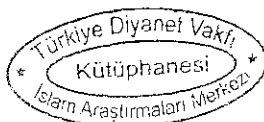




God Spatially Above and Spatially Extended: The Rationality of Ibn Taymiyya's Refutation of Fahṛ al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Aš'arī Incorporealism

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*Ibn Taymiyye, Takıyyüddin (030676)
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Abstract

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) wrote his tome *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* to refute Aš'arī *kalām* theologian Fahṛ al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) argument in *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* that God is not corporeal, located, or spatially extended. *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* is the largest known refutation of *kalām* incorporealism in the Islamic tradition, and al-Rāzī's *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* was apparently the most sophisticated work of its kind circulating in Ibn Taymiyya's Mamlūk scholarly milieu. Ibn Taymiyya in *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* deconstructs al-Rāzī's rational arguments and explicates an alternative theology of God's relation to space. Translating his understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān and the Sunna into *kalām* terminology and drawing on Ibn Rušd's (d. 595/1198) Aristotelian notion of place as the inner surface of the containing body, Ibn Taymiyya envisions God in *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* as a very large indivisible and spatially extended existent that is above and surrounds the created world in a spatial sense.

Keywords

anthropomorphism, Aš'arism, divine attributes, Fahṛ al-Dīn al-Rāzī, God, Ḥanbalism, Ibn Rušd, Ibn Taymiyya, incorporealism, *kalām*, space, theology

Résumé

Ibn Taymiyya (m. 728/1328) écrivit son traité *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* pour réfuter l'argument du théologien Aš'arī Fahṛ al-Dīn al-Rāzī (m. 606/1210) dans *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* selon lequel Dieu n'est pas corporel, situé ou spatialement étendu. Le *Bayān talbīs*

al-ğahmiyya est la plus grande réfutation connue de l'incorporélisme du *kalām* dans la tradition islamique et le *Ta'sīs al-taqdīs* d'al-Rāzī demeure l'œuvre la plus aboutie du genre circulant dans le milieu savant mamelouk d'Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya dans *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* déconstruit les arguments rationnels d'al-Rāzī et déploie une théologie alternative de la relation de Dieu à l'espace. Traduisant sa compréhension de la signification du Coran et de la Sunna dans la terminologie du *kalām* et s'inspirant de la notion aristotélicienne d'Ibn Rušd (m. 595/1198) du lieu comme surface intérieure du corps contenant, Ibn Taymiyya envisage Dieu dans le *Bayān talbīs al-ğahmiyya* comme un très grand existant indivisible et spatialement étendu qui est au-dessus et entoure le monde créé dans un sens spatial.

Mots clefs

anthropomorphisme, aš'arisme, attributs divins, Fahṛ al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Dieu, ḥanbalisme, Ibn Rušd, Ibn Taymiyya, incorporélisme, *kalām*, espace, théologie

Introduction¹

Qur'ānic verses such as "[The angels] fear their Lord above them" (*yaḥāfūna rabba-hum min fawqihim*; Kor 16, 50) and "The All-Merciful sat over the Throne" (*al-Raḥmānu 'alā l-'arši stawā*; Kor 20, 5) raise thorny questions about God's relation to body, location, and space. I will distinguish four approaches to these questions among early and medieval Muslim theologians to set the stage for this article's focus on the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328). These issues are often analyzed through an epistemological lens of rationalism and traditionalism that identifies rationalism with Mu'tazilī adherence to the incorporeality of God and traditionalism with literalism. This dichotomy too easily obscures the rationality of views opposing the Mu'tazilīs, and it struggles to make sense of the rationalizing character of Ibn Taymiyya's "traditionalist" theology. The following typology therefore focuses on the theology of each approach rather than on the degree to which it might be considered rationalist or traditionalist.²

- 1 The primary research for this article was funded by a Research Fellowship from the Leverhulme Trust.
- 2 On the limitations of the rationalist-traditionalist dichotomy, see further Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa*, Karachi, Oxford University Press ("Studies in Islamic Philosophy," 1), 2002, p. 16-29. For a recent deployment of the rationalist-traditionalist

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