

THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE UNITY IN KITĀB AL-HAYAWĀN OF AL-JĀHIZ

By

SA'ID H. MANSUR, M. A. (Alex.), Ph. D. (McGill)

Department of Arabic

I

In previous writings on al-Jāhiz there is no awareness of the existence of a comprehensive world-view in *K. al-Hayawān*. The crowning achievement of al-Jāhiz's career has been often thought to be a mere book on animals or an encyclopaedia containing subjects irrelevant to each other. This is partly due to the unsystematic way in which al-Jāhiz himself presented his material and to the disorder that characterizes the large amount of material which his book contains. There is, moreover, no separate work devoted to the study of this *magnum opus* and to the proper understanding of its thought-content.* In this paper we shall try to reconstruct al-Jāhiz's concept of Divine Unity and to cast light on his view of God which forms one basic element in his world-view. An attempt will be made to grasp the main line in al-Jāhiz's ontological thinking and to find the way in which he sought to penetrate to the reality of Being.

The idea of creation, in al-Jāhiz's world-view, and the relation between God and the world reflect God's absolute wisdom. Al-Jāhiz's purpose in *K. al-Hayawān* is to find this wisdom wherever it may be. Through the various kinds of creation he sought to establish the existence, unity and glory of God and the absolute distinction between the Creator and the created beings. This is the consistent method by which he approaches the doctrine of tawhīd. The same concern appears everywhere in *K. al-Hayawān*: it lifts the book above the level of an ordinary analytical work to make it into an exercise of serious worship and deep contemplation.

* A separate treatment of this kind has been made by the writer in a Ph. D. thesis submitted to McGill University and entitled "The World-view of al-Jāhiz in *K. al-Hayawān*." نظرة الجاهز إلى الوجود في كتاب الحيوان.

what is not smelled and see what is not seen. Her organization of the different activities according to the degree of knowledge and the strength of body, and her absolute obedience to the chiefs are the real movers to thought and enlightenment for the reason. The bee's great production of a substance useful to people should not also be forgotten¹.

The ant cannot act as a horse in a battle, but yet it enables us to see what subtle sensations it has and its deep consideration of the consequences of its own affairs. This is a high degree of prudence which raises the ant over other animals in sagacity and by which it also stands higher than many people. It can smell what the hungry man cannot smell, carry what is hundreds of times heavier than its body and has a complete ability of co-operation with other ants to whom it can talk and understand.²

Al-Jāhiz shows how worms and maggots generate in vinegar and salt. Worms may generate and live even in poison which is supposed to be deadly. Other tiny animals live on poison and a bird called salamander falls into the fire without having its feathers burnt. The scarab does not move if it is placed among flowers, but once it is taken back to the dung heap, it moves. The lowest animals such as the mole which is blind and deaf and has no sense but that of smell, nevertheless procures its own food when it stands at the entrance of its hole and the flies fall into its mouth. Al-Jāhiz finds in these aspects of animal life a real admonition which should sharpen the minds and awaken the heedless. By reflecting on these things the soul flourishes, the reason becomes enlightened, and the spirit enjoys noble goals.³

We have seen before that al-Jāhiz had a deep interest in showing that the mountain is not more indicative of God than the little stone; nor does the sphere which contains our world give more evidence of God's wisdom than the human body. As evidences of the Creator tiny and subtle things are then of equal value with larger things. As signs of God all these things are not differentiated from one another; there is a differentiation, however, between those who recognize their significance and those who neglect to do so.⁴

1. Vol. VI, p. 10.

2. Vol. IV, pp. 6 — 7.

3. Vol. II, pp. 111 — 112, Vol. V, p. 309, Vol. VI, pp. 411, 434 — 35.

4. Vol. III, p. 229.

Al-Jāhiz saw different aspects of wisdom in the creation of flies in spite of their dirtiness and meanness. He recognized their usefulness to people through their eating harmful mosquitoes. Among animals he did not find a way of sleep more wondrous than that of flies. He saw two possibilities: either the flies sleep or they do not. If they sleep, how does it happen that they both sleep and hold to the wall at the same time; or if they give up conscious control of their legs, how can they avoid falling since the fly is heavier than air. If they do not sleep, it would be even more strange that a nation from the animal kingdom does not need to sleep.¹

Al-Jāhiz describes how a certain snake which lives in the desert catches birds by a very strange trick. In the heat of the desert summer at midday when no creature can bear to touch the hot earth, the snake buries its tail in the burning sand like a stiff piece of wood. The small bird or the locust avoids alighting on the hot sand and prefers to perch on the upright piece of wood. By this trick the snake captures food and is nourished. It goes away when it is satisfied. The marvels seen here are several. The first is the snake's ability at disguise so that the bird could not distinguish between the snake and a piece of wood. The second is the snake's ability to think of this trick, and the third is the snake's lack of regard for the heat of the sand in which it buries one third of its body.²

The first wondrous thing in the locust is its ability to split the solid rock. The locust's tail is not like an iron nail; but when she fixes it on the rock to lay her eggs, she makes furrows in the rock which keep the eggs in a safe place until life starts. God be praised, al-Jāhiz says, for the wisdom He bestowed on the locust and the proofs He made exemplify so that one who meditates may think and consider God, the Creator of the world.³

Al-Jāhiz's main concern, as noted before, is to look for the different degrees of sensation in animals, the sagacities embodied in their natures and the wonder in their formation. The animals know how to defend themselves, and they consider the consequences of matters of nature, without deliberation, by the sensitive faculty, without thought. In the light of these wonders man should then put away his vanity,

1. Vol. III, p. 208.

2. Vol. IV, pp. 107 — 108.

3. Vol. V, p. 550.

realize his disability, and properly estimate the limit of his strength. Dumb and speechless animals may manage their lives better than man in spite of his being a perfect creature gifted with the power to deliberate and speak.¹ Even the seemingly more stupid animals such as the vulture and the wasp al-Jāhiz believes to exhibit wisdom and to prove the opposite of what might at first appear. The most miraculous thing that astounds man is the manner in which the wasp builds its home. Who taught the small ant to divide the grain and eat the pellicle so that the grain will not grow and become spoiled? And if it is a coriander grain, she divides it into four pieces because she knows that it would grow if it were divided into only two. Al-Jāhiz states that medical doctors claim to have learned the principle of enema from the bird. When the bird is constipated, it goes to the sea, takes salt water with its peak, and ejects the water into its inside, and so it drops excrement.²

As we have seen al-Jāhiz does not write about the big animals only because of the magnitude of their bodies, neither does he neglect the small ones because of their smallness. Rather, he is searching for what is more miraculous, guiding, and expressive of the wisdom of God.³

Not only, however, did al-Jāhiz concern himself with the creation of animals but also with other created things. He devoted for example a long discussion to fire. The reason lies also with the broad-ranging objective of his work. If the development of the content leads to such subject as fire al-Jāhiz does not fail to discuss them. In the consideration of fire in particular al-Jāhiz sees there are matters that sharpen thinking and foster contemplation.⁴ He sees such subjects to be more beneficial than the elephant, the monkey, and others. Consequently, he thinks there is no harm but benefit to deal with what may present itself so long as it does not involve writing long chapters, but we can see that what he wrote on fire is too long.

From all these examples we see how al-Jāhiz chose pictures from nature to illustrate God's power of creation as reflected in particular

1. Vol. VII pp. 71 — 72.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 31 — 32, 35 — 36.

3. Vol. V, p. 150.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 148 — 149.

in the strange abilities of animals. By this approach to the absolute belief in a Creator he undertook to establish the doctrine of *tawhīd* without restricting himself to the aridity of the theological arguments concerning the Divine attributes.

The place of the problem of creation in the Islamic world-view in general is illustrated by Dr. Izutsu in the following words, "Creation (*khalq*) is unquestionably one of the cardinal concepts upon which stands the Islamic world-view. It plays a prominent role in all the aspects of the religious thought of Islam. In theology for example, it constitutes the very starting-point of all discussions in the form of the opposition between the "temporality" (*hadath*) and "eternity" (*aparte ante*) (*qidam*). The world is an "originated" (or "temporally produced") thing because it is the result of Divine creation. And this conception of the world's being "originated" (*muhdath*) forms the basis of the entire system of Islamic theology."¹

Al-Jāhīz sees the world to be an "originated" thing and contains a great number of created things all of which are the result of Divine creation. The foregoing examples show us al-Jāhīz's basic concern with the problem of creation as manifested in the natural entities and particularly animals. The stress on the animal kingdom can be understood through the fact that the great variety of its species makes the principle of motion conceivable and illustrates the phenomenon of life in its actual situation. The progression is from the study of animals to the awareness of motion and thence to the concept of life which is the condition of motion. While al-Jāhīz's speculation takes life in nature as its central point, it immediately leads to the cause that put all things into motion. The religious motive here is clear, and the purpose of convincing the greatest mass of men to see the existence of the Creator was consciously held in al-Jāhīz's mind. He believes the sense perception to be able to grasp these sensible created things by observation. The intellect can then realize the intelligible truth that lies beyond these perceptible forms.

By this method, however, it should be noted that al-Jāhīz does not produce an abstract philosophical theory to prove the existence of God. He started, as we have shown, from a natural basis by an extended inquiry into nature, seeing in its unity and variety an obvious proof of the existence of God by whose action the world has been made and organized. Al-Jāhīz seems, however, to apply the Aristotelian doctrine of causes. From this viewpoint God is the efficient cause of

1. Izutsu, T., *Comparative Study of The Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism, Part One, The Ontology of Ibn 'Arabi*, (Tokyo, 1966), Intr., p. ii.

the world, and the world is the final object or purpose of God. The basic interest of al-Jāhiz in the formal causes of nature can be seen in his long investigation in the forms of being. Here again we must emphasize that things are seen on the one hand as real entities, i.e., as constituting a great number of realities and on the other hand as a phenomenon in relation to the Real Truth. Al-Jāhiz focussed on the order of these realities and demonstrated that this order could never have been actualized by chance. He showed also that reason is able to conceive the efficient cause of the order of nature.

We can see, therefore, that the significance of creation in relation to the Creator lies in al-Jāhiz's interpretation of the world's having come to be through God's being. The world was not and then came to be. The role of God in its coming to be is the decisive point in al-Jāhiz's world-view. Consequently his focus on the concept of life points to the action of God. The concept of life seems to occupy the whole of al-Jāhiz's thought precisely because it is the great phenomenon that links living beings existing in time with the ultimate living Being Who exists from all eternity. His trend of thought embraces two themes, the creation, and the Creator. Life is the most valuable gift that has been granted to the world of beings. Reflection upon life led al-Jāhiz to contemplate the One who not only has life but also gives it.

III

At this point we must consider the role of the mutakallimīn and their arguments dealing with comparisons among different animals. Al-Jāhiz defends the detailed debate about the dog and the cock which occupies most of the first two volumes of *K. al-Hayawān*. In fact this debate is introduced in the first page in the book. Al-Jāhiz had heard about the attack and ridicule heaped upon al-Nazzām and Ma'bad for their discussions of the merits of the dog and the cock. These two Mutazili thinkers had inquired into the advantages and disadvantages of each animal, collecting and tracing all that was said about them, comparing them, and judging the value of each. What can be the value of the dog or the cock, the ridiculers had asked, that leads two of the great masters among the theologians to be so deeply involved in such a problem. Such a discussion is a sort of levity unsuitable for people of seriousness.

If this humorous manner were legitimate and acceptable — al-Jāhīz goes on to elucidate the attacker's point of view — it would be a substitute for thinking in 'tawhīd'. Such grave matters as the principle of 'wa'd' and 'wa'id' would then be dropped, the refutation of false doctrines would be ended, and there would be no contemplation of what is good and advantageous for the people. Is it not strange and unworthy to spend this long time making comparisons between cocks and dogs ?¹

It is important to reproduce the point of view of the opponent in this debate because the opponent had misunderstood the entire matter, as it is still misunderstood by modern scholars. Al-Jāhīz explained the concern of the theologians for the problem as an expression of their concern for tawhīd. The theologians, rightly comprehended, were doing precisely what their critics demanded. The debate that occupied the time and thought of the mutakallimīn was not an idle interest in animals but a way of approaching such subtle questions as the undivided atom. The very effort and length of time the greatest masters among the theologians have devoted to such discussions is an evidence of their seriousness. Furthermore, al-Jāhīz says that the Mutakallimīn have preferred these discussions even to worship, to reading the *Qur'an* and to praying; they claim that theological argumentation is above pilgrimage and jihād. Al-Jāhīz agreed with the critics that wa'd and wa'id, anthropomorphism, and tawhīd, etc., are important. His position was that the mutakallimīn were doing nothing but thinking precisely on the very things for which the attackers were calling. The mutakallimīn have, in fact, proven what their attackers demand, have written books about it and have had many disputes with others because of it. The opponent's minimizing of the dog and the cock debate, therefore, is a failure to understand the point of the debate. It is also a failure to comprehend intellectually what God has done. The ridiculers have attained only to the limit of what common people can see. Al-Jāhīz describes the opponent as a man who imagines that God's dispensation for a lowly insect such as the fly is imperfect, thus failing to understand the nature of creation and the deeper significance of its parts. Although the dog may not have any apparent value, its hidden disposition, the latent wisdom in its make-up and the evidences showing the wonderful planning of God in its creation are matters of ultimate importance. If in spite of its apparent lowliness,

1. Vol. I, pp. 200 - 203.

the dog exhibits God's providence, favour and wisdom — just as does man for whom the heavens and earth were created — then the dog is worthy of thought and a cause to thank God for the display of His wisdom through it.¹ If one looks more deeply than the opponent has done, it will be seen that the controversy over the dog and the cock lies within the core of the problem of tawhīd.

It does not appear from the foregoing that the debate over the dog and the cock is derived merely from the conflict between Arab and Persian prejudices as Dr. al-Ḥajiri thought. He states that al-Jāhiz had lifted the argument from its original context, raised it to a new standard and formed a literary subject from it.² Prof. al-Hajiri's view may be taken into consideration as giving insight into the origin of such discussions, but al-Jāhiz not only made the debate about the dog and the cock a literary subject. He also invested it with religious and philosophical meaning by making it a vehicle of approach to the subject of tawhīd and God's wisdom. Like Dr. al-Ḥajiri, Prof. Pellat, who says that the debate had some relation to the political events of the time, also misses its significance in relation to al-Jāhiz's vision of reality. Pellat goes into no detail in his explanation and does not mention the political circumstances which he has in mind.³ He refers in another place, however, to the relation between these controversies and prejudice, saying that the discussions of the dog and the cock hid behind them the deep conflict between the Arabs and non-Arabs.⁴ Pellat adds his voice to that of al-Ḥajiri respecting the origin of this form of discussion. If we look to the context of al-Jāhiz's statements themselves, however, we see that the discussion is intended to give a detailed illustration of the creation's indication of the Creator. The entire debate has a religious purpose and a philosophic content. The question which should be raised, however, is why al-Jāhiz or al-Nazzām and Ma'bad, who were mentioned as the two champions of the debate⁵, chose specifically the dog and the cock among many other animals? The

1. Vol. I, pp. 216 — 218.

2. Al-Ḥajiri, T., ed., *al-Bukhala' of al-Jāhiz* (Cairo, 1958), Intr., pp. 32 — 33; al-Hajiri, *al-Jāhiz ...* (Cairo, 1962), p. 405.

3. Pellat Cl., *Le Milieu Barrien et la formation De Jāhiz* (Paris, 1953), Intr. p. XII.

4. Pellat, *Gahiz à Bagdad et à Samarra, Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* (Rome, 1952), Vol. XXVII, p. 64.

5. Vol. I, p. 356.

clue is gained from al-Jāhiz himself who says that discussion about the dog and the cock was widespread and that there was much consideration of what the learned could derive from their hidden aspects.¹ The inner nature of the dog is similar to the inner nature of man while the human exterior is similar to that of the monkey. Cocks and dogs also have different uses and characteristics and contain various signs and evidences of wisdom.² God has put all these things into them in order to show the precision of His work and the perfection of His creation. He has constituted their exteriors as an evidence of His wisdom and fashioned their inner natures with sagacity. God wants us to contemplate them, to see the crucial point in their nature, and by this means to know Him. In the light of these things the reason should understand that the whole of creation, from the egg of the louse to the seven spheres, was not created in vain.³

We have seen that the debate about the dog and the cock and similar debates lie within the core of the discussion about the doctrine of *tawhid*. We have seen also that such debates have a religious purpose and a philosophic content. The realities of the dog and the cock, though conceived to be phenomenal, are important to the extent that they give hints to the intellect of a supreme and One reality. Al-Jāhiz does not see the created world as an image nor a dream but as real. It is composed of a great variety of real things such as the dog and the cock, and only in this sense al-Jāhiz can be considered to be a pluralist. This pluralism, reflected in his world-affirming attitude, does not mean that the reality of the world is independent of the power of God who is the only ultimate Being. By affirming the world al-Jāhiz draws near to Aristotle but the distance between them is that which is seen between al-Jāhiz's temporal world and Aristotle's eternal one. The distance between Aristotle's God and the God whom al-Jāhiz knows is the same which separates abstract philosophic thinking from a religious philosophical approach. It is the distance between a philosopher and a man of religion in whose thought, as we have said, religion stands at the root of all and sets his philosophy in motion.

IV

Creation as it has appeared in al-Jāhiz's previous arguments must be seen as kind of manifestation of God's existence as a Creator, but

1. Ibid, p. 210.

2. Ibid., pp. 209, 210, 215.

3. Vol. II, pp. 109 -- 110.

the essence of God and the essence of the world are completely distinct from each other. Although al-Jahiz did not treat the problem of non-existence ('adam) in his work, we can infer from his extensive elaboration of the problem of creation that he wished to distinguish between the Necessary Being (God) and the contingent being of the world. In order to establish the distinction between the two types of being the Mu'tazilah as a whole considered 'adam to be a thing having an essence which is given being by God's act of creation. 'Adam is therefore, seen to be the matter from which the world came to be.¹ Thus, creation is considered to be the addition of existence to the essence of 'adam.² In this Mu'tazili view 'adam has a technical meaning; it is not pure non-being, rather it signifies the non-existent possible. By the realization of the possibility that is 'adam through God's granting it existence, the world is formed. The two essences, that of God and that of the created being, however, are completely different. Nothing is like Him.

The distinction between the essence of God and the essence of the world is made in another way also by negation of positive attributes of God. Such a view of the essence of God can be traced back to Aristotle's metaphysics. In order to preserve the Oneness of God the Mu'tazilah interpreted the Divine attributes in a way designed to preserve the Divine essence from division. This Mu'tazili interpretation of the Divine attributes implied in their doctrine of tawhid is expressed in one single statement only in *K. al-Hayawan*. Both the fact that a clear statement of this Mu'tazili doctrine occurs only once and the context in which the statement is made are of importance for understanding al-Jahiz's situation, as we shall shortly see. The statement was made as refutation to an idea of the Dahriyyah. Al-Jahiz says: "The Dahri knows that we believe that we have a God who is the absolute Creator of bodies; living but not with life; a knower but not with knowledge; a thing which is undivided, has no length, breadth, or depth; and that the prophets revive the dead."³ The latter idea implies recognition of the Qur'anic revelation and the information it offers about the miracles of the prophets, both of which were strongly denied by the Dahriyyah.

The above statement reflects the typical Mu'tazili view concerning God's eternal essence and the Divine attributes which are merely

1. See Nadir, A., *Falsafat al-Mu'tazilah*, (Alexandria, 1951), Vol. I, p. 72 ff.

2. See Ghazali, *al-Iqtisad fi al-'Itiqad* (Ankara, 1962), p. 36.

3. Vo. IV, p. 90.

mental considerations. The attributes are not distinguished, according to the Mu'tazilah, from the eternal essence of God; otherwise His Being would lose its oneness. God is then a knower, as al-Jāhīz says, without knowledge, i.e., by negating the ascription of the opposite of knowledge to God. In al-Jāhīz's understanding the only implication of this approach is the affirmation of the oneness of God. According to Ash'arism, however, as represented by Ghazali, this approach is absolutely wrong. The attributes in Ghazālī's view are not identical with the essence but are added to the essence and distinguished from it. God knows with a knowledge which is different from His essence. This latter understanding, as al-Jāhīz sees it, leads to the contrary of Divine Unity, for it implies that God is made of parts. Al-Jāhīz, like all the Mu'tazilah believed God to be simple, uncompounded, and undivided. To believe Him to possess many attributes in addition to His essence is to contradict His unity.

Nowhere else in the book do we see an open statement such as this denying the usual physical sense of the attributes. Significantly, the statement occurs in a context of argument against the Dahriyyah without any sign of reference to one of the Muslim sects. By the time al-Jāhīz wrote the statement, Mu'tazili influence was finished. The statement occurs in connection with the defense of Islam against the Dahriyyah who had disputed the Qur'anic mention of the kingdom of Solomon. It is not an attempt to attack the Sunni point of view concerning the eternal attributes. When conservatism came into power and triumphed over Mu'tazilism, it was unwise for al-Jāhīz to open a campaign against the Sunni doctrine, although he did not change his Mu'tazili principles, nor did he neglect to refer to the high position of the Mu'tazilah among the Mutakallimin.

It should now be clear that al-Jāhīz's method of seeing the proofs of God's existence in His action as exhibited in creation, especially of living beings does not imply any resemblance between the ultimate eternal reality and temporally real beings. All of the Mu'tazilah were strongly against any kind of anthropomorphism, and for this reason they refused to attribute to God any positive quality that can be attributed to His creatures. God is the only infinite being, and the reality of the world, as al-Jāhīz sees it, does not take it beyond the circle of

1. Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād* . . . , op. cit., pp. 129-32.

finiteness. Although the world shows the existence of its Maker and reflects the wisdom of His action, nevertheless, God is seen by al-Jahiz to be quite separate from the world and distinct from it. The unity of God then does not imply any unity between God and the world but implies the absolute glorification of God. 'Nothing is like Him' is understood in the light of all these considerations in which the principle of tawhīd lies.

The idea of creation stands in al-Jahiz's thought as a religious truth, but it leads to the philosophic doctrine of the uncreated Being and created being. In al-Jahiz's world-view creation is a religious truth, but at the same time it is also a rational truth. As in the Mu'tazilī theory of knowledge, ultimate reality can be known by way of both reason and revelation, but knowledge of it can come by 'aql even before sam' occurs. Any contradiction between the two must not be allowed since both of them point to creation, i.e., to God's Necessary Being and to the contingent being He has created, His creature.

Three basic elements here contribute to the understanding of al-Jahiz's world-view. First, the religious aspect is seen in the establishment of the existence of God and consideration of the role of revelation. Second, the rational element is seen in his method of reasoning to find out God's existence. Third, the natural element is seen in the appeal to the realm of nature and its living entities in whose make-up he seeks for the power, wisdom and good of its Maker.

V

It seems from the foregoing that al-Jahiz, as a Mu'tazilī thinker, had achieved a tremendous advance in the reconciliation of religion and philosophy. He himself has referred to this important matter. He even argued that the mutakallim could not master kalam without having a knowledge of philosophy equal to his knowledge of religion. The learned man in al-Jahiz's conception was one who combined the two, and the truly learned man was he who combined the affirmation of tawhīd with recognition of the operations of the natures of created things. The man who claims that belief in tawhīd is sound only when accompanied by denial of the actions of natures has in reality expressed his inability to speak of tawhīd. Again, if someone claims that the doctrine of natures is not valid if they are related to tawhīd, he will also

have proved his inability to speak of natures. Thus al-Jāhīz finds the position of the *mutakallim* to be strengthened by combining the doctrine of *tawhīd* with the power of nature. The denial of the action of nature would imply denial of the essence of nature itself.¹ It seems that this is the reason why a man like al-Shahrastānī said that the doctrine of al-Jāhīz was the same as the doctrine of the philosophers, except that his tendency and that of his followers lay towards the naturalist rather than the Divine philosophers.² Contrary to what al-Shahrastānī thought, the religious elements discussed above demonstrate the remarkable place of religion in al-Jāhīz's thought. This means that al-Jāhīz was not only close to the Divine philosophers, but also presenting a religious world-view. The stress of al-Jāhīz on nature and its operation does not take him closer to the naturalist philosophers. Al-Jāhīz's opposition to their materialistic doctrine is the decisive boundary between his philosophy and theirs.

In al-Jāhīz's conviction, therefore, the doctrine of Divine Unity is not contradicted by his recognition of the operations of the natures of created things. For example, al-Nāẓam's theory of *Kumūn* is connected with the doctrine of *tawhīd* in both al-Nāẓam's and al-Jāhīz's view. Both were opposed to Jahm's denial of the operations of natures. Jahm took an extreme position, he negated the heat of fire and the cold of ice. He also denied that the earth possesses the nature of causing things to grow and that trees have the nature of yielding. The real doer of all actions is God, and these actions are attributed metaphorically to all things.³ As for al-Jāhīz, the belief in *tawhīd* is not valid, as explained above, except when one recognizes the operation of nature, and nature in turn is undoubtedly ascribable to God's creation.

In respect of al-Jāhīz's view of the operations of natures there is nothing, however, in *K. al-Hayawān* which indicates that he held ideas such as those ascribed to him by al-Baghdādī and al-Shahrastānī. According to al-Baghdādī, al-Jāhīz believed that God does not put anyone into Hell but that it is the nature of the Fire to pull people to it.⁴ Al-

1. Vol. 11, pp. 134 - 135.

2. Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Nihal*, (Cairo, 1381/1961), Vol. 1, pp. 76.

3. Al-Shahrastānī, *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 87.

Al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* (Cairo, n. d.), p. 211.

4. Al-Baghdādī, *ibid.*, p. 176, al-Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 73.

Shahrastānī also reports that al-Jāhiz said that the people of Fire are not eternally punished in the fire but are transformed into the nature of Fire.¹ In al-Jāhiz's long discussion of fire we find no evidence of the point of view mentioned by al-Baghdādī and al-Shahrastānī who seem to have depended on Ibn al-Rāwandī's attacks against al-Jāhiz and the Mu'tazilah. Al-Khayyat strongly denied Ibn al-Rāwandī's reports concerning al-Jāhiz and stated that in the latter's books on the actions of natures there is no word of these lies.² However, we can put al-Jāhiz's idea as follows: God created Fire to be a punishment for the disobedient. Since it is the nature of Fire to burn, it has then to operate and produce burning to fulfil the purposes of God. The denial of the action of Fire necessitates the denial of its own essence. Consequently, the denial of this essence implies the denial of tawhīd and God's power over creation. Conjunction between tawhīd and the actions of natures is then necessary and not contradictory. So much can be understood from al-Jāhiz's writings, and the views ascribed to him by the theologians, seem to be false and exaggerated. However, what has been stated in the theological sources concerning al-Jāhiz's idea of knowledge being natural and necessary seems to be true.³ In *K. al-Hayawān* al-Jāhiz emphasized on the one hand that reason and knowledge are given by God to man, but on the other hand he recognized also that knowledge is the product of the natural operation of reason, the instrument which man possesses. He stated, therefore, that if animals possessed the minds of the philosophers, literateurs, wazirs, caliphs, leaders and prophets, the minds of animals would necessarily produce knowledge as the minds of all people do. In respect to knowledge, therefore, al-Jāhiz found all men to be the same, both the élite and the common people. The distinctions between them come from different degrees of ability in expression, memory, and organization. Knowledge of man reflects the existence of reason, and the knowledge displayed by animals shows the standards of intelligence they possess.⁴ Moreover, if the dog had possessed the instrument by which he could distinguish between good and bad, al-Jāhiz asserts that the dog would have been among those subjected to judgement and under the obligation of certain duties as man is. This instrument, i.e.,

1. Al-Shahrastani, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 75.

2. Al-Khayyat, *al-Intisar* (Cairo, 1944/1925), pp. 21 — 22, 91 — 92.

3. 'Abd al-Jabbar, A., *Al-Mughni fi al-wab al-Tawhid wa al-'adl*, Part XII al-Nazar wa al-Ma'arif, ed. Madkur, I., (Cairo, n. d.), p. 263, al-Shahrastani, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 75.

4. Vol. IV, pp. 81 — 82.

reason, must then declare its presence by the operation of its own nature; otherwise, there would be no difference between its existence and non-existence.¹

The belief that all things in the world engage in certain actions by nature then plays an important role in al-Jāhiz's concept of Divine Unity. Whether a thing is naturally created or brought about by the interference of man, its essence possesses the same nature. This means that both natural and artificial stone are able to break an egg according to the nature of their common essence. It is only in the metaphorical sense that one may say a man sees because he looks at something; rather he sees an object because of the nature of sense perception in the eyesight. Perfect eyesight then necessitates perception². The operation of sense-perception in this way does not imply any denial of God's creation of the thing and its nature as well. The assertion which must be clear, therefore, is that both the creation of God and operations of natures in al-Jāhiz's philosophy served as indications of the Divine Unity.

VI

Al-Jāhiz's conception of God, discussed above, hardly exhibits a clear relationship to any one of the established philosophical systems of Hellenistic thought. However, the Greek influence in general is obvious throughout the Mu'tazilī achievements. The doctrine of the attributes discussed above can be mentioned as an example. On the subject of Greek influences we shall content ourselves by pointing in this general way to Hellenistic terminology. Since *K. al-Hayawān* is not written in the form of a technical treatise on philosophy, there is little point in trying to trace detailed parallels between it and one particular school of Greek thought.

The point we want to make clear is that the world-view of al-Jāhiz as exemplified in *K. al-Hayawān* is basically religious. The affirmation of God's action as the Creator of the world is the dynamic flowing current at the center of his speculative thinking. The idea of creation is no doubt a dogmatic idea, but it lies in the depth of al-Jāhiz's specu-

1. Vol. II, 144, 147.

2. Vol. V, pp. 13, 11.

lation as the ontological basis of his metaphysics. The centrality of religion was a prevailing trend in all medieval philosophy, but the Islamic atmosphere is felt especially strongly in the great picture formed by the thousands of pages of *K. al-Haywān*.

Al-Jāhiz does not see God as merely the first cause nor as the prime unmoved mover in the manner of Aristotle. The activity of Aristotle's God does not go beyond the boundaries of His high theoretic life. It is limited to the highest knowledge that by which He knows only His own essence. He Himself is therefore the object of His thought. Al-Jāhiz, on the contrary, sees God as acting and the world of being as the practical effect of His act. The knowledge of God in this sense comprehends every individual created thing in the entire universe. Al-Jāhiz sees God to be religiously effective and religiously available, whereas Aristotle's God is not.

In al-Jāhiz's vision of being there are no Platonic ideal forms on whose models the material world is founded. As we have seen, al-Jāhiz views things in their concrete reality, as they are, not as shadows of ideals that exist outside the realm of things. There is nothing but the state of 'adam preceding the coming into being of existing things. The world which occupies his attention is the world of things either in their visible or unseen forms. These things for al-Jāhiz authentically exist in the world in all their multiplicity, while for Plato true being is that which is beyond things and multiplicity. It is completely against the Mu'tazili doctrine of tawhūd to conceive eternal ideas, not subject to decay, that share truth and full being with God.

God and the world in al-Jāhiz's world-view are not identical. It is clear that al-Jāhiz as a Mu'tazili was not only a monotheist but also a champion of Divine Unity and Justice. His basic doctrine, however, goes strongly against pantheism. Al-Jāhiz's insistence on observing, describing and searching for the indication of God in the world of being did not lead to identifying the world with God. All the Mu'tazilah completely rejected pantheistic views. The Neoplatonic pantheism which was one of the two principal features of Plotinus' system is, therefore, alien to al-Jāhiz's view of reality. The second feature in the Neoplatonic doctrine, i.e., the opposition to materialism is however, a basic pillar in al-Jāhiz's philosophy. For al-Jāhiz, there is nothing which emanates from God because such a belief would detract from the glorification of His essence. Consequently the Neoplatonic emanation is replaced by the concept of creation. The gulf between the

two concepts is profound. It is the gulf between distinction of God and the world and identification of the two. It is the gap between the process of a certain activity and the direct product that naturally flows by itself. The powerful source of being is seen by al-Jāhiz's rational Mu'tazilism to act by its own choice, while it is seen by the mystical Neoplatonic pantheism to produce without choice by its very nature.

Stoicism also identifies God with nature, but al-Jāhiz, as we have clearly shown, sees nature as completely separate from God. God does not stand inside the circle of the world which He ordered into being. God, therefore, is not in nature, but in order to arrive at God al-Jāhiz begins with the reality of nature that contains the signs of God. In order to show its difference from the Creator he refers constantly to its temporality, contingency, and created character.

Now, it is not our purpose in the present paper to draw comparisons between al-Jāhiz's concept of God and others but rather to delineate al-Jāhiz's stand-point by relating it to the established philosophical systems of Hellenistic thought that had a great influence upon Islamic philosophy. As we have seen, al-Jāhiz's vision of reality is not closely related to any of those philosophical systems. It was the idea of creation with its religious background which guided him and prevented him from adopting one of these systems. Also, it must be remembered that the influence of these systems around the second and third centuries (A.H.) was still in its beginning. Al-Jāhiz's criticism of some points in Aristotle's zoology shows us also the spirit of originality which he wanted to guide his Mu'tazili thought. For all these reasons his vision of reality was coloured principally by his own religious and rational approach.

We must emphasize again that al-Jāhiz views the reality of the world in relation to the ultimate Reality to be no more than a phenomenon. The world here is not a dream as Ibn 'Arabi viewed it nor is it an image as Plato conceived the material world. Al-Jāhiz inquires in the world of beings which contains real created things in so far as they give signs of the Ultimate Reality. Once he reaches God by this means he conceives Him to be the full Reality without conceiving another reality outside the sphere of God's action that is independent from his order. In this sense the world of being is therefore a phenomenon in relation to God's Being.