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The Mu'tazilis whom Hisham met and their discussions

I have been concerned with Hisham ibn al-Hakam, and after him with Hisham ibn Salim, only because adversaries of the Imamiyyah made him the crack through which they attacked the Imamiyyah with all their might, and directed at him, and through him at the Imamiyyah, every possible defamation, derogation, and disparagement, prejudice and malediction. They attributed to him what was correct – albeit infrequently – and, more often, what was incorrect; and, moreover, they attributed contradictory opinions to him.

The amazing thing about these adversaries is that we find enmity and hatred flung back and forwards between them since the birth of the sects they arose from up to our own day, may Allah desire that it cease, for they are mutually antagonistic adversaries, one against the other, in the strongest sense of antagonism and adversity, all of them attributing to the other what a Muslim does not attribute to someone he holds to be a brother in the religion. Nevertheless, we find that enmity and adversity have united them against the Imamiyyah in general and Hisham in particular, and so they befriend one another, and support one another.

The hostility towards Hisham ibn al-Hakam originated from the Mu'tazilah; they were the ones whom Hisham had opposed in argument, those who attributed to him what was attributed to them, as will be mentioned below. The adversaries of the Mu'tazilah, people like 'Abdu 'l-Qahir al-Baghdadi, al-Malat¹, Ibn Hazm, al-Isfarayini, Ibn Taymiyyah, his colleague adh-Dhahabi, and his student Ibnu 'l-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, Ibn Kathir and Ibn Hajar accused them at the very least of extreme innovation and deceit; they did not trust them or what they narrated, they said of them that they had invented falsehoods and a new religion for themselves, and that they were not bound by the laws of the shari'ah, but rather overstepped them.

This applied to many of them in general, and to many of the distinguished Mu'tazilah in particular. They passed on to unbelief or atheism, and departed from the religious community who cursed them and

washed their hands of them, but all of whom accepted what the Mu'tazilah attributed to the Imamiyyah and Hisham and theologians like him. They strayed from the religion except when they attacked the Imamiyyah, and were feeble liars except when they attributed an infamy to the Imamiyyah or spoke of them degradingly.

I will not extend the discussion to what they said about Wasil ibn 'Ata', 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, Abu 'l-Hudhayl, Thumamah ibn Ashras, an-Nazzam, and others like them among the leading personalities of the Mu'tazilah and their scholars. What is worse than this is that they followed and promoted the methods of their brothers-in-law the Mu'tazilah, who were their adversaries in dogma, and distorted and changed, discarded and added, perfected – as they claim – what they found tacking in the Mu'tazili armoury, and patched up any weakness they stumbled on.

I have quoted examples of this above, and a few more will follow. I do not intend in saying this that these observations should refute what they wrote about the characteristics of their masters – I have previously stated that I have given up this kind of hope. I have said what I have said by way of introduction to some of the ideas of Hisham ibn al-Hakam and the views attributed to him.

The Mu'Tazilis found fault with Hisham and fabricated false positions for him, the Anti-Mu'Tazilis agreed with them here but not always elsewhere

I shall not be led here to speak in detail of every idea they attributed to Hisham; it is possible for the reader to refer to what I have said about Muqatil ibn Sulayman and Dawud al-Jawaribi, which are clear examples of what they said about Hisham. I will be content here to clarify the points, which call upon us to refute an imputation like that, directed at Hisham.

Hisham ibn al-Hakam was, it is said, in the beginning, a Jahmi, a follower of Jahm ibn Safwan (d. 128/745), and then renounced him after joining the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, and his error had been made clear to him.^{[1](#)}

Jahm ibn Safwan, as is understood from his sect, was opposed to corporeality and anthropomorphism to the greatest extent; concerning the attributes of Allah, his school was a Mu'tazilah school when it first emerged. He was a contemporary of Wasil ibn 'Ata' and 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, the two founders of the Mu'tazilah, and they held nothing against him except the doctrine of the impermanence of Paradise and Hell and that felicity and chastisement were not eternal. They held against him his belief in irja' (postponement of judgement about whether the grave sinner was a believer or an unbeliever), not the doctrine of al-manzilah bayna 'l-manzilatayn (the state of the sinner as intermediate between that of a believer and an unbeliever), which was their doctrine concerning the grave sinner.^{[2](#)}

However, the principle point of difference between him and the Mu'tazilah as a whole was his belief in

predestination, and their belief in free will, since among the later Mu'tazilah there were some who believed in irja' and some who believed in the impermanence of Paradise and Hell. However all of them agreed on the doctrine of free will and refuted predestination. For this reason ash-Shahristani counts him among those who 'emerged from the Mu'tazilah in the days of Nasr ibn Sayyar and made his innovation from the Mu'tazili position on pre-destination clear.'³

One of the views of Jahm, which influenced Hisham ibn al-Hakam, was his statement about Allah, praise be to Him: 'He is a body unlike [other] bodies', as will be shown. One of Jahm ibn Safwan's doctrines, as al-Ash'ari relates, was that he believed that 'Allah is a body,' and went on to say that 'the meaning of "body" is "existent".'⁴ He says the same about Hisham. From this, he goes on to relate that he believed that 'God's knowledge is incipient: He did not know then He knew'⁵ and that he had taken this also from Jahm.⁶

ash-Shahristani compares 'Jahm and Hisham's assertion that knowledge ('ulum) is not in a location [with respect to Allah, praise be to Him, because since they spoke of the incipience of His knowledge they made Him a locus for His knowledge, and this contradicts His eternity, which was their doctrine] with the Ash'ariyyah's assertion that speech (taklim) is not in a location.'⁷

It is mentioned that the famous Mu'tazili theologian Abu 'l-Husayn, Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn at-Tayyib, al-Basri, al-Hanafi (d. 436/1044) adopted Hisham's view regarding God's knowledge. ash-Shahristani states: "He inclined towards the school of Hisham ibn al-Hakam concerning the belief that things were not known before they existed."⁸

But two other views are also reported on the authority of Hisham which contradict the aforesaid: 'The Creator never ceases to know through His Self, and He knows things after their coming into existence through a knowledge which cannot be said to be either incipient or eternal, and because it is an attribute and the attribute is not ascribed, it is not said about [this knowledge] that it is He or something else. They add that his belief about Power and Life was not like his belief in knowledge, except that he did not believe that they were incipient.'⁹

However, the Shaykh al-Mufid denied the truth of associating this opinion with Hisham, and his words follow. What was attributed to Hisham was his belief in strong compulsion (al-ijbaru 'sh-shadid), which the believers of the Sunnah did not subscribe to, as Ibn Qutaybah states.¹⁰

If this attribution is true and Hisham followed Jahm in it, as stated above, then he was distinguished from his Mu'tazili brothers by his belief in absolute predestination, and their belief in complete choice (ikhtiyar, or qadar as their adversaries called it).

In the light of what has been said, what was attributed to Hisham can be divided into two sections: (a) that which confirms with the beliefs of the Jahmiyyah who preceded him, and this is possibly a correct attribution as long as the narrations are correct, and these are the short examples I have quoted; and (b) the greater portion of what his adversaries attributed to him, and this does not accord with the beliefs of

the Jahmiyyah before him, nor those of the Imamiyyah after him; we have no alternative but to conclude that this was attributed to him calumniously and that it is true that Hisham may have held a part of these beliefs (this is only supposition with no basis in fact), but that he did not believe them in earnest, as will be shown.

It is necessary to point out that Hisham's Jahmiyyah period was doubtless during his early adolescence, and, moreover, when he was still a juvenile, since when he became an adolescent and still 'the first thing I noticed was his bare cheeks', as has been stated, he did not believe outright in the Imamate, but rather disputed about it and debated and argued with his adversaries and critics about it.

I think that it is closer to the truth, and more in line with the established facts of Hisham's life and behaviour, that his connections with the Jahmiyyah were limited to following Jahm ibn Safwan and some of his ideas, which are the three examples I mentioned earlier which are not incompatible with the doctrine of the Imamate, the requirements of its concomitants, and its defense, and did not involve an association with the Jahmiyyah sect in all its dimensions and extent. Hisham was not for one day a Jahmi except to a limited extent; he did not follow them in all his ideas and beliefs.

Some opinions incorrectly attributed to Hisham

Past and present scholars of the Imamiyyah have investigated the ideas, which were attributed to Hisham, and have defended him and refuted their attribution to him. All of these ideas are summarised with characteristic brevity in that which is cited by the Sharif al-Murtada, Abu 'l-Qasim, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn,

'Alamu 'l-Huda, al-Musawi (355/966–436/1044), who said: [A]nd as for what Hisham ibn al-Hakam is charged with regarding belief in corporeality, the ostensive meaning of what is narrated from him is his doctrine: 'a body unlike bodies.' There is no contradiction in saying that this belief is not anthropomorphism, is not inconsistent with any basic principle (asl), does not oppose any derived doctrine (far'), but is an error in expression [since by 'body' the 'existent' is intended, not the material body, as will be mentioned] which depends upon language for its affirmation or denial. Most of our followers say that he brought this up in the course of opposition to the Mu'tazilah, and said to them: "If you say that the Eternal is a thing unlike things, say He is a body unlike bodies."

Not everyone who proposes something and asks questions about it is a believer in it or upholds it. It is possible that the intention behind this statement was to draw out their answer to this question and to understand what they held regarding it, or to reveal their inadequacy in putting forward a satisfactory answer, or for other reasons, which he does not express.

As for the narration that he upheld the view that Allah is a body having the reality of apparent bodies (al-ajsamu 'l-hadirah), and the report about the spans (ashbar) of God's hand attributed to him,¹¹ we only know of it from the narration of al-Jahiz on the authority of an-Nazzam, and it contains nothing but an

accusation which is clearly unreliable in its expression.

The whole matter is evidence that the schools must learn from the mouths of their spokes- men and authorized followers and whoever is reliable in narrating about them, and should not rely on propagandistic adversaries . . . That Hisham was innocent of this accusation is demonstrated by what is related on the authority of the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, in his statement: 'O Hisham, continue to be supported by the Spirit of Holiness as long as you defend us with your tongue', spoken when the shaykhs came to him [this has been narrated from al-Mufid], and by his words . . . [12](#) He, peace be upon him, marked him out in matters to do with speculation and proof and urged the people to hasten to face him and debate with him.

How can an intelligent person believe this statement that his Lord is seven spans of His own span after what we have mentioned? As for the incipience of [Divine] knowledge, this is another narration they circulated, and we do not know that the man wrote about it, nor that the account is trustworthy.

As for determinism and [God's] obliging [someone] to do what he is unable [to do], it is something about which we do not know whether it was his opinion. [13](#) To these words of ash-Sharif al-Murtada can be added a few comments condensed from more extensive discussions:

1. ash-Shahristani states:

This Hisham ibn al-Hakam, who had a profound [know- ledge] of theology, could not have ignored the objections he made against the Mu'tazilites. [This] man in fact went beyond what he made his adversary admit, while remaining well short of the anthropomorphism, which he professed. This was how he had objected to al-'Allaf: 'You say that the Creator knows through knowledge, that His knowledge is His essence, that He shares with incipient [created] things in being a knower through knowledge, that He is distinct from them in that His knowledge is His essence, so He is a knower unlike [other] knower. So why do you not say that He is a body unlike [other] bodies, a form unlike [other] forms, that He has power unlike [any other] power, and so forth.' [14](#)

2. The biographers have cited more than thirty books and treatises, which Hisham wrote. Those which are concerned with Unicity and its aspects are: (1) Kitabu 't-Tawhid, (2) Kitabu 'l- majalis fi 't-tawhid, (3) Kitabu 'sh-Shaykh wa 'l-ghulam fi 't- tawhid, (4) Kitabu 'r-radd 'ala Aristatalis fi 't-tawhid, (5) Kitabu 'd-dalalat 'ala hadathi (huduthi) 'l-ajsam, (6) Kitabu 'r- radd 'ala 'z-zanadiqah, (7) Kitabu 'r-radd 'ala ashabi 'l-ithnayn, (8) Kitabu 'r-radd 'ala ashabi 't-tabayi', [15](#) (9) Kitab fi 'l-jabr wa 'l-qadar, (10) Kitabu 'l-Qadar, (11) Kitabu 'l-Istita'ah, (12) and in their existence have no need of God, who is their Creator, this being one of the historical roots of modern materialist thought; they also came in different degrees, from those who were plain and simple materialists – common materialism – and those who were influenced by the thoughts and philosophies of the Greeks, or Buddhist or Hindu beliefs.

Kitabu 'l-Ma'rifah, (13) Kitabu 'l-Altaf, (14) Kitabu 'l-Alfaz. [16](#) If these ideas were firmly established ideas of Hisham, then he would have mentioned them in his books, and his Imami biographers would have

narrated them, and so would those who passed on knowledge and read his works, not one of which has reached us or been alluded to in the accounts of the Imamiyyah, although some of his ideas are mentioned in their accounts, as will be seen.

In addition, that which adversaries do relate about Hisham's ideas they say that he said in the course of discussion and debate with his Mu'tazili adversaries and do not attribute a single one of them to what he wrote in any of his books. If these adversaries had stumbled upon any remnant of such ideas in his books then they would have attributed it to the book itself.

3. The statement of Hisham: 'a body unlike [other] bodies' was originally one of Jahm ibn Safwan's ideas, and if Hisham held it, then he was following Jahm in it, as was stated previously. Perhaps, after the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, had turned him away from the Jahmiyyah, Hisham used it when the Mu'tazilah were disputing with the adversaries of the Jahmiyyah. This statement remained fixed in the minds of his students or other Shi'ah, and when Hisham came to hold a high position and rank with the Imams, peace be upon them, and the Imamiyyah as a whole, the Imams asked about it, as will be shown. It is not correct for us to refute the honorable word of al-Murtada, that Hisham used it in the course of debate, employing what comes to us in the way of accounts which emphasize Hisham's belief in the body.

4. Based on my investigation, and within the bounds of the sources I possess and they are very limited when weighed against those that have perished – I am almost certain, for reasons which there is not enough room here to mention, that Abu 'l-Hudhayl al-'Allaf is to be considered the principle source for most of what is attributed to Hisham ibn al-Hakam. [17](#)

As to what is related by others besides Abu 'l-Hudhayl, there are statements showing us that these accounts can be traced back to him, if the narrators are truthful and have not fabricated the narration. For all the narrators the chain of their Mu'tazili education goes back to him. Abu 'l-Hudhayl taught an-Nazzam, Thumamah ibn Ashras, an-Numayri al-Basri (d. 213/828) – one of Hisham's Mu'tazili contemporaries –, and Ja'far ibn Harb al-Basri, then al-Baghdadi (177/793–236/850). [18](#)

An-Nazzam taught Zurqan, Muhammad ibn Shaddad ibn 'Isa al-Basri (d. 278/891), the famous author of Kitabu 'l-maqalat, which is considered one of the authoritative Islamic reference works concerning treatises and sects, [19](#) and al-Jahiz, 'Amr ibn Bahr (163/780–255/869). [20](#) Ibn Qutaybah ad-Dinawari, 'Abdullah ibn Muslim (213/828–276/889) studied with al-Jahiz. [21](#)

Ja'far ibn Harb was the teacher of Abu 'l-Husayn al-Khayyat, 'Abdu'r-Rahman ibn Muhammad al-Baghdadi (d. 300/912), the author of al-Intisar wa'r-radd 'ala Ibnu'r-Rawandi al-mulhid. [22](#)

Al-Khayyat taught al-Ka'bi al-Balkhi, 'Abdullah ibn Ahmad (273/886–319/931); [23](#) and Mu'tazili imams who came after these, such as the two Jubba'is and the Qadi 'Abdu'l-Jabbar, drew from them. Al-'Allaf is reckoned to be the head of the chain in this list.

Ibn al-Rawandi accused al-Jahiz of having gone too far in his opposition to Hisham, to the extent that he stood shoulder to shoulder with the adversaries of the Commander of the Faithful, peace be upon him, and was 'driven to partisanship and seeking revenge for his two teachers in the person of Hisham ibn al-Hakam'.[24](#)

Ibn al-Rawandi does not specify who the two teachers were; without a doubt, one of them was an-Nazzam,[25](#) and it is clear to anyone who traces the thread back that the second is Abu 'l-Hudhayl.[26](#)

Abu 'l-Hudhayl took revenge on others within the Imamiyyah, e.g., their theologians Abu 'l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Isma'il ibn Shu'ayb ibn Maytham al-Kufi, then al-Basri, famous among them as 'Ali ibn Maytham:[27](#) 'He was one of the prominent theologians among our followers who disputed with Abu 'l-Hudhayl and an-Nazzam, and held sessions and wrote books'.[28](#)

There is also what Ibn Hajar narrated from Abu 'l-Qasim at-Taymi in the "Kitabu 'l-Hujjah": 'He debated with him before the amir of Basrah'.[29](#)

The Imami defense of Hisham

Indeed, there exists in the accounts of the Imamiyyah the attribution of the doctrine of God's having a body to Hisham ibn al-Hakam, and these accounts contributed to the belief being attributed to him; and yet his belief in it is inexplicable.[30](#) His belief is clearly set forth in a number of places, among them is a Tradition from Yunus ibn Zabyan, in which he relates Hisham's belief to the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, and says:

He claims that Allah is a body, because the matter is two-fold: a body and the action of the body. It is not possible for 'Maker' to have the meaning 'doing', while it is possible for it to have the meaning 'doer'. Abu 'Abdillah, peace be upon him, said:

Woe to him. He knows that a body is limited and finite, that a form is limited and finite, and if limits are permitted then addition and subtraction are [also] permissible, and if additions and subtractions are permitted, then He is a created being.[31](#)

There is also a Tradition from Hasan ibn 'Abdi 'r-Rahman al-Himmani, who said:

I said to Abu 'l-Hasan Musa ibn Ja'far, peace be upon him, that Hisham ibn al-Hakam claimed that God was a body unlike any thing [i.e., a body unlike (other) bodies], Knowing, Hearing, Seeing, possessing Power, Conversing and Speaking; Speech, Power, and Knowledge go together, nothing of them being created. He, peace be upon him, renounced the doctrine of body, because it is limited, and he pointed out that these attributes do not go together, since there are among them those which are attributes of essence, such as Knowledge and Power, and those which are attributes of action, like Conversing and Speech.[32](#)

It is stated in a Tradition from 'Ali ibn Abi Hamzah:

I said to Abu 'Abdillah, peace be upon him, that I heard Hisham ibn al-Hakam relate on your authority that Allah is a body, eternal and radiant, and that knowledge of Him is necessary, and He bestows [it] upon whoever of His creatures He wishes.^{[33](#)}

However, it is extremely likely that the narrator has confused the words of Hisham ibn al-Hakam with what is attributed to Hisham ibn Salim, as will be seen. Whatever the case may be the meaning of the hadith is not different from what has been stated previously.

The same statement has been made on Hisham's authority in books of theological ideas: 'He is a body unlike bodies', and that Hisham said: 'What I intend by saying "body" is that He is existent, that He is a thing, and that He is self-existent, because whatever exists is either a body or an attribute of bodies.'^{[34](#)} It has already been said that Hisham took this statement from Jahm ibn Safwan.

Hisham's excuse in this was that he had not come across another term besides 'body', which conveyed the meaning of 'self-existent being'; the error or correctness of this expression is a question of language, not belief, as al-Murtada stated. 'Body' in the Arabic language has a distinctly defined meaning, and it is incorrect to apply another meaning to it unless this meaning is qualified and justifiable.

Hisham lived at the beginning of an age in which theological and philosophical terms were being coined in the Muslim community, and he was one of those early mutakallims who 'was feeling his way towards an adequate philosophical vocabulary in Arabic', as W. Montgomery Watt has stated.^{[35](#)}

Perhaps the clue to this harshness on the part of the Imams peace be upon them, and this manifestly cutting denial of what Hisham expressed goes back to the fact that 'body', as we have indicated previously, has a clear significance in ordinary speech, stemming from its meaning in the Arabic language, and that, if Hisham ascribed 'body' to God and coupled 'unlike bodies' to it, it would almost certainly induce the idea of, or lead the ordinary mind to, corporeality and anthropomorphism, provided 'a body unlike bodies' were interpreted by them in a way close to the interpretation we have related earlier, based on the statements of the non-Imami Traditionists who believed in corporeality, limbs, and the parts of God, but said that He did not resemble in any one of these things anything belonging to a created body, or limbs, or parts.

The meaning of their doctrine, even if they did not make it clear, was that Allah has 'a head unlike heads', and 'a hand unlike hands', and 'an eye unlike eyes', and that He is 'a body unlike bodies' with the word 'body' continuing to carry the same meaning as that which was ordinarily understood, and not the precise meaning which Hisham intended and which was elevated above the ordinary level of comprehension, not to mention the comprehension of scholars who were not specialists in the science of theology.

Hisham should not have used the word 'body' without a clear explanation of its context. For this reason,

the expression suggests corporeality and anthropomorphism in the mind of the listener, even if the speaker who deployed the term did not intend these concepts, especially a theologian like Hisham ibn al-Hakam, given the distinguished position he held with the Imams, peace be upon them, and the indisputable scholarly and religious position he held with their Shi'i followers.

The following discussion, concerning the debate surrounding Hisham ibn Salim, will bear witness to what we have said, since in it the Imam, peace be upon him, approves of what Hisham ibn al-Hakam and his followers state, but only when the people being addressed are specialists in the science of theology who can distinguish between scholarly terminology and the ordinary meanings of language.

The opinion of Hisham on God's body being unlike other bodies, and the Imami position against him

It is appropriate, although perhaps rather surprising, that I should pass on an opinion concerning 'a body unlike bodies' from one of the most stalwart of Muslim scholars, strict and vehement in matters of belief, one of the many who stood by the Qur'an and the Sunnah in his opinion, inflexible regarding the way they were formulated, and one of the greatest critics of what he saw as innovation and heresy in religion, Abu Muham- mad 'Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm al-Andulusi (384/994-456/1064), who stated:

If they say to us: You state that Allah is Living unlike [other] living beings, Knowing unlike [other] knowers, Powerful unlike those who possess power, a thing unlike [other] things, and you do not prohibit the doctrine that He is a body unlike [other] bodies, then it should be said to them, but let Allah be the judge: Is there not a Text trans- mitted in the name of the Most High which contains the designation that He is Living, Powerful, and Knowing in the sense that we designate such things?

But going no further than the Text is a duty (fard), and no text has come ascribing a body to Him, and the proof of ascribing a body to him does not stand, rather proof prohibits this ascrip- tion. If a text were to come to us which assigned a body to Him, then we would be obliged to believe that; but we would say that he is unlike bodies, as we state with respect to Knowing, Powerful, and Living, without any difference. As for the expression 'thing,' the Qur'an contains it, and proof makes it necessary.^{[36](#)}

He also says:

Whoever states that Allah is a body unlike bodies is not an anthropomorphist [read mushabbih in place of mushtabih] because it is the limit of the names of Allah, since 'we name Him the Glorious and Exalted, which he did not assign to himself. As for he who says that Allah is like bodies, he is an apostate regarding His names, and an anthropomorphist because of it.'^{[37](#)}

Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid ash-Shafi'i al-Mu'tazili says:

As for he who says He is a body unlike bodies, in the sense opposite to an accident from which it is

impossible to imagine an action coming, and denies it has the sense of 'body', and when he then extends this expression to mean that He is a thing unlike things, and an essence unlike essences, then their case is easy, because they differ in expression, they being: 'Ali ibn Mansur, as-Sakkak, Yunus ibn 'Abdi 'r-Rahman, and al-Fadl ibn Shadhan, and all these are Shi'i elders . . . And partisans of Hisham ibn al-Hakam in our time claim that he did not believe in spiritual corporealism (at-tajsimu 'l-ma'nawi),^{[38](#)} but that he believed that He is a body unlike bodies, with the meaning which we mentioned for Yunus, as-Sakkak, and the others, although al-Hasan ibn Musa an-Nawbakhti, who was one of the eminent Shi'ah, has had pure anthropomorphism attributed to him in the book al-Ara' wa 'd-diyana.^{[39](#)}

What an-Nawbakhti mentions he relates from Mu'tazili adversaries of Hisham, some of whom al-Murtada names in his preceding discussion. Ibnu 'l-Jawzi spoke about him and his book, saying: "Abu Muhammad an-Nawbakhti mentions, on the authority of al-Jahiz, on the authority of an-Nazzam . . ."^{[40](#)} but Ibn Abi 'l-Hadid leaves out the chain of transmission, for obvious reasons.

Shaykh al-Mufid states:

Truly Allah knows everything that is, prior to its existence, and there is no event which he does not know before its occurrence . . . This is a doctrine of the entire Imamiyyah, and we do not recognize that which the Mu'tazilah relate from Hisham ibn al-Hakam with regard to a difference of opinion [i.e., the attribution to him which was mentioned previously, that he said God knows of events after their occurrence, the doctrine which Jahm held].

According to us this is a complete fabrication of theirs about him, and an error of those Shi'i who blindly follow them in it and state it on his authority. We find no listed book or established meeting [in which he explicitly clarifies his view concerning God's knowledge], and his statements on the fundamentals of the Imamate and concomitant issues demonstrate the opposite of what the adversaries narrated from him.^{[41](#)}

Thus it appears that the adversaries of the Imamiyyah were more lenient about 'a body unlike bodies', and the Imams, peace be upon them, stricter; I have already cited my opinion about the reason for this strictness.

The opposition of the Non-Imamis to Hisham's opinion

There is a body of evidence which offers convincing proof of the innocence of Hisham ibn al-Hakam of that which his adversaries attributed to him regarding corporeality and anthropomorphism, and, moreover, that his statement 'a body unlike bodies' did not find favour with the Imams.

1. Our scholars relate that Hisham retracted his statement 'a body unlike bodies' after the Imam as-Sadiq, peace be upon him, criticized him for it.^{[42](#)}
2. A statement by Hisham ibn al-Hakam which al-Kulayni transmits in the chapter on the falsity of the doctrine that God can be seen with ocular vision (ibtalu 'r-ru'yah), in the context of the hadith of the

Imams, peace be upon them, which the distinguished al-Majlisi explains with his statement:

Because he was one of the greatest followers of the ma'sumin (the infallible ones), peace be upon them, [the statement by Hisham] was well regarded because it was taken from them.⁴³ In this statement, Hisham proves the impossibility of seeing God under any circumstance, as ocular sight is incapable of fixing upon anything besides bodies. He states at the end of it:

'Allah is above comparison with anything'.⁴⁴ If Hisham was among those who believed in corporeality then it would not have been possible for him to say what he said.

3. His statement, which as-Saduq narrates on his authority, in reply to someone who asked: "In what manner do you know your Lord?" He stated: "I know Allah, exalted be His greatness, through my soul, because it is the closest thing to me," and then gave proof through the compoundedness of his body and the principles according to which it was constructed. Then he said:

It is impossible for there to be a composition for which there is no composer, and the stability of a form without a former; I know that [my body] has a creator who created it, and a former who formed it, different from it in all its aspects [i.e., not having that which is composed of parts, because they entail imperfection and need]. Allah has said: And in yourselves, can you not see? (adh-Dhariyat, 51:21).⁴⁵

4. We have already listed the names of those of Hisham's books which deal with Unicity and the discussion related to it, such as the Kitabu 'd-Dalalah 'ala hadathi (huduthi) 'l-ajsam – according to at-Tusi: al-ashya' instead of al-ajsam.⁴⁶ How could someone who describes Allah as a body write a book in which he maintains that bodies are inherently created and incipient and not eternally pre-existent.

However, this book, like Hisham's other books, and like the great mass of books by Imami scholars written during the first four centuries, has not come down to us; anyone who refers to the well known catalogues of Imami books – the catalogue of the Shaykhu 't-Taifah at-Tusi and that of an-Najashi – will find that ninety per cent of the familiar books whose names are listed in them have perished, and no trace of them remains except for their titles listed in the catalogues. I have described some of the reasons for this in my biography of the Shaykhu 't-Taifah at-Tusi in the introduction to the "Kitabu 't-Tawhid" from al-Kulayni's al-Kafi, referring to his famous library which the adversaries burned many times, just as they did others.

There remains before us no route to the study of Hisham via the many different books he wrote, except to be guided by their titles to their contents, and from this tiny ray of light to be guided back to the doctrines, which the author expounded in them. From a study of Hisham's books we are able to judge that he argued with atheists (zanadiqah) and refuted them, argued with dualists, and attacked the materialism which existed in those days, and which was expressed by upholders of natural explanations (tabayi'). Despite all this we find some adversaries who accused him and his followers of atheism, and some who accused them of having taken their beliefs from dualists.

5. That which will follow is a biography of Hisham ibn Salim, whom Hisham ibn al-Hakam opposed because the doctrines he espoused were based on hadiths which were untrue or which he had not correctly understood. Hisham ibn al-Hakam charged him that these opinions only led him to believe in corporeality, which Hisham ibn al-Hakam refuted.

- [1.](#) al-Kishshi, pp.256–7; Majma‘u ‘r-rijal, vol.6, pp.216–7; Ibnu ‘n-Nadim, al-Fihrist, al-Istiqamah ed., Cairo, p.257 (Tajaddud ed., Tehran, [to which reference is usually made] p.224), al-Manaqib, vol.4, p.244.
- [2.](#) Ibnu ‘l-Murtada, al-Munyah wa ‘l-amal, pp.23, 107; and see al-Balkhi, Dhikru ‘l-Mu‘tazilah, p.67; al-Qadi ‘Abdu ‘l-Jabbar, Fadlu ‘l-i‘tizal, p.241.
- [3.](#) 100 al-Milal wa ‘l-nihal, vol.1, p.32; see the Encyclopaedia of Islam, new ed., vol.2, p.388, and the Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam, p.83, and the references given in both of them.
- [4.](#) Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, p.269; vol.2, p.164.
- [5.](#) al-Intisar, pp.14, 50; al-Fisal, vol.2, p.126, & vol.4, p.182; Lisanu ‘l-mizan, vol.6, p.194.
- [6.](#) ash-Shahristani, al-Milal wa ‘n-nihal, vol.1, p.87; Nihayatu ‘l-iqdam, p.215; al-Fisal, vol.2, p.126; al-Mu‘tamad fi usuli ‘d-din, p.45; Ibn Abi ‘l-Hadid, vol.11, p.63.
- [7.](#) Nihayatu ‘l-iqdam, p.245.
- [8.](#) al-Milal wa ‘n-nihal, vol.1, p.85; Nihayatu ‘l-iqdam, p.221.
- [9.](#) Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, p.268; ash-Shahristani, al-Milal wa ‘n-nihal, vol.1, p.185; al-Farq bayna ‘l-firaq, p.49; Ibn Abi ‘l-Hadid, vol.3, p.219.
- [10.](#) Ta‘wil mukhtalafi ‘l-hadith, p.48; Lisanu ‘l-mizan, vol.6, p.194.
- [11.](#) Hisham said of his Lord: "He is seven spans [the length] of His own span", this is mentioned in all the non-Imami sources (Ibnu ‘l-Murtada az-Zaydi al-Mu‘tazili reduces them by two and gives five spans): al-Bahru ‘z-zakhkhar, vol.1, p.47; al-Munyah wa ‘l-amal, p.30.
- [12.](#) He mentions what was related from Ibn Shahrashub above in the first part of the biography of Hisham.
- [13.](#) ash-Shafi, vol.1, pp.83–88.
- [14.](#) al-Milal wa ‘n-nihal, vol.1, p.185, and, citing this, Dr. ‘Ali Sami an-Nashshar, Nash‘atu ‘l-fikri ‘l-falsafi fi ‘l-Islam, vol.2, p.220, who, however, does not discuss it.
- [15.](#) By whom he had in mind those who held that things exist of themselves
- [16.](#) Perhaps this latter was an explanation of the technical terms, which he used or which were used in theology. For all these titles see at-Tusi, al-Fihrist, p.204; an-Najashi, al-Fihrist, pp.304–5; Ibnu ‘n-Nadim, al-Fihrist, p.224; Ma‘alimu ‘l-‘ulama‘, p.115; Majma‘u ‘r-rijal, vol.6, pp.233–4; Hadiyyatu ‘l-‘arfin, vol.2, p.507; and others.
- [17.](#) Refer to the account directly from Abu ‘l-Hudhayl, Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, pp.103, 257, 258; and on his authority al-Farq bayna ‘l-firaq, pp.48, 216; and al-Firaq madhahabi ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, p.127; and from Abu ‘l-Hudhayl, al-Fisal, vol.4, p.184; and on his authority Minhaju ‘s-sunnah, vol.1, p.203; Lisanu ‘l-mizan, vol.6, p.194; and from Abu ‘l-Hudhayl, Fadlu ‘l-i‘tizal, pp.140, 262; al-Huru ‘l-‘iyn, p.254; and al-Kirmani, al-Firaqu ‘l-Islamiyyah, p.44.
- [18.](#) Refer to the account of him in Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, p.110; al-Firaq, p.50; Minhaju ‘s-sunnah, vol.1, p.214.
- [19.](#) Refer to the account in Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, pp.109, 112; vol.2, p.232; Minhaju ‘s-sunnah, vol.1, p.208; and on the authority of Zurqan, al-Huru ‘l-‘iyn, pp.148–9, 170.
- [20.](#) Refer to the account of his (which lacks a chain of authority) in Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, pp.104, 268; vol.2, pp.161–2; and on his authority, al-Firaq, pp.49, 216.
- [21.](#) See his reference to al-Jahiz in ‘Uyunu ‘l-akhbar, vol.3, pp.199, 216, 249; and see also what he states about Hisham in Ta‘wil mukhtalafi ‘l-hadith, p.48, and Lisanu ‘l-mizan, vol.6, p.194.
- [22.](#) 119 Refer to what he explicitly attributes to Hisham in al-Intisar, pp.14, 37, 50.
- [23.](#) See the account from him in Maqalatu ‘l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, pp.104, 107–8; vol.2, pp.163–4, 231; al-Firaq, pp.49, 50; Minhaju ‘s-sunnah, vol.1, pp.207, 208; al-Firaqu ‘l-Islamiyyah, pp.44–45; and from al-Ka‘bi, al-Milal wa ‘n-nihal, vol.1, p.184.
- [24.](#) al-Intisar, p.103.
- [25.](#) Agreeing here with the sources, which give al-Jahiz as a pupil of an-Nazzam: see Fadlu ‘l-i‘tizal, p.265; al-Munyah wa

'l-amal, pp. 153, 162; Tarikh Baghdad, vol.7, p.97; vol. 12, p.213; Ibn Khallikan, vol.3, p.471; Mu'jamu 'l-udaba', vol.6, p.57; Nuzhatu 'l-alibba', p.192; and many other sources. al-Jahiz amplifies accounts from an-Nazzam, and praises him in his books: refer to the name indexes in al-Bayan wa 't-tabyin, al-Hayawan, etc.

[26.](#) al-Hayawan, vol.6, p.166.

[27.](#) His report concerning the discussion surrounding Hisham ibn Salim will follow.

[28.](#) an-Najashi, p.176; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.4, p.167; and refer to examples of his disputations with Abu 'l-Hudhayl, in which he gained the upper hand, in al-Fusulu 'l-mukhtarah, vol.1, pp.6, 55; al-Bihar, vol.10, pp.370-2.

[29.](#) Refer to Lisanu 'l-mizan, vol.5, pp.265-6, to see what he invented about him.

[30.](#) See al-Kafi, vol.1, p.105, nos.285/6; at-Tawhid, pp.97, 99; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.303.

[31.](#) 128 al-Kafi, vol.1, p.106, no.287; at-Tawhid, p.99; al-Fusul 'l-mukhtarah, vol.2, p.285; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.302; vol.10, p.453. Another tradition on the same subject with a clearer and more detailed explanation about Hisham ibn Salim will be mentioned in his biography.

[32.](#) al-Kafi, vol.1, p.106, no.288; at-Tawhid, p.100; al-Ihtijaj, vol.2, p.155; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.295.

[33.](#) al-Kafi, vol.1, p.104, no.282; at-Tawhid, p.98; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.301.

[34.](#) Maqalatu 'l-Islamiyyin, vol.1, p.257; vol.2, p.182; and see 'Ali Sami an-Nashshar, Nash'atu 'l-fikri 'l-falsafi fi 'l-Islam, vol.2, p.230; Sahir Muhammad Mukhtar, at-Tajsim 'inda 'l-Muslimin, p.127, and the sources indicated in both of them.

[35.](#) The Formative Period of Islamic Thought, Edinburgh, 1973, p.248.

[36.](#) al-Fisal, offset print, Daru 'l-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1395/1975, vol.2, pp.118-9.

[37.](#) Ibid., vol.2, p.120.

[38.](#) Which necessarily implies corporeality, and is opposed to literal corporealism (at-tajsimu 'l-lafzi), i.e., the declaration that God has a body in the material sense.

[39.](#) Sharh Nahju 'l-balaghah, vol.3, p.228.

[40.](#) Talbis Iblis, p.83.

[41.](#) Awailu 'l-maqalat fi 'l-madhahib wa 'l-mukhtarat, Tabriz, 2nd printing, 1371, pp.21-22.

[42.](#) al-Mufid, al-Fusulu 'l-mukhtarah, vol.2, pp.284-5; al-Karajiki, Kanzu 'l-fawa'id, pp.198-9; al-Bihar, vol.3, p.290; vol.10, p.452; Mir'atu 'l-'uqul, vol.2, p.5.

[43.](#) Mir'atu 'l-'uqul, vol.1, pp.341-2.

[44.](#) al-Kafi, "Kitabu 't-Tawhid", vol.1, pp.99-100, no.269.

[45.](#) at-Tawhid, p.289; al-Bihar, vol.3, pp.49-50.

[46.](#) an-Najashi, al-Fihrist, p.304; at-Tusi, al-Fihrist, p.204; Ibnu 'n-Nadim, p.224; Ma'alimu 'l-'ulama'; p.115; Majma'u 'r-rijal, vol.6, pp.232-3; Idahu'l-maknun, vol.1, p.476; Hadiyyatu 'l-'arifin, vol.2, p.507; adh-Dhari'ah, vol.8, p.254.

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