In his book on animals al-Jāḥiẓ frequently refers to al-Naẓẓām’s doctrine of latency (kumūn), that is, the idea that fire is hidden in the stone or wood from which it is produced. In one passage on this question he depicts al-Naẓẓām as arguing against opponents who denied that there was any difference between good and bad seed, salty and sweet water, different types of soil, and suitable and unsuitable times of planting: the only difference lay in God’s wish to create grain, grapes, olives and the like from them when they were combined, the result was not latent in the ingredients themselves. Al-Naẓẓām declared that anyone who held this to be true had agreed with the Jahmiyya, gone to al-jahālāt, and professed denial of the ṭabāʾiʿ and the ḥaqāʾiq.

What is al-Naẓẓām referring to? Jahālāt means something like absurdities or nonsense, views revealing ignorance (Ungereimtheiten, as Van Ess suggests in his translation of another passage). The absurdities relate to two denials associated with the followers of Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), the Transoxa-
nian mawlā and rebel whose beliefs are viewed with disfavour in all surviving sources. The first denial is of the ṭabāʾiʿ, the four elementary qualities which both al-Naẓẓām and al-Jāḥiẓ himself saw as key constituents of the natural world. Jahm and/or the Jahmiyya denied that these entities generated anything, or even that they existed, as we read elsewhere in al-Jāḥiẓ’s animal book.4 The second denial is of the ḥaqāʾiq, which Frank translates as ‘essential characters’ or ‘essential natures’, reading the word as largely synonymous with ṭabāʾiʿ.5 Van Ess opts for the ‘core of things’ (Wesenskern) or ‘the real powers of action’ (die realen Wirkkräfte) and relates the statement to Jahm’s denial of free will: God governed everything, humans were just marionettes in his hands.6

Other passages in al-Jāḥiẓ, however, show that the jahālāt had to do with perceptions. Al-Jāḥiẓ tells us that he had written a book against the Jahmiyya fī ʾl-idrāk wa-fī qawlihim fī ʾl-jahālāt, ‘about perception and their doctrine concerning the jahālāt’.7 Here al-jahālāt seems to be used as a technical term, not simply as a term of abuse. In a more expansive vein, al-Jāḥiẓ cites al-Naẓẓām as remarking, in polemics against Dirār b. ‘Amr, that he who says that animals live without blood must also deny the ṭabāʾiʿ and reject the ḥaqāʾiq in accordance with Jahm b. Ṣafwān’s doctrine about the heating of fire and cooling of snow, food and poison, and perception and sensory impressions (al-idrāk waʾl-hiss); but that, he says, is another chapter (dhālika bāb ākhar) fī ʾl-jahālāt.8 Again, the jahālāt seems to be a technical term for a doctrine relating to perception, and here too the doctrine involves denial of the elementary qualities and the ḥaqāʾiq, but this time the jahālāt are cast as the consequence of holding that animals live without blood. How could anyone make so strange a postulate? Dirār allegedly held that blood was only created when you saw it.9 Elsewhere al-Naẓẓām reiterates that whoever denies the doctrine of latency will eventually enter fī bāb al-jahālāt. Here he goes through a long sequence of ilzām (whoever says A must also say B and so also C, etc.) in order to show that whoever denies that there is fire in the stone thereby joins those who argue that there is no water in the water skin on the grounds that the water is only cre-

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4 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Ḥayawān (n. 1 above), iv, p. 288, l. 6; v, p. 11, ll. 1–2; cf. also iv, p. 74, l. 4 where Jahm and Ḥafs al-Fard are contrasted with those who believe in the ṭabāʾiʿ.
6 Cf. Van Ess, ττ, 11, p. 498; ττ, vi, p. 31.
7 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Ḥayawān (n. 1 above), i, p. 10, l. 1. The text has al-jihāt, but the variant al-jahālāt is clearly to be preferred; cf. v, p. 7, ll. 1–3, where Van Ess also emends al-jihāt to al-jahālāt (ττ, vi, p. 29 and n. 16).
8 Al-Jāḥiẓ, Ḥayawān (n. 1 above), v, p. 11, l. 3 (ττ, vi, pp. 31–32).
9 Ibid., p. 10, l. 5 (ττ, vi, p. 31).