

# Analyzing the Epistemic Underpinnings in the Acceptance and Rejection of *Ḥāl* as

Proposed by al-Bāqillānī

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## The Historical Background for *Ḥāl*

Muslim theologians have long discussed the nature of the relationship between God and His attributes. Mu'tazilī thinkers saw a contradiction between the unity of God and a multiplicity of eternal attributes. This led them to negate God's affirmative (*thubūtiyya*) attributes. However, when faced with a plethora of evidence for God's attributes in Islamic sources, they resorted to creative concepts in an attempt to resolve the tension. One such creative solution was the concept of "state" (*ḥāl*) introduced by Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933).<sup>1</sup> Once this concept was introduced, Muslim theologians differed in accepting and rejecting it. Those who accepted the concept of *ḥāl* amongst the Ash'arīs were Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013) and Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085); however, al-Juwaynī later retracted that opinion.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, al-Bāqillānī's rendition of *ḥāl* was different than that of Abū Hāshim in its definition and motives.

## Definition and Categorization

A *ḥāl* has been defined as a positive attribute (*ṣifa ithbātiyya*) for an existent (*mawjūd*) that (meaning the additional attribute) is neither existent nor nonexistent. The *ḥāl* then divides into caused (*mu'allala*) and uncaused. The caused would be every predication (*ḥukm*) for the being that is a result of a meaning (*ma'nā*) within the being. Therefore, "being knowledgeable" would be a caused *ḥāl* because it is a result of a meaning which, in this case, is knowledge. Abū Hāshim added an extra stipulation that life (*ḥayāh*)

must be a condition for the meaning found in the being, while al-Bāqillānī did not stipulate that and left it more general. As such, “blackness” would be a caused *ḥāl* for al-Bāqillānī, but not for Abū Hāshim because life is not a condition for blackness. The uncaused would be every attribute that is established for the being that is not caused by an attribute that is additional (*zā'id*) to the being. According to Abū Hāshim, a *ḥāl* cannot be known independent of the being, while according to al-Bāqillānī it can.<sup>3</sup>

It is outside the scope of this paper to investigate the reasons for the differences between al-Bāqillānī and Abū Hāshim in their conception of *ḥāl*. Instead, this paper aims to provide an analysis of the premises and principles involved in the acceptance and rejection of *ḥāl* as proposed by al-Bāqillānī. In doing so, it will show that there were essentially three groups: those that accepted it, those that negated it, and those that accepted a modified version of it. It would be extremely difficult to present all the scholars that fell under each group. However, I will list some of them here. Al-Bāqillānī and seemingly Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490) accepted the *ḥāl*.<sup>4</sup> Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/936) and the majority of theologians that followed his methodology rejected the *ḥāl*.<sup>5</sup> Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) proposed a modified *ḥāl*. From amongst these groups, both those who accepted it without modification and those who categorically negated it ran into inconsistencies, while those who accepted a modified version avoided the inconsistencies and contradictions of the first two groups.

### **Arguments for *Ḥāl* as Advocated by al-Bāqillānī**

The advocates of *ḥāl* present two main arguments. First, they argue that there are particular instantiations in external reality that are different in and of themselves, yet share

a common meaning. Hence, what differentiates them must be other than what makes them similar. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. Salīm (d. 631/1233), famously known as Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, explains this argument with an example. He explains that the particular instantiations of white and black are equivalent in “being colors” (*kawnuhu lawnan*) or “colorness” (*lawniyya*), and that what separates them is “being black” or blackness (*sawādiyya*) and “being white” or whiteness (*bayādiyya*). Hence, “being black” is not the same as “being a color” because that by which they are the same cannot be what differentiates them.<sup>6</sup> Dr. Muḥammad Ramaḍān further expounds this argument by saying that in external reality there exist two things: the being that is described with attributes, and the attributes themselves. So, when there is an object that is black, what exists in external reality are the object and the attribute of blackness. However, the advocates of *ḥāl* claim there is an additional attribute required (this additional attribute would be the *ḥāl*), which is “being black.” This additional attribute is required because the attributes of black and white are both under the genus of colors. What differentiates black from white is not the particular instantiations of black and white as they are identical in being colors; rather, what differentiates between them is “being black” and “being white.” Thus “being black” is the relationship between the object and the attribute black. Similarly, the relationship between the attribute black and the universal of color is the attribute of “being a color.” Hence, “being black” is what separates black from white, and “being a color” is what black and white share. According to the proponents of *ḥāl*, both what they share and what they differ in are additional attributes which would be considered a *ḥāl*.<sup>7</sup> Since this relationship is observed in the mind and not in external reality, it is neither existent (*mawjūda*) nor

nonexistent (*ma'dūma*). In fact, it is a median between existent and nonexistent.<sup>8</sup> More will be said on its status as a median between the two later.

One can directly apply this concept to the attributes of God. God has the attribute of knowledge and the relationship between God and His attribute of knowledge is His “being knowledgeable.” “Being knowledgeable” would be a *ḥāl*, while simply “knowledgeable” would be one of God’s names.<sup>9</sup> The necessity of the *ḥāl* arises in this case from God’s multiple attributes all falling under the universal of attributes. Hence, they all share the trait of “being attributes,” and thus require an additional attribute which would distinguish them. Accordingly, both “being an attribute” and “being knowledgeable” would be considered *aḥwāl* (plural of *ḥāl*) according to what was stated before that a *ḥāl* is both that by which there is sharing (*ishtirāk*) and differentiating (*iftirāq*).

The second main argument that promoters of the *ḥāl* present is that if one did not subscribe to the idea of the *ḥāl*, it would be impossible to have definitions (*ḥudūd*) and conclusive proofs (*burhān*). That is because definitions and proofs require universals. A definition is composed of a thing’s genus (*jins*) and its differentiator (*faṣl*). Also, a proof can only be conclusive if it is based on universals. That is because the characteristics of particulars are subject to change from one particular to another, while what is true for a universal is uniformly true for all particulars under it. Without definitions and proofs, one could not determine the unknown because to reach the unknown from the known, the premises have to be certain (*umūr yaqīniyya*).<sup>10</sup> In other words, the fact that we can formulate conclusive proofs and definitions demonstrates that there are universals that

particulars fall under. The fact that particulars fall under universals prove that there is something by which there is *ishtirāk*, and that by which there is *ishtirāk* is a *ḥāl*.

### **Classification of Parties that Reject *Ḥāl* as Proposed by Bāqillānī**

Those who reject *ḥāl* as proposed by Bāqillānī can be classified into two groups: those who categorically reject it, and those who accept a modified version of Bāqillānī's *ḥāl*. Both of these groups object to two foundational premises of Bāqillānī's account of *ḥāl*: that by which there is *ishtirāk* and *iftirāq* has to be an additional attribute, and that the additional attribute can be neither existent nor nonexistent. They both hold that that which separates beings (*dhawāt*) is the beings themselves. They also hold that it is impossible for there to be a median between existence and nonexistence. Where these two groups differ is the premise of *ishtirāk*.

### **The Position of Those That Categorically Rejected *Ḥāl***

Al-Shahrastānī states that according to those who entirely reject the *ḥāl*, “things are identical and different by their particular beings (*dhawāt mu'ayyana*); as for genera (*ajnās*) and kinds (*anwā'*) their generality is only in the words that indicate them, and likewise their specificity.”<sup>11</sup> What this means is that they do not accept that two particulars that share a species or genus hold anything in common other than the fact that both of them would be referred to with the same words. Falling under the same universal does not indicate a shared meaning, but rather that both are simply referred to by the same name. Similarly, according to them, that which differentiates beings such as “blackness” or “whiteness” does not indicate a common meaning. A simple example will elucidate their stance. Human beings are a species and are defined as living, rational beings (*ḥayawān*

*nāṭiq*). This definition (*ḥadd tāmm*) is comprised of a thing's genus and differentiator (*faṣl*). In this particular example, living would be the genus, and rational would be the differentiator. According to those who categorically reject the *ḥāl*, the genus of living does not indicate a shared attribute of living (*ḥayawāniyya*) amongst all species under it, only that all species under it are referred to by the word living. Similarly, they posit that the differentiator of rational does not indicate a shared attribute of rationality (*nāṭiqiyya*) amongst all human beings, only that all human beings are referred to using that word. Thus, there essentially are no universals, only particulars.

Given their premise of the rejection of universals and the affirmation of only particulars, they concluded that there is in fact no *ishtirāk* or *iftirāq*, as they are based on an assumption of universals indicating meanings. Once *ishtirāk* in meaning is categorically denied, the necessity of the *ḥāl* as an additional attribute to differentiate particulars under a singular universal drops. As such, the first argument of the promoters of the *ḥāl* does not apply to this group. However, the second argument made by the promoters of the *ḥāl* is exceptionally compelling against this group, as one cannot have proofs and definitions without universals.

Although this group rejects the premise of *ishtirāk*, it does agree with the promoters of the *ḥāl* that if there is *ishtirāk*, then *iftirāq* would be through an additional attribute. This is similar to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī's (d. 324/935) position on there not being actual *ishtirāk* in existence (*wujūd*), but rather in words only (*mushtarak lafzī*), and that existence is the very being (*ʿayn*) of the necessarily existent (*wājib*) and the possibly existent (*mumkin*).<sup>12</sup> Putting the two together gives the impression that he felt that if there were

actual *ishtirāk*, existence would be something extra in addition to the essence (*māhiyya*). Although the issue of *ishtirāk* in existence is not the same as the issue of the *ḥāl*, the principles involved overlap. This can further be substantiated by the fact that the majority of the Ashā‘ira reject the *ḥāl*, while a great number of the Mu‘tazila, who held that the *ishtirāk* in existence is in meaning (*ma‘nawī*) not words (*lā lafzī*) and hence that existence is in addition to the essence, accepted the *ḥāl*.<sup>13</sup> All these points suggest that both those who accepted the *ḥāl* and those who categorically rejected it agreed that if there was *ishtirāk*, the differentiator between two particulars under one universal must be by an additional attribute.

### **The Problem of an Intermediary State Between Existence and Nonexistence**

Since this additional attribute would be a relationship between the object and another attribute, it would not be considered existent. For something to be existent, its mental conceptualization (*ḥaqīqa*) must be independent.<sup>14</sup> For example, movement, knowledge, and blackness, albeit accidents, are existent because they can be conceptualized in and of themselves, whereas a relationship between two things is dependent in its conceptualization upon the conceptualization of those two things first. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) states while explaining why the *ḥāl* is not existent, “and not existent so to exclude accidents (*a‘rāḍ*).”<sup>15</sup> ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), commenting on al-Ījī’s statement, explains, “because they [accidents] unlike *ḥāl* are mentally conceived in and of themselves (*mutaḥaqqaq bi-i‘tibār dhawātihā*).”<sup>16</sup> Based on his commentary, al-Jurjānī believes that for a thing to be existent, its conceptualization

cannot be dependent on other things. It is for this reason that he finds accidents to be existent, while he deems the *ḥāl* as nonexistent.

At this juncture, I should point out that according to the majority opinion, those things whose conceptualization is dependent on others are only present in the mind and not in external reality (*khārij*).<sup>17</sup> These secondary conceptualizations which are present only in the mind are called *ma‘qūlāt thāniya*.<sup>18</sup> The discussion then boils down to whether conceptualization in the mind is existence. Those that rejected the *ḥāl* held existence to be restricted to external reality. Although the proponents of the *ḥāl* did not explicitly ascribe to the notion of conceptual existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), their positioning of the *ḥāl* as an intermediary between existence and nonexistence can be seen as precursory to the position of later theologians (*mutakallimīn*) in regards to universals (*umūr i‘tibāriyya*) being existent in the mind (*dhihn*) and nonexistent in external reality (*khārij*).<sup>19</sup>

Second, this additional attribute would not be nonexistent (*ma‘dūm*). It would then, therefore, be an intermediary between existence and nonexistence. Al-Ījī iterates why the *ḥāl* would not be nonexistent, “and nonexistent so as to exclude negation (*sulūb*).”<sup>20</sup> Al-Jurjānī explains this to mean that negative attributes of existent things are considered nonexistent. The *ḥāl* is not a negative attribute; rather, it is affirmative and hence not nonexistent.<sup>21</sup> Examples of negative attributes would be “not black,” “not moving,” and “not knowledgeable.” Although they are attributes, they are nonexistent, whereas positive attributes such as knowledge, blackness, and motion are existent. Since the *ḥāl* is an affirmation of a relationship, it is not nonexistent. Hence, the conundrum of not being existent nor nonexistent.



Those that negate the *ḥāl* argue that the impossibility of a thing being neither existent nor nonexistent is known by intuition (*badīha*).<sup>22</sup> The argument of those who categorically negate the *ḥāl* can be formulated as follows: it is impossible for a thing to be neither existent nor nonexistent; the *ḥāl* as proposed by its advocates is neither existent nor nonexistent; therefore, the *ḥāl* cannot exist. If the *ḥāl* does not exist, then particulars differentiate in and of themselves. If particulars differentiate in and of themselves, then there is no *ishtirāk* in particulars; and if there is no *ishtirāk* in particulars, then universals only indicate commonness of terms for designation and not shared meanings. One easily notices how the entire argument hinges on the intuitional rejection of an intermediary between existence and nonexistence, and how the rest of the argument follows.

Al-Jurjānī attempts to resolve the problem of the intermediary by deferring to a difference in definitions between those that negate the *ḥāl* and those that affirm it. He posits that those that affirm the *ḥāl* understand the existent to be that whose existence is its own (*mā lahu taḥaqquq aṣālatan*) and the nonexistent to be that which categorically cannot exist (*lā taḥaqquq lahu aṣlan*). If existence and nonexistence are defined as such, an intermediary in the form of that which exists secondarily through the existence of something else (*mā yataḥaqququ tab'an*) would be conceivable.<sup>23</sup> The nuance of making the nonexistent that which cannot exist as opposed to that which does not exist, and making the existent that which is existent by its own existence as opposed to a general account of existent allows for an intermediary.

### **The Position of a Modified *Ḥāl***

The second group that rejected the *ḥāl* as proposed by al-Bāqillānī agreed with the supporters of the *ḥāl* in the premise of *ishtirāk*. They agree that the mind perceives universals regardless of the words used to indicate them, and that the mind forms categories for things that share a particular meaning. However, they differed with the proponents of the *ḥāl* in that they did not hold that there was *ishtirāk* in particulars in external reality. For them, *ishtirāk* was only in the mind. Therefore, there is no need for the *ḥāl* as an additional attribute for particulars.

To properly understand this issue, one must understand how the mind conceives universals. The mind first perceives common meanings without considering words (*alfāz*) or particulars (*a'yān*), for example, the meaning of “being liquid.” The mind can perceive this meaning independent of the word “liquid” and independent of any particular liquid. Then the mind forms various mental categories for a singular thing. For water, the mind might categorize it under liquid, drink, etc. For those who categorically negate the *ḥāl*, the mind categorizes water under liquid because the word “liquid” applies to water. According to al-Bāqillānī and the promoters of the *ḥāl*, the mind categorizes water under liquid because the attribute of liquidity is found in particular instantiations of water. Those that ascribe to a modified *ḥāl* say that this categorization returns to meanings that are existent (*mawjūda*) in the mind (*dhihn*). These categories in being universals have no existence in particulars. So, when we say existence, or accidents, or color, then in external reality there is no general existent (*mawjūd muṭlaq*), or general accident, or general color. There are only particular existents, particular accidents, and particular colors from which the mind perceives meanings. For example, the mind will extract the meaning of “accidental” from particular accidents. Then, the mind will assign words to those meanings. Subsequently, the

mind will categorize the first meaning under a common meaning and a differentiating meaning (*ya'tabiru al-'aql minhā ma'nan wa-wajhan*). So, the mind will categorize the concept of an accident under existence and differentiate it from a substance by the meaning of accidental.<sup>24</sup>

What is important is that the *ishtirāk* and *iftirāq* is in the meaning of accidents, not particular accidents. It is for this reason that those who hold the position of a modified *ḥāl* describe it as existent in the mind (*mawjūda fī al-dhihn*) and nonexistent in external reality (*ma'duma fī al-khārij*). For this third group, the *ḥāl* is that by which there is *ishtirāk* of meanings, not particulars, in the mind.<sup>25</sup> They agreed with the promoters of the *ḥāl* in there being *ishtirāk*, but differed in where the *ishtirāk* occurs, and agreed with the negators of the *ḥāl* in there being no *ishtirāk* in particulars, but differed with them in their reducing *ishtirāk* to words only.

As a result of these premises, neither of the two arguments made by the establishers of the *ḥāl* was cogent against this group. The first argument was not cogent, because the case for an additional attribute for a particular can only be made if there is *ishtirāk* in the particular. Although this group did believe in *ishtirāk*, they did not believe it to be in the particular. Hence, there is no need for an additional attribute. The second argument also does not hold against them because it only works against those who reduce *ishtirāk* to words. Lastly, this group avoided the problem of an intermediary between existence and nonexistence by making *ishtirāk* in the meaning that would then be existent in the mind, but nonexistent in external reality. The implications of this position can also be seen in the issue of whether the essence of nonexistent things is established (*thābit*) in external reality.

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1. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfiyya, 2009), 127.
  2. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aḥmad al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2005), 41.
  3. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, *Ghāyat al-marām fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutūb al-‘Ilmiyya, 2004), 30-32.
  4. I say seemingly because in his work, *Umm al-barāhīn*, he lists being knowledgeable as different from the attribute of knowledge. Sa‘īd Fūda comments in his *Tahdhīb sharḥ al-sanūsiyya* that this distinction is likely an indicator that al-Sanūsī accepts *hāl*. However, al-Sanūsī, in his other work, *al-Ṣughhrā*, does not make the distinction between being knowledgeable and the attribute of knowledge. Hence, it is difficult to say with certainty which way al-Sanūsī leaned. See Sa‘īd Fūda, *Tahdhīb sharḥ al-sanūsiyya* (Amman: Dār al-Rāzī, 2004), 59.
  5. Ibid.
  6. Ibid., 32.
  7. Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, 128.
  8. Muḥammad Ramaḍān ‘Abdallāh, *al-Bāqillānī wa-ārā’uhu al-kalāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Rayāḥīn, 2018), 467-68.
  9. Sa‘īd ‘Abd al-Laṭīf Fūda, *Tahdhīb*, 59.
  10. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, 35.
  11. Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, 129.
  12. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Uthmān b. Mūsā, Afandī, *al-Masālik fī al-khilāfiyyāt* (Beirut: Dar al-Ṣādir, 2007), 114.
  13. Ibid., 95.
  14. I opted to translate *ḥaqīqa* as mental conceptualization based on al-Farhārī equating *ḥaqīqa* to *māhiyya*, and his definition of the *māhiyya* of a thing as *ṣūratuhu al-ma‘qūla bi-lā i’tibār al-wujūd al-khārijī*. This discussion can be found in *al-Nibrās* under the discussion of *ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’*.
  15. Al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 41.
  16. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1998), 1:65.
  17. I state it as the majority opinion because al-Thānawī in *al-Kashshāf* states, “that if it is said (*qīla*) that relationships (*iḍāfāt*) have existence in external reality, they would be primary conceptualizations (*ma‘qūl awwal*).” The fact that he uses *qīla* indicates that it is a minority opinion. His usage of *qīla* may alternatively indicate that he finds that position weak. In that case, it would have no bearing on the number of those who adhere to the position. See Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Thānawī, *al-Kashshāf fī Iṣṭlāḥāt al-Funūn wa-l-‘Ulūm* (Beirut: Maktaba Lebanon, 1996), 1593.
  18. Ibid.
  19. Ramaḍān ‘Abdallāh, *al-Bāqillānī*, 468.
  20. Al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 41.
  21. Al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 1:65.
  22. Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, 130.
  23. Al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 2:3.
  24. Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām*, 144.
  25. ‘Alī b. Muḥammad, *Ghāyat al-marām*, 34-35.