

Two Competing Approaches in the Mu'tazilite View of the Human Being: The Traditions of Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām

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Abstract: This article seeks to present the bases of two views related to human beings held by Basran Mu'tazilites and their reflections in theoretical physics, knowledge, and ethics. The first one is based on the rejection of atomism, which was begun by al-Nazzām and continued by al-Jāhiz, and therefore argues that the human being is essentially nothing more than soul and that the body is just an instrument. The second one, which accepts atomism and was begun by Abū al-Hudhayl and reached its zenith under Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār, states that the human being consists of the body and that the soul is like a breath and has no ability to direct a person's actions. One cannot, however, evaluate such views just from how a group perceives the body and the soul, because one can also observe the results of such views in other matters related to human beings, such as knowledge and ethics. Indeed, al-Nazzām accepts the nature of man and his followers dealt with issues like the formation of self, whereas Abū al-Hudhayl, who rejects nature or any other perpetual power, and his followers focused on the progress of the human being's actions.

Keywords: *al-Nazzām, Abū al-Hudhayl, Mu'tazila, atomism, nafs, human nature.*

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Introduction

It is no exaggeration to say that evaluating the conception of a human being according to a certain theory reveals not only its view of human beings, but also provides clues for what it has to say about knowledge, ethics, and politics. As the goal of such an investigation is to determine a human being's different aspects, dealing with humanity as a whole means analyzing the basic source of these aspects.

Early Muslim theologians held heated debates on what a human being is in their efforts to identify the real subject of actions and behaviors like knowing, hearing, and acting. Almost all of them came up with a different answer. Hishām b. Ḥakam (d. 190/805) argues that a human being consists of an inanimate body to which the soul gives life. He thinks that a soul, a light from the lights, comprehends things and performs the acts. Bishr b. Mu'tamir (d. 210/825) similarly contends that a human being is composed of an outward body and a soul that gives it life. Mu'ammār b. 'Abbād (d. 220/835) does not accept the body as an essential component of a human being. According to him the human being consists of an essence that accepts neither disintegration and integration, nor motion and rest. This unperceivable essence, which has no need for time or space, puts the body in motion and then directs and stops it.¹ Therefore, a person's actions do not originate from the body.

Dirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815 [?]) argues that a person is a body formed from accidents.² 'Alī al-Aswārī (d. 240/854), who had followed Abū al-Hudhayl (d. 227/841) but then joined al-Nazzām, thinks that a person consists of a soul, which is located in the heart. Hishām al-Fuwāṭī (d. before 230/845) believes that an indivisible part (*juz'un lā yatajazza'*) located in the heart makes a human being a human being.³ In a like manner, Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 240/854) argues that what accounts for this reality is located in the heart and is the same thing that makes a person the object of commands and prohibitions. This scholar also transmitted the view that animate souls located in the body feel emotions and pains, but only the soul located in the heart possesses the ability to do something, for the heart controls the body and the body obeys the heart.⁴ Al-Najjār and his followers state that a human being is composed of many parts, and thus whenever one talks about human being the latter should be understood as the sum of a body and a soul.⁵

1 Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa al-'adl: al-Taklīf*, ed. Muhammad 'Alī al-Najjār and 'Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Cairo: n.d.), XI, 310-11.

2 Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 310-14.

3 Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 310-14.

4 Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 331.

5 For the details of the Mu'tazilite views, see Majid Fakhry, "The Mu'tazilite View of Man," *Recherches*

Based on this, one can easily conclude that Muslims of the third/ninth century pondered deeply on the nature of the human being. As a matter of fact, this was actually a new subject for the theologians because not even the core of such discussions had been present in the prior century. Even though we cannot say exactly why this heated debate appeared, one should take into consideration the possible effects of translated Greek books and Muslim theologians' debates with dualist approaches such as Manichaeism, which asserted that the existence of different essences caused the person to engage in good and evil actions.⁶ In fact, these debates with Manicheans and the Platonic and Aristotelian definitions of the human being lead us to this conclusion.⁷ On the other hand, one should also remember that the issue of free will had been among the most essential topics debated by Muslim theologians ever since the early days of Islam and that deepening the ensuing discourse would be considered effective in terms of discussing the nature of human beings.

Even if we cannot make a clear classification based on the afore-mentioned definitions, it is understood that this particular discourse developed around the various views of the body and soul in terms of who (or what) was the real agent. Another issue is the sequence according to which the above-mentioned thinkers influenced each other. Frankly speaking, it is difficult to classify the theologians of this period as part of a school. However, considering their influence upon the following periods, we can also say that this particular discourse was formed around two different conceptions of the human being. Al-Nazzām (d. 231/845), Thumāma b. Ashras (d. 213/828), and al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868) held that one should understand *nafs* (soul) as referring to the human being, for the body is just a medium for the soul. The second view, begun by Abū al-Hudhayl and continued by Abū 'Ali al-Jubbā'i (d. 303/915) and his son Abū Ḥashim al-Jubbā'i (d. 321/933), reached its zenith under Qāḍi 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024). According to it, the body refers

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6 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Jam'iyya al-Ri'āyat al-mutakāmila, 2004), 4, 441; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin*, ed. Nawāf al-Jarrāh (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadr, 2008), 190. See also George F. Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mu'tazilite Ethical Rationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7/1 (1976): 66.

7 For example, al-Jāhiz employs "meanings in the soul" which recalls Platonic thinking. See al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, I, 205-06. Reminding us of the Aristotelian definition, he defines human being as "a talking living (*al-insānu huwa al-ḥayyu al-nātiqū*).” See al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, VII, 49. In another book, he defines a human being as a declaring and talking living being. See Jāhiz, *al-Bayān wa al-Tabayīn*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Ḥārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥanjī, 1998), I, 70, 170.

to the human being. The difference between these two views extends beyond the missions attributed to body and soul. The first view accepts that human beings have an innate and perpetual nature, whereas the second one rejects the existence of any nature that ensures the carrying out of mental and physical deeds.⁸ The latter view argues that rather than nature, the conditions in which the human beings exist cause motion and action.

The goal of this study is to show not only the bases of these two views from physical aspects, but also their reflections in other areas, such as ethics. By doing so, I hope to get a correct and comprehensive understanding of these two tradition in respect to their conception of human being.

Al-Nazzām's Soul-oriented View on Human Beings

According to al-Nazzām, the soul refers to the human being, for which the body is only an instrument. If the soul were not in the body, it could be in a state that thinks necessarily. However, as this is not the case, the soul has to make voluntary choices when faced with joy and sorrow because it has to fulfill its fundamental function, namely, thinking, not out of obligation but out of choice. For this view, the human being's power originates from itself, for he or she performs physical activities without needing any external power/being either before or during the activity.⁹

According to al-Nazzām, who argues that the soul can act independently from the body, it can carry out the necessary actions,¹⁰ namely, those that are a sign of human nature. However, given that the soul is faced with the calamity of the body¹¹ and exists in the body,¹² a human's acts occur volitionally and the ensuing pleasure and sorrow are the motives of actions. On the other hand, if soul were to be saved from the body, it could only execute these actions by necessity.¹³ When we think about the meaning of occurrence "out of necessity/naturally," we can say that al-Nazzām argues that the body is the cause for the actions' volitional (*ikhtiyārī*)

8 Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *Muḥīṭ*, I, 56, 386-88; Qāḍī, *al-Mughni*, IX, 10-20.

9 Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, 191; Abū al-Husayn 'Abd al-Rahmān b. 'Uthmān al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār wa al-radd 'alā Ibn al-Rāwandī*, ed. Henrik Samuel Nyberg (Egypt: Dār al-kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925), 36; Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bi, "Bābu dhikr al-Mu'tazila min maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin," in *Faḍl al-i'tizāl wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, ed. Fu'ad Sayyid (Tunisia: al-Dār al-Tūnusiyya li al-nashr, 1986), 70-71; al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-kutub al-thaqāfiyya, 1994), I, 42-43.

10 Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, 191.

11 Ḥayyāt, *al-Intiṣār*, 36.

12 Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 1:42-43.

13 Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, 191.

occurrence, for it is the source of senses and desires (*shahwa*). As expressed by al-Jāhiz, one of his followers, the soul is the source of intellect¹⁴ and the latter's encounter with desire brings about the optionality of human acts. Al-Jāhiz also maintains that this optionality implies the state of uncertainty, whereas those acts dominated by the intellect refer to the state of naturalness.¹⁵ In that case, from al-Nazzām's perspective, the soul can fulfill the functions of thought and mental actions by necessity, and the intellect's activities cannot actualize optionally in a soul separated from the body.

Al-Nazzām views the soul as a subtle body (*al-jism al-laṭīf*)¹⁶ that spreads through the body, beginning from the heart, and has a different effect upon every organ depending upon its characteristics.¹⁷ Horevitz, who tried to discover the basis of this view, linked the idea of a soul as a body to Stoic influence, as that school sees the soul as a breath (*psukhê*). According to him, both views refer to the same thing. In like manner, al-Nazzām's thinking of soul as a thing nested in body is another proof for Horevitz. Even though one may establish some similarities between al-Nazzām and the Stoics, no historical evidence shows that he had Stoic sources.¹⁸

The relationship that al-Nazzām established among the heart, the rest of the limbs, and the soul also suggests a link between him and Aristotelian thought. Unlike Galen (d. 210), who argued for a physiology centered on the brain, al-Nazzām prefers a heart-centered physiology, as did Aristotle and his followers. He argues that the soul-body relationship is in the form of *mudākhala*, namely, the interpenetration of the bodies. Later historians of thought give the example of the water in rosewater in an attempt to explain that the soul is spread all over the body and is in mutual interaction with all of the latter's elements.

Al-Nazzām holds that just like every other body, the soul also has parts. Based on an expression in one of al-Sharistānī's works, which uses *quwwa* (faculty), *qism* (part), and "the ability before action" together, one can interpret "parts of the soul" as sensation, the ability to move, and desire.¹⁹ Examining the soul's faculties

14 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Ṣinā'a al-kalām," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz: al-Kalāmiyya*, ed. 'Ali Bū Mulhim (Beirut: Dār wa maktaba al-hilāl, 2004), 54.

15 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Kitāb al-Masā'il wa al-jawābāt fi al-ma'rifa," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz: al-Kalāmiyya*, ed. 'Ali Bū Mulhim (Beirut: Dār wa maktaba al-hilāl, 2004), 116.

16 Al-Ka'bi, "Bābu dhikr al-Mu'tazila," 70-71.

17 Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 42-43.

18 'Abd al-Hādī Abū Rida, *Ibrāhīm b. Sayyār al-Nazzām wa āra'uh al-kalāmiyya al-falsafīyya* (Cairo: Matba'a al-Lajna al-Ta'lif wa al-Tarjama wa al-Nashr, 1946), 102.

19 Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, I, 42-43.

in a similar manner in the works of al-Jāḥiẓ, who adopted al-Nazzām's thinking, also supports this interpretation.²⁰ And thus al-Nazzām says that the soul is one, that it has parts, and that the mental and physical acts can happen by means of these parts. Neither of them present a map of the soul's faculties or powers as do the Greek and Hellenistic cultures; however, al-Nazzām's writings do contain the concepts of sensation, uniting sensible forms, imagination, and thinking, each one of which is an act of soul. In fact, the following sentence briefly explains the relationship between the soul and mental states: "The soul is the one that feels, senses, perceives, is one part (that actualizes all these); it is neither light nor dark."²¹

We may continue to explain al-Nazzām's thoughts by analyzing this statement. As he rejected atomism and wrote books on this subject, it would be wrong to interpret "one part" as "atom." If one takes both the context and the discourses of his time into consideration, one can conclude that this phrase was directed against the Manicheans, who believed that the soul could not be accepted as one thing because certain actions done by human beings are completely opposite to each other, such as performing both good and bad deeds. Therefore, the soul cannot be of one essence. In his discussions with the Manicheans, al-Nazzām contended that the soul was one essence and that that essence carried out all mental activities.²²

Al-Jāḥiẓ, who developed his master's thoughts on physics and human nature, interprets the view of powers, which exists perpetually from birth, as the tendencies and inclinations of human beings. The soul consists of innumerable tendencies, from fondness to comfort, avarice to wealth, looking after one's own comfort, domination, stinginess, selfishness, interest in the opposite gender, and desire to protect one's self. Such tendencies originate from a couple of main human inclinations, such as sexuality, nourishment, and communication.²³ As a result of the ensuing conflict and support among them throughout one's life, other tendencies manifest themselves. For example, the need for sex and nourishment lead people toward objects like wealth, property, and houses, which are used to satisfy such needs, whereas sex leads to the development of all kinds of behaviors ranging from paying attention

20 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Dalā'il wa al-i'tibār 'ala al-khalq wa al-tadbīr* (Beirut: Dār al-nadwa al-Islāmiyya, 1988), 54; "Kitmān al-sirr wa ḥifẓ al-lisān," in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn. (Cairo: Maktaba al-Ḥanji, 1964), 156.

21 Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, 190.

22 Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, IV, 442.

23 Jāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, I/I, 108; "Fi al-jiddi wa al-hazl," in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Harūn (Cairo: Maktaba al-Khanji, 1964), 270-71; "Kitāb al-Masā'il wa al-jawābāt fī al-ma'rifa," 116.

to clothing to forming a unique style.²⁴ Human feelings of selfishness and jealousy help develop mutual relations such as trade and agreements.²⁵ Accordingly, none of a person's moral characteristics corresponds to a feature that does not originally exist, but rather to one that develops over time. All of them already exist in human beings and manifest themselves when the conditions are suitable.²⁶

Al-Jāhiz, who tries to determine the instinctive foundations of behavior, writes that if one defines the fundamental determiners of human nature, it can be easier to make sense out of human behavior. For instance, providing information originates from the human instinct to manifest his/her superiority as a living being, pride originates from his/her nature of desire to overcome, writing comes from his/her thought to become eternal and protect his/her existence, and extreme desire and anger originate from the sadness felt for missing something desired.²⁷ In this way, he tries to figure out the tendencies and inclinations that originate human behaviors.

Al-Jāhiz also examines the effects of circumstances on human behavior by pointing out the effects of foods on the body and the resulting affects one's moral tendencies. He writes that the human body is formed of four fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. A person's behavior changes depending upon these fluids' dominance or passiveness. For example, there is a direct relation between happiness and the scarcity/abundance of blood, between calmness/laziness and the scarcity/abundance of phlegm, between aggressiveness and the scarcity/abundance of yellow bile, and between sorrow/sadness and the scarcity/abundance of black bile.²⁸

Moreover, the effects of circumstances on one's character are not limited to this. Just as the effects of the environment influence the appearance of animals, it also influences all of their behaviors, even to how they walk. Careful observation reveals similarities between human beings and animals that share the same environment,²⁹ and clearly so in the formation of desires. On the one hand, al-

24 Jāhiz, "Kitmān al-sirr wa ḥifz al-lisān," 144; Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, I, 11.

25 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Ḥujaj al-nubuwwa," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1991), 249.

26 al-Jāhiz, "Ḥujaj al-nubuwwa," 238.

27 Jāhiz, "Kitmān al-sirr wa ḥifz al-lisān," 145; Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Risāla al-nubl wa al-tanabbul wa dhamm al-kibr," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz: al-Adabiyya*, ed. 'Alī Bū Mulḥim, (Beirut: Dār wa maktaba al-hilāl, 2004), 135; Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, II, 74; 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Al-Ma'āsh wa al-ma'ād," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, 124-25.

28 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāhiz, "Kitāb al-Tarbi' wa al-tadwīr," in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, III, 79-80.

29 Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, IV, 70-71.

Jāḥiẓ often states that human nature is influential and that all desires originate from a human tendency because it is impossible to eliminate or suppress them. For example, even physical interference with one's genitalia would not be enough to suppress his/her sexual tendencies. Contending that wants and desires are shaped by the social environment and that sexual desires are shaped by the society in which one lives, he presents the male inclination toward foreign concubines as an example. Accordingly, Basran men desire Indian or lower-class women, Yamani men desire Abyssinian women, and Damascene men desire Greek women. "Other than the exceptions, everybody likes the foreigners and concubines coming to them."³⁰ We may interpret these statements as follows: People feel lust toward those people of opposite gender whom they can easily acquire and with whom they can enjoy different pleasures. Therefore, al-Jāḥiẓ draws attention to how social conditions affect moral inclinations.

This principle of "human nature and environmental conditions" in his ethical analyses is, in a way, an adaptation of the classical physics theory of *kumūn* to ethics. In fact, those who support this theory both accept the conflict between bodies and sub-bodies and argue that the human self's tendencies are in constant conflict with each other and with the ability to think. They also say that the most dominant tendency turns into the person's character. On the other hand, when we think about the emphasis placed on the perpetual effects of one's surroundings on the behaviors, the physical foundations of these explanations of how the environment influences human life become understandable.

In conclusion, al-Nazzām and al-Jāḥiẓ maintain that the soul is the essence that creates actions and that human beings, due to the perpetual nature of this essence, have certain innate tendencies just as all objects do. But because human beings have different circumstances and bodies, such tendencies reveal themselves in different ways.

Abū al-Hudhayl and His Followers' View on Human Beings

When we study the ethics-physics relationship established by the atomist school, another Mu'tazilite approach, we encounter a different theory. Abū al-Hudhayl argues that the human being is an eating, drinking personality with two legs and two hands, whereas the soul is only an accident belonging to human beings. Therefore, when one talks about human beings one is actually talking about the

30 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, "Fakhr al-sūdān 'ala al-biḍān," in *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, 215.

body, for the soul, just like one's hair or nails, has no effect upon the creation of actions but should be considered as something within the body.³¹ According to this, human beings have accidents just like other objects do, and the soul is one of these accidents. In other words, Abū al-Hudhayl regards the body as a main constitutive element of human being, whereas al-Nazzām regards the latter as the soul. The former views "the outward personality" as that which perceives and comprehends, and the latter regards that which perceives and comprehends as the soul.

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, who continued to defend atomist thought in the Mu'tazilite school³² and therefore rejected the existence of the nature of beings,³³ completed some of the ambiguous parts in Abū al-Hudhayl's thinking. In the volume titled *al-Taklīf* in his twenty-volume *al-Mughnī*, he mostly cites and discusses the definitions of human being argued by third/ninth and fourth/tenth-century Muslim theologians. One of them is the view adopted by the Mu'tazilite theologian Mu'āmmar. As mentioned above, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār states that the soul cannot be independent of body because vitality, the element that makes human beings active, necessarily needs a location. For example, only a body can sense heat, cold, and pain. Thence, he rejects the posited body-soul dualism.³⁴ He also rejects the perception of a soul spread over the body as an effective element (a softened form of such a dualism) on the grounds that such a situation may destroy the organs' harmony and creates an inconsistent human activity.³⁵

Saying that the soul is active in an organ necessitates that it be attached to the body and that in the case of the non-existence of a perceivable activity from heart toward other organs, the activity will not be realized, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār criticizes al-Aswāri's view that the soul is in the heart as an element that gives vitality.³⁶ He further maintains that the argument of accidents existing in the human body give human beings their vitality is unacceptable because accidents are the products of an active cause and cannot be a sufficient cause (*ma'nā*) in and of themselves.³⁷

31 al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt*, 189.

32 For Mu'tazilite atomism see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 273-495; Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalam Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Mu'tazilī Cosmology* (Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1994), 90-141; Josef van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (London: Harvard University Press, 2006), 79-117.

33 Yusuf Rahman, *The Miraculous Nature of Muslim Scripture: A Study of 'Abd al-Jabbār's I'jāz al-Qur'ān* (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1995), 14-19.

34 J. Peters, *God's Created Speech; A study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qāḍī I-Quḍāt Abū I-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār bn Aḥmad al-Hamaḍānī* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 410.

35 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 314-15.

36 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 318.

37 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, XI, 321.

Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār criticizes al-Nazzām’s contention that the soul spreads over the body as the main element of vitality and that the body’s vitality and movements depend on this essence³⁸ in the following terms: While being able to move a healthy organ, not being able to move a paralyzed organ shows that there is no active soul over the body. In like manner, the fact that when the organs of senses become impaired one cannot feel or sense proves that there is no active essence as soul.³⁹ According to him, the proofs showing that the human being characterized as *ḥayy* (living) is made up of the body also show that it is not made up of pieces and that the *ḥayy* being is the seen personality. These proofs also lead to the conclusion that there is no soul spread over the body.⁴⁰

In addition to rejecting any body-soul dualism, he also criticizes the view that the human being is a body-soul combination by criticizing the view of Bishr b. Mu‘tamar. Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār proves his view by arguing that life (*ḥayāt*) and a living being (*ḥayy*) are two different things.⁴¹ As implied in this criticism, this reality forms the main parameters of his view of the human being, the understanding of which depends on understanding the attributes of having knowledge and ability. Accordingly, life is a state related to each organ, and an organ’s ability to sense and perceive, to feel heat, cold, and pain, shows that it has life.⁴²

In other words, the body’s ability in this regard shows that it is the main element that forms the concept of the human being as well as what does not constitute a main element for the human being. Based on this justification, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār argues that those organs with feelings have the feature of life, whereas blood and hair do not. Therefore the soul, like blood and hair, is not an active being, does not give human vitality, and is not a living being. At most, it can be something needed for being alive, such as vibrancy, breath, and wind.⁴³ Thus he rejects its existence of the soul as an essence that can affect on body but accepts the possibility of a soul as breath.⁴⁴

After claiming that our organs have life when considered one by one, he nevertheless asserts that they are not living and so concludes that organs do not

38 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, XI, 339.

39 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, XI, 339.

40 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, XI, 340.

41 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, XI, 335.

42 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, XI, 309-13; See also R. M. Frank, “Several Fundamental Assumptions of the Baṣra School of the Mu‘tazila,” *Studia Islamica* 33 (1971): 6.

43 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 331, 334.

44 Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 337, 338.

carry out actions based on the fact that heat and cold, despite being two opposite feelings, are felt in the same way by the same sense organ despite being different features of the senses. Given that reality, the sense organ cannot be the agent because the same organ cannot provide more than one feeling. Therefore, something else should be the agent of actions, namely, whole human being (*jumla*). And so "living being" refers to the entire human being.⁴⁵ Based on these explanations, one can easily conclude that the concepts of "living" (*ḥayy*) and "whole" (*jumla*), which are used almost interchangeably, are determinative in his thought.

Being "living" is accepted as the framing concept that encompasses the agent's fundamental characteristics: having knowledge and ability.⁴⁶ Given the mission he lays on "living" by following the footsteps of Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'i and Abū Ḥashim al-Jubbā'i, whom he calls as his masters, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār defines a human being as "a being distinguished from other beings by its special formation, and a living (*ḥayy*) and able (*qādir*) being formed from a known structure."⁴⁷ He calls a human being *al-ḥayy al-qādir* (an able living being).⁴⁸ To explain the meaning of living, he uses the features of being able and of having knowledge (knowing) as the basis, for according to him the proof of having life is one's possession of ability and knowledge.⁴⁹

Considering the whole human being as the agent brings up certain theoretical problems, the main one being that in accordance with a metaphysical principle, an extrinsic cause should have an impact on the body.⁵⁰ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, who is aware of this problem, seems to have resolved it as follows: Given that the entirety of something is considered extrinsic in regards to its parts,⁵¹ accepting the entirety of a human being as effective does not mean accepting the body as effective over the body.

As mentioned above, he defines the human being as *al-ḥayy al-qādir* (an able living being),⁵² a conceptualization that is almost same as al-Nazzām's *al-ḥayy al-qawīyy* to define the soul. Even though *quwwa* (power) is used instead of *qudra* (ability) are used interchangeably in Islamic theology and Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's

45 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 314.

46 Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī, *Fi al-tawḥīd dīwān al-uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīdā (Egypt: Maṭba'a dār al-kutub, 1969), 24.

47 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 311, 321.

48 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 314, 317.

49 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa* (Cairo: Maktaba al-Wahba, 1965), 161.

50 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 88.

51 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 87.

52 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 314, 317.

own books state that they are synonymous,⁵³ studying the thinkers' preferences reveals that they perceive these two concepts as different. In respect of the actions of human beings, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and other atomist theologians prefer *qudra*, whereas al-Nazzām and other non-atomist theologians and Aristotelians prefer *quwwa*. While *qudra* refers to ability in general (i.e., a being with the ability to carry out an action with different aspects), *quwwa* means the ability in particular to do a certain aspect of a thing.⁵⁴ Those who employ *quwwa* say, for example, the *quwwa* of a certain organ, whereas those who employ *qudra* say that the whole human being has *qudra*.

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār contends that a human being's ability does not originate from himself (*bi-nafsihi*), which means that an external source gives him the ability to can carry out his actions.⁵⁵ Al-Nazzām, on the other hand, posits that the soul means life and *quwwa* and that it can move by the ability originating from itself (*bi-nafsihi*).⁵⁶ Therefore, no ability is given to a human being either before or during an action⁵⁷ because the human being or soul perpetually has the ability to carry out an action.

Clearly, these two very different views of a human being are not just based on the centrality human being's body or soul, but on whether his/her perpetual ability to perform an action is internal (soul) or external (given by God). The difference lies not in God's creation of ability and soul, but whether human beings possess the characteristic of "ability" from the first moment of their existence. If we put this in more contemporary terms, it is the question of whether human beings have had autonomy as regards their actions since the beginning of their existence.

Those theologians who shared Abū al-Hudhayl's atomist views adhered to the idea that human beings did not have a nature. In fact, the definition of a human being made by Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, one of the last Mu'tazilite theologians, is in this context.⁵⁸ According to this view, it is meaningless to argue for the existence of human nature, for accepting that means that one should accept the influence of certain situations existing in human body on knowledge and will, which, in turn, means that human beings are unfree in their actions. Because nature means the

53 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Usūl al-Khamsa*, 393, 402; *al-Muḥiṭ*, II, 160.

54 Al-Jurjāni, *Kitāb al-Ta'rifāt* (Egypt: Maṭba'a al-Khayriyya, 1306 AH), 75-77.

55 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Majmū' fī al-Muḥiṭ bi al-taklīf*, comp. Ibn Mattawayh, ed. J. J. Houben (Beyrut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1981), 2:29; Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Usūl al-Khamsa*, 162.

56 Al-Ka'bi, "Bābu dhikr al-Mu'tazila," 70-71.

57 Al-Ka'bi, "Bābu dhikr al-Mu'tazila," 70-71.

58 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, IX, 331, 334.

power of influence and being influenced, this power existing in body causes the formation of will and action. Instead of this, atomist theologians upheld *qudra*, which holds that before every action that a human being would like to carry out, God creates the ability to do many similar forms of the desired action, which makes the human being *qādir* (able) to carry out the action. This view's main characteristic is the rejecting of the perpetuity of *qudra*,⁵⁹ for its supporters avoid using certain terms that imply perpetuity (e.g., personality, character, and human nature) in their books.

There is a clear parallelism between the discourse around *qudra* and the view of atomism. For example, the body consists of atoms, and because atoms have no perpetual nature the entirety that they form has no certain characteristics like instinct and natural tendency. But this view has some difficulties, for it does not explain how God gives ability to human beings. We should accept that this theory was revised during the fourth/tenth and fifth/eleventh centuries and that such difficulties were minimized. The tenth-century theologian Abū Hashim posited the view of the existence of vacuum between atoms as the Mu'tazilites' fundamental view⁶⁰ and based the theory of *ḥāl* upon it. According to him the variations among the atoms' actions are due to this very vacuum, which allows God or human beings to intervene in the atoms' sequence.⁶¹ Beside that, the possibility of moving an atom both to point A and to point B refers to *ḥāl*. In this way, an interim state was accepted between an object's existence and non-existence, a view that brings the atoms' sequence and their circumstances to forefront. Therefore, when trying to understand an object's movement, one should examine the circumstances enabling it to move before examining the action that causes it to change its location and transform its characteristics. As a result, the atomist theologians started to explain a human being's transformation into an able state via conditions surrounding him/her. Accordingly, the state of healthiness or sickness, refers to the conditions of having *qudra*.

Atomist theologians also explain the origins of values via conditions, for Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār says that "what makes an action good or bad is its circumstances" and that even justice, regarded as the highest value, is good due to its circumstances.

59 Yunus Cengiz, *Mu'tezile'de Eylem Teorisi: Kādī Abdülcebbar Örneği* (İstanbul: Düşün Yayınları, 2012), 115-39.

60 Josef van Ess, "Mu'tezile Atomculuğu," trans. Mehmet Bulğen, *Kelâm Araştırmaları* 9/1 (2012): 272.

61 Abū Rashīd al-Nisābūrī, *al-Masā'il fi al-khilāf bayn al-Baṣriyyin wa al-Baghḍādiyyin*, ed. Ma'n Ziyada and Riḍwān al-Sayyid (Beirut: Ma'ḥūd al-inmā al-'Arabī, 1979), 37.

In another statement, he says that no value accepted as good can be regarded as bad under different circumstances.⁶² By presenting such general principles, he asserts that an action's consequences can only be evaluated by paying attention to the ensuing benefit and harm, pleasure and pain, and sadness and happiness.⁶³ In other words, virtually no action can be evaluated as good or bad in and of itself. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār says that there is a parallelism between the results related to values and the situation of attaining accidents by atoms.⁶⁴ Thus, determining the values' origins depends on the agent's historical circumstances. Just as the view that the atoms' sequence and characteristics, which are assumed to be caused by their relations with other atoms, effect movements, the emergence of the ability (*qudra*) that ensures the actions are accepted as being depends upon the agent's circumstances.

Evaluation and Conclusion

An analysis of these two conceptions of the human being reveals a clear difference between them on one point and a similarity on another point. The most fundamental difference is related to whether one accepts or rejects the existence of human nature. Al-Nazzām and his followers both accept it and contend that every human being has a different ability, whereas Abū al-Hudhayl and his followers reject it and assert that human beings act according to the mental and physical equipment that they possess, which is based on changing circumstances and situations as well as the ability created by God.

When their works are examined, the results of these two views can be seen openly or implicitly in ethical, psychological, social, and historical thought. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine all of these issues in detail; however, we can mention some issues that may express the purposes of this works. For example, all of al-Jāḥiẓ's books on ethics sought to determine the sources of adopting a second nature (tendency) and the practices that ensure this. At the basis of analyzing such human behaviors as speaking, joking, writing, jealousy, pride, and the difficulty of keeping a secret exists the effort to explain their foundations in nature. In like manner, al-Jāḥiẓ explains in his many books how one can attain

62 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Muḥiṭ*, 1, 236; *al-Mughni*, VI/I, 75-77.

63 For an examination on actions, see: George F. Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd. al-Jabbar* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Sophia Vasalou, *Moral Agents and Their Deserts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 87-95.

64 Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 220. Also see Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughni*, VI, 77.

virtues and build himself/herself.⁶⁵ An examination of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's books reveals that there is no mention of such things, for someone who rejects the view of nature cannot explain how to attain a second nature.

It is also possible to observe the effects of these different views in terms of epistemology. The books of al-Nazzām and al-Jāḥiẓ deal with the process of attaining knowledge as sensing, imagination, and thinking,⁶⁶ whereas those of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār examine this process as sensing, assumption, conviction, and opinion.⁶⁷ It is remarkable that he never deals with the issue of imagination. The reason for these differences is the former accepts human abilities and understands human beings by means of them, whereas the latter rejects such a view.

One can say that the common point between these two competing views is that both pay attention to the circumstances and evaluate many issues in the light of them. Both views hold that circumstances are considered the dominant factor. The human being's role can be easily understood in al-Nazzām's view of physics, but not in his view of human beings. However, one can see the effect of this in al-Jāḥiẓ's discourse on almost all issues. Al-Jāḥiẓ thought that human tendencies revealed themselves according to one's circumstances and that actions independent from the circumstances had no value because they would be regarded as good or bad depending on their circumstances. At a later date, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār also accepted this view.

Accepting human nature means making a universal claim. However, as in all claims of universality, this one also is an obstacle to seeing a human being as a historical being. According to the most optimistic interpretation, such a discourse neglects the fact that every human being has different means and potentials. The discourse of universality is also classifier because it evaluates the individuals according to their general and class abilities. In fact, we can observe this approach in modern institutions based on this very claim of universality, for prisons, hospitals, and schools are designed to divide people into classes and neglect their subjectivities.

We may study this analysis by focusing on the circumstances as a discourse that limits the universalist discourse based on accepting human nature. Considering human beings and the relationships based on their circumstances is, to a certain extent, a historicist discourse because it offers the necessity of considering the

65 Yunus Cengiz, *Doğa ve Öznellik Câhiz'in Ahlâk Düşüncesi* (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015), 145-277.

66 Cengiz, *Doğa ve Öznellik*, 92-145.

67 Cengiz, *Mu'tezile'de Eylem Teorisi*, 170-82.

social fields, especially those of ethics and politics, within the context of their historicity. When this is done, it appears that all patients, convicts, students, personnel, and citizens turn into individuals who need to be evaluated separately. Therefore, each one needs to be considered as an individual equipped with different means and potentials.

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