

# THE ATTITUDE OF JA'FAR AL-ŠĀDIQ AND ‘ALĪ AL-RIDĀ TOWARD KALĀM AND RATIONAL REASONING\*

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*Kalām* is a form of theological reasoning expressed in dialectical arguments.<sup>1</sup> Its methodology is to be differentiated from other kinds of theological reasoning derived, *inter alia*, from the Qur’ān and the Sunna. A form of a dilemma structure typical of *kalām* is already found in the Qur’ān.<sup>2</sup> However, *kalām* very probably originated from the influence of Christian theology on Islam, either as a result of religious disputations with Christians or by following modes of discussion introduced into Islam by converts.<sup>3</sup> According to J. van Ess, “there was a written literature in the first century of Islam, and there did exist at that time a certain familiarity with the technique of *kalām*, although it was handled with a somewhat helpless rigidity.”<sup>4</sup> In the heresiographical literature we find a list of practitioners of *kalām* (*mutakallimūn*) beginning with ‘Alī b. Abī Tālib (d. 40/661). He is reported to have disputed the Khawārīj on questions of the Promise and the Threat. Next ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar

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<sup>1</sup>L. Gardet, “Ilm al-Kalām,” *ET*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. For a discussion of the discursive arguments of *kalām* see J. van Ess, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, G.E. von Grunebaum, ed. (Wiesbaden, 1970), pp. 21–50.

<sup>2</sup>J. van Ess, “Early Development of *kalām*,” in *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, G.H.A. Juynboll, ed. (Carbondale, Illinois, 1982), p. 232, n. 12. See for example Qur’ān 3:20 which reads: “...If they have surrendered, they are right guided; but if they turn their backs, thine it is only to deliver the message...” A.J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>M.A. Cook, “The Origins of *kalām*,” *BSOAS* 43 (1980): 40f. *Idem*, *Early Muslim Dogma — A Source-Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 153–158.

<sup>4</sup>J. van Ess, “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology,” in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, J.E. Murdoch and E.D. Sylla, eds. (Dordrecht, 1975), p. 98. Van Ess published two refutation tractates against the believers in free will written by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. between 99/718 and 101/720) and ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (d. 101/720). *Anfänge Muslimischer Theologie* (Beirut, 1977). In his *Early Muslim Dogma*, Cook casts doubt on the authenticity of these two treatises.

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(d. 73/692) dissociated himself from Ma'bad al-Juhanī (d. 80/699–700), because the latter adhered to the doctrine of free will.<sup>5</sup> Jahm b. Šafwān (d. 129/746), a theologian who exerted great influence on the Mu'tazilīs,<sup>6</sup> adduced an argument based on disjunction to prove the perdition of Paradise and Hell.<sup>7</sup> Abdallāh b. al-Muqaffa', a contemporary of the fifth and the sixth Imams (d. circa 140/757), translated parts of Aristotle's treatises on logic into Arabic.<sup>8</sup> Another contemporary of the sixth Imam, who is reported to have been in the Imam's circle and to have engaged in theology<sup>9</sup> and sciences is Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795–6).<sup>10</sup> These details show that *kalām* and sciences were present in the first and second centuries of Islam.

This paper will seek to prove that the Shī'ī Imams Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) and 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818) were acquainted with *kalām* systems of argumentation and used both of these to refute heretics and to establish their dogmas. We shall also demonstrate that dealing with *kalām* does not contradict belief in mystical ideas, and that *kalām* appeared in Shī'ī Islam from its beginning. Another aim will be to show that at times the opposition was not to the *kalām* system of argumentation, but rather to a doctrine or a set of ideas identified with an individual *mutakallim*. This phenomenon may explain why one opposes *kalām*, yet at the very same time uses *kalām* forms of debate.<sup>11</sup> I chose Ja'far

<sup>5</sup> Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayna al-firaq*, Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Sa'd, ed. (Cairo, n.d.), p. 220.

<sup>6</sup> His contemporaries Wāṣil b. 'Aṭā' (d. 131/748) and 'Amr b. 'Ubayd (144/761) appear in the heresiographical literature as the founders of the Mu'tazila. Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq*, p. 70f. For an excellent explanation of the name Mu'tazila and characterization of these two personalities see S. Stroumsa, "The Beginnings of the Mu'tazila Reconsidered," *JSAI* 13 (1990): 265–293.

<sup>7</sup> B. Abrahamov, "The Creation and Duration of Paradise and Hell in Islamic Theology," *Der Islam* 79 (2002): 100.

<sup>8</sup> G. Troupeau, "La logique d'Ibn al-Muqaffa' et les origines de la grammaire arabe," *Arabica* 28 (1981): 242–250.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, M. Nyberg (ed.), French translation by A.N. Nader (Beirut, 1957), p. 81 of the Arabic text.

<sup>10</sup> J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra. Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin, 1991–7), vol. 1, pp. 358–369. For a list of scholars contemporary with Ja'far who engaged in theological discussions see W. Akhtar, *Early Shī'ī Imāmiyya Thinkers* (New Delhi, 1988), p. 62f. H. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam* (Princeton, 1993), p. 111f.

<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon appears repeatedly in Sunnī thought. One of the staunch enemies of *kalām* is Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal. In his refutation of the Jahmites, he uses a *kalām* device, the argument from disjunction named *taqṣīm* or *qisma*, not only in order to overcome his opponent, but also in order to establish dogma on a rationalist basis. He could have used a rational argument, that is, not a *kalām* argument, but he preferred a dialectical form of proof. (Such a rational proof would be: "God cannot be everywhere, including dirty places, for being in these places means a denigration

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al-Ṣādiq and 'Alī al-Riḍā because of the numerous theological traditions emanating from them.<sup>12</sup> Underlying our research is the assumption that the ideas and doctrines ascribed to the Imams in the Shī'ī-Imāmī sources are in most cases authentic and express in principle their own doctrines. In accepting these materials as genuine, I follow M.A. Amir-Moezzi's excellent book *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, but respectfully disagree with him concerning the position of *kalām* in early Shī'ī thought.

The following story proves that sometimes opposition to *kalām* arises from the doctrine of a particular *mutakallim* and not from his methods of argumentation. A man claiming to be a *mutakallim* came to Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to dispute with the latter's disciples. Al-Ṣādiq said to Yūnus b. Ya'qūb, one of his followers: "If you are proficient in *kalām* (*tuḥsinu al-kalām*), engage with him in disputation (*kallamtahu*)." Yūnus answered: "I heard you prohibiting the use of *kalām* (*tanhā 'an al-kalām*) and saying 'Woe unto the practitioners of *kalām* (*wayḥun li-aṣḥāb al-kalām*).'" Al-Ṣādiq responded: "I said 'Woe unto them' if they abandon what I state and adhere to what they wish."<sup>13</sup> Thus, according to the sixth Imam, *kalām* is an efficient device to prove what the Imam regards as the right doctrine, but not as a free organ which may cause people to deviate from the true tenets of religion. Here al-Ṣādiq does not refer to the use of polemics against heretics or unbelievers, but rather to advancing one's own dogmas. This tradition may also reflect theological discussions among al-Ṣādiq's disciples.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*,<sup>15</sup> Ibn Bābawayh relates a story about a dis-

of God.") "Ibn Ḥanbal asks the Jahmite whether God was without anything before creation. The Jahmite answers in the affirmative. Then Ibn Ḥanbal raises the following question: 'When God created a thing, did he create it inside Himself or outside Himself?' To this question there are three possible rejoinders, only one of which is right. If the Jahmite argues that God created the creation inside Himself, he will be considered an unbeliever, for he argues that *jinn* (demons), people and Satan are inside God. If he argues that God created the material world outside Himself and then entered it, this also will be unbelief, for he argues that God entered into dirty places. Finally, if he argues that God created His creation outside Himself and then did not enter it, he will withdraw his contention." Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā al-zanādiqa wa 'l-jahmiyya*, in 'Aqā'id al-salaf, 'Alī Sāmī al-Nashshār and 'Ammār al-Ṭālibī, eds. (Alexandria, 1971), p. 95f. B. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology, Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Amir-Moezzi notes that the number of traditions established by the fifth and the sixth Imams outnumbers all the traditions emanating from the other ten Imams; see *The Divine Guide in Early Shi'ism*, D. Streight, trans. (Albany, 1994), p. 158, n. 143.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī*, 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī, ed. (Tehran, 1377-9/1957-60), vol. 1, p. 171.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Modarressi, *Crisis*, p. 114.

<sup>15</sup> This book can be characterized as a *summa theologica*, for in it Ibn Bābawayh discusses not only God's unity, but also a variety of theological notions.

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cussion held between the eighth Imam 'Alī al-Riḍā and a *mutakallim* from Khurāsān<sup>16</sup> called Sulaymān al-Marwazī. The latter came to al-Ma'mūn's court at the invitation of the caliph in order to participate in a theological council (*majlis fī al-tawḥīd*).<sup>17</sup> What is most interesting is that in al-Ma'mūn's brief conversation with Sulaymān, the former characterizes al-Riḍā as one who loves *kalām* and its followers.<sup>18</sup> The ensuing debate between Sulaymān and al-Riḍā proves al-Ma'mūn's point: the Imam employs *kalām* methods of debate such as disjunction and *ilzām*.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Ibn Bābawayh describes a council held at al-Ma'mūn's court which brought together thinkers from various religions and sects (*ahl al-adyān wa-aṣḥāb al-maqālāt*). He mentions a Catholicos (*jāthalīq*), the Exilarch (*ra's al-jālūt*), heads of the *Šābi'ūn*, the head of the Magian priests (*al-hirbidh al-akbar*), 'Imrān al-Šābī, Qusṭās the Byzantine and the *mutakallimūn*.<sup>20</sup> In his debate with the religious leaders, al-Riḍā demonstrates his profound knowledge of the Old and the New Testaments in an attempt to prove that Muḥammad is mentioned in these texts.<sup>21</sup> However, what is significant for our purpose is al-Riḍā's use of syllogism to refute his adversaries. When the Magian priest argues that Zoroaster's prophecy is established through successive tradition (*khabar mutawātir*),<sup>22</sup> al-Riḍā rejoins that acceptance of the method of this form of tradition obliges one to believe in the prophecy of Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad.<sup>23</sup> In a similar manner, al-Riḍā answers the question whether God's essence changed when He created the world. He states

<sup>16</sup>Very probably the nickname *mutakallim Khurāsān* alludes to the possibility that he was an official who served the regime as a disputant. Cf. S. Pines, "A Note on an Early Meaning of the Term *mutakallim*," *IOS* 1 (1971): 224–240.

<sup>17</sup>Convening councils on various subjects was a very common practice in the 'Abbāsī court. *The Majlis, Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, H. Lazarus-Yafeh et al., eds. (Wiesbaden, 1999). For a *majlis* of *mutakallimūn* in Hārūn al-Rashīd's (d. 193/809) court, see al-Kashshī, *Rijāl* (Karbala', n.d.), pp. 222–226.

<sup>18</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (n.p., 1321 AH), p. 457.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 463–465. *Ilzām* means forcing one's opponent to admit views which are absurd, or heretical, or contrary to his own views. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology*, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 428f.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 430–443. This was one of the main arguments used by Muslims in polemics with Jews and Christians to prove the veracity of Muḥammad's prophecy. Cf. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds, Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton, 1992), ch. 4.

<sup>22</sup>"*Khabar mutawātir* is a tradition repeatedly transmitted by so many persons whose number and righteousness exclude any possibility of their prior agreement on lie." B. Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20,1 (1993): 22, n. 15.

<sup>23</sup>Al-Riḍā ignores the inevitable conclusion from his contention: he is also obliged to believe in Zoroaster.

that just as the fire's essence does not change when it burns something, so God's essence does not change when He acts.<sup>24</sup> In *kalām*, this kind of syllogism is called *al-istidlāl bi 'l-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib* (inferring what is absent from what is present) or *qiyās al-ghā'ib 'alā al-shāhid* (lit. judging what is absent by analogy with what is present).<sup>25</sup> According to Sulaymān al-Marwazī, God's will is identified with His essence. On the basis of human knowledge and experience, al-Riḍā states that just as the agent of an act is not identified with his acts and precedes his act in time, so the willing person is not identified with his will and precedes his will in time.<sup>26</sup> It is worth noting that al-Riḍā not only refutes his opponent, but also expresses his own idea on the existence of attributes in God.

Already Ja'far appears as a firm advocate of the argument from design which deduces God's existence, creation of the world, unity and wisdom from the wonderful phenomena in the world. Answering a heretic (*zindīq*)<sup>27</sup> who asks what is the proof for the existence of the creator of the world, Ja'far states that the acts observed on earth prove God's existence. When one observes a building, one knows that it has a builder even if one does not see him; and this also holds true for the world.<sup>28</sup> A detailed form of the argument from design, including the argument from composition, the argument from changes, and the notion that the world fits man's needs, also occurs in *Tawhīd al-Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī*, a treatise which Ja'far dictated to his disciple al-Mufaḍḍal,<sup>29</sup> and in *Kitāb al-ihlālaja*, a debate between Ja'far and an Indian physician.<sup>30</sup>

In the course of this debate Ja'far uses disjunction to prove that *al-ihlālaja* cannot produce itself and that God created it. Ja'far asks: "When this fruit created itself and governed its creation, was it before its coming to be or after its coming to be?" Since the two possibilities are absurd, it is proved that *al-ihlālaja* was created by another being.<sup>31</sup>

In a tradition traced back to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, Ja'far is said to have refuted the heretic by adducing the argument from mutual hy-

<sup>24</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 448.

<sup>25</sup> B. Abrahamov, *al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr* (Leiden, 1990), p. 193, n. 91.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 462.

<sup>27</sup> For this term see Abrahamov, *al-Qāsim*, p. 180f, n. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* (Beirut, 1983), vol. 3, p. 29. The source of this passage is Ja'far's *Kitāb al-ihtijāj*.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3, pp. 57–151. On this treatise, see E. Kohlberg, *A Medieval Muslim Scholar at Work: Ibn Tawūs and His Library* (Leiden, 1992), p. 187.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Majlisī, *ibid.*, pp. 152–198. *Ihlālaja* is the myrobalan fruit used in medicine; see Kohlberg, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Al-Majlisī, *ibid.*, p. 158. A similar argument referring to the creation of man is ascribed to al-Riḍā. *Ibid.*, p. 36. A slightly different version of this proof occurs in *Kitāb al-ihtijāj*; al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 10, p. 182.

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pothetical prevention (*dalīl al-tamānu'*)<sup>32</sup> combined with the argument from design to prove God's unity. "If there are two gods, the following possibilities must be taken into consideration: Either they are eternal and strong (*qadīmayni qawīyyayni*), or weak (*da'īfayni*), or one of them is strong and one of them is weak." The first possibility means that one may overcome the other and be the only ruler. The text does not refer to the second possibility, probably because a god cannot be weak. And if one is strong and the other weak, this proves that there is one god. Ja'far states further that "if you say that they are two, this must entail that they agree with each other, or disagree with each other." In his answer, Ja'far does not deal with the first possibility (the text may be corrupt) and refers only to the second, the disagreement between the two gods. Since we observe that the creation is well designed and ordered, we prove that the ruler of the world is one.<sup>33</sup>

The theological doctrines of Ja'far and al-Riḍā are expressed not only in their polemics with heretics and leaders of other religions, but also in texts devoid of refutation. Let us take for example Ja'far's doctrine concerning free will and predestination. Actually he puts forward a thesis of intermediate position, meaning that he advocates neither free will nor predestination; this is expressed in the words: "there is neither compulsion nor leaving man to his own discretion" (*lā jabr wa-lā tafwīd*). Ja'far's seemingly contradictory statements concerning this issue may be explained in the light of this intermediate position. On the one hand, Ja'far says that man is predestined to either happiness or misery,<sup>34</sup> but on the other, he denies that God compels man to act.<sup>35</sup> Ja'far is well aware of the impossibility to solve the problem of free will and predestination logically, because of the contradictory consequences deriving from two attributes of God, namely, His compassion or justice, and His power. He formulates the problem in the following manner: "God is too compassionate to compel His creatures to carry out sins and then to punish them for their wrong-doing. And He is too powerful to will a thing which will not exist."<sup>36</sup> In other words, God's compassion or justice entails free

<sup>32</sup>The gist of this argument is the impossibility of the existence of two gods who would oppose each other and prevent each other from carrying out acts. For various types of *dalīl al-tamānu'*, see my *al-Qāsim*, pp. 190-2, n. 89.

<sup>33</sup>Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 10, p. 194f. For Mūsā al-Kāzīm's (the seventh Imam d. 183/799) use of disjunction see Ibn Bābawayh, *Amālī al-Šādūq* (Najaf, 1970), p. 368.

<sup>34</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 367f; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 152.

<sup>35</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *ibid.*, p. 369.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.* On p. 370 the attribute justice occurs: "God is too just to compel..." In another version of this tradition traced back to al-Riḍā, there is an addition at the end of the tradition: "O son of Adam, I (God) am more entitled to your good deeds (*awlā bi-ḥasanātika*) than you, and you are more entitled to your evil deeds than I.

will, while God's power entails predestination. Consequently, al-Ṣādiq prefers to hold an intermediate position (*amr bayna al-amrayn*).<sup>37</sup> In some variants of this much quoted tradition the term *qadar* appears instead of *tafwīd*.<sup>38</sup> Here *qadar* represents the Mu'tazilī stance on free will and *jabr* the Jahmī position concerning predestination.<sup>39</sup> A similar way of looking at delicate theological issues is al-Ṣādiq's attitude toward the creation of the Qur'ān. He states that God's speech is neither created (*makhhlūq*) nor eternal (*azalī*),<sup>40</sup> but temporally coming into being (*muḥdath*).<sup>41</sup> Possibly, holding intermediate positions characterizes the cautious manner in which the Imams Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and al-Riḍā handled theological issues. Al-Riḍā states that "We, the family of Muḥammad, [represent] the middle way" (*al-namaṭ al-awsaṭ*).<sup>42</sup> For al-Riḍā the in-

You commit sins by my power which I (God) put in you." Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 157. The last statement is not clear, for a man also carries out his good deeds by the power God grants him. The whole paragraph is reminiscent of the Qadarī notion that good comes from God and evil — from man and Satan. Moreover, the concept of *tafwīd*, God's leaving man to his own discretion, appears in Qadarī and Khārījī circles. W.M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London 1948), p. 52f. M. Schwarz, "The Letter of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī", *Oriens* 20 (1972): 18f; J. van Ess, "Qadariyya," *EI*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. Another point of similarity between Ja'far al-Ṣādiq's thought and that of the Khārījīs is the simultaneity of the occurrence of the power to act and the act; see Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 161.

<sup>37</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 371. Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 159f. W. Madelung, "The Shiite and Khārījī Contribution to Pre-Ash'arite *kalām*," in *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, P. Morewedge, ed. (Albany, 1979) (= *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, Variorum Reprints, London 1985, VIII), p. 126.

<sup>38</sup>Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 159.

<sup>39</sup>Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-'khtilāf al-muṣallīn*, H. Ritter, ed. (Wiesbaden, 1963), p. 41, ll. 4–6. W. Madelung, "Imamism and Mu'tazilite Theology," in *Le Shī'isme imāmīte*, T. Fahd, ed. (Paris, 1970) (= *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, Variorum Reprints, London 1985, VII), p. 18, n. 1. It is also possible that *qadar* represents the Qadariyya, the forerunners of the Mu'tazila. The use of both *qadar* and *tafwīd* (see above n. 36) may indicate that on this issue Qadarī thought influenced the Imams' doctrine.

Hishām b. al-Ḥakam is reported to have held an intermediate position regarding human action. According to him, from the point of view of man's will and acquisition (the verbs used are *arāda* and *iktasaba* respectively) human action is choice (*ikhtiyār*), while from the point of view of the action's occurrence from man as a result of a cause which stimulates it (*al-sabab al-muḥayyij 'alayhā*), it is compulsion (*iḍṭirār*). Al-Ash'arī, *ibid.*, p. 40, l. 13–p. 41, l. 3. For the doctrine of *kasb* or *iktisāb* see my "A Re-examination of al-Ash'arī's Theory of Kasb according to *Kitāb al-luma'*," *JRAS* (1989) no. 2: 210–221.

<sup>40</sup>According to the Mu'tazilīs, the Qur'ān is not eternal, but created in time; see J.R.T.M. Peters, *God's Created Speech* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 330–384.

<sup>41</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 228. According to Ja'far, all God's factual attributes (*ṣifāt al-fi'l*) such as will, speech, and motion, temporally come into being. Cf. M.J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut, 1978), pp. 353–355. Al-Jurjānī (*Kitāb al-ta'rīfāt*, G. Flügel, ed. [Beirut, 1978], p. 86) defines *ḥudūth* (coming into being) as the existence of a thing after its non-existence.

<sup>42</sup>Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 101.

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intermediate position with regard to free will and predestination has a practical aspect. Asked about the meaning of this way, he answered that one has to find the way to implement what is required and not to commit what is forbidden.<sup>43</sup>

The visibility of God in this world and the world to come is a much debated issue in Islamic theology. There are many verses in the Qur'ān which refer explicitly or implicitly to this problem.<sup>44</sup> On the basis of these verses and of rational considerations, three main attitudes toward the subject developed:

- a. The likeners (anthropomorphists — *mushabbiha*) state that since God is a body, He can be seen;
- b. Most of the Mu'tazilīs (with the exception of Hishām al-Fuwaṭī and 'Abbād b. Sulaymān), the Zaydīs, the Khārijīs, and most of the Murji'īs argue that since God is not a body, He cannot be seen; however some understand seeing God as knowing Him;
- c. The Orthodox theologians who accept the doctrine of God's visibility and yet do not state its modality.<sup>45</sup>

Asked about seeing God, al-Riḍā stated that all people agree that knowledge is a necessary result of seeing. Hence, if seeing God is possible, knowledge of God necessarily ensues. Now, this knowledge must be either belief or no belief. If knowledge which follows seeing God is belief, then knowledge which derives from acquisition in this world is not belief, since it is the opposite of the former knowledge. Consequently, there is no believer in this world, for no one sees God in it. However, this conclusion is an absurdity, for there are believers in this world. If knowledge which derives from seeing God is not belief, then knowledge which derives from acquisition must either be lost or not lost in the hereafter. The end of the proof is missing, but we may assume that it would conclude with the following sentence: Since knowledge which derives from acquisition is not be lost in the hereafter, it necessarily follows that the opposite is true, namely, knowledge which derives from seeing God does not exist. Hence God cannot be seen in the world to come.<sup>46</sup> Again, the Imam here uses a speculative argument to prove the invisibility of God.

Like his contemporary theologians, Ja'far al-Šādiq does not refrain from treating the problem of God's attributes. Following his father, Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. ca 114/732), he holds the identity of God's

<sup>43</sup>Ibn Bābawayh, *'Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (Najaf, 1970), vol. 1, p. 102.

<sup>44</sup>See for example Qur'ān 7:43, 10:26, 75:22–23, 85:15.

<sup>45</sup>B. Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Theology of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm: Kitāb al-Mustarshid* (Leiden, 1996), pp. 15–18, 108–145.

<sup>46</sup>Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, p. 96f.



attributes with His essence (for example, *al-‘ilm dhātuhu*).<sup>47</sup> Consequently, he denies the separate existence of attributes, a thesis which precedes that of the Mu‘tazilīs Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 235/849) and al-Nazzām (d. 221/836); God knows, hears and sees by virtue of His essence which is not divided into parts.<sup>48</sup> Also al-Riḍā states that God is Omnipotent by virtue of His essence (*qādir li-dhātihī*) not by virtue of power (*lā bi ‘l-quḍra*).<sup>49</sup>

A theme which is connected both with the problem of attributes and the problem of free will and predestination is God’s will. Notwithstanding the prohibition against inquiring into God’s essence and attributes, to which we shall refer later, Ja‘far al-Šādiq and al-Riḍā state in several traditions<sup>50</sup> that God has two kinds of will (*mashī‘a*, *irāda*): a. A decisive will (*irādat ḥatm*); and b. An inducing will (*irādat ‘azm*). These two terms can be understood in the light of the examples adduced in the tradition. God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from the tree, and this was His inducing will. However, He willed their act of eating, meaning that He decided that they should eat, and His will was necessarily implemented. Likewise, God ordered Ibrāhīm to sacrifice his son Ishāq, but He did not will by a decisive will that Ibrāhīm should do it.<sup>51</sup> ‘Allāma Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, an eminent Imāmī-Shī‘ī scholar in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, calls the first kind of will “creative will” (*irāda takwīniyya*) and the second kind “legislative will” (*irāda tashrī‘iyya*). Creative will refers to a thing from the point of view of existence, meaning that this will makes a thing exist, while legislative will refers to the moral value of a thing. God orders the good and forbids the evil.<sup>52</sup>

Al-Šādiq’s and al-Riḍā’s use of *kalām* argumentation must be jux-

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108. Cf. al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 484.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *‘Uyūn*, p. 96.

<sup>50</sup> These traditions are ascribed to ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (still alive in the year 307/919), a prominent Qummī scholar, a Qur’ān exegete and an important authority of al-Kulaynī. His father, Ibrāhīm b. Hāshim, is said to have known al-Riḍā. See Madelung, “Contribution,” p. 130; M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 33–35.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, p. 151.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 1. Very probably al-Ṭabāṭabā‘ī adopted these two terms from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who distinguished between *al-irāda al-kawniyya* and *al-irāda al-dīniyya al-shar‘iyya*, in accordance with what is found in our Imāmī-Shī‘ī source. F. Meier, “The Cleanest about Predestination: A Bit of Ibn Taymiyya,” in his *Essays on Islamic Piety and Mysticism*, trans. John O’Kane (Leiden, 1999), p. 328f. Meier points out earlier sources of this differentiation between God’s two kinds of will. *Ibid.*, pp. 330–334.

Ja‘far al-Šādiq and al-Riḍā discussed other theological issues, such as the refutation of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh* — see, for example, al-Majlisī, *Biḥār*, vol. 4, pp. 11–15. Al-Kashshī, *Rijāl*, p. 241.) in a logical way. I have not addressed these discussions here because they do not add essential points to our argument.

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taposed with traditions in which they forbid engaging in *kalām* and defame the *mutakallimūn*. Do these traditions contradict the proofs we have sought to advance in this paper? To answer this question, let us first introduce the materials against dealing with theology in general and with *kalām* in particular.

To begin, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq advocates God's transcendence which results in the prohibition to consider God's essence. "Beware of speculation (*tafakkur*) about God, for speculation about God only adds perplexity," and "Speak on what is below the Throne and not on what is above the Throne", meaning do not speak about metaphysical matters.<sup>53</sup> Al-Ṣādiq also warns of the danger of engaging in religious disputations, for these create doubts.<sup>54</sup> On Qur'ān 53:42 "And that the final end is unto thy Lord" (*wa-ilā allāh al-muntahā*), which is usually interpreted to mean man's coming before God after death, al-Ṣādiq says that "When speech (or discursive theology) reaches God, stop it" (*idhā intahā al-kalām ilā allāh fa-amsikū*). Thus it is permitted to speak about all religious matters except for God. In another tradition al-Ṣādiq links God's transcendence with the ban on speaking about God: "People always (logically?) speak (*lā yazālu bihim al-manṭiq*) [about religious matters] till they come to speak [in discursive manner (*takallamū*)] about God. When you hear this, say 'there is no god but Allāh the One who has no like'."<sup>55</sup> The last statement means that since God is a being without equal, He cannot be known.

As a logical result of the perception of God's transcendence and the prohibition against treating His essence in a speculative manner, Ja'far condemns the *mutakallimūn* as being impious and harbouring doubts. In the same context, Ibn Bābawayh cites Ja'far's tradition that the *mutakallimūn*<sup>56</sup> will perish,<sup>57</sup> while the Muslims<sup>58</sup> will be saved, which seems to suggest that the former are unbelievers or heretics. Al-Riḍā turns the prohibition on *kalām* into an absolute ban. He was asked about the Mutakallimūn's<sup>59</sup> interpretation concerning his forefathers' prohibi-

<sup>53</sup> Al-Majlisī, *Bihār*, vol. 3, p. 259. Cf. Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 471f. *Babylonian Talmud*, trac. *Ḥagīga*, fol. 11b. Similar notions also appear in Sunnī religious literature. See Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology*, ch. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Majlisī, *ibid.* Ibn Bābawayh, *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 473. *Idem*, *al-Muqni' wa 'l-hidāya*, Muḥammad b. Maḥdī, ed. (Tehran, 1377 AH), p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Here they are termed *aṣḥāb al-kalām*, literally those who have or practise *kalām*.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 476.

<sup>58</sup> Or the Shī'īs (reading *musallamūn*). I am grateful to Prof. Amir-Moezzi for this note.

<sup>59</sup> Exactly: "Your clients the *mutakallimūn*" (*mawālīka al-mutakallimūn*), which is a clear allusion to the notion that *kalām* is not a pure Arabic mode for dealing with religious matters.

tion against engaging in *kalām*. The *mutakallimūn* understood this prohibition as being directed against those unskilled in *kalām*, whereas the skilled were allowed to engage in *kalām*. Al-Riḍā rejected this interpretation, stating that both the skilled and unskilled were forbidden to use *kalām*, "for its sin (the sin of using *kalām*) is greater than its usefulness" (*fa-inna ithmahu akbaru min naf'ihī*<sup>60</sup>). One should add to this statement traditions which forbid the use of analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) in religious matters, both in law and theology. True, most of these traditions deal with law;<sup>61</sup> however, Ja'far generalizes the prohibition against using analogy when he states that the Qur'ān and the Sunna refer to everything,<sup>62</sup> meaning that there is no need to use *qiyās*. The same attitude toward using analogy appears among traditionalist circles in Sunnī Islam.<sup>63</sup>

We have seen that according to our sources, the Imams Ja'far and al-Riḍā used *kalām* argumentation and analogy which are expressed, *inter alia*, in the argument from design. However, they forbade the use of either. How can these two positions be reconciled? We can suggest several solutions. The first is the Imams' acceptance of *kalām* purely as a weapon in the battle against unbelievers and heretics. In al-Shaykh al-Mufīd's (d. 413/1022) view, the *mutakallim* Hishām b. al-Ḥakam was one of the greatest followers of Ja'far, whom Ja'far regarded as a defender of Islam against the unbelievers.<sup>64</sup> Thus, *kalām* is rejected as a method for dealing with Islamic religious ideas, and may only be employed as a device against opponents. But this solution still does not explain the Imams' use of *kalām* in formulating their own doctrines.

However, a second solution is alluded to in the tradition cited above; that is, *kalām* is a danger to the common people, thus only proficient scholars are permitted to use it. This view is buttressed by the actions of the Imams themselves, namely, in their use of *kalām* argumentation and analogical reasoning. As we have seen, the *kalām* of the Imam is lawful. This also suggests that the source of the problem was not *kalām* methods of argumentation, but rather the ideas expressed by certain *mutakallimūn*. It may also be argued that the Imams adapted their conduct to changing circumstances. The fifth Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir is reported to have given one of his followers different answers to the same

<sup>60</sup>This is a paraphrase on Qur'ān 2:219. Ibn Bābawayh, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 477.

<sup>61</sup>Al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 1, pp. 57–59.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 59, para. 4.

<sup>63</sup>Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology*, ch. 3.

<sup>64</sup>Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Fuṣūl al-mukhtāra min al-'uyūn wa 'l-maḥāsīn* (Beirut, 1985), p. 28. For this work, whose materials were collected by al-Mufīd's disciple al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (f. 436/1044), see M.J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd* (Beirut, 1978), p. 34, para. 86.

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question because of *taqiyya*.<sup>65</sup> It is, of course, possible for an Imam to change his mind, a phenomenon not uncommon even among the greatest personalities. However the Imams' ambivalent attitude toward *kalām* is explained or rationalized, the phenomenon itself cannot be denied; that is, the Imams Ja'far and al-Riḍā used *kalām* and analogical reasoning. This ambivalence is also exhibited in the works of Sunnī scholars such as Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya and others.

In his *The Divine Guide in Early Shī'ism*, Amir-Moezzi characterizes the teachings of the Imams as dominated by what he calls "the hiero-intelligence" which perceives the suprarational.<sup>66</sup> The Imams' doctrines, characterized by this intelligence, consist of cosmogonic, mystic, esoteric and magical elements. Amir-Moezzi ascribes the use of *kalām* argumentation mainly to the Imams' disciples but not to the Imams themselves.<sup>67</sup> This is an evaluation which contradicts explicit traditions. It is true that, as we have seen, there are traditions hostile to *kalām* and to the use of dialectical and logical reasoning, but it is likewise true that traditions imbued with *kalām* argumentation also exist. Using the same sources cited in Amir-Moezzi's work, my impression is that Ja'far's and al-Riḍā's approach to theology through logical methods is not exceptional. Moreover, I disagree with Amir-Moezzi's sharp distinction between engaging in mysticism on the one hand and in rational theology on the other. One has to distinguish between the epistemological and existential levels. From the epistemological point of view, sacred intellect stands in contradistinction to rational discursive intellect. However, in reality a thinker may use both devices. Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) was a mystic and also a *mutakallim*. The same combination of theology and mysticism can be applied to al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1073) and to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Al-Ghazālī is also an example of a scholar who both condemned *kalām* and used it. The theologian al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) was a Sunnī in his behaviour, but held some Ismā'īlī doctrines.<sup>68</sup> In his treatise *The Book of Guidance to the Duties of the Heart* (*Kitāb al-hidāya ilā farā'id al-qulūb*), the Jewish mystic Bahyā b. Paqūda (fl. at the second half of the eleventh century) merges mysticism with *kalām* proofs.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup>For the term precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyya*), see E. Kohlberg, "Some Imāmī-Shī'ī Views on *Taqiyya*," *JAOS* 95 (1975): 395-402 (= *Belief and Law in Imāmī Shī'ism*, Variorum 1991, III). Van Ess, *Theologie*, vol. 1, p. 284. Al-Nawbakhtī, *Kitāb firaq al-shī'a*, H. Ritter, ed. (Istanbul, 1931), p. 52, l. 6ff.

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 6ff.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup>W. Madelung & T. Mayer, *Struggling with the Philosopher, A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics, A New Arabic Edition and English Translation of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī's Kitāb al-Muṣāra'a* (London and New York, 2001), pp. 1-4.

<sup>69</sup>D. Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy, Sufi Language of Religious Expe-*

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Judah Ha-Levi incorporates theological and philosophical proofs along with mystical perceptions in his *Kuzari*.<sup>70</sup>

In sum, the literature of the Imams is more complex than modern scholars have suggested. Amir-Moezzi has turned our attention to the differences among the Imams concerning involvement in politics.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, I think that it is implausible to present the Imams as holding a mainly monolithic set of ideas characterized by either rationalism or mysticism. Every Imam should be examined in the light of the traditions ascribed to him. In our research we have emphasized the role of *kalām* and logical reasoning in the teachings of Ja'far and al-Riḍā without excluding other forms of literature. Whatever can be said about the role of *kalām* in their doctrines in relation to other ideas and modes of learning, one point cannot be ignored: their use of *kalām* and logical reasoning.<sup>72</sup> It seems reasonable to assume that this use of *kalām* by the Imams is one of the factors which paved the way for the strengthening of rationalist inclinations in Imāmī-Shī'ism in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

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<sup>70</sup>Y. Silman, *Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi, the Kuzari and the Evolution of Thought* (Albany, 1995).

<sup>71</sup>*The Divine Guide*, pp. 62–69.

<sup>72</sup>Al-Mufīd notes that the leaders of the Imāmiyya have always engaged in logical reasoning; see Madelung, "Imamism," p. 22, n. 1.

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