-Jahm b. Safwān and His Philosophy'
ISLAMIC CULTURE, Vol. 11., (1937), p. 224.

not eternal, but is created.

The second argument of Jahm is concerned with
the relationship between God's knowledge and His essence.
It is an elaboration of supposition (a) from the first
argument. He said:

> "God's knowledge does not precede phenomena because
> that would imply change in Him, because knowing
> that a thing will be is different from knowing
> that it is. There is one knowledge for every
> knowable."13

Al-Shahrastānī's account of Jahm b. Safwān and Hishām b.

Hakam is that:

> "They agreed that God knows eternally what will
> be, and knowledge about the future is not the
> same as knowledge about the present."14

From these two statements, it can be concluded that, since

God is regarded as the creator of things as they are, and

since these things are changeable, according to Jahm, God

knows things after they have been created. This is to es-

tablish the absoluteness and the uniqueness of God. This

would follow the same conclusion as for the first argument

that is, God's knowledge is created.

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13. A. S. Tritton, Muslim Theology, (London, Luzac &
    Company Ltd., 1947), pp. 63 - 64.

14. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
    Kalām, edited and translated by Alfred Guillaume,
    (London, Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 78.

Now, we proceed to analyse al-Ash⁶arī's reply
to Jahm's positions or rather the Jahmites' positions.
Al-Ash⁶arī maintained that God's knowledge is eternal
and he set out to prove that both of Jahm's arguments
are false. To begin with, al-Ash⁶arī makes clear that
the eternity of God's knowledge was affirmed by all Mus-
lims and to deny this would be regarded as a departure
from this general agreement. This is not a philosophi-
cal argument, but rather an accusation against the Jahmi-
tes.

Al-Ash⁶arī said:

"The Muslims unanimously agreed, before the origin
of the Jahmiyyah and the Mu⁶tazilah and the Haru-
riyyah, that God had knowledge eternally, and
said: 'God's knowledge is eternal, for God's
knowledge precedes created things' and they do
not refuse to say of every new thing that arises
and everything that comes down from God, 'All
this exists antecendently in God's knowledge;'
and therefore he who denies that God has know-
ledge dissents from the Muslims and is guilty
of a departure from their agreement."15

This statement of al-Ash⁶arī is in agreement with the po-
sition of the Early Orthodox. In Fikh Akhbar 11 by Abū
Hanīfa (died 767 A.D) a contemporary of Jahm b. Safwān,
it is stated that:

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15. Al-Ash⁶arī, Al-Ibāna ⁶An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 95.

"He has been from eternity and will be to eternity
with His qualities and His names. None of His
qualities or names has come into being; from
eternity He knows by virtue of His knowledge,
knowledge being an eternal quality."16

This is also an accusation rather than an argument. It

is obvious that here al-Ash'arī is expressing his orthodox

attitude to the problem.

Moreover al-Ash'arī accused the Jahmites of

borrowing their position from non-Islamic sources, namely

'the zindiq'. He made this accusation because, according

to al-Ash'arī, their position in maintaining the created-

ness of God's knowledge would entail that God has no know-

ledge before the thing is created. And, since God is eter-

nal and knowledge is created, therefore the proposition

that 'God is knowing' is impossible.

"They have simply borrowed this from the 'zindiqs'
and the advocates of 'ta'tīl'; because many of
the 'zindiqs' believe that God is not a knower,
or a wielder of power, or a living one, or hear-
ing one, or a seeing one".17

Concerning the proposition of the first argument

of Jahm, that is, God knows things after He creates them,

16. Quoted by A.J. Wensinck, Muslim Creed, p. 188.

17. Al-Ash'arī, Al-Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 94.

follows another proposition that is 'God originates know-
ledge for Himself'. This, according to al-Shahrastanī's
account of the orthodox argument, in replying to Jahm's
theory is totally unthinkable. If God originates know-
ledge for Himself, then either: i.(a) it must be in·His
essence, or (b) in a substrate, ii₀ not in either. More-
over, he clarified that:

> "Origination essentially demands alteration; and
> origination in a substrate would demand that the
> substrate should be of time; while origination
> not in a substrate would demand the denial of
> God's specifying."18

From this reply, it is reasonable to assume that the idea
'God originates knowledge for Himself' is unthinkable.

Another proposition derived from Jahm's theory
is that, if God knows things after He creates them, that
is, 'God's knowledge is like human knowledge', then God
knows things after they exist₀ Al-Ash'arī's general ar-
gument that 'God is unlike a creature' throws light on
his reply to Jahm's position₀ It is to presume that if
God were like a creature, it would follow that His rela-
tion to temporal production would be that of a creature.

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18. Al-Shahrastanī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
    Kalām, p. 78.

If God were like a creature, it would lead to the following
alternatives: God would be like a creature either: (a)
in all respects, or (b) in some respects. If (a) is the
case, it would entail that He be temporally produced, as
a creature is, in all respects. If (b) is the case, God
would be temporally produced, in that there are some res-
pects in which He is like a creature and some in which He
is not. Both alternatives are equally impossible to pre-
sume of God, since God is eternal but creatures are tem-
poral either in all respects or in some respects. Al-Ash'rī
concluded:

> "But it is impossible for the temporally produced
> to have preexisted eternally."19

Referring to this argument, there are good grounds for main-
taining that God's knowledge is eternal, and it pre-exists
eternally. And to hold that God knows things after He
creates them is unreasonable.

The second argument of Jahm is closely related
to the first one: If God's knowledge is eternal, it must
follows that God knows in the past, present and future,
since things before they exist are different from them-

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19. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', translated by Richard
    J. Mc Carthy, in The theology of Al-Ash'arī,
    (Beyrouth, Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), p. 9.

selves after they exist. So, the different forms of the

knowable in a different state of time or situation of

the knowlable would entail that God's knowledge will

change as the knowable changes. And if it is eternal,

it is impossible to change. Therefore, according to Jahm,

God's knowledge is created.

Since this was the object of Jahm's position,

al-Ash'arī produced the counter argument to this claim.

Al-Ash'arī's reply was reported by al-Shahrastānī, as fol-

lows:

> "The way in which they differ is nothing to do with
> knowledge about them, but is peculiar to themselves.
> They are known because knowledge comes into contact
> with them but that does not alter."20

Since it has been agreed that God is eternal, which is a

state regarded as timeless, the changing of the thing know-

able, that is, the thing in eternity and afterwards created,

does not affect His essence.

Furthermore, considering the new cognition pre-

cedes from the thing as it exists he claimed:

"Are these new cognitions knowable before they come

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20. Al-Shahrastānī, Ki'āb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
    Kalām, p. 79.

into existence, or are they not an object of know-
ledge?. If they were knowable was it by eternal
knowledge and cognitive power, or by other cogni-
tions which preceded their existence?."21

These two alternatives are produced in order to clarify

their claim regarding the new cognition of a knowable.

This is a conclusion which can be drawn from Jahm's ar-

gument of the changeableness of the knowable. The first

alternative would mean that everything is known by eter-

nal knowledge and this would also follow from Jahm's

answer about the new cognition. The second alternative

is certain to be impossible, because it would entail that

those cognitions need further cognitions and result end-

less chain (tasasul).

     From these discussions, it is concluded that,

accoi .ing to al-Ash‘arī, the knowledge of God is eternal,

for God knows the things before He creates them. And be-

cause God's knowledge is eternal and is not affected by

the changing of time and of things that exist, therefore

it is false to believe that God's knowledge is created.

It is eternal. Since it is eternal, it is to be believed

that God knows the past, present and the future. In re-

lation to the main problem of this study, that is the

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21. Ibid., pp. 79 - 80.

problem of Free Will and Predestination, a question arises.
Since God has foreknowledge of human action, the question
therefore arises: what is man's responsibility for acts
which were determined in God's knowledge?. This question
will be answered later.

2. The Eternity Of The Knowledge Of God And Its Relation With His Essence.

It has been already argued, in the previous sec-
tion, that the knowledge of God is eternal. And it has
been said before, that God Himself is eternal. The problem
is, how are these two eternities to be related, that is,
how is the eternity of the knowledge of God to be related
to God Himself?. The following questions serve to show how
this problem has been dealt with by the Muʿtazilites and
al-Ashʿarī's comments on their views.

Firstly, if God's knowledge is eternal, does
He know through Himself, is this knowledge part of Himself?.
Secondly, if God's knowledge is eternal, is it predicated
of God simply to assert His being and to deny His ignorance?.
These two questions were central to the thought of two lead-
ing scholars of the Muʿtazilites. The first question is
identified with the position of Abu'l-Hudhail al-ʿAllāf

(died 841 A.D) one of the famous scholar of Basrite school
of Mu⁶tazilites. Whereas the second question is identified
with the position of al-Nazzām (died 840 A.D) who during
his youth associated with philosophers, dualists and mate-
rualists as well as sceptics. Both of them influenced the
contemporaries of al-Ash⁶arī, that is, al-Jubbā'ī and his
son, Abū Hāshim.

Regarding Abu'l-Hudhail's position, al-Shahras-
tānī reported that he was following the philosophers' con-
ception of the knowledge of God. He stated:

> "Abu'l-Hudhail al-⁶Allāf followed the philosophers
> in holding that God knows by knowledge which is
> Himself (nafsuhu)."22

Regarding al-Nazzām's position, al-Ash⁶arī mentioned that:

> "He denies knowledge, power, life, hearing, seeing,
> and [other] essential attributes [of God] and
> says that God is continuously knowing, living
> powerful, hearing and eternal in virtue of him-
> self (bi-nafsihi), but not in virtue of knowledge,
> power, life, hearing, seeing, and eternity, and
> so is his view with regard to [other] essential
> attributes."23

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22. Ibid., p. 69

23. Al-Ash⁶arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn, Vol. 2., p. 486,
    quoted from Harry A. Wolfson, "Philosophical impli-
    cations of the Problem of Divine Attributes",
    JOURNAL OF AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY, Vol. 79,
    No. 2, (1959), pp. 73 - 80 (p. 76)

Referring to Abu'l-Hudhail's position, it is
obvious that he is in favour of maintaining the simplicity
as well as the absoluteness of God. God's qualities must
be regarded as either negations or logical references or
relations. Because of His absolute simplicity, nothing
positive could be said about God since then there would
be added subject' and predicate quality and being to Him.
However God is not to be regarded as composite.

According to the report of al-Shahrastānī quoted
before, it is obvious that Abu'l-Hudhail was influenced by
the philosophers in his conception of divine attributes.
If we investigate in detail al-Nazzām's position, then we
can conclude that his position is also influenced by the
philosophers. This claim is substantiated by H. A. Wolf-
son who established that both al-Nazzām and Abu'l-Hudhail
were influenced by Aristotle.[24]

The phrase which indicates the relationship bet-
ween the Mu'tazilites' (al-Nazzām and Abu'l-Hudhail) posi-
tion and Aristotle's is 'which is Himself', which both
al-Nazzām and Abu'l-Hudhail used although they differed
in their positions — Abu'l-Hudhail saying that 'God knows
by Himself'(in virtue of Himself), whereas al-Nazzām denied

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24. Ibid., pp. 77 - 78.

it, saying that God knows not in virtue of knowledge.

Thus H. A. Wolfson pointed out that:

> "The Arabic expression 'li-nafsihi' or 'bi-nafsihi',
> which we have translated 'in virtue of Himself' is
> a direct translation of the Greek ‘Καθ’ αὑτόν,’
> which means 'according to himself', 'by himself'
> or 'in virtue of himself',"25

To make clear Aristotle's position on this subject, H. A.

Wolfson summarised Aristotle's meaning of the phrase quoted

above in three alternatives:

> "(1) that which is the definition of the subject,
> thus signifying its essence, or (2) that which
> is its genus and differentiae, or (3) that which
> is its property."26

Although Abu'l-Hudhail and al-Nazzām differ in

this matter, they still used the characteristic phrase,

'in virtue of'. In this regard, H. A. Wolfson stated that:

> "Accordingly, when both al-Nazzām and Abu'l-Hudhail
> describe divine attributes as terms predicated of
> God 'in virtue of himself', they mean thereby that
> each of these terms signifies a property of God."27

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25. Ibid., p. 77.

26. Ibid., p. 77. See also, Aristotle, The Works of Aris-
    totle, Vol. VIII., Metaphysica, Translated into English
    under the editorship of J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross.
    (Oxford, the Clarendon Press, 1908). Book V, Chapter
    18, 1022a.

27. Ibid., p. 77.

However, with regard to the question of any predicate

of God, for example the predicate 'knowing', signifying

a property of God, they have different interpretations.

If we are to assume that both of these scholars

were influenced by the Metaphysica of Aristotle, we have

to examine the translation movement in the history of Is-

lamic thought. Ishāq b. Hunain (died 911 A.D), a famous

Muslim translator of Greek works, is said to have trans-

lated into Arabic the following texts:

> "The 'Categories', the 'Hermeneutica', 'De Genera-
> tione et Corruptione', the 'Ethica' in Porphyry's
> Commentary, parts of the 'Metaphysica', Plato's
> 'Sophist', parts of 'Timaeus', and finally the
> spurious 'De Plantis'."28

The Metaphysica of Aristotle had not been translated during

the debates between al-Nazzām and Abu'l-Hudhail which took

place before 850 A.D. The translation would have been made

between the middle of the ninth century and the early part

of the tenth century. However, al-Ash⁶arī stated that

Abu'l-Hudhail was influenced by Aristotle.

> "This view of his is taken by Abu'l-Hudhail from
> Aristotle, For in one of his books, Aristotle
> says that the Creator in His entirety is know-
> ledge, in His entirety is power, in His entire-

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28. M. Fakhry, History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 26.

"ty is hearing, in His entirety is seeing."[29]

Though the translation of the Metaphysica had not yet been done in the time of these two scholars, it is quite reasonable to say that they were familiar with the concept due to the popularity of Aristotelian teaching throughout the new Islamic states, especially Persia (Iran).

This is a good example of the way in which the Muʿtazilites, in rationalizing their conception of God, especially the unity of God, employed Greek philosophy, which is also regarded as an external element in Islamic thought. This was the main target of the orthodox theologians seeking to attack and abolish it. Al-Ashʿarī strongly opposed such elements and he is regarded as a hammer of the Muʿtazilites.

With regard to the problem of the attributes of God in general, al-Ashʿarī is reported to have produced or reproduced the principle of 'Mukhālafa', that is, 'God's difference from all created being'. The principle of 'Mukhālafa' is derived from the concept of 'tanzīh', the concept of excluding God from all human likeness, in contrast

29. Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn, Vol. 2, p. 485, quoted from H.A. Wolfson's article, p. 78.

to the concept of 'ta<u>sh</u>bīh' (comparison) and 'ta'tīl'

(divesting).

These two extreme positions of 'ta<u>sh</u>bīh' (com-

parison) as held by the Anthropomorphists and 'ta'tīl'

(divesting) as held by the Mu'tazilites were the main

targets of al-A<u>sh</u>'arī in his interpretation of the di-

vine attributes. The principle of 'Mu<u>kh</u>ālafa' is used

to trace a middle path between these two extremes. Al-

A<u>sh</u>'arī admitted the existence of the divine attributes

with the qualification of 'tanzīh'. Thus, he admitted

the existence of the knowledge of God, but this knowledge

cannot be compared to human knowledge neither can God's

other attributes be compared to those of men.

With the qualification of 'Mu<u>kh</u>ālafa' he main-

tained that the attributes of God, especially the know-

ledge of God, are unique and fundamentally different from

those of creatures. This is of course, to avoid the con-

fusion raised by the Mu'tazilites and the Anthropomorphists,

both of whom are regarded as heretical by the orthodox sec-

tion of the Muslims.

In relation to the Qur'ānic teaching regarding

the problem of the divine attributes, he stated that with

the qualification of the principle of 'Mukhālafa' no at-
tributes should be ascribed to God unless they are speci-
fically expressed in al-Qur'ān. In this, he is in agree-
ment with the majority of the Muslim theologians and phi-
losophers.

As against the position of the Mu'tazilites, al-
Ash'arī held that the knowledge of God is not identical
with His essence and as against the Anthropomorphists he
maintained that the knowledge of God is not distinct from
Him. These two quotations below will serve to show his
doctrine clearly.

> "the essential divine attributes of knowledge, power,
> and life are eternal and subsist in God's essence."30

> "God has attributes which inhere eternally in Him and
> are in addition to His essence."31

As far as these two quotations are concerned, al-Ash'arī
has clearly departed from the Mu'tazilites conception of
the knowledge of God as well as from Anthropomorphists.
This is a very difficult balance to be preserved. The

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30. Al-Shahrastānī, <u>Kitāb al-Milal Wa'l-Niḥal</u>, Vol. 1.,
     p. 67, quoted from M. Fakhry, op cit., p. 231.

30. Al-Ash'arī, <u>Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn</u>, Vol. 1., p. 291.
     quoted from M. Abdul Hye, 'Ash'arism', in <u>A History
     of Muslim Philosophy</u>, Vol. 1., edited by M.M. Sharif,
     p. 227.

following paragraphs are his philosophical arguments in
favour of his doctrine.

(i) The Knowledge Of God Is Not Identical
     With His Essence.

    If the knowledge of God is identical with His
essence, it would be followed by the conclusion that 'God's
knowledge is God'. Then if this is true, one could address
his petitions to God's knowledge rather than to God Himself,
which is unthinkable. We found this argument in his reply
to the argument of Abu'l-Hudhail. He said:

> "Since you say that God's knowledge is God, say,
> 'O knowledge of God, forgive me and have mercy
> on me': And then he will decline to do this
> and will be involved in contradictions."32

    From this argument, al-Ash'arī proceeds to main-
tain that God has knowledge by which He knows rather than
knowledge which is Himself. He set up a number of argu-
ments by firstly clarifying that the works of God are the
works of Wisdom; then he proves that God is knowing by
knowledge.

    In the section discussing the orthodox position

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32. Al-Ash'arī, Al-Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 95.

of maintaining that everything in the universe is attri-
buted to God's creative power, al-Shahrastānī proves that
the works of God are of wisdom. He says that this world
and universe are well ordered and arranged, manifesting
that there is a perfect and a wise architect who designed
it. It is impossible to assume that this well ordered
universe is the work of man, since man's knowledge is of
generalities not details. Moreover man's knowledge is
not in line with what man does. Therefore, there will be
one other than man who is wise and perfect, who is able
to arrange these phenomena. And finally, al-Shahrastānī
states that this is a position hold by al-Ash'arī. He
says:

> "Such was al-Ash'arī's system as expounded in his
> books, and applied to the actions of the igno-
> rant."33

Having these as the proofs that the work of God
is the work of wisdom, then al-Ash'arī used this phrase
at the very beginning of his argument in maintaining that
God is knowing, not ignorant. He argued:

> "Besides, if works of wisdom could be produced by
> one who is not knowing, we could not know but
> that perhaps all the determinations, dispositions
> and works which proceed from living beings pro-
> ceed from them while they are unknowing. The im-

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33. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
    Kalām, p. 30.

possibility of that proves that well-made works
can be produced only by one who is knowing."34

On the basis of this argument, he goes on to
prove the real question at issue. It has been proved be-
fore that works of wisdom prove that God is knowing. This
means that God has knowledge. The reason is that:

"If the works did not prove the knowledge of the
man from whom they proceed, then they would not
prove that the man from whom they proceed is
knowing."35

From this statement, al-Ash'ari argued that: (a) If the
proposition that works of wisdom prove that God is knowing
but do not prove that God has knowledge, is valid, then
it entails the further proposition, (b) that works of
wisdom prove our knowledge but do not prove that we are
knowing. In other words, if proposition (a) is valid,
it is possible also to accept proposition (b). But, it
is unthinkable to imagine proposition (b) that is, man
has knowledge, but does not know and likewise man is know-
ing but has no knowledge. Therefore, both proporsitions
(a) and (b) are invalid. And it is reasonable to hold
that God has knowledge, since He is knowing. He has know-

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34. Al-Ash'ari, Kitab al-Luma', p. 13.

35. Ibid., p. 15.

ledge, in the sense that He is not only knowing but knowing
by knowledge.

The Muʿtazilites are reported to have claimed
that the works of wisdom do not prove the knowledge of the
man who is knowing. The reason they put forward is derived
from their understanding of the meaning of 'his being know-
ing'. According to al-Ashʿarī, they said:

> "the knowing man may be known to be knowing by one
> who does not know that he has knowledge."36

From this understanding, they concluded that the meaning
of 'his being knowing' is not that he has knowledge.

Al-Ashʿarī replied to this question in two ways.
First, if the understanding of 'his being knowing' as held
by the Muʿtazilites is true, it would entail another pro-
position that 'works of wisdom prove that one has knowledge
of them, but do not prove that he is knowing'. This has
been proved before to be false. Second, al-Ashʿarī dis-
agreed with the meaning of 'his being knowing' given by
Muʿtazilites. He produced his understanding of the phrase
as follows:

> "I hold that one's being knowing means that he has

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36. Ibid., p. 16.

knowledge. Thus one who does not know that
Zaid has knowledge does not know that Zaid is
knowing."37

Consequently, if we do not know God has knowledge, we do

not know that He is knowing. So also, if we know God has

knowledge, we know that He is knowing; it is impossible

to maintain that we know God has knowledge, but do not

know He is knowing. And it is impossible to hold that

we do not know that God has knowledge, but know that He

is knowing. Since this is impossible, it is to be be-

lieved that God is knowing by knowledge rather than God

is knowing by His essence.

What al-Ash⁶arī is trying to prove in his pre-

vious argument is that the knowledge of God is not iden-

tical with His essence. However, al-Ash⁶arī does not fi-

nish his argument here, but he goes on to prove that the

knowledge of God is not distinct from Him. He set up se-

veral arguments to support this claim, which is perhaps

his argument in reply to the Anthropomorphist conception

of attributes.

(ii) Knowledge Of God Is Not Distinct From Him.

Just as he denied the claim that the knowledge

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37. Ibid., p. 16.

of God is identical with His essence, al-Ash'arī is also

reported to have denied that the knowledge of God is dis-

tinct from Him. In other words, according to al-Ash'arī,

God's knowledge is not distinct from Him, whether it is

said to be as a quality apart from God's essence or as

an attribute distinct from God. In his second set of ar-

guments on the doctrine of knowledge of God and other di-

vine attributes, he is trying to prove that these attri-

butes are not to be regarded as distinct from God Himself.

R. J. McCarthy explained the use of the word

'distinct' here as: "Distinct from everything, i.e. a

separate entity in himself."[38] Al-Ash'arī himself defined

the word 'otherness' in his own understanding as: "that

one of two things can be somehow separate from the other."[39]

Despite these two definitions of the terms involved, we

have already learned that God is eternal, His knowledge is

eternal and it is easier to suppose that these two eterni-

ties are not separate from one another. In other words,

the definitions of 'distinct' and 'otherness' as understood

by al-Ash'arī are used to maintain and clarify the whole

argument of this section, that is the knowledge of God

38. Ibid., note 16, p. 16.

39. Ibid., pp. 16 - 17.

which is eternal is not distinct from God Himself who is
eternal.

In this section of the argument, al-Ash'arī
used the same method as was used in the first section;
thus he argued:

> "If one could claim that the work of wisdom proves
> that the knower is knowing and his knowledge is
> known subsequently, another could claim that the
> work of wisdom proves that the knowledge is know-
> ledge and it is known to belong to a knower sub-
> sequently."40

These propositions are invalid and since the assertions
are the same, therefore the proof that the knower is know-
ing is also to be regarded as a proof of knowledge.

After citing several passage of the Qur'ānic
verses in favour of his doctrine, al-Ash'arī concluded
his doctrine by producing two propositions: (a) God is
knowing by Himself. (b) God is knowing by a knowledge
which cannot be Himself. If (a) is the case, it would
entail that He Himself would be knowledge. It has been
proved to be false. If (b) is the case, then it also would
entail another proposition, that is, He is knowing by a
quality distinct from Him. If this is true, then we should

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40. Ibid., p. 17.

have to say that quality is knowledge. Moreover, he

said:

> "But knowledge cannot be knowing, nor can the
> knower be knowledge, nor can God be identified
> with His attributes. Do you not see that the.
> way in which one knows that knowledge is know-
> ledge is that by it the knower knows?. For
> the power of man, by which he does not know,
> cannot be knowledge. Hence, since the Crea- ·
> tor cannot be knowledge, He cannot be knowing
> by Himself. And if that be impossible, it is
> certain that He is knowing by a knowledge which
> cannot be Himself."41

Finally, he stated that if God is knowing by Himself

or by a quality which can be Himself is possible, it

would mean that 'knowing' does not refer to God Him-

self or not to a quality. This certainly would be

impossible because there would be no affirmation

either of God or of quality which cannot be Himself.

This has been an account of al-Ash‘arī's treat-

ment of the central problem of the divine attributes,

especially the problem of the knowledge of God. He re-

jected Jahm's solution by saying that to hold that

knowledge of God is created is unreasonable. Al-Ash‘-

arī proves that it is eternal, and since it is eter-

nal, it is reasonable to hold that God knows the past,

the present and the future. He opposed the Mu‘tazi-

lities' solutions claiming that God is knowing by His

essence. He claimed that God is knowing by knowledge. The

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41. Ibid., p. 19.

knowledge of God is not to be thought of apart from His

essence, as held by Anthropomorphists. These two elements,

firstly, knowledge is not God, and secondly, knowledge is

not other than God are described as an effort of al-Ashᶜ-

arī to go and form his doctrine between the two extremists,

the rationalist Muᶜtazilites and the Anthropomorphists as

well as the compulsionist positions.

With regard to the main issue of this study,

that is the solution of Free Will and Predestination ac-

cording to al-Ashᶜarī, it is quite clear that all human

actions are foreknown by God before they exist. If this

is so, is the responsibility of man for what he has done

consistent with the foreknowledge of God?. Is it thinkable

that man receives punishments in the life hereafter for

his wrongdoings, since these wrongdoings were foreknown

by God before they existed or even before a man was born?.

We shall find the solution to this question examining al-

Ashᶜarī's solution to the main problem of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CREATEDNESS OF HUMAN

ACTION.

Al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī, after arguing that God knows every-
thing past, present and future and arguing that God knows
by a knowledge, proceeds to prove that everything created
in the universe is created by means of God's capability,
including the actions of man, whether they are compulsory
or voluntary. From these positions rise a number of ques-
tions and suppositions. Since God creates everything in
the universe, especially all categories of human actic .s,
whether they are good or evil, can it be claimed that God
is an evildoer?. If God creates everything, what is man's
share of responsibility for his actions if we say that He
knows these actions before they occur and both wills and
creates them?.

Al-Ash'arī primarily is concerned to prove that
God alone is the Creator of the universe. Though God is
the Creator of all in the universe, He is not an evildoer:
man has his responsibility for what he has done. To make
quite clear al-Ash'arī's proposed solutions, we shall pre-
sent them under different topics and areas of discussion.
They are, 'the createdness of human actions', 'the problem
of evil', 'the discussion of capacity' and finally 'the
theory of acquisition'. These topics serve to show al-
Ash'arī's approach to the most controversial issue in the
history of Islamic theology and philosophy. With the prob-
lem of the knowledge of God as the background of al-Ash'-
arī's understanding of God, we learn that al-Ash'arī's
solution is unique. However some difficulties remain and
may be dealt with by clarifying the terms used.

1. The Mu'tazilite Doctrine of Human Actions.

Before we proceed to discuss the createdness of
human actions as viewed by al-Ash'arī, it is worth inves-
tigating briefly the Mu'tazilite thesis which is described
as the counter-part of al-Ash'arī. In general, the Mu'ta-
zilites held that the voluntary astions of man are made
by means of man's capability which is given to them by
God. In particular, Abu'l-Hudhail b. al-Allāf held that

man has a capacity to act freely in the world.

Through the concept of 'tawallud' (generation) which he followed, he proves that certain actions are acts of man himself. He said:

> "Man can cause in himself movement, rest, will and knowledge, but cannot cause accidents like colour and taste, the nature of which is not known. Secondary effects of his acts are his work, such as the pain caused by a blow or the noise produced by knocking two objects together."[1]

Since he says that man can cause knowledge, but not accidents like taste, therefore, he is trying to divide human actions into two categories. Firstly, the actions of which man knows the modality, for example the flight of the arrow. Secondly, the actions of which man does not know the modality, for instance, pleasure and hunger. According to Abu'l-Hudhail, man is said to be the author of his actions of the first category whereas God is regarded as the author of the second one.

However these categories of Abu'l-Hudhail were opposed by Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir (died 825 A.D) the leading theologian of the Baghdadite Mu'tazilites. Bishr b. al-

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1. A. S. Tritton, _Muslim Theology_, p. 87.

Muʿtamir said: "Whatever is 'generated' from our deeds is of our doing."[2] These two scholars, though they differ in the second category of actions of this concept, are in agreement on the problem of whether man is the author of his actions.

The motive of using this concept is quite obvious, since like other Muʿtazilites, they wish to maintain the justice of God by dissociating God from such actions of man so that man is to be regarded as the responsible agent of what he has done.

Another leading Muʿtazilite scholar, Muʿammar b. ʿAbbād al-Sulāmī (died 842 A.D) of the Basrite school of the Muʿtazilites, held that human actions needed no creator. He introduced the theory of ʾmaʿānī' in order to justify his claim, and the following paragraphs are an elaboration of his view.

Muʿammar made the distinction between what he called 'bodies' and 'accidents'. Regarding the existence of 'bodies' and 'accidents', he said that:

> "the existence of bodies is to be ascribed to God, whereas the existence of accidents must be ascribed to the 'action' of bodies themselves."[3]

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2. M. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 63.

3. Ibid., p. 65.

Then he goes on to make a distinction regarding the existence of the 'action'. This action, according to Mu'ammar, may proceed in either by of two ways: (a) by necessity from its nature — or (b) by free will or free choice. An example of the former is the burning of the fire and an example of the latter is human action as well as the action of animals.

As far as human actions are concerned, they are regarded as actions of free will or free choice. This free will is to be regarded as accident and its existence is regarded as the actions of the bodies themselves. Since human actions are in the category of accidents they are, surely, not the creation of God, for God is only the creator of (bodies), therefore human actions are not the creations of God.

The argument he put forward is as follows: Colour is regarded as an accident of which a body may or may not be susceptible. If the body is susceptible of colour, then this colour belongs "to it by nature and is of its doing".[4] And, on the other hand, if a body might not be susceptible to the colour, "God might decide to colour

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4. Ibid., p. 65.

the body, and yet the body might not receive the colour

of which it is not susceptible."[5] Therefore, it is to

be maintained that, according to this argument that:

> "God cannot be said to cause the accidents, except
> indirectly, that is, through the agency of the
> body which causes its own accidents naturally."[6]

From this notion, it is evidently, that Mu'ammar put the

body as the true cause of its accidents, which are infi-

nite in number, rather than God. Therefore God is not the

true cause of the accidents of bodies. And perhaps, Mu'-

ammar is the object of the crucial criticism of this no-

tion, because he is in the position of maintaining that

body is more powerful than God. His opponents charge

him with claiming that:

> "[God] created a finite number of bodies and each
> body produced an infinity of accidents."[7]

Moreover, since human actions are the actions

of bodies themselves, and bodies are the creation of God,

does it not follow that human actions are the creations

of God?. Or is man regarded as body so that we can sup-

pose that human actions are God's creation since bodies

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5. Ibid., p. 65.

6. Ibid., pp 65 - 66.

7. A.S. Tritton, op cit., p. 101.

are God's creations?. According to Mu'ammar, this con-
clusion does not follow. His doctrine of man will serve
to show how Mu'ammar answers this question.

His doctrine regarding the nature of man is
described as a critical solution, because he maintained
that man is a spirit. This position rests on a distinc-
tion he makes between 'bodies' and 'substances'. He said
that bodies are to be regarded as motionless, and possess
length, width and depth. On the other hand, substances
are souls (nufūs). Man is not body, for body in its true
sense is regarded as an instrument or tool or cover. And
man has no accident like colour, etc. Perhaps soul re-
presents the highest being and transcends bodies and ac-
cidents. From this statement, it is obvious that accor-
ding to Mu'ammar, man is soul. This position shows that
Mu'ammar s trying to establish 'man is a spirit'.

To this extent, regarding the act of man (man
in his definition), he is reported to have held that:

> "Man acts in the inward world of the will (fī nafsihi).
> Thus he is capable of knowledge, will, hate, and
> representation, but is incapable of accomplishing
> anything at all in the outward world. Whatever is
> generated in the world of nature, therefore, and
> whatever inheres in bodies, such as motion and rest,
> colour, and taste, heat or cold, etc., is the work

of the body in which it inheres, through a ne-
cessity of nature."8

In his first argument, Mu'ammar proved that God
is not the creator of human actions, since human actions
are categorized as accidents and accidents are not the
creations of God. Therefore, God is not the creator of
human actions.

In his second argument, he is in a position to
maintain that man is regarded as an intellectual subs-
tance (soul). Man is not 'body' but 'in a body' and body
is regarded as a thing to be inhabited. Man is not acci-
dent, and it follows that man is not the creator of human
actions, for body is to be described as the natural cause
of its accidents. It is evidently on the basis of these
arguments then Mu'ammar proposed his philosophical proof
that neither God, nor man (in his definition) is the crea-
tor of human actions. Therefore, his proposition that
human actions needed no creator follows, because they exist
through the agency of the body which causes its own acci-
dents naturally.

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8. M. Fakhry, op cit., p. 66.

It is reported that his aim in establishing
the proposition that human actions need no creator, was
to dissociate God from the creation of evil, to establish
the justice of God.

This extraordinary solution of the problem of
human actions was unsatisfactory to the great majority
of Muslim scholars, especially the orthodox. Other Mu'-
tazilite scholars differ from him regarding the theory of
'bodies' and 'accidents'. The Mu'tazilites, in general,
maintain that God is the creator of both 'bodies' and
'accidents', whereas Mu'ammar as has been mentioned be-
fore held that God is the creator of bodies, but not
accidents. Though the Mu'tazilites differed from him
in this matter, they agreed that man was the author of
his own actions.

With regards to his theological-philosophical
development, it was reported that Mu'ammar was, like other
leading Mu'tazilite scholars, influenced by external and
non-Islamic elements, especially in his doctrine of 'ma'-
anī'. However, substantiation of the claim that he was
influenced by such philosophers requires a clear explana-
tion of the translation movement, especially of Greek works.
In the previous chapter, we stated that most of the Greek

works were not yet translated before the middle of the

ninth century A.D., while Mu'ammar died in the 809 A.D.

However, Anwar G. Chejne, without furhter evidence,

stated that:

> "Thus, an answer must be found to the statement of
> Ibn al-Murtadā who asserts that Mu'ammar has been
> exposed to gnosticism and Zoroastrianism, and to
> al-Shahrastānī who reports that he was under the
> influence of the philosophers."9

Moreover, he stated that, Mu'ammar's seniors such as

Dirār b. 'Amr (died 815 A.D), Jahm b. Safwān (died 745

A.D.) and Wāṣil b. 'Atā' (died 748 A.D.) were not free

from the influence of the Greek philosophy, and further-

more, it is evident that they influenced him in many es-

pects of his theological and philosophical doctrines.

As far as the idea of the doctrine of 'ma'ānī'

is concerned, it is related to Indian philosophy.

> "Professor Das Gupta writes that in the Nyaya system:
> the capacity of anything cannot be known until the
> effect produced is known, and if capacity to produce
> effects be regarded as existence or being, then the
> being or existence of the effect cannot be known
> until that has produced another effect and that an-
> other ad infinitum."10

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9. Anwar G. Chejne, "Mu'ammar Ibn 'Abbād al-Sulamī; a
   leading Mu'tazilites of the Eighth-Ninth Century.",
   MUSLIM WORLD., Vol 51 (1961), p. 313.

10. A. S. Tritton, op cit., p. 100.

As has been mentioned before, according to the doctrine
of 'ma'ānī' body produces an infinity of accidents. Like-
wise, in the Nyaya System, the existence of the effect
cannot be known until it produces another effect, which
leads to endlessness. Therefore, it is reasonable to sup-
pose that the doctrine of 'ma'ānī' is related to the Nya-
ya System in Indian philosophy.

If this is true, it is a good illustration of
al-Shahrastānī's claim that Mu'ammar was influenced by
philosophers. And this is considered as the external
element in Islamic thought, the influence of which al-
Ash'arī spent so much of his life working to abolish.

In reply to the Mu'tazilite doctrine of human
actions, al-Ash'arī puts forward his philosophical argu-
ments in favour of his position that human actions are
created by God. His theory rests on one main issue. The
Mu'tazilites, in general, hold that human actions are of
two kinds: compulsory and voluntary. An example of the
former is 'shivering from fever' and an example of the
latter is 'moving, approaching'. The Mu'tazilites main-
tained that compulsory actions are to be attributed to
God, whereas voluntary action must be attributed to man
himself. As opposed to this position, al-Ash'arī says

that all human actions whether they are compulsory or vo-
luntary are God's creations. Based on this, he argues
that God alone is true and efficient creator of all in
the universe including human actions, compulsory and vo-
luntary. Moreover, he states that the creation of com-
pulsory and voluntary actions are not to be regarded as
different. In other words, compulsory and voluntary ac-
tions are alike creations. The following paragraphs will
serve to clarify al-Ash‘arī's doctrine.

2. Al-Ash‘arī's Doctrine of Human Actions.

(i) God is the True And Efficient Creator
of All Actions.

In his attempt to deal with the problem of human
actions, al-Ash‘arī is concerned to oppose the views pre-
sented by the Mu‘tazilites. He holds that the existence
of every action in the universe is created by God's capabi-
lity, including the compulsory and voluntary actions of
man. On this point, al-Ash‘arī argued that although God
is the sole creator of all categories of human actions,
it does not entail the attribution of evil to God and does
not contradict the concept of human responsibility. In
contrast to the Mu‘tazilite positions, he maintains that
man's power of action is the same as every other accident
of man's being: it is the creation of God.

As has been mentioned before, Muʿammar argued
that human actions needed no creator at all, for God is
the creator of 'body', but not 'accident'. Since human
actions are described as accidents, and accidents are
not the creation of God, therefore, God is not the crea-
tor of human actions. Moreover, man is also not to be
called the author of his actions because accidents are
caused by body through its nature, and man is not a 'bo-
dy'. Therefore, man is not to be regarded as the author
of his actions. From this theory, Muʿammar made 'body'
the true cause of its accidents (human actions) by its
nature. Based on this proposition, we will investigate
al-Ashʿarī's reply to the position of Muʿammar.

In one of his propositions to prove that 'God
is not the creator of human action', Muʿammar argued that
'God might decide to colour the body, and yet the body
might not receive the colour of which it is not susceptible",[11]
It is relevant to refer here to al-Ashʿarī's proof of
'god wills everything which can be willed, in the sense
that those things which can be and 'de facto' are willed'[12]
Muʿammar said: 'God might decide to colour the body'.
The problem arises, does God's will decide to colour the

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11. Supra, this chapter, pp. 56 - 57.

12. Al-Ashʿarī, Kitāb al-Lumaʿ, p. 33.

body?. In this regard, al-Ash‘arī argued God wills every-

thing which can be willed. To support this claim he said:

> "There cannot be in God's dominion anything which
> He does not will. For if there were in God's
> dominion something not willed by Him, one of
> two things would have to follow: either the
> affirmation of unmindfulness and neglect, or
> the affirmation of weakness, impotence, feeble-
> ness, and failure to attain His desire. Since
> such things cannot be said of God, there cannot
> be in His dominion anything which He does not
> will."13

The reason for this claim is that: if what God wills takes

place, it cannot be overtaken by weakness or failure. On

the other hand, if what God wills does not take place, it

would entail that He must be overtaken by weakness and

failure. Similarly, with respect to Mu‘ammar's proposi-

tions: if God wills to colour the body (which, according

to Mu‘ammar, God might decide), and this does not take

place (for, according to Mu‘ammar, the body might not re-

ceive the colour of which it is not susceptible), then it

would entail that God must be overtaken by weakness and

failure. From this argument, it is certain, according to

al-Ash‘arī that Mu‘ammar's theory results in the attribu-

tion of weakness and failure to God. This is impossible

to say of God.

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13. Ibid., p. 34.

To be more precise with regard to the action derived from body (in Mu⁶ammar's theory), al-Ash⁶arī argued that:

> "Similarly, then, if the taking place of an act
> of His which the Creator does not will would
> necessitate His weakness and failure to attain
> His desire or His unmindfulness and neglect,
> the same would be necessitated by the taking
> place of another's act unwilled by Him."14

According to al-Ash⁶arī, all temporally produced things are the creations of God and all things which proceed from others are acts of God. Therefore, in contrast to Mu⁶ammar's position that human actions exist by the nature of body, they are believed to be the creation of God.

However, al-Ash⁶arī is reported to have believed in the course of nature, as reported by al-Shahrastānī:

> "he did allow a certain facility and ability (tamak-
> kun) which a man feels himself to possess, namely
> soundness of body and a belief in the course of
> nature."15

Though al-Ash⁶arī agreed on the question of the course of nature, he does not in his doctrine maintain that nature can give existence of any kind.

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14. Ibid., p. 35.
15. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī ⁶Ilmi'l-Kalām, p. 38.

> "We have proved that God creates men's actions.....
> and he creates by choice and will, not by nature
> and essence."16

Regarding the question of 'body' and its nature, al-Shah-
rastānī again mentioned that:

> "Body is composed of matter and form, so that if
> it exerted influence it would be in conjunction
> with matter; and matter has a privative nature,
> so that it is impossible that it should bring
> anything into existence."17

These two statements of al-Shahrastānī are not reporting

the position of al-Ashᶜarī, rather he is reporting his

own position and the other al-Ashᶜarītes'. However, since

he is also an al-Ashᶜarīte, it is reasonable to suppose

that these statements derive from al-Ashᶜarī's doctrine.

As far as human actions are concerned, according

to al-Ashᶜarī, their existence is nothing to do with body

and its nature, for God is all-powerful and God alone is

the creator of all in the universe. Muᶜammar's theory

that human actions need no creator would entail ascribing

commitment of weakness and failure to God.

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16. Ibid., p. 88.

17. Ibid., p. 26.

Furthermore, al-Ash'arī argued that the true

and efficient Creator of all in the universe is God alone,

and no other agent would be able to bring into existence

any action in all its dimensions. He maintained that the

total content of the being of any action is the product

of an agent who determines it in its totality with knowing

intention. We have discussed the knowledge of God in the

previous chapter, whereby, al-Ash'arī held that God is

knowing by a knowledge and He knows everything in detail

not in general. To prove the proposition that 'the created-

ness of human action is by God', he argued that God alone

knows the total content of the being of any action. From

this proposition, he draws the conclusion that God alone

is the true and efficient Creator of every action which

exists in the universe.

By using the example of 'faith' and 'unbelief',

he elaborates his argument and affirms that the true and

efficient cause which determines the being is the cause

in its total reality. He said:

> "The rational proof of the creation of men's act
> is our experience that unbelief is bad, false,
> vain, inconsistent and of a certain contrariness,
> whereas faith is good, toilsome, and painful.
> And it is our experience that even though the
> unbeliever deliberately exert to make unbelief
> good and right, it will be contrary to his in-
> tention; and even though the believer wish that

faith be not toilsome, painful, and vexatious,
it will not be according to his wish and de-
sire."18

From this argument, it is evident that an act
comes into existence by a producer who determines and
knows the total content of its being, that is knows,
the act of faith of the believer to be good, but the
act of unbelief of the unbeliever to be bad and vain.
If this act comes into existence without a producer who
knows and produces it as it really is, then surely, it
would exist without a producer. This would fall into
the theory of Mu'ammar who holds that human actions need
no creator or producer. This has been proved by al-Ash'-
ari to be false and impossible. So it is certain that
an act comes into existence as it really is by a producer
who intentionally produces it as such. Moreover, he argues:

> "For if an act could come to be as it really is
> without someone who intends that, one could not
> be sure but that all acts are like that, just as,
> if an act could come to be without an agent, one
> could not be sure but that all acts are like
> that."19

Here, al-Ash'ari holds that if an act comes into existence

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18. Al-Ash'ari, _Kitāb al-Luma'_, p. 55.

19. Ibid., p. 55.

as it really is, without someone who intends it as it really is, then it would be possible that an act of the same content of being could exist not the same as the other though they are in the same content of being. Therefore, it is possible to suppose that an act comes into existence as it really is by a producer who determines it as it really is and by someone who intentionally produces it as it really is.

The producer of the act of faith and unbelief would not need to be believer and unbeliever, for both of them can deliberately exert themselves to make unbelief good and right and make fatih not painful and toilsome. This intention shows that they are not the producers of faith or unbelief as they really are. It is certain that God alone is the producer of faith and unbelief as they really are.

Up to this point, al-Ash'arī proves that all works or acts need a producer who creates them knowing their real nature and content. Besides, if acts can be produced by a producer who does not know their real nature and content, it would mean that they could be produced without a producer, and since this is impossible, the former case is also impossible. We all know of

examples where a man does not know the real nature and
content of what he is about to produce; therefore, it is
possible for there to be a producer other than man him-
self. It is neither man who produces unbelief and faith,
in their total content of essential reality, nor, on the
other hand can material reality such as body cause any
human actions, for, as has been stated before 'body' can
affect nothing in things distinct from itself.

The central essence of these arguments is to
make neither man nor body the producer of any act, but
God alone as the true and efficient producer or creator
of actions. This means that there is no agent who is able
to produce it as it really is except God, and no one with
power over it to produce it as it really is, in the sense
that he creates it, except God.

Since al-Ash'arī sees God as the true and only
creator of human actions of all kinds, the question arises,
what is the difference betweem al-Ash'arī and the Jabarites
or the compulsionists?. Al-Shahrastānī's account of the
Jabarites as has been stated in the previous chapter men-
tioned that the pure Jabarite gave no power at all to man
to perform his action; every action came from God. Al-
Shahrastānī goes on to report that:

> "As for those who assert that originated power
> has an influence in acting and who call this
> 'acquisition' (kasb), they are not Jabaris,
> although the Mu'tazila apply the term 'Jabari'
> to one who does not assert that originated
> power in isolation (istiqlālan) has an in-
> fluence in production and origination."20

From this report it is clear that the Mu'tazilites claim
that those who do not assert that originated power has
its influence to create, will be regarded as Jabarites.
This certainly is an accusation directed against al-Ash'-
arī by the Mu'tazilites. For al-Ash'arī believed that
God is the creator of all actions in the universe. But
al-Shahrastānī makes it clear that the upholder of the
theory of acquisition is not to be called the Jabarite.

The Mu'tazilites maintained the capability of
human action to establish the justice of God. On the
other hand, the Jabarites or the Compulsionists maintained
the uniqueness and absoluteness and omnipotence of God.
It is likely that al-Ash'arī in his first step towards
his solution of the createdness of human actions followed
the position of the Jabarite in maintaining that God alone
was the true creator of these actions. But, as far as al-
Ash'arī is concerned, he is not to be associated with the

20.　W. Montgemory Watt, <u>Free Will and Predestination in
　　　Early Islam</u>, p. 96.

Jabarite's doctrine. Following the orthodox position,

he maintained that the justice of God in its true sense

lay apart from both the 'Jabr' (compulsion) and the 'Qa-

dar' (the theory in which man is capable of performing

his own action, this is the Mu'tazilite position in ge-

neral).

To prove his orthodox position, al-Ash'arī

held that God was not the immediate agent who performed

the act. He argued:

> "Acts must have an agent who makes them as they
> really are, because an act cannot dispense with
> an agent. So if the agent who makes the act as
> it really is be not the body, God must be the
> agent who makes it as it really is. But the
> act does not need an acquirer who acquires it
> as it really is in the same way that it must
> have an agent who makes it as it really is,
> so that, if the act be an acquisition, God
> must be its acquirer."21

It is here he introduced the term acquisition'

which we shall develop later. He maintained that although

God is the true and efficient creator of every act as it

really is, it does not follow that God is the one who

actually performs the act or is what he called 'the ac-

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21. Al-Ash'arī, <u>Kitāb al-Luma'</u>, p. 57.

quirer' of the act. This problem lies in the distinc-
tion between the term 'creator' and 'acquirer'. He said
that the action needs the creator who makes it as it
really is, but it does not need the acquirer who makes
it as it really is. In other words, the creator creates
an action as it really is but the acquirer does not.
These two terms, by definition, are described as not co-
extensive. From this, it is obvious that al-Ash‘arī is
saying that: the action takes place through a created
power of the one who actually performs the act, but this
created power is not sufficient to determine the act in
its total reality and content.

Despite his claim that compulsory actions and
voluntary actions are alike in creation, which we shall
discuss in the next section, he claimed that the proof
of God's creation of compulsory actions is also the proof
of God's creation of voluntary actions but not the ac-
quisition of the voluntary actions. He said that the
proof of the createdness of compulsory actions as they
are proves that the one who moves thereby because of the
compulsory actions is not God. And the one who moves
because of compulsory action is not the agent who makes
it as it really is. The reason for his claim lies in
the definition of 'the one moving'. He said the term
'the one moving' is to be defined as the motion which

find its locus in him. But God cannot be said to act that way. He used an analogy to clarify this:

> "Similarly, if the acquisition is itself proof of
> an agent who makes it as it really is, it does
> not necessarily prove that the agent who makes
> it as it really is is also the one who acquires
> it; nor does it prove that the one who acquires
> it as it really is is also the agent who makes
> it as it really is. For the acquirer acquires
> a thing because it takes place in virtue of his
> created power over it. But the Lord of the world
> cannot be one able to do a thing in virtue of a
> created power, and therefore cannot acquire the
> acquisition, although He is the agent who really
> makes it."22

From this clarification, it is clear that God cannot be regarded as the acquirer of human actions, because by definition the actions or event exist through a created power and on the other hand, God's power is uncreated, absolute and transcendant.

To make it quite clear, the example given before should be applied, that is, the act of unbelief of the unbeliever. It has been proved that the unbeliever does not produce the act of unbelief in its total content of reality. From this, it follows that saying that the unbeliever acquired the act of unbelief means that he disbelieved through a created power. The act of disbelief does not come into existence in its reality by the acquisition of the unbeliever. Therefore, by using this example, the act of

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22. Ibid., pp. 57 - 58.

unbelief of the unbeliever comes into existence through

the acquisition of the unbeliever and the total content

of its reality and essential nature of unbelief is deter-

mined by God.

(ii) Compulsory and Voluntary Actions are Alike
      in Creation.

The doctrine of human action of the Mu'tazilites

is based on the distinction they made between the compul-

sory actions and voluntary actions. They claimed that

compulsory actions are the creations of God, whereas vo-

luntary actions of man are attributed to man himself. Al-

Ash'arī agreed with them in the distinction between com-

pulsory and voluntary actions of man, but disagreed with

their use of the two categories. He maintained that there

is no reason to make compulsory actions and voluntary ac-

tions different in creation. He argued, if the Mu'tazilites

claimed that compulsory actions were God's creation due to

their temporality, the case would be the same for voluntary

actions which are also temporal. And if the Mu'tazilites

claim that compulsory actions are the creation of God be-

cause they need time and space, voluntary actions are also

the same needing time and space. He argued:

"Another rational proof of the creation of men's
acts is that the proof which proves that God
creates necessary [compulsory] motion also
proves that He creates acquired [voluntary]
motion. For that which proves that God crea-
ted necessary motion is the latter's beginning
to be ——and the same is true of acquired mo-
tion. The creation of necessary motion is also
proved by its need of a place and a time ——and
the same is true of acquired motion. Hence, .
since every proof by which one infers.that
necessary motion is created by God compels
one to judge that acquired motion is also
created by God, the creation of acquired mo-
tion is necessary for the same reasons that
necessitate the creation of necessary motion."[23]

For this reason, it is false for the Muᵉtazi-

lites, according to al-Ashᵉarī, to believe that voluntary

actions are not the creation of God. Both compulsory and

voluntary actions are the creation of God, for every proof

of the createdness of compulsory actions is also the proof

of the createdness of voluntary actions.

Regarding the above argument, an objection arises;

if compulsory actions are regarded as necessary, then vo-

luntary actions are also regarded as necessary. And if

voluntary actions are regarded as acquisition, then com-

pulsory actions must be regarded as acquisition. This

objection derived from the essence of al-Ashᵉarī's claim

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23. Ibid., pp. 58 - 59.

that compulsory and voluntary actions are alike in crea-

tion. In answer to this objection, he says that this

does not follow from such a proposition because, by de-

finition, these two categories of actions are different.

> "There is no necessity of that, because the two
> differ with respect to necessity and acquisition.
> For necessity means that to which the thing is
> constrained and compelled and forced, and from
> which it can find no way to get free or to es-
> cape, even though it strive to be freed from it
> and want to escape from it and exhaust its en-
> deavors to do so. So if one of the two motions
> be of this description, i.e. the description of
> necessity, as in the case of one shaking from
> palsy or shivering from fever, it is necessary
> motion; and if the other motion be of a contra-
> ry description, it is not necessary motion."24

From this argument, it is stated that shaking from palsy

or shivering from fever are regarded as compulsory actions

and the act is characterised by the absolute incapacity

of the man, and he is not free from such act. On the

other hand, the act of going and coming and the like are

regarded as voluntary actions and they are freely deter-

mined by the agent and the fact that they take place from

the one who performs them through a created power.

The conclusion which can be drawn from this chap-

ter is that according to al-Ash‘arī, God is the creator of

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24. Ibid., p. 59.

the universe, including the actions of man voluntary and
compulsory. This does not mean that al-Ash'arī can be
associated with the determinists or compulsionists (Ja-
barites), for he maintained that man is responsible for
what he does through the theory of acquisition. This
then is the central core of the problem of Free Will and
Predestination or man's potentiality to perform his own
actions, as it was debated in earlier centuries of Islam.
However, the theory of acquisition here has not been dealt
with fully, for in connection with the createdness of hu-
man action, there arises another problem that is, the prob-
lem of evil and God's justice. The question is that since
God creates everything, even all human actions of good and
evil, this means that God creates evil. Since God creates
evil, can He be regarded as the evildoer or is He Himself
evil?. Furthermore, if it is true that God creates evil,
then is it just or unjust for God to punish the evildoer
in the life hereafter?. These questions will be treated
in the next chapter on 'the problem of evil'.

CHAPTER   FOUR

THE PROBLEM   OF   EVIL.

The central issue here is the question whether
God is Justice or Injustice since He creates everything
in the world, including evil. In the previous chapter
al-Ash⁶arī argued that God was the real creator of the
universe including the acts of man, compulsory and vo-
luntary and of good and evil. On the other hand, the
Mu⁶tazilites in general maintained that God created on-
ly the compulsory, not the voluntary. In this regard,
they held that God created only the good but not the
evil.

1. The Mu'tazilite Interpretation of the
   Creation of Evil.

The Mu'tazilites in general, from the very
beginning, tried to maintain the justice of God and the
absoluteness of God. To associate God with the creation
of evil is against the claim of the Justice of God. If
God creates evil, it follows that God is evil. And if
God is evil, He must be unjust to His creatures. So,
the main point of the Mu'tazilites is to avoid 'attri-
buting evil to God'. This does not means, according to
the majority of them, that God has no power over evil.
Only al-Nazzām held that God has no power over evil,
which distinguishes him from other Mu'tazilite scholars.

Before we elaborate the Mu'tazilite position in
general, it is worth noting some scholars among them who
have different interpretations of this problem. To begin
with, it is interesting to consider the interpretations
of Abu'l-Hudhail, who is said to have the following po-
sition:

> "That God has power to do evil, but that He did
> not actually do it because of His wisdom and
> compassion. Alternatively he argued that evil
> proceeds from deficiency, that there is no de-
> ficiency in God, and that therefore it is im-

possible to suppose His doing evil."[1]

Abu'l-Hudhail's reasons for avoiding 'attributing evil to
God' are twofold, Firstly, the nature of the acts of God
or God Himself, and secondly, the nature of evil. Since
it has been agreed that God is wise and His works are
works of wisdom, it is impossible to suppose God doing
evil which is regarded as contrary to the work of wisdom.
Moreover, it is impossible to suppose that God has power
to do evil due to the nature of evil itself, that is,
'evil proceeds only from deficiency'. From these two
reasons, Abu'l-Hudhail concluded that it is impossible
to maintain that God, though He has power over evil,
creates it.

Al-Nazzam, however, has a different interpreta-
tion of the problem of evil. He said that God neither has
power over evil, nor creates evil. His position is based
on two considerations, firstly, the nature of evil itself,
and secondly, his idea of God. On the former he said that
evil is the essence of a thing, therefore the power to create
it is itself to be regarded as evil. From this argument,

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1. W M. Watt, Free Will and Predestination In Early Islam,
     p. 72.

it is obvious that he is trying to avoid the following

statement, that 'if God creates evil, God Himself is evil'.

As for the latter, he argued:

> "If God has power over evil, then the occurrence
> of evil is possible, and as the supposition of
> the occurrence of a possible thing entails no.
> impossibility, let us suppose that evil did
> occur. Now, God might or might not have know-
> ledge of the evil which occurred. If we say
> that He did not have the knowledge of it, it
> would necessarily follow that He was ignorant;
> and if we say that He did have it, it would
> necessarily follow that He was in need of this
> evil; for had He not been in need of it, He
> would not have created it. When a person is
> not in need of a thing and knows its inherent
> evils, he will have nothing to do with it, if
> he is wise."2

This argument comes mainly from the theory of the works

of God. Since it has been proved that the works of God

are the works of wisdom, therefore, it is unreasonable

to suppose that God is in need of creating evil. More-

over, it has been proved that God knows; then to suppose

that God is ignorant of the occurrence of evil (so that

we can suppose that He is not in need of evil) is also

unreasonable. The conclusion which can be drawn from al-

Nazzām's argument is quite simple. Since God is not ig-

norant, the occurrence of evil is in His knowledge, there-

fore, He is in need of evil. But on the other hand, since

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2. Mir Valiuddin, "Muʿtazilism", in A History of Muslim
   Philosophy, Vol. 1., edited by M.M. Sharif (Wiesbaden,
   Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), pp. 199 - 219 (p. 209).

God's works are regarded as works of wisdom, surely, He
is not in need of evil. God is wise and so He has nothing
to do with the creation of evil.

Another Mu'tazilite scholar who had a different
interpretation of this issue was 'Abbād b. Sulaimān (died
864 A.D). He argued:

> "All that God does is right. There cannot be any-
> thing profitable for man which He does not do;
> if there were, He would be unjust. He does not
> create unbelief but gives the unbeliever power
> not to believe. He does not create anything
> which we call evil or bad, like hunger or sick-
> ness; even the pains of hell are not evil,
> either really or metaphorically."3

His doctrine of uncreatedness of evil is based on the dis-
tinction he made between 'power over evil' and 'power to
do evil'. An example of this distinction would be a wife's
conception of a child. W.M. Watt elaborates this example,
stating that 'Abbād was influenced by Mu'ammar.

> "Just as a man has power over his wife's concep-
> tion of a child, although he himself does not
> have power to conceive a child, so (thought
> Mu'ammar) God may have power over movement
> (that is, can cause men to move) although He
> Himself does not have power to move, and like-
> wise may have power over evil (sc. the evil-
> doing of men) but not power to do evil."4

3. A.S. Tritton, <u>Muslim Theology</u>, p. 117.

4. W. M. Watt, op cit., p. 82.

The main problems to deal with were the 'attributing evil
to God' and 'the power of God'. From this doctrine,
ʿAbbād is on his way to avoiding 'attributing evil to
God' and at the same time asserting 'God is all powerful'.
In connection with the question of the unbeliever, he ar-
gued that since unbelief is evil, and God does not create
evil, therefore unbelief is not the creation of God. From
this argument, he draws the conclusion that God does not
make a man to be an unbeliever, because unbelief is an
addition to the man who is an unbeliever.

ʿAbbād's interpretation of evil was opposed by
al-Jubbāʾī (died 915 A.D). He said that the distinction
between 'power over evil' and 'power to do evil' is in-
valid. He maintained that from this distinction it would
follow that God is weak though He has power, because He
is not the agent of such actions. As to the example given
by ʿAbbād, al-Jubbāʾī is reported to have said:

> "If God brought about conception in a woman, he
> said, then He was 'one causing conception' (muh-
> bil), although this was the word which would
> normally be applied to her husband."[5]

Regarding his interpretation of evil and the reward in the
life of hereafter, al-Jubbāʾī is well-known for his failure

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5. Ibid., pp. 83 - 84.

to give a satisfactory answer to his pupil, al-Ash'arī,

on the theory of 'salāh wa'l-Aslāh (that is 'God is bound

to do the best for His creatures'). His failure to ex-

plain this theory is regarded as one of the causes óf al-

Ash'arī's separation from the school of the Mu'tazilites.

From these brief observations on the Mu'tazilite

doctrine, it is obvious that, though they differ in inter-

pretation, they are alike in their main aim, to maintain

the justice of God and uniqueness of God. On the basis of

this similarity, we shall in the following paragraphs gather

their arguments in general to see the problem clearly.

The Mu'tazilites believed that God's Will is not

related to everything, for the following reasons:

> "God's volitions are in time say that God wills
> His particular acts in the sense that He purposes
> to create them according to His knowledge. His
> will precedes the act by a moment. He wills that
> the good acts of His servants should come to pass
> and that the evil should not."6

From this proposition, they argued: "If God's will is re-

lated to everything, He wills evil....If He wills evil,

He is evil."[7] From this argument, arise two fundamental

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6. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
   Kalām, p. 86.

7. Ibid., p. 87.

questions: if it is not God who creates evil, then, who
is the creator of it?. And why does God not create evil?.

Their answer to the first question was given
in the previous chapter, that voluntary actions are made
by means of human capability given by God. Good and evil
actions are described as voluntary. Therefore, they said
that good and evil are made by man's capability given by
God. It is false, according to them, to hold that evil
is created by God.

Regarding the second question, the Mu'tazilites
based their answer on the goodness of the creation of God.
They held that God is only bound to do what is best for
His creatures. They argued:

> "A wise man only does a thing for a wise purpose;
> and action without purpose is useless folly. The
> wise acts for his own advantages or to profit some
> one else. Since God is exalted above profit ob-
> viously He must act for the profit of others, and
> all His acts must be Salutary [the best for His
> creatures]."8

In this connection, the Mu'tazilites fall into
two different groups. The first hold the opinion expressed
by the Baghdādites that, in providing the greatest possible

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8. Ibid., p. 127.

powers of mind and body of man, God was bound to do the best for them; even the punishment in the life hereafter is the best for them because when man is released from Hell, he is fit for Heaven. The second opinion was that of the Basrites, who hold that creation was the result of grace and favour. Moreover God is bound to avoid weaknesses in men and do the best for them. Both of these sections are right, as far as their doctrine of 'salāh wa 'l-Aslah' is concerned. Both sections believed that God is bound to do the best for His creatures. This position followed from another interpretation of the un-believer or the disobedient.

> "If God knew that a people would be disobedient
> to His commands through an apostle, His know-
> ledge would restrain Him from willing their
> performance. If He knew that men would dis-
> believe and perish, their well-being would
> turn Him from His wish. It is as though one
> let down a rope to a drowning man, knowing
> that he would strangle himself with it."9

After this brief examination of Muʿtazilite in-terpretation of evil, we shall now present the reply from al-Ashʿarī.

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9. Ibid., p. 130.

2. Al-Ashʿarī's Interpretation of Evil.

The Muʿtazilite position on the problem of evil was totally unacceptable to al-Ashʿarī. The idea of maintaining the justice of God by attributing the creation of evil to an agent other than God, according to al-Ashʿarī, would only raise another fundamental problem, that is, it would compromise the sovereignty of God. If God is not the creator of evil, then God would not be all powerful. Evil exists, and to deny this, would mean denying the reality of our history. Now, if the occurrence of such evil has nothing to do with God, then it would entail two alternatives: either (a) it exists by itself, or (b) it exists through an agent other than God. As to the former, al-Ashʿarī has argued that every existing being does not exist by itself. This was discussed in the previous chapter concerning Muʿammar's view that 'human actions need no creator' but exist by their nature through the 'body'. Though Muʿammar emphasized human actions, the same point is also applied to evil because evil is regarded as an accident, and every accident must be ascribed to the action of bodies themselves.[10] Since the first alternative has been proved to be false, we conclude that evil exists

10. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 55.

through another agent. If this agent is not God, then

it would lead to a concept of dualism: which is contrary

to the Islamic concept of God and creation. Al-Ash'arī

develops his doctrine to maintain that God is a creator of

evil, yet He is a just God. In other words, according

to al-Ash'arī, to say that God is the creator of evil

does not at all lead to the conclusion that God is not

a just, all-powerful God. First of all al-Ash'arī argued

that evil is the creation of God as of other existences.

Then in his reply to the Mu'tazilite position he said that

God's actions are without purpose. Again to avoid any

confusion with the Mu'tazilites, he maintained that God

creates evil to be the evil of another being distinct from

Himself. After dealing with these problems, as treated

by al-Ash'arī, we shall examine his solution to the problem

of the justice of God, in which he claims that to say that

God creates evil is not inconsistent with the concept of

the justice of God.

(i)   The Createdness of Evil by God.

It has been argued by al-Ash'arī that God creates

everything in the universe, including the human actions com-

pulsory and voluntary. This claim leads to another, that

good and evil are believed to be the creation of God. On

the other hand, the Muᶜtazilites maintained that God

creates only good but not evil, because God does what

is best for His creatures. Then the question arises,

if God is not the creator of evil, who is the creator

of it?. If it is created other than by God's capabili-

ty then it will follow that the agent (other than God)

must be an effective power in the sense that he can create

things contrary to God's creation. This is centainly a

dualistic position.

Regarding the theory of effective power al- Ashᶜ-

arī claimed that if God wills a thing, it is, and when He

does not will it, it is not. We have discussed this in

the previous chapter, in his reply to Muᶜammar's posi-

tion.[11] However, in this section we shall elaborate it

to see how it applies to the present discussion. He put

forward two alternatives regarding the theory of effect-

tive power:

> "Which is the worthier of the attribute of effec-
> tive power; he of whom it is true that, when he
> wishes a thing to be, it most certainly is, and
> when he does not wish it, it is not; or he who
> wills it to be and it is not, and what he does
> not will, is?."[12]

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11. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 64 - 65.

12. Al-Ashᶜarī, Al-Ibāna ᶜAn Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 101.

He then claimed that if the Mu'tazilites are in favour
of the second alternative, then they support an untenable
conclusion. And if they were in favour of the first al-
ternative, then they would have admitted that Satan is
worthier of effective power than God. From this argument
al-Ash'arī is trying to oppose the Mu'tazilite position
that evil was created by an agent other than God. This
agent must be regarded as an effective power to will and
create evil. This certainly follows from their position
that Satan is more effective than God, since that he (Sa-
tan) wills, is, and what he does not will, is not. More-
over, this argument deals directly with the problem of
the eternity of God's knowledge and His eternal Will. As
has been discussed before, al-Ash'arī recognizes the eter-
nity of God's knowledge. Then, from this, he argued that
'God eternally knows' will be true at a given time, and
His will which is eternal will also be at that same time.
Consequently, what He knows will not be eternally, nor
what He eternally wills. Therefore, He wills what He knows
in eternity.

The indirect consequence of this position is that,
since God's Will is eternal, like His knowledge, there is
no reason to maintain the creation of evil is without His
will, for what He eternally knows will be and what He eter-

nally wills will be; and what He eternally knows will

not be, will not be and what He eternally wills will not

be, will not be. Therefore, from this argument, there

is no reason to maintain that evil is not created by God,

for He knows it to be and wills it to be, and if He knows

it not to be, He wills it not to be. It has been agreed

by the majority of the Muslim scholars that God is the

only effective power in the universe, which leads to the

following conclusion;

> "When God wills a thing, it is, and when He does
> not will it, it is not because He is the worthier
> of the effective power."13

Then, it is certain that another agent is not regarded as

an effective power. If he is effective, this would lead

to dualism. Since another agent is not effective in power,

therefore, to claim that evil is created by an agent other

than God is meaningless and invalid.

The Mu‘tazilite position in maintaining that God

only creates good but not evil was reckoned to be similar

to the dualistic concept of Zoroastrianism. In the teaching

of Zoroastrianism, the world was regarded as the battle-

ground of good and evil. The good was led by Ahura-Mazda

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13. Ibid., p. 101.

and the evil was led by Angra Mainyu, also known later
as Ahriman.[14]

Regarding al-Ash'ari's argument concerning the
Mu'tazilite position, he claimed that, if they held that
God created only the good, not the evil, they would fall
into the dualistic concept of God and creation as was
found in the teaching of Zoroastrianism. Since the Mu'-
tazilites would not accept the Zoroastrian position, the
only alternative remaining to them, according to al-Ash'ari,
was to maintain that God creates the good as well as the
evil. This certainly will not fall into dualism but re-
cognizes the power of God. However, just as surely, the
Mu'tazilite conception of Creator and the creation is far
different from that of Zoroastrianism. But al-Ash'ari
maintained that the idea of separating the creation of
good and evil is similar to the doctrine of Zoroastrianism.
This claim was made by the later follower of al-Ash'ari,
Ibn al-Murtada, especially in his comment on Mu'ammar,
"Mu'ammar had been exposed to gnosticism and Zoroastrianism."[15]

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14. Ninian Smart, "Zoroastrianism," Encyclopaedia of Phi-
    losophy, Vol. 8 (London, Collier, Macmillan Ltd.,
    1967), p. 382.

15. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 61 note 9.

(ii) Gd's Actions Without Purpose.

It has been mentioned before that the Mu'tazi-
lites introduced the theory of 'Salāh wa'l-Aslah' (God
creates the best.for His creatures) to maintain the good-
ness and justice of God. From this theory they concluded
that God is bound to do the best for His creatures. They
also held that God does not create evil, for creating
evil is surely contrary to the goodness of God. Al-Ash'-
arī's reply to this theory was reported by al-Shahrastānī.

Al-Shahrastānī used the term 'ordhodox' to refer
to a school including al-Ash'arī, opposed to the Mu'tazi-
lite position. The argument is elaborated as follows:
If God is bound to do what is best for His creatures due
to the fact that God who is regarded as wise must do and
act for a wise purpose and an action without a purpose is
useless and meaningless as claimed by the Mu'tazilites,
then it would follow that the creator is absolutely depen-
dent. Firstly, this argument is a direct reply to the po-
sition of the Mu'tazilites in general, especially with
regard to their theory of 'Salāh wa 'l-Aslah', by wich they
argued that "a wise man only does a thing for a wise pur-
pose; and action without purpose is useless folly."[16] Secondly,
it deals with al-Nazzām's position in particular, who argued
that "If we say that God did have [knowledge of the evil],

16. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
Kalām, p. 127.

it would necessarily follow that He was in need of this

evil, for had He not been in need of it, He would not

have created it."[17] Regarding al-Nazzām's argument,

though he does not say that God was in need of evil,

he used the premise that if, for example something

exists, God had need of it. The phrase 'had need'

shows that God's works have purpose. The orthodox

said that God's actions are without purpose, therefore,

al-Nazzām's premise in his argument is invalid. Regard-

ing the theory of 'Salāh wa 'l-Aslāh' which involves the

use of the phrase 'God's action is with purpose', the

orthodox claim that the Muʿtazilites' theory is invalid,

becuase to claim that God's action is with purpose would

entail that God is dependent. If He is in need of some-

thing as the end product of His actions then He is indeed

dependent and not self-sufficient. According to the or-

thodox God's actions embrace good and He does not destroy

the world. However, this does not mean that He is in need

of gain and advantage from His actions. Al-Shahrastānī

concluded that:

> "There is a difference between a good consequence
> following divine operation, and attributing good
> and utility to the disposition of those acts,
> just as there is a necessary difference between
> a perfection which necessitates a thing's exis-

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17. Supra, This chapter, p. 83.

tence and one which merely evokes it. The
former is an excellence like an inseparable
attribute; the latter an excellence like a
provocative cause."18

From the above argument, it is clear that ac-
cording to al-Ash'arī and the orthodox, the Mu'tazilite
argument does not hold, since the premise used by them
is proved to be invalid. Since the premise is invalid,
the conclusion is also invalid. Therefore the theory
of 'Salāh wa 'l-Aslah' is meaningless.

Apart from the main aim to establish the doc-
trine of the justice of God, the theory of 'Salāh wa 'l-
Aslah' is to maintain that God's actins are the actions
of good will and for the walfare of man. The theory is
related to the idea of 'Providence' in Christianity. In
this connection, it is of interest to compare these two
ideas briefly. Regarding the idea of 'Providence', John
of Damascus had stated:

> "The works of God are partly according to the
> goodwill of God and partly according to per-
> mission. Works of goodwill comprise all those
> which are undeniably good, while works of per-
> mission are concessions."19

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18. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-
Kalām, p. 127.

19. J. W. Sweetman, Islam and Christian Theology, Part 1.,
Vol. 2., (London, Lutterworth Press, 1947), p. 171.

With reference to these two theories, in Islam
and·Christianity, it is obvious that they are related in
the sense they are similar in interpretation. To try to
decide whether Christianity influenced Islam or Islam in-
fluenced Christianity in this matter, would lead to an-
other detailed investigation. As far as the theory of
'Salāh wa 'l-Aslah' is concerned, it was developed by
Wāsil b. 'Atā' (died 784 A.D). He was the earliest
scholar of the Mu'tazilite school and is reported to
have adopted this theory from the creed of Mu'bad al-
Juhānī (died 699 A.D) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (died be-
fore 743 A.D).[20] John of Damascus died in 750 and it is
uncertain whether Muslim scholars were influenced by the
Christians in this matter. However, the similarity of
these two is quite obvious.

Regarding the origin of these two theories,
Sweetman reported:

> "Both Stoicism and Platonism emphasized the provi-
> dential view of the world. The two great reli-
> gions, quite apart from Greek philosophy which
> they came to use, strongly maintained the same
> belief. Neoplatonism was equally sure and its
> various exponents, while expressing themselves
> in various ways, saw the order of the whole cos-
> mos as manifesting in different degrees the Di-

20. Mir Valiuddin, "Mu'tazilism", in A History of Muslim
    Philosophy, Vol. 1., edited by M.M. Sharif, p. 205

vine Intelligence. In the school of Alexandria, generally speaking, there was an optimistic view of the world."21

From this brief account of Greek philosophy concerning the 'providential view of the world', it is obvious that the theory of 'Salāh wa 'l-Aslah' and 'Providence' are closely related to Greek philosophy, and may have originated in Greek philosophy.

In this section we have dealt with al-Ash'arī's reply to the position of the Mu'tazilites in general and of al-Nazzām in particular. The Mu'tazilites, though they differ among themselves in interpreting the uncreatedness of evil by God, all agree that by disociating God from creating evil, they establish the concept of Justice of God. However, al-Ash'arī accused the Mu'tazilites of borrowing from Greek philosophy and adopting it into their doctrine. As far as al-Ash'arī is concerned, he is trying to abolish any external influence in Islamic thought, and he says that the Mu'tazilites are not free from such an influence in their interpretation of evil.

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21. J. W. Sweetman, op cit., p. 175.

(iii) <u>God Creates Evil to be Evil of Another</u>

<u>Being Distinct From Himself.</u>

On the basis of the two sections discussed above,
at least two conclusions could be drawn. Firstly, the
controversial question of maintaining the justice of God
(according to the Mu'tazilites) and sovereignty of God
(according to the Compulsionists) remains unsolved. Se-
condly, it is evident that all Muslim scholars who deal
with this issue give more emphasis to the question of
'what God does' rather than 'what man does'.

Regarding the first conclusion, al-Ash'arī is
closer to the Jabārites' position on upholding the sovereign-
ty of God. They held that all actions are determined by God
whether they are of good or evil. This must be regarded as
'attributing evil to God'. But al-Ash'arī, though he main-
tained the createdness of evil by God, argued that it did
not follow that God is evil. Concerning the second conclu-
sion, since God's action is the main object to be discussed
rather than man's action, it involved the question of 'God's
decree'. The word 'decree' is a translation of the Arabic
word 'Qadā''. It might also be translated as 'decision'.
According to al-Ash'arī, the term 'God's decree' is not
co-extensive with the term 'evil' or 'unbelief'. In favour
of this claim, he produced his philosophical arguments which
lead to a middle path position between the two extreme

schools, that is the Mu'tazilites and the Compulsionists
(including the Jabarites).

It has been argued before that God is the éf-
ficient creator of everything in the universe in the sense
that He creates things as they really are, faith to be
good, and unbelief to be bad and false. On the other hand,
man, through experience, wants unbelief to be good and
feels that faith is painful. Since God is the true pro-
ducer of unbelief, He can never be the unbeliever, who
desires that unbelief to be good, neither can He be the
producer of faith that is painful. Al-Ash'arī then argued:

> "So if the one who produces unbelief as it really
> is cannot be the unbeliever, and if the one who
> produces faith as it really is cannot be the be-
> liever, then the intentional producer of both
> must be God Most High, Lord of the Worlds."22

The solution of the problem is therefore as fol-
lows: it has been shown that God is the producer (creator)
of evil, as it really is. He cannot be the evildoer, who
desires that evil be good (as contrary to its reality).
Therefore, from this analogy, it follows that, according
to al-Ash'arī, God creates evil to be evil for another,

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22. Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, p. 56.

not for Himself. He confirmed this claim by a statement: "But I maintain that evil is from God in the sense that He creates it as evil for another, not for Himself."[23]

With respect to the position of Abu'l-Hudhail, who argued that evil proceeds only from deficiency, it is obvious that al-Ash⁶ari should agree with this statement, for al-Ash⁶ari said, evil is bad and vain. But the point on which they differ is derived from Abu'l-Hudhail's statement that 'there is no deficiency in God'. Al-Ash⁶ari should also agree with this statement, for he is in the position of maintaining the absoluteness of God. Their difference lies in their different understanding of the actions of God, especially with regard to evil. Al-Ash⁶ari argued that God creates evil to be the evil of another, not Himself and this certainly entails that evil proceeds from the evildoer (man), not God. Therefore it is true that evil is a deficiency, but the second premise, 'there is no deficiency in God' in invalid because evil proceeds from the evildoer, not God. Since, according to al-Ash⁶ari, God creates evil to be bad and vain, whereas the evildoer wants it to be good.

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23. Ibid., p. 68.

(iv)   The Justice of God

Al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī argued in favour of the position that evil is created by God for another, not for Himself, and God could not be·held to be an evildoer or evil itself. However, this position does not directly answer the question whether God is just or unjust. At first sight, al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī's position could easily be taken as establishing God as unjust to His creatures. Thus, the question of the justice of God should be dealt with in another way. To analyse this issue, we have to define the terms involved. Since, as has been mentioned before, all Muslim scholars emphasise the question of 'what God does' rather than 'what man does', the term 'God's decree' must play a vital role in dealing with this problem. Besides that, the terms 'evil' and 'justice' should be clarified as to what al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī meant by them.

Regarding the term 'God's decree', al-A<u>sh</u>ʿarī defined it in his reply to ⌐he question whether God decrees acts of disobedience. He answered, "Yes, in the sense that He has created them, and has written them down."[24] From this statement, it is obvious that al-

24.   Ibid, p. 65.

Ash'arī defined the term as co-extensive with the term
'God's creation'. We have already discussed his posi-
tion, maintaining that God creates all in the universe
as it really is. And in this regard God is understood
to have decreed all things in the universe including
what is good and what is evil. Since evil is part of
God's creation and is also to be regarded as part of
what God has decreed, therefore, the term 'evil' is
not co-extensive with the term 'God's decree'. It can
be said that God's decree is co-extensive with God's
creation. But since the existence of evil is only a
part of God's total creation, it cannot therefore be
said that evil is co-extensive with God's decree.
From this clarification, it is unreasonable to claim
that the existence of evil in the sense that God creates
it, entails anything inconsistent with the term 'God's
decree', for evil is not co-extensive with the term
'God's decree'.

Al-Ash'arī divided 'decree' into two kinds.
Firstly, decree in the sense of command, announcement
and information; this is right. Secondly, decree in
the sense of creation; this includes right and wrong.
By using the word 'unbelief' as an example of 'evil',
he concluded:

> "We are pleased that God has decreed unbelief as
> bad and determined it as false, but we are not
> pleased that the unbeliever is thereby unbe-
> lieving because God has forbidden us that."25

It is obvious that, though al-Ash'arī believed in God's

decree, it does not follow that he is content with the

evil of the evildoer, for God does not command such

acts.

As to the term 'justice', al-Shahrastānī stated

the definition given by the orthodox including al-Ash'arī:

> "Justice, in fact, consists in giving things their
> place, and this implies acting as Lord according
> to His own will and knowledge. The opposition is
> unjustice and it is inconceivable that He should
> be wrong in His decision and unjust in His deal-
> ing."26

The term 'evil' has been defined and discussed

before and does not need to be dealt with again. Brief-

ly, evil is simply bad and vain.

As far as al-Ash'arī is concerned, if we are

to establish the 'justice of God' with respect to God's

decree and the createdness of evil by Him, we are able

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25. Ibid., p. 66.

26. A. J. Wensinck, op cit., p. 85.

to justify it through a correct use of these terms.

Al-Ash'arī has proved that God is the true
and efficient creator, for He creates things as they
really are and God's decree in the sense of creation,
involves what is good and what is evil. But it has
been stated that God's decree in the sense of command
is regarded as right, therefore the term 'evil' is
not co-extensive with the term 'God's decree'. Re-
garding the createdness of evil, God creates evil in
the sense that He creates it to be vain and bad. This
indicates that He is giving evil its place as bad an
vain. Referring to the term 'justice', that is, 'gi-
ving things their place', therefore, what God does
in the sense that He creates evil is not incompatible
with the concept of justice. Therefore, there is no
reason to say that God is unjust, though evil is be-
lieved to be a creation of God, for 'evil' is created
by God as it really is, to be bad and vain.

On the other hand, if we are to establish the
justice of God in connection with human responsibility
and human action, it demands another interpretation,
which will be taken up in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DISCUSSION OF HUMAN CAPACITY.

In his 'Discussion of the Capacity', al-Ash'arī
leads us to the conclusion that man has no causality
at all, but what God wills and creates for him. This
is significant for it is the problem with which we are
concerned. The word 'capacity' is the translation of
the Arabic word 'istitā'a', and it is sometimes trans-
lated as 'faculty'.[1] This chapter will elaborate al-
Ash'arī's arguments and his reply to the Mu'tazilite
positions on the problem concerned. This chapter will
be mainly based on his discussion in his Kitāb al-Luma'.

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1. Ibid., p. 128.

The way he introduced this problem is quite
different from the way he introduced other chapters
in his work. He does not explore the problem with the
citing of the Qur'ānic verses as he does in other chap-
ters, rather he cited them after he produced his philo-
sophical arguments as if to confirm what had been ar-
gued philosophically. Besides the fact that his 'dis-
cussion of capacity', like other chapters, attempted
to reply to the Muʿtazilite positions, it also offered
an understanding and definition of the term 'capacity'.
Using this as a basis, he proceeded to draw up his so-
lutions.

1. The Muʿtazilite Theories of Human Capacity.

Beginning from their position that human actions
are of man's own initiative, the Muʿtazilites went on
to develop their theories on the problem of human capa-
city. These differ from those of the orthodox as well
as al-Ashʿarī. To deal with the Muʿtazilite positions,
we will discuss the positions of Abu'l-Hudhail and al-
Nazzām.

Regarding Abu'l-Hudhail's theory of human capa-
city, al-Ashʿarī reported, "Man lives and is capable,

and life and capacity are both distinct from him."[2]

This position is common to the majority of the Mu'ta-

zilite scholars except al-Nazzām. To explain the na-

ture of 'capacity' he is reported to have said:

> "Capacity is an accident, something more than
> bodily soundness and health; actions of the
> heart occur at the same time as capacity,
> those of the members in the second time."[3]

This position is derived from the concept of moment where

he divided the occurrence of actions of man into two ca-

tegories. First, the actions which are incomplete in

the sense that they only occur in the human heart. Se-

cond, the actions which are complete in the sense that

they occur in reality. The former are regarded as the

actions which exist in the heart of man and the man has

to make his decision whether to choose one action or the

other. The latter are regarded as the performance of

the actions decided upon in their real existence in the

world through human capability.[4] This concept of Abu'l-

Hudhail is reported by al-Ash'arī as follows:

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2. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
   Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 229.

3. A. S. Tritton, Muslim Theology, p. 87.

4. W. M. Watt, Free Will and Predestination In Early
   Islam, p. 70.

"Man is able to act in the first, and he acts in
the first, and the act occurs in the second;
for the first moment is the moment of 'yaf⁴alu'
[will act or act] and the second moment is the
moment of 'fa⁴ala' [acted]."5

To make this concept more clear it is important to

note Abu'l-Hudhail's definition of 'moment'. He is

reported to have said:

"The moment is the division (farq) between acts
and it extends through the interval from act to
act, and with every moment there originates an
act."6

Abu'l-Hudhail's understanding of human capacity

is closely related to his doctrine of the uncreatedness

of human action by God. He had argued that the actions

of which man knows their modality such as the flight

of the arrow, are regarded as man's own actions.7 Re-

lating this statement to the problem with which we are

concerned here, it is clear that when a man has made a

decision to perform a particular action in the first mo-

ment, he is supposed to have a knowledge of its modality.

And moreover, Abu'l-Hudhail stated that capacity exists

in that moment and is realised in the second moment.

5. Al-Ash⁴arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 233, quoted from W.M. Watt, Free
Will and Predestination In Early Islam, p. 70.

6. Al-Ash⁴arī, Ibid., Vol. 2., p. 443, quoted from
W. M. Watt, ibid., p. 70.

7. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 54.

This means he holds that capacity precedes the act,
the decision exists in the first moment and the act
exists in the second moment, and these are regarded
as man's own actions.

Al-Nazzām, on the other hand had a different
position regarding whether human capacity is distinct
from man or not. He said, according to al-Ashʿarī:

"Man lives and is capable by himself, not with
the life and capacity distinct from himself."8

Regarding the question whether man acts in the first
moment or the second moment, he is reported as holding
a different view from Abu'l-Hudhail. According to al-
Nazzām:

"Man is able in the first moment to act in the
second moment. Before the existence of the se-
cond moment it is said that the act will be
performed (yufʿalu) in the second moment; when
the second moment has existed, it is said that
the act has been performed (fuʿila). That of
which 'will be performed in the second' is predi-
cated before the existence of the second is the
same as that of which 'has been performed in the
second' is predicated when the second moment has
come into being."9

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8. Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 229.

9. Ibid., p. 234, quoted from W. M. Watt, Free Will
and Predestination In Early Islam, p. 71.

When we compare the positions of Abu'l-Hudhail

and of al-Nazzām regarding the acts of man in the theory

of moment, the distinction between their views is quite

obvious. Abu'l-Hudhail explained in his theory that

the act had been started or existed in the first moment

which, as mentioned before, was the moment of decision.

Though in the moment of decision, it was in man's heart

to choose the act, Abu'l-Hudhail said the act had also

occurred in that moment, and the second moment, he re-

garded as the realization of that action. On the other

hand, al-Nazzām appeared to have maintained that in the

first moment the incomplete act or the act in the time

of decision, can be regarded as an act, but it cannot

be established as existing, unless the second moment

comes.[10]

As the consequence of this position, another

interesting question arises, whether 'capacity' can

precede the act or not. To deal with this question the

Mu'tazilites held different positions, but the majority

of them said that capacity is before the act.[11] More-

over, since Abu'l-Hudhail said that the act had been

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10. W. M. Watt, Ibid., p. 71.

11. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
    Musallin, Vol. 1., p. 230.

started in the first moment, he held that incapacity

could occur in the second moment in the sense that the

act occurred without the existence of power.[12] "A

little speech may ʾaccompany dumbness, action (move-

ment) may accompany death"[13]

Another fundamental problem to be dealt with

in the discussion of capacity is whether power is over

both it and its contrary. The Muʿtazilites in general,

after asserting that the capacity is before the act,

went on to say that power over a thing is also power

over its contrary. Moreover they said: "When one of

the contraries occurs it is necessary for man to be at-

tributed with power over it and its contrary."[14]

For Abu'l-Hudhail, the power occurs in the mo-

ment of decision, which means that in that moment, man

is regarded as a capable agent to decide to perform the

act, as well as to act, though the act really exists

in the second moment. This position is confirmed by

his claim that incapacity may exist in the second moment

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12. Ibid., Vol. 1., p. 230.

13. Ibid., Vol. 1., p. 232. quoted from W. M. Watt,
     Free Will and Predestination In Early Islam, p. 71.

14. Al-Ashʿarī, Ibid., Vol. 1., p. 231.

in the sense that the existence of the act took place

without the existence of the power of the agent. This

solution is more easily understood when we refer to his

understanding of the term 'moment'. W. M. Watt wrote:

> "The point is, however, that Abu'l-Hudhail is not
> thinking so much of time as measured by a clock,
> but rather of time as experienced, in a somewhat
> Bergsonian sense."15

When man makes a decision in the first moment, according

to Abu'l-Hudhail, he is regarded as an agent of a decided

action. The term 'decision' is equivalent to the term

'choice' (ikhtiyār). Therefore, the concept of free

hoice of human action, according to Abu'l-Hudhail star-

ted in the first moment. From this it follows that the

c acity of man exists in that moment, for man is sup-

posed to have knowledge to decide and be able to decide

and act. This makes Abu'l-Hudhail hold that man is a

responsible agent though the act is not realized in the

second moment. Therefore, non-occurrence of capacity

or power, according to Abu'l-Hudhail, results in the

non-occurrence of decision and also involves the non-

existence of choice. In this sense, it is clear that

the act does not exist and man is not its agent of

such an act. For, "When a man is not choosing (mukh-

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15. W. M. Watt, op cit., p. 70.

tār), he is not the agent of the action, to which he is
compelled (mudtarr) and forced (mujbir)."[16]

Al-Nazzām maintained that capacity is man him-
self, since he made no distinction between man and his
capacity. He then emphasized more the will of man as
the only action of man:

> "Man's only act is will and that as the result
> of suggestions which are necessary and both from
> God. The bad are not to mislead men but to make
> their choice real. The will is movement in man;
> what happens outside him is the work of God
> through nature. Those acts, which proceed im-
> mediately from will, follow it inevitably."[17]

Regarding the term 'suggestion', he connected it to his
analysis of k.owledge, and his def'nition of the term
'choice'. W. M. Watt explains:

> "Al-Nazzām also appears to have been the first to
> make the point that for a proper choice the man
> must have before his mind two 'suggestions', one
> telling him to go forward, the other to desist."[18]

Al-Nazzām said that when a man is confronted with these
two suggestions, he is to decide which one to choose.
Al-Nazzām sees the will of man as the force in man to

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16. M. Schwarz, "Acquisition (Kasb) in Early Kalām.",
    in Islamic Philosophy and The Classical Tradition.,
    edited by S. M. Stern, (Oxford, Bruno Cassirer
    Publishers Ltd., 1972), pp. 355 - 387 (p. 370).

17. A. S. Tritton, op cit., p. 93.

18. W. M. Watt, op cit., p. 73.

act, for he said that 'will is a movement in man' and 'capacity is man himself'. From these statements, it is obvious that al-Nazzām's definition of choice and the man who chooses is: "him, who when he wills (shā'a) acts, and when he does not will, does not act."[19] This position was not in agreement with the majority of the Mu tazilites, for he said that the suggestion to do and not to do occurs in the human mind.

Having looked at these arguments of the Mu'ta-zilites in brief, we shall discuss al-Ash'arī's reply to each in turn. There are many arguments of the Mu'-tazilites which we have not discussed in the preceding paragraphs and in fact there are many Mu'tazilite scho-lars involved in this debate, but in this brief inves-tigation it is impossible to analyse every respect of debate and every person involved. However, we have produced the most important points to which al-Ash'-arī responded in his Kitāb al-Luma' and elsewhere in his works.

Abu'l-Hudhail and al-Nazzām are representatives of the Mu'tazilite scholars who although belonging to

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19. M. Schwarz, op cit., p. 370.

the same school, differed among themselves in inter-

pretation of the problem which concerns us. However,

although they differed they still agreed that man has

power to act, and he is the responsible agent and the

justice of God can be upheld.

2. Al-Ash'arī's Discussion of Human Capacity.

At the beginning of his discussion of human ca-

pacity, al-Ash'arī makes clear his definition of human

capacity. The definition of the term is important for

him in dealing with the critical issue which emerges

from the subject. However, he does not define the term

'capacity' independently, but with regard to its rela-

tions to man. We have discussed al-Nazzām's position

in which he said that capacity is the man himself. In

contrast to this claim, al-Ash'arī argued that al-Nazzām's

position is untenable. If al-Nazzām's position were cor-

rect, then it would follow that, 'capacity' is a reali-

ty and a necessity of a man. This, according to al-Ash'-

arī, is not possible because man is not capable all the

time. Since man is sometimes incapable, therefore, ca-

pacity cannot be the reality of man. For this reason

he claims that human capacity is distinct from man him-

self. His argument is as follows:

"He [man] is sometimes capable and sometimes
impotent, just as he knows at one time and
does not know at another, and now moves and
again does not move. Therefore he must be
capable in virtue of something distinct from
him."20

The existence of capacity in man indicates that man is

capable. On the other hand, non-existence of capacity

indicates that he is incapable. If capacity is man

himself then to suppose that he is incapable is impos-

sible (referring to al-Nazzām's position which is that

capacity is the reality of man himself). But it is

certain that man is sometimes incapable, therefore ca-

pacity is something apart from man.

However, if we refer to al-Nazzām's position

as a whole, this argument of al-Ashʿarī's answer is

not adequate. We have already discussed al-Nazzām's

claim that when man wills he acts, when he does not will,

he does not act. The term 'impotent' is the point where

al-Ashʿarī differ from al-Nazzām. With respect to the

terms 'impotent', 'will' and 'act', it is clear, accor-

ding to al-Nazzām that they can be related as follows:

20. Al-Ashʿarī, Kitāb al-Lumaʿ, p. 76.

the existence of will entails the existence of action,
but capacity also exists in the time of suggestion. The
non-existence of will entails the non-existence of ac-
tion. The non-existence of will, according to al-Nazzām,
is a result of choosing in the first moment of the ac-
tion. And it is true that choosing not to will is done
by a capacity in the mind of man in the first moment
of the action. With regard to this problem, al-Ash'arī
in his argument of the distinction between man's capa-
city and man himself, does not dir·ctly answer the po-
sition of al-Nazzām, but his answer follows from his
understanding of human capacity.

As far as al-Ash'arī's position is concerned,
human capacity is regarded as an accident of his being.
This is due to the fact that man cannot be described
as capable at every moment. This position is in agree-
ment with the position of Abu'l-Hudhail who held that
'human capacity is an accident'. However al-Ash'arī
agreed with Abu'l-Hudhail only on this point, but in
all interpretations in which Abu'l-Hudhail depaited
from this position, al-Ash'arī adapted a different
position.

Through the theory of moment, Abu'l-Hudhail
held that capacity or power precedes the act. This con-
clusion was rejected by al-Ash'arī, who said, that ca-
pacity did not precede the act. He argued that this
was so:

> "...because the act must begin to exist either
> with the capacity at the very moment that the
> latter begins to be, or after it. If the for-
> mer is the case, then it is true and certain
> that the capacity exists with the act and for
> the act. But if the existence of the act is
> posterior to that of the capacity — and there
> is a solid proof that capacity does not endure
> — then the act must begin to exist in virtue
> of an inexistent power."21

The majority of the Mu'tazilites, especially Abu'l-
Hudhail and al-Nazzām, through the theory of moment,
fall into the second category in the above argument.
Abu'l-Hudhail claimed that the incapacity would exist
in the second moment, as has been discussed before.
Al-Ash'arī argued, if this is the claim then it would
be possible for the man to act though he is impotent
during the time when the act is realised. This is un-
thinkable.[22] The Mu'tazilite position is also untena-
ble for another reason. Al-Ash'arī argued that the ca-
pacity does not endure. According to al-Ash'arī the
endurance of the capacity would be through either of

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21. Ibid., p. 77.

22. Ibid., p. 77.

two alternatives: first, of itself or second of the existent quality of durability. He elaborated these two alternatives:

> "Now if it were to endure of itself, it would have to be its own duration, and it could not exist save as enduring. But this would ne-cessitate that it be enduring at the very moment that it begins to be. On the other hand, if it were to endure because of a duration sub-sisting in it — and duration is a quality — a quality would subsist in a quality, and an accident in an accident; and that is false."23

It is here that al-Ash'arī holds human capacity cannot exist before the action exists, as held by the Mu'tazi-lites especially Abu'l-Hudhail in his theory of moment. Since the second alternative has been proved to be fal-se, according to al-Ash'arī, it follows that the capaci-ty exists in the moment the action is realised. There-fore, it is to be regarded as capacity with the act and for the act.

Another position of the Mu'tazilites to which al-Ash'arī replied is the question of whether a power or capacity over a thing is also a power or capacity over both it and its contrary. As has been mentioned before the majority of the Mu'tazilites maintained that

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23. Ibid., pp. 77 - 78.

the power over a thing was the power over both it and

its contrary. Al-Ash'arī disagreed with this, saying

that a power over a thing is for that thing and cer-

tainly not for its contrary. If we refer to Abu'l-

Hudhail's position, it is obvious that he maintained

that the power is for both it and its contrary. This

is derived from his conception of decisions of man in

the first moment, since he said that man is capable

to decide the action, and the action is regarded as

existing in that moment, therefore, capacity is the

power of both. Al-Ash'arī argued:

> "It is a condition of created power that its
> existence include the existence of the object
> of the power. For if that were not so, and
> if it could exist for one unit of time with-
> out an object, then it could exist for two
> or more units of time without an object,
> since there is no difference between one
> unit of time and two or more units. And if
> that were so, it could exist perpetually,
> the creature possessing it being all the
> while an agent in no wise acting."24

The limitation in the definition of 'capacity' as pro-

posed by al-Ash'arī, suggests the answer to the problem

concerned. This argument is concerned with the contrast

between the nature of human power which is created and

that of God which is eternal. Regarding the problem of

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24. Ibid., p. 78.

God's power, al-Ash'arī said it is an attribute of
God, transcendent in His Being and that His power has
no temporal relationship with the objects of actions
in the temporal world. Moreover, God's power is eter-
nal in His actions.[25]

On the basis of this position, al-Ash'arī con-
cluded that the nature of human power which is created
entails the existence of its object when it exists.
If this proposition is rejected, then it would neces-
sarily follow that human power is eternal. To say this
would lead to a non-Islamic concept of being. It is
not in the compass of Islamic thought to hold that
things are non-material and have a transcendental di-
mension to their being. God alone is eternal.

Therefore al-Ash'arī concluded this argument
by saying:

> "it must be a condition of man's power that its
> existence included the existence of its object.
> Since that is so, it is impossible for a man to
> have power over both the being and its contra-
> ry. For if he had power over both, both would
> have exist; and that cannot be."26

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25. Ibid., p. 78.

26. Ibid., p. 78.

The non-Islamic element which we mentioned
above is in connection with the statement that things
are non-material and have a transcendental dimension
to their being. This statement is closely related to
Neoplatonism. Regarding the compilations of Greek
works which were made available to Islam, it has been
stated that:

> "Those two Neo-Platonic compilations contain vir-
> tually all the germinal elements that went into
> Islamic Neo-Platonism: the utter transcendence
> of the First Principle or God; the procession
> or emanation of things from Him; the role of
> reason as the instrument of God in his creation,
> and the locus of the forms of things, as well
> as the source of the illumination of the human
> mind; the position of the soul at the periphery
> of the intelligible world and the link or 'ho-
> rizon' between the intelligible and the sensi-
> ble worlds; and finally the contempt in which
> matter was held, as the basest creation or ema-
> nation from the One and the lowest rung in the
> cosmic scale."27

In this quotation M. Fakhry is not dealing directly with
our subject of discussion — but with the situation of
Islamic thought at a time before al-Ash'arī — but the
list given is obviously relevant to our problem. How-
ever we have not precisely pointed out the evidence for
this claim. What is certain in this regard, according

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27. M. Fakhry, A History of Islamic Philosophy, p. 44.

to al-Ash'arī, is that if any one rejects the claim

that human power or capacity is created, he will fall

into non-Islamic thought. Therefore, in rejecting the

Neo-Platonic concepts, he denies that the nature and

being of the world as well as human power originate

from eternity. And he also claims that human power

and capacity regarded as material being exist and re-

late to temporal objects.

His claim that the power of a thing is for that

thing and not for its contrary, needs a further elabo-

ration. Al-Ash'arī adopted another approach to explain

and prove that a power cannot affect two motions. He

said, if one power could affect two motions, then it

would entail two alternatives, which are equally impos-

sible. The two alternatives are: (a) it would be a

power over two motions which took place simultaneously

or (b) it would take place continuously or consecutive-

ly. If (a) were the case, then these two motions would

exist in one place and one time. This would be impossi-

ble because the distinct effects would exist in a single

point, that is, it is impossible to presume that in a

single point, occurs two distinct effects at one time.

If (b) were the case then, both of these motions would

not co-exist with one another, and it has been proved

before that capacity does not endure. For these reasons,

it is clear that a single action cannot affect two
motions.[28]

On the basis of the previous arguments on his
understanding of human capacity, al-Ash'arī goes on
to argue that human capacity is closely related to the
act which occurs from it and moreover he maintained
that this capacity exists simultaneously with the act.
He said:

> "Another proof that the capacity is with the act
> and for the act is the fact that he for whom God
> does not create a capacity cannot acquire anything.
> Hence since he cannot acquire the act if there be
> no capacity it is certain that the acquisition
> exists only because the capacity exists. And
> this is equivalently an affirmation that the ca-
> pacity exists with the act and for the acts."[29]

In this additional proof, al-Ash'arī introduced
the term 'acquisition' for the first time in this dis-
cussion. This argument is also used to complete his
treatment of the problem which has been discussed phi-
losophically in the preceding paragraphs.

In the previous arguments, al-Ash'arī discussed
the problem of human capacity independently of its re-

28. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 79.

29. Ibid., p. 79.

lation to God's creation of man's capacity. This
shows that human capacity, though created by God,
can be discussed within its own being and reality.
In the previous discussions, the only terms analy-
sed were power and capacity, but in this additional
argument, al-Ash'arī includes the term acquisition
as well as God's power.

Beginning from his position that 'capacity
exists with the act and for the act', he goes on to
discuss the relationship of this capacity to the agent
in which the act takes place. Firstly he takes up
the bodily instrument of the agent:

> "The nonexistence of limb entails the nonexistence
> of the power, and the nonexistence of the power
> entails the nonexistence of the acquisition. For
> if the limb does not exist, the power will not
> exist. But it is because of the nonexistence of
> the power that the acquisition is impossible —
> when the limb does not exist — and not because
> of the nonexistence of the limb. If the limb
> were inexistent, and the power existed, the ac-
> quisition would take place."30

In this argument, al-Ash'arī used 'limb' as an example
of a bodily instrument of man. The non-existence of the
action is not because of the non-existence of the bodily
instrument, but because of the absence of power

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30. Ibid., p. 80.

of the act. For if the bodily instrument, in this case

the 'limb' does not exist, resulting in the existence

of acquisition, then it would entail the proposition

that when the limb exists then it necessarily follows

that acquisition exists. But, as has been discussed

before, al-Ash'arī said that man is sometimes capable

and sometimes incapable, and furthermore, though the

limb of man exists man is still incapable. For this

reason it is unthinkable to suppose that the existence

of the limb entails the existence of acquisition. There-

fore the absence of the bodily instrument of man is not

regarded as a fundamental cause of the absence of ac-

quisition.[31]

Secondly, al-Ash'arī took up the accident of the

agent and its relation to capacity and acquisition. To

begin with, al-Ash'arī discussed 'life' which according

to most theologians is the most fundamental accident

among others. They said this because when life does not

exist then other accidents and attributes or qualities

do not exist at all. Al-Ash'arī said that the non-exis-

tence of life entails the non-existence of the acquisi-

tion, and elaborated this claim as follows:

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31. Ibid., p. 80.

> "Yes, because when life does not exist the power
> does not exist; and it is because of the non-
> existence of the power that the acquisition is
> impossible, not because of the non-existence
> of life. Do you not see that life can exist
> along with impotence, so that a man does not
> acquired?"32

Here, again, he comes to the same conclusion as in his

discussion of the bodily instrument of the agent. The

absence of life does not entail the absence of acquisi-

tion, but the absence of acquisition is due to the ab-

sence of power as he had claimed in regard to the bodily

instrument. The reason he put forward follows from the

premise that though the agent has life, it does not ne-

cessarily hold that he has power. This premise is also

used by al-Ash'arī in rejecting Abu'l-Hudhail's position

that 'capacity would exist in the second moment'. Al-

Ash'arī said that then an act of a man could exist af-

ter several hundred years even though in these several

hundred years the man could be impotent.

On the question of the knowledge and skill of

the agent and their relation to 'power' and 'acquisition',

al-Ash'arī used the same approach as in the case of those

of the bodily instrument and life. He said that the ab-

sence of knowledge or skill does not necessarily entail

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32. Ibid., p. 80

the absence of action or acquisition, but the absence
of knowledge or skill entail the absence of power. The
absence of power is the true cause of the absence of ac-
quisition or action. By using the example of the know-
ledge of 'how to weave' and 'the power to weave', he
argued:

> "and since knowledge of how to do it may be accom-
> panied by impotence, we know that the nonexistence
> of the weaving is due only to the nonexistence of
> the power to do it, and that, were God to make it
> a custom to create the power to do it along with
> the nonexistence of the knowledge of how to do
> it, the weaving would indubitably take place."33

From these three arguments dealing with the re-
lation of power and acquisition to the bodily instru-
ments as well as accidents or qualities of the agent,
it is clear that al-Ash‘arī put a strong emphasis on
the role of 'power' or 'capacity' in order to realise
the action or the acquisition of man. The absence of
acquisition is not immediately due to the absence of
such bodily instruments or accidents or qualities, but
due to the absence of power though the power itself oc-
curs through them.

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33. Ibid., p. 81.

Finally, al-Ash'arī summarised his position on
this problem by stating that the absence of 'allowing'
(this would include God's creation of power) would en-
tail the absence of the acquisition. Analogically, the
existence of 'allowing' would entail the existence of
acquisition. This is sometimes presented as a an objec-
tion to his position.[34] Furthermore, as if the answer
to the question of existence of constitution entails
the existence of the acquisition or action, he answered:

> "That is just what we say, because the constitu-
> tion supports only what subsists in it. And
> every objection they urge concerning this point
> is to be answered as we answered the objections
> regarding the limb and life, because the non-
> existence of the acquisition is not due to the
> nonexistence of such things."[35]

Al-Ash'arī's solution to the question of the bo-
dily instrument of the agent and its relation to 'power'
or 'capacity' and 'acquisition' is a direct reply to the
position of Mu'ammar. Mu'ammar stated that "free will
is to be described as accident and its existence is re-
garded as the action of the bodies themselves."[36] It
is clear that when Mu'ammar spoke of the occurrence of
human actions, he argued that their occurrence was due
to the action of the bodily instrument of the agent. He

34. Ibid., p. 81.
35. Ibid., p. 81.
36. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 56.

made the body the true cause of the occurrence of those actions. From these premises Mu'ammar concluded that human actions needed no creator at all. Although we did not discuss Mu'ammar's position of 'capacity' in particular in this chapter, we have already discussed his position on the question of human action in the previous chapter and this conclusion is a consequence of his position regarding human action.

When al-Ash'arī proposed his solution to the question of an agent's qualities, such as life and knowledge and their relation to capacity or power and acquisition, he was also dealing with al-Nazzām's position as well as that of Abu'l-Hudhail. First of all al-Nazzām stated that 'capacity is the man himself'. This position is close to Mu'ammar's. Moreover al-Nazzām argued that when a man wills he acts and when he does not will, he does not act. Moreover he held that will is a movement in man. From these statements, it is obvious that al-Nazzām emphasized the quality of will in the agent as the cause of the occurrence of the actions. In other words, the occurrence of the actions of the agent is due to the occurrence of will. Though al-Ash'arī in his three sets of arguments regarding this problem did not directly deal with the quality of will of the agent,

he did say that "the answer respecting the life is like
that respecting the limb"[37] and he gave the same formula
with respect to the quality of knowledge. Therefore it
is reasonable to hold that this answer could also be
applied to the quality of 'will' of the agent.

Up to this point al-Ash'arī maintained that, in
opposition to the position of al-Nazzām, within the li-
mit of the term 'capacity', capacity is distinct from
the agent. His claim that capacity exists with the act
and for the act is regarded as his direct answer to the
position of the majority of the Mu'tazilites' saying
that capacity perdures through the occurrence of the
action in the second moment. And it is regarded as his
answer to the position of Abu'l-Hudhail who said that
capacity occurred immediately before the action in the
first moment. And finally he argued that the occurrence
of acquisition is due to the occurrence of capacity, not
depending on the occurrence of the bodily instrument and
qualities and accidents of the agent. And on the other
hand, the absence of acquisition is due to the absence
of capacity and not because of the absence of the bodi-
ly instrument of the agent and accidents and qualities

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37. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 80.

of the agent. From all these points, al-Ash'arī claimed

that capacity is created by God, as has been discussed

before. Moreover, he said that the capacity is with the

act and for the act and it is due to the fact that he

for whom God does not create a capacity cannot acquire

anything.

3. The Discussion of the Question of Incapacity.

After the discussion of capacity is confirmed

by citing several passages of al-Qur'ān as proof texts

in supporting his thesis on capacity, al-Ash'arī then

introduced the question of incapacity (al-'Ajz). This

problem was introduced by the question of God's obli-

gations and its relation to the incapability of the

agent. As in his discussion of capacity, al-Ash'arī

begins by making several important distinctions regar-

ding term.

In Abu'l-Hudhail's theory of moment, in which

he claimed that the statement, 'man acts in the first

moment, and the act occurs in the second moment', it

can be seen that this would entail the proposition that

this act is left unformed between the first and second

moment. This proposition is assumed by al-Ash'arī.
To this proposition, al-Ash'arī added, if that is the
case, then it would be possible for incapacity to exist
in between these two moments and so the act would occur
while the agent was incapable.

Based on the above hypothesis, al-Ash'arī then
set out to tackle the problem of God's obligation and
its relation to the agent who is incapable of fulfil-
ling it. He agreed that God punishes the unbeliever
because of his action of unbelief. According to al-
Ash'arī, this does not mean that man is unable to ful-
fil the obligation of God which is imposed on him. The
reason he put forward is as follows:

> "If you mean by your words that he [man] is in-
> capable of believing because of his impotence
> to do so —— no. But if you mean that he is
> incapable of believing because he omits to do
> so and is preoccupied with the contrary of be-
> lief —— yes."38

From this argument, it is clear that al-Ash'arī agreed
that God's obligation is imposed on a man who is unable
to believe, in so far as he is an unbeliever, because
such a man is impotent to believe. On the other hand,
God does not impose an obligation on the unbeliever,

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38. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 83.

in so far as he is an unbeliever, who fails to believe

and includes in his understanding misconceptions of

belief. For the former, al-Ash'arī is trying to main-

tain that he (the unbeliever) could in some other time

be a believer, when his impotence in believing is gone.

The latter which is more complicated is elaborated as

follows, God does not impose an obligation on the un-

believer, who is incapable of fulfilling that obliga-

tion. Al-Ash'arī argued that in this case the inabi-

lity of the unbeliever to fulfil an obligation is owing

to the fact that the unbeliever is preoccupied with

the contrary belief. He said:

> "Inability to do a thing is had when both the
> thing and its contrary are beyong one's power.
> Hence it is impossible for one who is unable
> to do a thing to be unable simply because he
> omits to do it."39

This shows that within the limit of his under-

standing of incapacity, the realisation of the unbelief

of the unbeliever cannot be the agent of the contrary,

that is, belief. Thus, on the basis of the explanation

above, al-Ash'arī argues:

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39. Ibid., p. 83.

> "If the power to do a thing were also a power
> to do its contrary, by analogy with inability,
> then help to do a thing would have to be help'
> also to do its contrary, by analogy with the
> fact that inability to do a thing is also in-
> ability to do its contrary."40

Therefore from this argument, it is clear that the power

to act is not the power of not acting. Then, in other

words, the incapacity of belief in this case, is not

in any sense, according to al-Ash'arī the incapability

of disbelief. Since this is true, he argued:

> "So if such a comparison be impossible, their al-
> legation is vain and their objection collapses,
> and there is no necessity of comparing the po-
> wer with the inability, since there is no rea-
> son which brings them together, and since po-
> wer does not belong to the genus of inability."41

The important point from the above quotation is that al-

Ash'arī is trying to hold the claim that incapacity is

not the analogy of power.

After his explanation on incapacity as the basis

of his understanding of the term, he goes on to discuss

the relation between the bodily instrument of the agent

and its relation to incapacity, as he did in the question

of capacity discussed before. As if to answer the objec-

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40. Ibid., p. 83.

41. Ibid., p. 84.

tion whether God can enjoin an obligation on a thing

in the absence of a limb (bodily instrument) he rep-

lied:

> "No, because a man is commanded only to accept
> or omit, and when the limb does not exist there
> can be neither acceptance nor omission."42

Moreover, he argued, since the nonexistence of this bodi-

ly instrument which is needed to execute the act com-

manded would entail the impossibility of acceptance or

omission of that command, then there is no command in

this case, because, as in the previous case, incapable

here simply means unable to do the thing or its contra-

ry. Therefore, it is impossible for God to command a

man who lacks of limb, and the absence of a limb entails

the absence of power. This is also true in the case of

commanding a man to pay Zakāt (a religious tax) who has

no money.43

To conclude his philosophical discussion of the

problem of incapacity, al-Ash'arī attempts to deal with

the problem of the act and its contrary which are both

covered by incapacity. He said, due to the limitation

of what cannot be done by a man who has no power at all,

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42. Ibid., p. 84.

43. Ibid., p. 85.

it is impossible to suppose that the incapability to

do a thing is distinct from the incapability to do every

other thing. Furthermore, if death comes about, then

there would be no actions at all. In this case if the

incapability of doing a thing is distinct from incapa-

bility of doing every other thing, then it would be

necessary to say that the nonexistence of acts would be

due to the existence of all inabilites. Al-Ash‘arī

concluded:

> "This would necessitate the presence in one atom
> of two inabilities and two deaths. But if this
> were possible, one of the two could be supplanted
> by life with the result that the same atom would
> be simultaneously living and dead —— which is
> absurb."44

The above argument serves to show the impossibility of

maintaining the position that the 'incapacity to do a

thing is distinct from the inability to do every other

thing'. Thus, in this argument, al-Ash‘arī tries to

elaborate his understanding of incapacity with regard

to the act and its contrary, enlarging the 'incapacity'

to include both the act as well as its contrary.

Following these discussions as well as the dis-

cussions of the previous chapters, we shall focus on

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44. Ibid., p. 85.

al-Ash'arī's philosophical solution to the problem of
Free Will and Predestination in the following chapter.
To do this, we shall discuss it in the context of his
theory of acquisition, the term which was discussed
briefly in the previous chapter, especially in "The
Createdness of Human Action' and 'The Discussion of
Capacity'。

CHAPTER SIX

THE THEORY OF ACQUISITION.

In the previous chapters, we have already discussed the conceptions of the knowledge of God, human action and human capacity as viewed by al-Ash‘arī. These conceptions have a very close relation to the theory of acquisition which we are to discuss in this chapter. As far as the theory of acquisition is concerned, it was discussed long before al-Ash‘arī. The concept was introduced by earlier scholars of Islam. For the purpose of our present study, we shall discuss the positions of Dirār b. ‘Amr (728 – 815 A.D) and al-Najjār (who, although his dates are uncertain, was a contemporary of Dirār b. ‘Amr). The main aim of this chapter is to discuss al-Ash‘arī's arguments and their rela-

tion to the problems discussed in the previous chapters.

1. The Theory of Acquisition According to

    Dirār b. ʿAmr and al-Najjār.

In the Muʿtazilite genealogy, Dirār is reputed
to have been the founder of the Basrite School.[1] He
was an influential scholar during his time because he
was a lecturer at the University of Basrah, which was
also called the 'Majlis' (Assembly).[2] Though he was a
scholar of the Muʿtazilites, his doctrine of human ac-
tions was not in agreement with the majority of the Muʿ-
tazilites, since he held that human actions are created
by God. Al-Ashʿarī reported:

> "The ground of the separation of Diʾ r b. ʿAmr
> from the Muʿtazila was his view that the acts
> of men are created, and that one act comes
> from two agents (fāʾilān), one of whom creates
> it, namely God, while the other acquires it
> (iktasaba), namely man; and that God is the
> agent of the acts of men in reality, and that
> men are the agents of them in reality."3

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1. W. Montgemory Watt, Free Will and Predestination
    In Early Islam, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 62.

3. Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
    Musallin, Vol. 1. p. 281, quot d from W. Montgemory
    Watt, Ibid., pp. 104 - 105. See also al-Baghdādī,
    Kitāb al-Farq bain al-Firaq, edited by Muhammad Badr,
    (Cairo, 1910), p. 201.

From the above report, it is clear that Dirār
maintained the omnipotence of God and at the same time
that man was a responsible agent of his own acts.
Since Dirār held that God and men are the agents of hu-
man actions in their reality, then it is important to
discuss his ideas about God and man and their relation
to the human actions. This will serve to show his over-
all theory of acquisition.

Dirār's idea of the Will of God involves two ca-
tegories:

> "(1) That which is the thing willed or, in other
> words, the will to create is the act of creation.
> This formula means that the divine will needs
> no instruments, but passes at once from plan to
> performance. The statement that God's being
> willing is His essence refers to this aspect
> of His will. (2) That which is command, or act,
> or the creation of man's acts. One act can be
> the work of two agents; man's acts are done by
> both God and man; God created them, man acquired
> them."4

This idea of God's will is used to maintain that there
are two kinds or categories of actions. The first cate-
gory is compulsory creation which does not involve human
beings, since they are not in need of any instrument.

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4. A. S. Tritton, _Muslim Theology_, p. 69.

Whereas, the second category is voluntary actions of man

which is realised through God's activity of creation

and man's activity of action. Moreover, both God and

man are regarded as the real agents of the act.

Regarding Dirār's conception of man, Dirār said
that man is body, and this body is composed of accidents.
Starting from this claim he is reported by al-Ash'arī
to have made the following statements:

> "He holds that capacity is before the act and with
> the act and it is part of him who is capable."5

Furthermore, regarding Dirār's understanding of 'body'

and 'capacity', al-Ash'arī reported that Dirār held that

colour and the like are part of the 'body'. Al-Ash'arī

goes on:

> "He is reported to have said that capacity and
> life are also parts of the body."6

These are some of the views of Dirār regarding the crea-

tion of human action by God and acquisition by man.

What is more significant in this connection is that Di-

rār saw man as an active agent and the true agent of

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5. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
   Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 281. See also al- Baghdādī
   op cit., p. 201.

6. Al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
   Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 345.

his actions, quite apart from God. This follows from

his statement that God creates the actions in reality

and man acts in reality.

We turn now to al-Najjār who was a Murji'ite.

Regarding his position on the problem of human actions,

al-Ash'arī gives a detailed account, which is relevant

for our purpose and can be divided into two sections:

firstly, al-Najjār's idea about God and secondly, his

idea about man. On the first he held that:

(1) "There is nothing in the sphere of God's sovereignty
     except what He wills; He is ceaselessly willing
     that what He knows will be in its time, and will-
     ing that what He knows will not be will not be."7

(2) "In respect of the assertion of the unity of God
     al-Najjār held the doctrine of the Mu'tazila,
     except with regard to His will and generosity;
     he opposed them in respect of Qadar; and he held
     the doctrine of postponement (irjā' — the dis-
     tinguishing mark of the Murji'a)."8

On the second, that is, his idea about man and his ca-

pacity, he said:

(1) "Man is body and spirit; he has a phenomenal power,
     that of acquisition, which is incompatible with
     creative power."9

(2) "One power is not sufficient for the performance of

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7. Ibid., p. 283, quoted from W. Montgomery Watt, p. 106.

8. Ibid., p. 285, quoted from W. Montgomery Watt, p. 107.

9. A. S. Tritton, op cit., p. 72.

two acts, but for each act a power is originated along with the origination of the act; the power does not endure; the existence or non-existence of the act depends on the existence or non-existence of the power."10

(3) "Man does not act in another, but only performs acts in himself, such as movements, rest, volitions, cognitions, unbelief, faith; man does not make pain, nor perception, nor vision; he makes nothing at all by way of 'generation' (tawallud)."11.

Then, with regard to the relationship of God's creative power and that of man's acquisition, al-Najjār explained that human action is created by God and man only acquires it. This is his theory of acquisition. He said, according to al-Ash‘arī:

(1) "The acts of men are created by God; men are the doers of them."12

(2) "The power (istitā‘a) may not precede the act; the help (‘awn) from God is originated in the time (hāl) of the act along with the act, and this is the power."13

On the question of believer and unbeliever and their relations to God's Will and obligations, al-Najjār held that:

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10. Al-Ash‘arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn Wa'khtilāf al-Musallin, Vol. 1., p. 283, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, Free Will and Predestination In Early Islam, pp. 106 - 107.

11. Ibid., p. 284, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, p. 107.

12. Ibid., p. 283, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, p. 106.

13. Ibid., p. 283, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, p. 106.

(1) "The power of faith is succour, right direction,
grace, kindness, benefit, guidance (tawfīq, tas-
dīd, fadl, niᶜma, ihsān, hudā): the power of un-
belief is confusion, abandonment, affliction,
evil (dalāl, khidhlān, balā', sharr)."14

(2) "The believer is a believer, one following the true
religion (muhtadin), whom God succours and guides;
the unbeliever is abandoned, one whom God aban-
dons and leads astray, on whose heart He makes
an imprint (or 'sets a seal' — tàbaᶜa), whom He
does not guide nor regard; God creates his unbe-
lief, and does not do what is good for him; if
God regarded him and did what was good for him,
he would be sound."15

(3) "God has imposed duties on the unbelievers which
they are not able to perform, not because of any
inborn imtence or accidental infirmity, but be-
cause they do not do them (li-tarki-him la-hu)."16

From these reports, we can conclude that Dirār
and al-Najjār are in agreement in maintaining that human
actions are created by God. This is in opposition to the
position of the Muᶜtazilites in general. Both wrote be-
fore the time of al-Ashᶜarī and were regarded as the up-
holders of the theory of acquisition. We have brought
them into our discussion in this chapter in order to com-
pare the solution of al-Ashᶜarī regarding the theory of
acquisition. Though we have mentioned before that both

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14. Ibid., p. 283, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, p. 107

15. Ibid., pp. 283 - 284, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt,
p. 107.

16. Ibid., p. 284, quoted from W. Montgemory Watt, p. 107.

Ḍirār and al-Najjār agreed in maintaining the created-
ness of human actions, they had of course different in-
terpretations of the problem. The points at which they
diverged are firstly, the question of the createdness
of human action by God in reality and man performing ·
that created action in reality; secondly, the question
of the relationship of capacity and act; and thirdly,
the interpretation of generated effects.[17] We shall
discuss these differences together with their relevance
for the position of al-Ashʿarī later in this chapter.

Having the previous discussion as the background
to the theory of acquisition as viewed by the early Muslim
scholars and al-Ashʿarī's predecessors, we are now to ela-
borate al-Ashʿarī's interpretation of the subject. How
is the theory of acquisition dealt with by al-Ashʿarī?
How does the theory of acquisition as interpreted by al-
Ashʿarī compare with its use by his predecessors? These
questions are the main questions to be discussed in this
chapter.

2. Al-Ashʿarī's discussions of the Theory of Acquisition.

As far as al-Ashʿarī is concerned, God has fore-

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17. H.A. Wolfson, The Philosophy of the Kalām, (Cam-
bridge, Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 670.

knowledge, in the sense that He knows the past, the present and the future. He also holds that human actions are created by God. Moreover he said that good and evil are the creations of God. Human power or capacity is also the creation of God. On the other hand, man is still regarded as a responsible agent for what he does. He also maintained that God is a just God though evil is created by Him. These positions seem to contradict one another. It is through his theory of acquisition, that al-Ash'arī tried to reconcile these contradictory positions and held that they are not inconsistent with the fact that God is a just God, and God is all-powerful.

The following questions are posed to explore his philosophical treatment of the subject. If we are to assert that God has foreknowledge in the sense that He knows everything in the past, present, and future and to assert that everything created in the universe is created by God's capability then what is man's share of responsibility for his actions?. In other words, how is man considered as a responsible agent of his actions since God knows these actions before they come into existence and He wills and creates them?. Is the concept of human responsibility therefore inconsistent

with the fact that God knows how a man will act before

that action exists through man's acquisition?. Is the

concept of human responsibility inconsistent with the

fact that God creates everything?. On the other hand,

is the justice of God inconsistent with the fact that

God creates evil in the universe?. Is it inconsistent

with the fact that God creates the power or capacity of man

to perform actions?. Moreover, is the omnipotence of

God inconsistent with the fact that man has the act through

acquisition?. These problems are solved in the follow-

ing way, in al-Ash'arī's philosophical arguments of the

theory of acquisition.

As far as the works of al-Ash'arī are concerned,[18]

the term 'acquisition' was introduced in his discussion

of the problems which are closely related to the question

of God's power and God's will as well as of man's action

and man's power or capacity. In his Kitāb al-Luma', the

term is introduced in three separate discussions. First-

ly, the term occurs in his 'Discussion of the Qur'ān and

the Divine Will'. In his answer to the question regard-

ing the speech of God, he argued:

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18. Kitāb al- Luma' and Al-Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna.

"If God produces in another a necessary writing,
that other is writing of necessity; and simi-
larly, if the writing be an acquisition, that
other is writing by acquisition. So if God
were to produce His speech in another, that
other would have to be speaking by the speech
of God."19

This argument is related to the problem of the speech

of God and we shall not discuss this argument because

it has little interest in our discussion. Secondly,

the term also occurs in his 'Discussion of the Qadar'.

In this discussion, al-Ash'arī introduces the term ac-

quisition by posing the problem in the form of a ques-

tion, showing that the term is assumed already to be

well known to the reader. The question is this: "Why

do you claim that the acquisition of creatures is created

by God."20 To answer this question, al-Ash'arī cited se-

veral passages of al-Qur'ān in support of his position.

Therefore it is more theological than philosophical,

and outside of our share of interest. However, the term

is further analysed later in this discussion as a synonym

for human voluntary actions. From the question quoted

above and the explanation in the later discussion, al-

Ash'arī maintains that human acquired actions are crea-

ted by God. Thirdly, the term appears in his 'Discussion

19. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 32.

20. Ibid., p. 53.

of the Capacity'. After he argued that capacity is

distinct from man, that the capacity occurs for the

act and with the act, he concluded with his additional

argument that if God does not create capacity for man

to perform his action, there will be no action performed

by man. This argument is used to prove that capacity

is with the act and for the act and also used to prove

that human capacity or power to perform an action is

created by God. He said:

> "Hence, since he (man) cannot acquire the act
> if there be no capacity, it is certain that
> the acquisition exists only because the ca-
> pacity exists."21

Here again, al-Ash'arī used the term acquisition in re-

lation to human action of the voluntary kind. This ar-

gument is used to show the relationship between God's

power and man's acquired action and capacity. Both

man's acquired action and his capacity are regarded

as the creation of God, in the sense that if God does

not create the action, there will be no action, and if

God does not create the capacity, there will be no capa-

city. And furthermore, according to this argument, the

occurrence of acquisition depends on God's will to cre-

ate both the action and the capacity. Therefore, the

term here is introduced as a synonym of human volunta-

ry action.

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21. Ibid., p. 79.

The term also appears in his work Al-Ibāna ⁶An

Usūl al-Diyāna. In this work the term is introduced

in his 'Chapter containing the Kalām concernning God's

Will'. He said:

> "There cannot be, under the authority of God, any
> acquisition (iktisāb) on the part of human beings
> that God does not will, just as there cannot be
> any universally recognized act of God's own that
> He does not will."22

Though in this argument, al-Ash⁶arī stated the term 'ac-

quisition' in connection with the will of God, he still

meant the term acquisition to refer to the action of man

in the voluntary manner. From all these quotations, it

is clear that the term 'acquisition' has been used to

apply to the voluntary actions of man, as opposed to

the actions which are regarded as compulsory.

Before we procede any further to elaborate this

theory, it is worthwhile and important to give a detailed

account of al-Ash⁶arī's doctrine of human action and its

relation to its agent. As far as human actions are con-

cerned, according to al-Ash⁶arī, they can be divided in-

to two categories. Firstly, there are actions in which

man has no power to accept or to prevent them from occur-

ring; this is regarded as compulsory action. The agent

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22. Al-Ash⁶arī, Al-Ibāna ⁶An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 108.

of this action is God, and man has nothing to do with
it. The second category is voluntary action in which
God is the true and efficient creator and they occur
through human activity, thus they are regarded as man's
by acquisition. Extending this we can say that God
creates the acquired actions as they really are, then
man acquires them. This point is described as the es-
sence of the theory of acquisition.

His argument in favour of the distinction bet-
ween the two categories of actions is as follows:

> "the man who goes and comes, and approaches and
> reeedes, is quite different from one who sha-
> kes from palsy or shivers from fever."23

The former are regarded as acquired actions whereas the
latter are regarded as compulsory actions. To define
the compulsory actions, al-Ash'arī said:

> "For necessity [compulsory] means that to which
> the thing is constrained and compelled and
> forced, and from which it can find no way to
> get free or to escape, even though it strive
> to be freed from it and want to escape from
> it and exhaust its endeavors to do so."24

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23. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 59.

24. Ibid., p. 59.

This distinction, according to al-Ash'arī, would be ac-
knowledged by everyone. Using the same method of argu-
ment, that is, the method based on the function of human
knowledge, the Mu'tazilites arrived at a different argu-
ment; they asserted that:

> "a man feels intuitively that a thing happens or
> does not happen according to his will. He can
> move or not move. Unless he had the power to
> produce what he wanted, this feeling would be
> inexplicable."25

From this statement, it is clear that the Mu'tazilites
hold that the existence of an act is dependent on man's
own will and intention, and this follows the proposi-
tion that if man wants movement, movement will exist.
This makes the Mu'tazilites upholders of the doctrine
of Free Will, or the so-called Libertarians in Islam,
who hold that voluntary actions are the actions of man's
intentions and activity. On the other hand, al-Ash'arī
makes this distinction in order to limit the discussion
to that of voluntary action or acquired action.

With regard to the problem of the createdness
of human acquisition by God, al-Ash'arī pointed out
that God is not only the sole creator of acquisition

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25. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi 1-
Kalām, p. 35.

(acquired action) as well as of compulsory action, but
God is also the only real agent of both kinds of actions.
Al-Ash'arī said:

> "It has no agent who makes it as it really is save
> God, and no one with power over it so that it will
> be as it really is, in the sense that he creates
> it, save God."26

In this statement, al-Ash'arī guarded himself from claiming
that man is the real maker or doer of his own action, but
the performance of such an action is to be left to man,
so that man is regarded as the responsible agent for what
he has done. He maintained that the true creator of hu-
man acquired action is God alone. Though this problem
has been discussed in the previous chapter, it is worth
elaborating it in the present discussion because it has
a very close relation to the theory of acquisition in par-
ticular.

(i) Man Acquires a Created Action With a Created
    Capacity.
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Since we have discussed from al-Ash'arī's theory
that God creates the acquisition of man, and man acquires
it, the problem arises: how are these two agents (God the

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26. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 56.

creator and man the acquirer) of the one same action
connected, and how does man acquire that action which
is created by God?. With regard to the relationship
between the act of God and of man, al-Ash⁶arī holds ·
that the fact that man acquired a move means that the
action of movement is attributed to him, while that '
same movement is created by God in the sense that God
creates it as it really is. This means that the move-
ment is not created by man because 'create' is defined
as making (creating) a thing as it really it is. On
the other hand, when we say that God creates a movement,
this does not mean that God Himself moves. According
to al-Ash⁶arī, the definition of 'some one moves' means
that the movement inheres in him. In this case it is
impossible to suppose that the movement inheres in God.
Al-Ash⁶arī gave two passages to support this claim in
his Kitāb al- Luma⁶. Firstly, he said:

> "Similarly, if the acquisition is itself proof of
> an agent who makes it as it really is, it does
> not necessarily prove that the agent who makes
> it as it really is is also the one who acquires
> it: nor does it prove that the one who acquires
> it as it really is is also the agent who makes
> it as it really it."27

Secondly, he said:

> "If I were the creator of my acquisition, when it

27. Ibid., pp. 57 - 58.

> is really a creation of God, then God Himself
> would be moving by the necessary motion which
> He creates in one who moves thereby. Since
> that is impossible, because God creates it
> as the motion of another, we are not cons-
> trained by what they say, because our ac-
> quisition is a creation of another."28

From these arguments, it is clear, according

to al-Ash'arī, that God creates the acquisition of man,

just as he creates the compulsory actions. The acquisi-

tion is thus performed by man in virtue of the power

created by God in him.

Moreover, if the acquisition of man is not to

be regarded as the creation of God, it would entail

the position that the universe also is not the crea-

tion of God. In other words, if the proof of the crea-

tedness of human acquired action is invalid, it would

weaken the proof that the universe was created by God

and not by some other being. Al-Ash'arī explained:

> "Moreover, the same would have to be said of the
> motions of the celestial spheres and of the union
> and composition of the parts of the heavans. And
> if this were so, these things would cease to prove
> that God made them as they are, and one could not
> be sure but that the parts of the heavans have a
> uniter who is not God, and the celestial spheres
> and arranger, and the stars a mover who is not
> God."29

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28. Ibid., p. 62.

29. Ibid., p. 61.

We have already discussed the view that God
gives us power to perform our acquisition. If that is
the case, a question arises: is it not true when God
gave us power to perform our acquisition, God would
have to relinquish His own power?. As far as al-Ashʿ-
arī's theory is concerned, this does not follow. When
God gives us the power to perform, He does not relinquis
His own power, since:

> "For that over which God creates in us power is a
> fortiori the object of His power, just as His
> knowledge of a thing is superior to that which
> He creates in us, and His hearing of a thing is
> superior to that which He creates in us."30

To the problem of how man acquires an act which
is created by God, al-Ashʿarī explained that this action
is originated, takes place in time and space, just as
with compulsory action. This is in line with his solu-
tion to the problem of capacity and its relation to the
act. Both problems we have discussed in detail in the
previous chapter. We have discussed the question of
the acquired actions which take place in time and space
in our discussion of the creation of both compulsory and
voluntary actions by God.31 We have also discussed the

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30. Ibid., p. 62.

31. Supra, Chapter 3, p. 77.

argument that capacity is with the act and for the
act.[32] Corresponding to these two solutions, we can
see quite clearly al-Ash'arī's solution regarding the
question of how man acquired the action which is creat-
ed by God. In so far as the acquisition is created by
God, it can only exist if and when God creates in man
the action as acquisition and the power to perform it.
Al-Ash'arī argued:

> "And when He refrains from making it to be an
> acquisition of ours, it is impossible for us
> to acquire it. So what we have said proves
> that we acquire a thing only after God has
> created it as an acquisition of ours."[33]

The power of man in this regard is described as
distinct from man not part of him. The reason for this
claim has been discussed in the previous chapter.[34] Brief-
ly stated, if the power is distinct from man then he would
always be powerful, since sometimes man is capable and
sometimes he is incapable. Therefore, it is impossible
to say that man is always powerful or potent, and there-
fore the power of man is distinct from himself. Moreover,
this power does not endure. It is regarded as momentary
in the sense that it exists for the act and with the act.

32. Supra, Chapter 5, p. 126.

33. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 62.

34. Supra, Chapter 5, p. 120.

This means that the action and the power come into

existence at the very same moment. The argument for

this claim is obtained from al-Ash'arī's proof that

the capacity cannot precede the act. He said:

> "We claim that [capacity cannot precede the act]·
> because the act must begin to exist either with
> the capacity at the very moment that the latter
> begins to be, or after it. If the former is the
> case, then it is true and certain that the ca-
> pacity exists with the act and for the act. But
> if the existence of the act is posterior to that
> of the capacity — and there is solid proof that
> the capacity does not endure. — then the act
> must begin to exist in virtue of an inexistent
> power."35

It is quite obvious, according to al-Ash'arī, that the

power exists for a particular action only. It is not

as al-Ash'arī demonstrates, for two alternatives (com-

mission or omission):

> "it must be a condition of man's power that its
> existence include the existence of its object.
> Since that is so, it is impossible for a man
> to have power over both the thing and its con-
> trary. For if he had power over both, both
> would have to exist; and that cannot be."36

Therefore, the existence of the power entails the exis-

tence of the action necessarily. And that power is for

a particular action, not its contrary.

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35. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 77.

36. Ibid., p. 79.

From the above explanation, we can summarise
al-Ash'arī's discussion of the problem of how man ac-
quires the action which is created by God. Two sets
of passages in his Kitāb al-Luma' help us to understand
the problem clearly. Most of these passages have been
dealt with either in this chapter or in the previous
chapters. In the first set, al-Ash'arī used the term
'power' and in the second set, he used the terms 'power'
and 'capacity' interchangeably.[37]

His first set of statements which are concerned
with the term 'power' are as follows:

"....the acquirer acquires a thing because it takes
place in virtue of his created power over it."[38]

"....the true meaning of acquisition is that the
thing proceeds from its acquirer in virtue of a
created power."[39]

These statements indicate that the acquirer only ac-
quires the act by a power which is created by God. The
occurrence of the acquisition is due to the occurrence
of the created power. This means that the absence of
the created power would necessarily entail the non-oc-
currence of acquisition. Then, the acquirer would not

37. H. A. Wolfson, op cit, pp. 685 - 687.

38. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al-Luma', p. 58.

39. Ibid., p. 60.

act. Then al-Ash'arī goes on to claim that the occur-

rence of the action which is an acquisition has no agent

who makes it as it really is except God. He said:

> "It has no agent who makes it as it really is
> save God, and no one with power over it so
> that it will be as it really is, in the sense
> that he creates it, save God."40

> "Does a man, then, acquire the thing as it real-
> ly is, i.e. as vain unbelief and good faith?.
> [Al-Ash'arī replies]; This is an error, 'He
> acquires unbelief' means only that he disbe-
> lieves in virtue of a created power. Likewise
> our saying 'He acquires faith' means only that
> he believes in virtue of a created power, with-
> out his having acquired the thing as it really
> is."41

These statements clarify what al-Ash'arī means by his

claim that acquisition is created by God. Man, accord-

ing to al-Ash'arī, does not create the action as it really

is — unbelief to be bad and faith to be good. But, God

creates the thing as it really is. These statements

are a further clarification of the term 'acquisition'

and its function. Thus, from this explanation, it is

clear that God is the creator of the acquisition and

man is the acquirer. Finally, in this first set of al-

Ash'arī's explanations of 'power', we conclude with his

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40. Ibid., p. 56.

41. Ibid., p. 58.

statement: "When God empowers us over acquired motion

it must be He who creates it in us as our acquisition."[42]

This statement indicates that al-Ash'arī is trying to

establish the concept of the omnipotence of God. The

occurrence of the acquisition is due to the existence

of power which is imposed by God on us. If God did

not empower us, the occurrence of acquisition would

be impossible. For this reason, God is absolutely

powerful. Does this mean that al-Ash'arī is a compul-

sionist?. No, because he claims that man is the ac-

quirer of his action which means that man is responsible

for his actions.

The second set of the statements emphasized

the terms power and capacity. In these statements al-

Ash'arī applied the term 'power' and 'capacity' inter-

changeably. The statements are as follows:

> "But since he is sometimes capable and sometimes
> incapable, it is true and certain that his ca-
> pacity is something distinct from him."43

> "We claim that [the capacity cannot precede the
> act] because the act must begin to exist either
> with the capacity at the very moment that the
> latter begins to be, or after it."44

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42. Ibid., p. 62.

43. Ibid., p. 76.

44. Ibid., p. 77.

"...the capacity exists with the act and
for the act."45

"...the capacity does not endure."46

These statements serve to prove, according to al-Ash ͨarī,

that the capacity is not the man himself, thus man can-

not perform the action naturally. But, the capacity is

distinct from himself, and it is created by God. The

occurrence of the capacity or power entails the occur-

rence of the action. It does not exist before the act,

as claimed by some of Mu ͨtazilite scholars.

> "...it is impossible for a man to have power over
> both the thing and its contrary. For if he had
> power over both, both would have to exist; and
> that cannot be."47

> "We deny that because a power is a power only
> over what exists with it in its locus."48

These statements are used to support al-Ash ͨarī's claim

that the capacity is for a particular action which exists

in the hand of man and that power or capacity is not

for the contrary and for another motion different from

the motion which exists in the hand of man.

These two sets of statements provide al-Ash ͨarī's

answer to the problem of how man acquires the acquired

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45. Ibid., p. 77.

46. Ibid., p. 77.

47. Ibid., p. 79.

48. Ibid., p. 79.

action which is created by God. According to al-Ashʿ-

arī, the occurrence of the acquisition depends on the

occurrence of the power or capacity. Both are created

by God. Acquisition is performed by man in virtue of

that created power. The power which is created is dis-

tinct from man himself. If the power exists in the

sense that God creates it, it is for a particular act,

not for its contrary. Moreover, one single power is

for a single act, not two or more than two. What is

more significant here is the claim of the absolute

ominipotence of God. Though man has his role to act

freely, it is within the limits of acquisition and

capacity which are both created by God.

It has been noted before that al-Ashʿarī is

trying to steer a middle course between the two extreme

positions of the Muʿtazilites and the compulsionists

(the Jabarites). Therefore, the theory of acquisition

is also to achieve this goal. The theory of acquisi-

tion is used to establish God as omnipotent and to

maintain the sovereignty of God on the one hand and

to establish the justice of God and to claim man's res-

ponsibility for what he does, on the other. According

to al-Ashʿarī, the justification of God's absolute

power and sovereignty in connection with human life has

moral consequences. But, to deny human responsibility

would result in denying the justice of God. Al-Ash'-

ari maintained that it was possible to reconcile the

omnipotence of God and the justice of God.

Al-Ash'ari gave prime importance in his theolo-

gy to the question of God's absolute power and sovereign-

ty in the world:

> "He creates things by His power, directs them by
> His wish compels them by His strength, and re-
> duces them by His might; wherefore the proud
> submit to His power, the lofty are subject to
> the strength of His lordship, doubters are cut
> off from a sure foundation in the knowledge of
> Him, to Him the necks of men submit, and the
> prudence of the discreet is confounded in His
> kingdom."49

On the basis of this quotation al-Ash'ari is not far from

the position of the Compulsionists, but it would be wrong

to put al-Ash'ari in the camp of the compulsionists, since

he attributes a share of human responsibility for what

man does. By contrast the compulsionists denied free

agency in man and ascribed his actions wholly to God.

Man is forced to accept what is imposed on him by God.

Thus any thought of human responsibility is in contra-

diction to the theology of the compulsionists. And to

claim al-Ash'ari as a compulsionist is therefore false.

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49. Al-Ash'ari, Al-Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 43.

However, the tension is in the relationship of 'the so-
vereignty of God' and 'human responsibility'. Al-Ash'-
ari solves this problem in his theology, as can be seen
from his use of the theory of acquisition.

We have discussed al-Ash'ari's position that the
capacity of man does not create his action, rather this
capacity is used to acquire those actions which are al-
so created by God. Because the true sense of the term
'creating' is to make things as they really are, this
will be the same as for all created things. Further,
al-Ash'ari claims that if man has the power of creating
in the true sense, it will necessarily mean that things
will come into existence not in their reality. This
is due to the fact that man, according to al-Ash'ari,
through experience wants, for example, unbelief to be
good and faith to be bad. This is surely contrary to
the reality of both unbelief and faith. Since this is
not the case, therefore it is reasonable to believe that
man does not create his own action by his capability.
And since man does not create his own action, and since
it does not come into existence without an agent who
acquires it, therefore man is the agent who acquires
it through the capacity given by God. This capability
is used for the occurrence of that action.

Regarding the question of the human share of
responsibility for what man has done, it is clear from
the above explanation that al-Ash‘arī prefers man's
acquisition rather than man's creation as the solution
to this question. It has been argued before that if
man chooses disbelief, in the sense of acquisition,
then this man will change and become an unbeliever; but,
if God creates unbelief, He will never become a believer,
who want unbelief to be good. This means that acquisi-
tion will cause change to the acquirer, but creation
will not cause such change to the creator.

(ii) The Concept of Human Responsibility is Not
     Inconsistent With the Concept of the
     Foreknowledge of God.
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Perhaps, what is more significant to this problem
is the question of whether the concept of human respon-
sibility is inconsistent with the claim that God has
foreknowledge, in the sense that He knows the future?
And is this claim inconsistent with the fact that God
is an absolutely powerful God in the universe?. The
Foreknowledge of God and the occurrrence of human ac-
quisition which is foreknown by God before it comes in-
to existence appear to be in contradiction. In the fol-
lowing paragraphs we shall analyse al-Ash‘arī's solution.

Al-Ash'arī previously demonstrates that God's
knowledge is eternal and is not identical with His essence
as well as not distinct from Him. Since it is eternal,
therefore God knows the thing in the past, present and
future. In Chapter 2 of this study, we discussed the
problem in detail. However, in the present discussion,
it is worth recalling a set of statements from the pre-
vious discussion.

(1) "All this exists antecedantly in God's knowledge."[50]

(2) "The nature of knowledge is to follow the knowable
without acquiring a quality from it nor acquiring
it as a quality."[51]

(3) "They are known because knowledge comes into con-
tact with them but does not alter."[52]

(4) "It is to be believed that God is knowing by know-
ledge rather than God is knowing by His essence."[53]

(5) "But knowledge cannot be knowing, nor can the knower
be knowledge, nor can God be identified with His
attributes. Do you not see that the way in which
one knows that knowledge is knowledge is that by
it the knower knows?. For the power of man, by
which he does not know, cannot be knowledge. Hen-
ce, since God the creator cannot be knowledge, He
cannot be knowing by Himself. And if that be im-
possible, it is certain that He is knowing by a
knowledge which cannot be Himself."[54]

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50. Supra, Chapter 2, p. 29.

51. Al-Shahrastānī, Kitāb Nihāyatu'l-Iqdām Fī 'Ilmi'l-Kalām, p. 79.

52. Supra, Chapter 2, p. 33.

53. Supra, Chapter 2, p. 47.

54. Supra, Chapter 2, p. 50.

From These statements, it is certain that the function
of knowledge is only to know but not to bring things
into existence. It is the condition of knowledge to
come into contact with the knowable, but not to alter.
It is the nature of knowledge to follow the knowable.
Above all, the knowledge is used to discover the truth,
not to bring things into existence. We have mentioned
before, that 'creating' is bringing things into exis-
tence as they really are. Perhaps, 'acquisition' may
be defined as acquiring a thing in virtue of a created
power. Since the function of knowledge is to discover
the truth, knowledge is quite unlike creation or acqui-
sition. Since this is the case, therefore, it is ob-
vious that knowledge is not analogous to the term ac-
quisition or creation, and they are not co-extensive.
A further reason is that, as has been mentioned above,
knowledge does not acquire a quality from the knowable
nor it acquires a knowable as a quality.

Therefore, man's share in responsibility for
his own action is not inconsistent with the claim that
God has foreknowledge, that God foreknows the actions
of man before they come into existence, for knowledge
does not affect that existence. It is reasonable to
believe that God foreknows the actions of man before
they exist, and man himself has his choice to act.

(iii)   The Concept of Human Responsibility
        Is Not Inconsistent With The Consept
        Of God's Omnipotence.

The most significant question to solve is whe-
ther the concept of human responsibility is inconsis-
tent with the claim that God is the creator of all in
the universe through His capability?. As we have al-
ready seen, God, according to the compulsionists (the
Jabarites), is the only active power. Furthermore they
claimed that to attribute a share of this to man through
the theory of acquisition, would entail comparing man's
power with that of God, which was impossible, according
to the compulsionists. They made no distinction between
the statements 'the building stands' and 'the man dies'.
They held that God makes the building stand and causes
man to die. Therefore, according to them, there is no
such thing as a human share of responsibility for what
man has done. One the other hand, the Mu'tazilites
claimed that man is the creator of his actions and free
to perform them. This is certainly in stark contrast
to the position that God creates everything in the uni-
verse by His capability. As far as these two opposite
positions are concerned the two elements mentioned above
can never be reconciled. But al-Ash'arī believed in
both ideas and proved that the two are not contradicto-
ry. The following statements, which we have discussed

before, are gathered in order to see clearly al-Ash'arī's

reconcilation.

(1) "Al-Ash'arī prefers man's acquisition rather than
    man's creation as the solution to this question."55

(2) "The occurrence of the acquisition is due to the
    occurrence of the created power. This means ·
    that the absence of the created power would
    necessarily entail the non-occurrence of ac-
    quisition."56

(3) "The acquisition will cause change to the ac-
    quirer, but creation will not cause such change
    to the creator."57

(4) "The occurrence of the acquisition is due to the
    existence of power which is imposed by God on
    us. If God did not empower us, the occurrence
    of acquisition would be impossible."58

From these statements, it is obvious that what is under-

stood by man's capacity is nothing more than man's acqui-

sition and this brings no effect to the existence of

an act if God's capability does not create the act.

Therefore, a human share in responsibility is not in-

consistent with the claim that God is the sole creator

of the universe, for what al-Ash'arī understood by hu-

man capability does not disturb the works of God in the

sense that they cannot bring a thing into existence as

it really it is. Human capability can affect nothing

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55. Supra, this chapter, p. 169.
56. Supra, this chapter, p. 162.
57. Supr , this chapter, p. 169
58. Supra, this chapter, p. 164.

in the universe.

(iv) The Concept of Human Responsibility Is not
      Inconsistent With The Concept of God's Will. ·

        With regard to the question of God's Will, the
same question arises; is the concept of human respon-
sibility inconsistent with the claim that God wills
everything which is to exist? From the very beginning,
al-Ash'arī held that God wills everything which can be
willed and de facto are willed.[59] Al-Ash'arī said:

    "We maintain this because the divine willing,
    being one of God's essential attributes, as we
    have already proved, must embrace everything
    which can truly be willed."[60]

Moreover, he stated:

    "The existence of what He did not command from
    another would not entail His weakness; but the
    existence of what He did not will from another
    would prove weakness. Moreover, the existence
    of what He has not commanded, but has forbidden,
    and yet He has willed its taking place, does
    not mean that weakness overtakes Him."[61]

These two statements are agreed in maintaining that what

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59. Al-Ash'arī, Kitāb al- Luma', p. 33 note no. 2
     by McCarthy (the translator).
60. Ibid., p. 33.
61. Ibid., p. 44.

God wills in the universe will necessarily come into

existence. On the other hand, what God does not will

cannot come into existence. Using the example of the

unbelief of the unbeliever, his solution to this problem

becomes clearer.

> "Moreover, we have already proved that the exis-
> tence of the capacity entails the existence of
> the act. So if God can empower men to believe,
> He can also effect that which, had He effected
> it in them, they would have all believed."62

Furthermore, in answer to the objection that God was

miserly towards man, if the above statement is true, al-

Ash'ari replied with a definition of the term 'miserli-

ness'.

> "Miserliness consists in the agent's not doing
> what he ought to do. But when something is a
> matter of generosity he who is generous is free
> to be generous with that or not to be generous.
> And in such a case no miserliness attaches to
> the agent if he does not do the thing."63

From this al-Ash'ari concluded in respect of the ques-

tion posed to him, "God has not effected in unbelievers

what would ensure their belief."[64] With regard to the

question of God's command, al-Ash'ari argued:

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62. Ibid., p. 97.
63. Ibid., p. 98.
64. Ibid., p. 98.

"Do you not see that He has commanded us to pray
and to be submissive and to move, yet He cannot
pray and be submissive and move, because that
is impossible for Him."[65]

With reference to the previous explanation,
the problem of human responsibility and its relation
to the question of God's will and command is somewhat
obvious. The existence of the unbelief of the unbe-
liever (the example used here) is definitely caused
by the will of God. The reason is that nothing can
come into existence without being willed by God. In
this case, the existence of unbelief is also regarded
as the creation of God, and it is an acquisition of
man in the sense that he acquired it in virtue of the
created power. Moreover, al-Ash‘arī's statement ex-
plains that God wills the unbelief as He created it
as it really is. And since God's decree is co-exten-
sive with the term 'God's creation',[66] therefore, the
claim that man has his share of responsibility for
what he has done is not inconsistent with the claim
that God wills everything which exists in the universe.

Previously, we have produced al-Ash‘arī's ar-

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65. Ibid., p. 101.
66. Supra, Chapter 4, p. 104.

gument for maintaining the justice of God with regard
to the creative power of God and its relation to the
creation. In its true sense, creating is to create
something as it really is, and the term justice, in
its true meaning is to bring something to its place,
therefore, the justice of God, in the sense of bringing
something to its place is not inconsistent with God's
creative power, for creating is also bringing something
into existence as it really exists.[67] However, the con-
cept of God's justice in connection with the creative
power of God, does not answer immediately the problem
of the justice of God in its relation to the question
of human responsibility. Thus the answer of this problem
of the consistency of a human share of responsibility
and God's will is also the answer to the problem of God's
justice and its relation to the problem of human respon-
sibility.

Al-Ash‘arī's discussion of the theory of acqui-
sition indicates the clear effort of him middle path
position in trying to maintain the absolute power of
God and the absolute justice of God. The extreme po-
sitions of the Mu‘tazilites and the compulsionists

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67. Supra, Chapter 4, p. 106.

brought these issues into contradiction. However, the

theory of acquisition was conceived of long before al-

Ash͑arī. At the beginning of this chapter we discussed

the positions of Ḍirār and al-Najjār with regard to their

conceptions of the theory of acquisition. In the follow-

ing paragaraphs we shall discuss their positions in re-

lation to al-Ash͑arī's.

(v) Al-Ash͑arī's Solutions and their Relation to
     Ḍirār and al-Najjār.
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As we have mentioned before, Ḍirār departed

from the majority of the Mu͑tazilites in maintaining

that human actions are created by God. Although human

actions are created by God, man has his share of res-

ponsibility for what he has done, because man is also

regarded as an agent for his actions. This is then

called 'acquisition'. Probably, for this reason, W. M.

Watt credited Ḍirār with being the first exponent of

the theory of acquisition.

> "Ḍirār is almost certainly the first exponent of
> the concept of 'acquisition' or 'Appropriation'
> (kasb, iktisāb) which eventually became the or-
> thodox account of man's voluntary activity."68

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68. W. Montgemory Watt, Free Will and Predestination
    In Early Islam, p. 104.

As far as the term 'agent' is concerned, Dirār
maintained that God and man are the agents of human
actions. They both act as the agents to bring the ac-
tion into its reality. In other words, according to
Dirār, God creates human action as it really is, and
man acquires that same action as it really is. This
brought Dirār to the concept of a dual agency in human
action, which is not in line with the theory of acquisi-
tion as understood by al-Ashʿarī. Al-Ashʿarī agreed with
Dirār, as far as God is the creator of human action, in
the sense that He creates it as it really is. But al-
Ashʿarī opposed Dirār's position in maintaining that man
acquires his action in its reality. Al-Ashʿarī said,
as has been discussed before, man acquires his action
in virtue of the created power. And man does not ac-
quire the action in its reality, because if man acquired
the action in its reality, then it would be possible for
unbelief to be good and faith to be bad and vain. The
concept of dual agents derived from Dirār's theory is
one of the points of disagreement between al-Ashʿarī
and Dirār.

Al-Ashʿarī claimed that Dirār held that capacity
is part of man himself. In this regard, we found two
separate statements by al-Ashʿarī. Firstly, he reported

of Ḍirār as follows:

> "Man is a combination of accidents. So also body,
> it is a combination of accidents such as colour,
> heat, cold... [etc.]. And accident can cause
> change to body. And man can make length, breadth and
> depth, for these are all parts of body."69

In his second report, al-Ashʿarī stated;

> "He is reported to have said that capacity and life
> also are parts of the body."70

From these reports, it is clear that, according to Ḍirār,
capacity is part of man himself. This is not in agree-
ment with al-Ashʿarī's conception of man's capacity, in
which al-Ashʿarī argued that if man's capacity is part
of man's nature, then it would be possible for man to
be always potent. But that is not the case, therefore
capacity is distinct from man himself. In this parti-
cular case, al-Naẓẓām may agree with Ḍirār in holding
that man's capacity is not distinct from man himself.

Another point on which al-Ashʿarī is not in
agreement with Ḍirār is when Ḍirār holds that capacity
precedes act, in the sense that "capacity is before

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69. Al-Ashʿarī, Maqālāt al-Islāmiyīn Wa'khtilāf al-
    Musallīn, Vol. 1., p. 281.

70. Ibid., Vol. 2., p. 345.

the act and with the act and it is part of whom is capable."[71] Al-Ash'arī however, claimed that capacity existed simultaneously with the act, for a particular action.

From all these explanations, it is obvious that al-Ash'arī's theory of acquisition is in contrast to that of Dirār. On the other hand, al-Ash'arī shares the same position as that of al-Najjār regarding the question of capacity. Al-Najjār is reported to have claimed that capacity does not precede the act, rather it exists simultaneously with the act, and capacity does not endure. As we have seen this is also al-Ash'arī's position. For this reason it has been said that al-Ash'arī was not influenced by the Mu'tazilites, such as Dirār. At this point in his theology he was closer to the Murji'ites.[72]

Al-Ash'arī described these two scholars (Dirār and al-Najjār) as 'ahl al-Ithbāt' (The Affirmers of the Qadar). The name 'ahl al-Ithbāt' did not belong to a particular school or sect, but was given to those

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71. Ibid., Vol. 1., p. 281.
72. W. C. Klein, In His Introduction to His Translation of Al-Ash'arī's Al-Ibāna 'An Usūl al-Diyāna, p. 36.

who affirmed the divine Qadar though on the other matters
they may have different positions.[73]   It is beyond the
scope of our interest here to go any further into the
term 'ahl al-Ithbāt'.   However with regard to the the-
ory of acquisition, it is claimed that al-Ash'arī had
a very close relation to those members of 'ahl al-Ith-
bāt', since he often discussed the problems which are
also central to 'ahl al-Ithbāt'. Does this mean that
al-Ash'arī was influenced by them or was al-Ash'arī him-
self one of 'ahl al-Ithbāt'?. This question must be
left to another investigation. As far as the theory of
acquisition is concerned, it is obvious that, according
to al-Ash'arī, the problem of Free Will and Predestina-
tion is somewhat answered.

(vi)   Conclusion.

The problem of Free Will and Predestination clearly
indicates al-Ash'arī's middle path position of the ortho-
dox theologian. He accepts the passages of al-Qur'ān
proclaiming the omnipotence of God and so also the pass-
ages proclaiming the justice of God which give a human
share of responsibility for what man has done. His

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73. W. Montgemory Watt, op cit, p. 112.

reconcilation of this problem is his theory of acquisition which gave God His part to create human actions as they really are and gave man his part to choose and acquire these created actions which then ease the question of man's share of responsibility for what he has done. An attempt to rationalize the orthodox position is therefore attributed to al-Ash'arī. Without disturbing the concept of the omnipotence of God, al-Ash'arī made man a responsible agent for what he had done. And without sacrificing the concept of the justice of God, al-Ash'arī put forward the claim that God is still an absolute power. From this study, it is reasonable to suggest that al-Ash'arī's works and intellect mark the turning point in the history of Islamic thought, and the problem of Free Will and Predestination is a good example of his effort to impose philosophical method and argumentation on the theology of the orthodox.

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