



The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought

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THE USES OF EVIL IN MATURIDIAN THOUGHT

Of the life of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturidī distressingly little is known.⁽¹⁾ Those who mention him agree that he was born, date unknown, in Māturid or Māturit, a place near Samarqand. They list him as one who followed the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa in legal matters. There is general agreement that he died in A.H. 333/944. One author⁽²⁾ says that he was buried in Samarqand. Professor 'Alī⁽³⁾ attempts to determine his birthdate from the fact that he claims a reference for one of al-Māturidī's teachers as being Muḥammad b. Muqātil al-Rāzī,⁽⁴⁾ who died in A.H. 248/862. From this he deduces that a possible birthdate would be A.H. 238/852. This must remain problematical. If it is true, al-Māturidī lived a long life. One author,⁽⁵⁾ however, suggests the opposite. He reports that al-Māturidī died in A.H. 336/947 at the age of 36. Al-Māturidī is, at any rate, a contemporary of his principal

(1) See F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden, 1967), I. 604-606 for principal biographical references and listing of works. Hereafter cited as *Sezgin*.

This article is based on a lecture given at Yale U. by invitation of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures in 1980. All translations from al-Māturidī are my own, part of the translation of and commentary on the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* that I have undertaken under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

(2) Ṭāsh Kuprīzadeh, *Tabaqāt al-ḥanaftiya*, MS no. 7367, Dar al-kutub al-misriya, fol. 72, as cited by Fathalla Kholeif, ed., *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Beyrouth, 1970), *muqaddima*, T. The Kholeif edition will hereafter be cited as *Tawḥīd*.

(3) M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden, 1963), I. 260.

(4) *Sezgin*, I. 436.

(5) Kuprīzadeh, *op. cit.*, fol. 72.

Mu'tazili opponent, Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī, who died in A.H. 319/931.

As to his place in the history of Islamic religious thought, the testimony of Ṭāsh Kuprīzadeh may be considered typical: ⁽¹⁾

Know, then, that two men may be considered leaders of orthodox Islam in the science of speculative theology, one a Hanafite, the other a Shaff'ite. The Hanafite is Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī, the rightly guided Imam... The other, the Shaff'ite is ... Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'ari al-Baṣrī...

It is with the latter that the orthodox *kalām* has been peculiarly identified, but Macdonald sometime ago ⁽²⁾ remarked that much of what passes today as Ash'arism is Ash'arism impregnated with the approach of al-Māturīdī.

Thanks to the discovery by the late Professor Joseph Schacht ⁽³⁾ of a still unique manuscript of al-Māturīdī's major philosophico-theological treatise the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, we are now able to study al-Māturīdī in his own words, operating as a speculative theologian. Within the realm of his effort in this work, it is the purpose of this study to examine his thinking on the question of evil and, in particular, the purpose which he describes in its existence.

A few words seem in order regarding the text upon which this study is based. It is not easy to judge what the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* is. By this is meant, is it a single book, or do we have several treatises, originally written separately, and united, at some point or other, by some member of the Maturidite school? Evidence can be found to support either view, though it must be remembered that we labor under the disadvantage of working with a unique manuscript. ⁽⁴⁾ In addition,

(1) Kuprīzadeh, *Miftāḥ al-sa'āda wa'miṣbāḥ al-siyāda* (Hyderabad, 1329), II, 21-22, as cited in *Tawḥīd, muqaddima V*.

(2) D. B. Macdonald, "Al-Māturīdī", in: *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1953), 362-363.

(3) Joseph Schacht, "New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology," *Studia Islamica*, I (1953) 23-42.

(4) It seems probable that other do exist, considering the importance of al-Māturīdī's teachings, particularly under the Ottomans. The notice in *Sezgin* of a *Risālat al-Tawḥīd* in Hyderabad does not seem on the basis of what I have

the manuscript is not only unique, but late. On the *recto* of the title page of the manuscript is written:

Praise be to God for His favors to His servant who is needful of Him. [This manuscript was transcribed] by the efforts of al-Amin al-Hanafi al-Shafi'i on the fifteenth of Sha'bān, 1150 (i.e., November, 1737).

That the copyist had access to another manuscript by al-Māturīdī is clear from the last chapter of the printed edition, the last eight pages of the manuscript. This section is a *mas'ala* which is described in the body of the text as "connected in substance [with what is now under consideration, but] in another manuscript." (*mas'alatu ulḥiqal bi'l-matni fī nuskhatin*).⁽¹⁾ What is not clear is was this "other manuscript" another version of the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, or a separate Maturidian work.

As we know it, the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* has within it four *basmallahs*, two of which, the first and the second, actually use the formula, while the third and the fourth imply it, but begin immediately with the customary praise of the divine and the usual formulaic prayers and blessings. The third actually begins with the word *nabladi'u*, "We now begin...". The first appears at the start of the work, page 3 of the printed edition: the second at the start of the editor's nineteenth chapter⁽²⁾ on the question of why did God create, page ninety-six of the text; the third, very shortly thereafter, on page 110, as a lead-in to a discussion on the reason for the disagreement of the various religious sects on the origin of the universe, and the last at the start of the editor's thirty-ninth chapter, on the question of human acts. The final encomium, however,

seen in Schacht's correspondence, through the courtesy of Professor Hourani of St. Anthony's College, Oxford, to be our work.

On the spread of Maturidism under the Ottomans, see W. Madelung, "The Spread of Maturidism and the Turks," *Actas IV Congresso de estudos arabes e islamicos*, 1968, 109-168. I am indebted to Judith Lichten of the University of Chicago for this reference.

(1) *Tawḥīd*, 393.

(2) I follow in this paper Kholeif's chapter headings. In my own translation I shall offer other suggestions on the division of the text.

only appears at the end of the section which the copyist describes as from "another" manuscript. This repetition of the formula, as well as the lack of a final encomium in our manuscript, is unusual in such a work and leads one to question the idea that what we possess is really one book, in the usual sense of the term. (1)

The lack of inner organization strengthens such questioning. There is repetition unusual even for a *kalām* work. Thus, for example, the question of naming God (*tasmiyatū 'llāh*) appears, first, between questions of the world's eternity and points of Qur'anic exegesis, then reappears two chapters later and emerges yet again after two more chapters. The material in these chapters is, moreover, so repetitive that it must lead one to question again if the *Tawhīd*, as we have it, is one book.

Yet, within parts, there does appear strict organization and obvious unity. The first eight chapters constitute a basic unit on questions of epistemology, cosmology and the existence of God. Chapters 28-32 offer a concise examination of Dualism in several forms. Thirty-three through thirty-six deal with Prophecy, while chapters thirty-seven through forty-four cover the question of human and divine action. Finally, the last ten chapters treat of the question of faith. But no clear organizational principles seem to cover the discussions found in chapters fifteen through twenty-seven.

I am inclined, at the moment, to consider the *Tawhīd* as a book compiled by a follower from smaller treatises of the master. This seems a view that would most satisfactorily account for the organization/disorganization already described, as well as the presence of four beginning formulations. With this brief description of the state of the manuscript from which we work, we may now proceed to the topic of our particular interest.

(1) Through the courtesy of private correspondence with Professors van Ess and Frank, I have gathered that their views are respectively that van Ess holds that what we have here is a text for personal use, while Frank is of the opinion that what we have is a standard, if somewhat unusual, *kalām* text of the period.

One, if not the, concern of the work under consideration is the role of opposites in reality. It matters little whether the opposition is the traditional one of classical philosophy, hot-cold, moist-dry, the moral one of ugly-beautiful, good-evil, or the theological-metaphysical one of light-darkness. (1) For al-Māturīdī, in a way reminiscent almost of Heraclitean thought, this opposition impregnates the whole of reality—the cosmos (*al-'ālam*) and man, the microcosm (*al-'ālam al-ṣaghīr*). In the early epistemological section of the book, al-Māturīdī examines the implications of what may be called his theory of opposition: (2)

As for the role of the intellect in garnering knowledge of religion, the intellect itself testifies that for this world to have come about only to be annihilated would be especially without wisdom. For the possessor of an intellect to deviate from wisdom's path, which path the intellect's act should be in harmony with, is repulsive to anyone who reflects on the matter. Thus, it is inconceivable that the cosmos, of which the intellect is a part, could be grounded on other than wisdom, or created, as it is, to no purpose. When that is established, it shows that the world was created to stay in existence, not to be destroyed.

This passage, occurring quite early in the work, shows al-Māturīdī's attachment to the principle, sometimes worded positively, sometimes negatively, that whatever is, precisely as it is, is in accord with wisdom and is not without purpose. Wisdom (*al-ḥikma*) is one of the recurrent terms which al-Māturīdī uses in regard to all aspects of reality. It is not for him a vague term, nor a passing Qur'ānic reference. Rather, it is almost synonymous with purpose (*al-qaṣd*) and denotes his assertion, sometimes explicit, but always present, that reality is rational and therefore subject to reasonable analysis. This position is central to his later struggle with the problem of evil.

(1) The text of the *Tawḥīd* is so shot through with references to these opposites that it would be profitless to give specific citations. No reader of the text can ignore his preoccupation with this aspect of reality.

(2) *Tawḥīd*, 4, lines 15-16; 5, line 1.

He continues: (1)

So, then, since the world, in its very basis, is founded on divergent natural characteristics (*calā tabā'i' mukhtalifa*) and mutually opposed aspects of being (*wa-wujūh mutadādda*), it needs one to direct it to harmony if it is survive. The same is true for man, for he is the being whom the philosophers (*al-ḥukamā'*) have called the microcosm. In particular, then, for him the intended task of the intellect is that it be that which combines what should be combined and keeps apart what should be kept apart. For man, like the cosmos, is grounded upon divergent affections (*'alā ahwā' mukhtalifa*) and natural characteristics which tend to scatter (*wa-tabā'i' mutashaitata*)... Without reason to control these, that situation would result in mutual estrangement (*al-tabāghuḍ*) of people, then physical conflict, and in that one would arrive at mutual annihilation (*al-tafānl*) and destruction (*al-fasād*). If the world's existence were due to an intelligent being who allowed this to happen, then it would be untenable to hold that there was any wisdom in its existing at all.

This passage is of particular significance in understanding al-Māturīdī's approach. A proportionality is established in it: God is to the cosmos as the intellect is to man, i.e., each serves as the directive controller (*al-mudbir*), and each is needed on the basis that divergent and mutually opposed elements cannot be conceived of as existing in any harmony at all, unless a power superior to all and knowledgeable of all enforces, as it were, harmonious coexistence. The need for such coexistence is absolute because the only alternative to it is ultimate annihilation. Although, in this passage, al-Māturīdī uses the line of reasoning to establish that the intellect is a type of vice-regent in the life of man for direct intervention of the divine therein, (2) he has also presented here the reasoning process by which later he will seek to prove that the world must have one gave it being in time (*al-muḥdith*). What is important for this study is that the existence of the giver of being, as well as the definition of the role of the intellect, is based upon necessity derived from the tension between opposites, found in both external and internal reality.

(1) *Ibid.*, 5, lines 2-8.

(2) This, of course, should be interpreted to mean only in manner of judgment and consequently of choice.

Of all the oppositions found in reality, none presents such awkwardness for theology or causes such tension in reality itself as the existence of good and evil within both the macro- and microcosm. A medieval theologian, in noting the first objection to the existence of God, stated the problem succinctly: ⁽¹⁾

It seems that God does not exist, for, if one of two contraries were infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word * God * means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable. But there is evil in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Islamic *kalām* was well-acquainted with this problem, discussing it at some length and with the same passion that accompanied the debates in Christianity and Judaism. For thinkers who have adopted the theistic position philosophically and, in addition, have accepted belief in a revealed faith, there are strict guidelines to be followed in any resolution of the tension between the affirmation of God's existence and the reality of existent evil in what He created. The modes of the existence of God and evil are limited. The profession of any sort of dualism is flatly unacceptable to the monotheism of a faith such as Islam. The notion of this system violates the profession of *lawḥīd* which lies at the heart of the Qur'anic message. Indeed, in al-Māturīdī, operating as a theologian, the argument that is always the death-blow to any form of dualism is not any philosophical problem which it may present, but the simple fact that it denies God's uniqueness. ⁽²⁾

Another option was tried within some school of the *kalām*, which was thought to be more promising. In essence, it reconciled these two opposites, God and evil, by divorcing the latter wholly from the former. This divorce was accomplished, so their opponents would charge, by making man the sole master of his own act. In broad description, this was the

(1) Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (New York, 1947), I. Pt. 1, Q. 2, Art. 3, Obj. 1.

(2) As will be seen, this same argument of violation of *lawḥīd* will be used to reject the Mu'tazilī doctrine of the production of human acts.

Mu'tazilī option, which even attempted to see the physical evils of life only metaphorically evil. Al-Māturīdī knew and disapproved of both aspects of their attempt. To the notion that man is the lord of his own act, he retorts: (1)

It is also the customary doctrine of Islam in regard to creation that there is no creator other than God, nor any Lord save He. But, if we were to believe that human acts (*al-af'āl*) came to be in time, but their coming forth from non-existence to existence (*mina 'l-'adam ilā 'l-wujūd*) and then disappeared after existing and then came forth again, according to some determination (*'alā taqdīr*) of their masters, we would then indeed have to consider that they have the attribute of creation, by means of which attribute creation is a creation. But, in saying that, one must also say that there can be a creator other than God... Besides, if that were permissible to believe, it would also be permissible to say that man is the lord of his own action. That is forbidden!

This rejection of any possible analogical use of the terms "creator" and "creation" as applicable to the creature is the characteristic response of critics to the Mu'tazilī attempt to assign to man the production of his own acts, which attempt would then assign the creation of moral evil to man alone, God merely permitting man to act in this way. The basis for the rejection of this attempt is the theological inference from the Qur'ānic statement: "There is no thing like Him (*laisa kamithlihī shai'un*), (2) seeing in the verse the universal negation of the use of the term 'creator' for man because the Qur'ān has also said: 'God is the creator of everything.'" This universal affirmation combined with the universal negation already quoted to preclude, in orthodox Islam, any logical substance or possibility to the idea of man as creator of his own act.

Al-Māturīdī also attacks the conjecture that evil is only so in a metaphorical sense, a statement which he counts as Mu'tazilī doctrine in regard to physical evils, on the basis that it is simply their mode of attempting refutation of the Dualist position. If moral evil is to be attributed to man and physical

(1) *Tawhīd*, 230, lines 14-18.

(2) *Qur'ān*, *al-Shūrā*, 42.11.

evil is merely metaphor, then there is clearly no reason for any dualist supposition. (1) His reaction to this approach is the flat statement: (2)

In regard to what we believe, we say that God is the creator of the substance of evil and of good and the creator of the act of the creature as evil or as good, for it is impossible that anything exist in the realm of His power which He did not create.

Having thus established himself in the mainstream of Islamic thought on the reality of evil, al-Māturīdī proceeds to bring fresh insight into the problem of evil, to the examination of which this paper now moves.

For al-Māturīdī, the concept of God's wisdom is an active principle governing and determining the structure and operation of the universe. (3) Wisdom in Maturidian thought is contrasted with folly (*al-safah*), i.e., stupidity, the result of ignorance (*al-jahl*) which flavors one's action with incompetency, inasmuch as the act described as "stupid" either works not at all or works wrongly. Wisdom is also contrasted with the notion of purposelessness, futile action. Thus, al-Māturīdī writes: (4)

Thus it is inconceivable that the cosmos is based on anything other than wisdom or that it is created to no purpose (*ʿabathan*).

By this analysis of the nature of wisdom through its opposite, al-Māturīdī stresses its definition as knowledgeable, purposeful competency. The divine wisdom thus becomes the operative principle for the cosmos, for, as he says: (5)

Since God is all-wise (*ḥakīm*) as well as all-knowing and self-sufficient (*ghānī*), it is inconceivable that His action deviate from wisdom.

Here self-sufficiency and knowledge are aligned with wisdom.

(1) It is to be noted that al-Māturīdī recognizes the validity of the worry of the dualist position and therefore strongly rejects the Mu'tazili's argument on this point, particularly because of its lack of touch with reality.

(2) *Tawḥīd*, 170, lines 4-5.

(3) This is in contrast with its normal fate as described, *passim*, by F. Rosenthal in his *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden, 1970).

(4) *Tawḥīd*, 4, lines 15-16.

(5) *Ibid.*, 96, line 22; 97, line 1.

The relationship of the latter with knowledge is clear, but some explanation is perhaps needed to comprehend al-Māturīdī's reasoning which brings together self-sufficiency and wisdom. He himself defines self-sufficiency as: (1)

He is self-sufficient because no need (*hāja*) by whose advantage He would gain touches Him. Thus, it is false to say that His action deviates with respect to wisdom.,

but he does not elucidate the connection in any explicit manner. His reasoning on this point seems to be that need implies imperfection. A being, radically imperfect, must needs, on some point, act imperfectly. Imperfect action indicates lack of wisdom. Therefore, God cannot act unwisely precisely because, having all already, He has total control over His action which will, therefore, assuredly be what He wills it to be.

Lastly, al-Māturīdī makes yet one more equation regarding wisdom. He says: (2)

The proper explanation (*ta'wil*) of wisdom is that it is the attainment [of the true nature for each thing] (3), i.e., putting each thing in its proper place. That is also the meaning of fairness (*al-'adl*). His act does not deviate from that.

Al-'adl, as used here, is both a structural and moral designate. Its first sense approaches the notion of balance in a cosmological sense. Thus, al-Māturīdī can say that God's creation does not deviate from 'adl. But, given the debate with the Mu'tazila, the word cannot escape the idea of justice which it has in that context. (4) In that sense, too, God does not deviate from justice, for to each thing is given its proper moral as well as existential place. Since this is so, al-Māturīdī can now explain that 'adl, in both senses, is equatable with wisdom. It is this equation, more than any other, that will permit al-Māturīdī to offer a different method for the examination of the place

(1) *Ibid.*, 97, lines 3-4.

(2) *Ibid.*, 97, lines 16-17.

(3) The phrase in brackets is taken from a similar expression found in *Tawhīd*, 306, line 4.

(4) As will be seen *infra*, this equation of wisdom-justice does, however, shift both the substance and the tone of the debate.

of evil in God's creation, for evil can now be examined in the context of wisdom, not in terms of human justice.

This framework established, one may now move to confront the problem of evil directly. The first aspect to be confronted is the fact of its being, precisely in terms of its existence. This question al-Māturīdī treats in his discussion of the questions of the divine decree (*al-qaḍā'*) and divine fore-ordination (*al-qadar*).⁽¹⁾ The two are defined and distinguished in the opening section of the *mas'ala fī'l-qaḍā'i wa'l-qadar*:⁽²⁾

The principle to be followed, we believe, is to bring this question and the whole question of the will in relation to that of the creation of actions (*fi-khalqi 'l-af'āl*). What is established regarding the one holds as well for the other, since God's creation of actions affirms that God both decreed their coming into being (*al-qaḍā'a bi-kawnihā*) and foreordained the beauty and ugliness which they possess in their existence (*wa' l-qadara laḥā'ald mā 'alaihā min ḥusnīn wa-qubḥ*). This also necessitates holding that He wills for them that they come to be as His creation.

In this passage one finds the Islamic affirmation that, since God creates action, one must attribute to that creative act not simply bare existence, but qualitative existence as well. Existentially, then, there is no doubt that al-Māturīdī holds that evil must also be of God's creation. In this vein he continues:⁽³⁾

So, then, the divine decree in its true nature is judgment about the thing (*al-ḥukmu bi' l-shai'*) and the decision in regard to what is appropriate for it (*wa' l-qaḍ' u 'ald mā yalīqu bihī*), for it is most reasonable (*wa-aḥaqqu*) that He make such a decision. But sometimes it refers to the actual creation of things because it is the mode of fulfillment of their being as they are, and it is in accord with what is most appropriate for each thing, that it be as He created it, since He who created the creature is all-wise and all-knowing, and wisdom is the attainment of the true nature due to each thing and putting it in its proper place... Accordingly, one may describe the acts of the creature as having been decreed by God, i.e., He has created them and passed judgment on them.

In the light of these statements, *al-qaḍā'* is, in philosophical

(1) *Tawḥīd*, 305-314.

(2) *Ibid.*, 305, lines 14-16.

(3) *Ibid.*, 306, lines 1-6.

terms, a metaphysical decision concerning the very act of existence and the essential structure of each thing. It is a matter of the truth (*al-ḥaqq* or *al-ḥaqīqa*, in that sense) of created reality. Inasmuch as evil is a thing (*al-shai'*),⁽¹⁾ it must be the result of the divine decree, else it could not be at all.

If the divine decree is to be seen as the determinant of the structure of the being, divine foreordainment⁽²⁾ is concerned with what may be called the qualities of created things. As al-Māturīdī says:⁽³⁾

As for the term *qadar*, it has two senses. One of them is that it is the divine ordinance (*al-ḥadd*) in accord with which the particular emerges into being, i.e., the making (*ja't*) of everything as it is, such as good or evil, beauty or ugliness, wisdom or folly. It is the proper interpretation of wisdom that each thing is created as it is, thus attaining for each thing what is most appropriate for it...

The second meaning of *qadar* is the manifestation (*bayān*) of that in accord with which each thing occurs, such as time and place, truth and falsehood and the reward or punishment which is assigned to each happening. The tradition handed down on the authority of God's Messenger regarding Jibrīl's asking him about faith is similar in what it says to one of these meanings. In it the Messenger is reported as saying that man's good and evil are from God, which response is linked with what we have mentioned about *qadar*. The first sense refers to the creation of the thing as it actually is. That refers to the acts of man, such as their emergence in a way that their imaginations cannot grasp in terms of good and evil, nor their intelligences determine. Thus it is proven that his acts come forth as they do by the power of God. Secondly, it is equally impossible that men on their own determine their acts in terms of time and place, for the power of their knowledge cannot attain to that either. So, for that reason, it is also impossible that the action comes about as it does by their own power. Their acts in all these aspects depend on God (*wa-hiya ghairu khārijatin 'ani 'ullāh*), as He said [in *sab'a*, 34.18]: «We have determined in their regard the journey...» and [in *al-ḥajar*, 15.60]: "...except for his wife. We have determined that she indeed is one of those who lag behind."'

As can be seen from this lengthy passage, there is but a thin line of distinction between *al-qadā'* and the first sense of *al-qadar*,

(1) The term *shai'* is for al-Māturīdī a synonym for an existent being. See his discussion of the term as applicable to God in *Tawḥīd*, 104-106.

(2) I have used this term rather than predestination because of the narrower scope of the latter as it is normally used.

(3) *Tawḥīd*, 307, lines 3-15.

while the second sense of *al-qadar* is closely related to the first sense thereof. It will be useful, then, to attempt to delineate these differences which, though slight, are yet significant. The main point of difference, as was suggested above, is that the divine decree is a two-fold decision. To put the matter analytically rather than existentially: one, that the thing be, and, two, that it should be in a way appropriate to it, by which I understand to be meant that it be this thing rather than that. The divine decree is thus creational and creative in the primary sense of those terms, i.e., to bring into being what was not. *Qadar* is viewed as an ordinance, and al-Māturidī lists the terms of the ordinance. The thing in being shall, in the first sense of *al-qadar*, be either: (a) good or evil; (b) beautiful or ugly; (c) wise or foolish. In the second sense of *qadar*, another triad appears: (a) time and place; (b) truth and falsehood; (c) reward and punishment. In this second sense *qadar* is called not *al-ḥadd* but *al-bayān*.

How seriously is one to take this distinction? Or, to put it another way, does it represent anything that can be distinguished? It is my belief that it does, though not with all the strict clarity that one would wish. The answer seems to lie in the two sets of triadic divisions made by al-Māturidī. The first triad, the set of the three doublets of good-evil, beauty-ugliness and wisdom-foolly may be called intrinsic clarifications in two senses: intrinsic to the divine willing itself and, thus, intrinsic to the nature of the created being, inasmuch as the thing is what God wills it to be. The second triad, the three doublets of time-place, truth-falsehood and reward-punishment, is, on the other hand, extrinsic clarification, referring to the externals of the action in time and place, to the action's relationship to the intellect in truth and falsehood and to the consequences of the action in terms of rewards and punishment.

From this analysis of the concepts of divine decree and divine foreordination, one may draw conclusions which, though directed by al-Māturidī specifically to the question of human acts, bear direct reference to the nature of any and all created being. The conclusions may be listed as follows:

- (1) The creature, in terms of its initial act of existence is dependent radically on the divine decree.
- (2) The creature, in terms of its internal qualities of good-evil, ugliness-beauty and wisdom-folly, is dependent on divine foreordination.
- (3) The creature, specifically in regard to its actions in their spatial, temporal, judgmental and eschatological relationships, is likewise dependent on divine foreordination.

In short, the second sense of *al-qadar* is called *bayān* because it is the manifestation in the public forum of the *ḥadd* of God in the first sense of the term.

It is against this backdrop and with this ambience of creaturely dependency that we may now move to al-Māturīdī's handling of the problem of evil, keeping in mind that evil is, within his system, a thing, not a negation of being that should be present.

For the purpose of this discussion I have isolated several passages in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* ⁽¹⁾ in which one can examine al-Māturīdī's attempt, if one may use Miltonian language, "to justify the ways of God to man." In broad outline, one may say that in these passages al-Māturīdī offers his view of evil as an epistemological tool, a means whereby man may rise to an understanding of God as existing, as existing as one, and gain insight into what God has promised and threatened in the world to come.

In Kholeif's fifth division of the *Tawḥīd*, ⁽²⁾ entitled by him from the first line of the section, "Evidence that the Cosmos has one who gave it temporal existence," al-Māturīdī offers twelve proofs which purport to show that, since he has already proved in the preceding chapter that the world is temporal in nature, for all its substances are, it necessarily follows that the temporal is not the adequate explanation of its own being. Of these twelve proofs, it is the second that is of particular interest for the purposes of this study. It reads as follows: ⁽³⁾

(1) The topic is actually discussed, in one form or another, in sixty-four pages of the printed text, almost one-sixth of the entire book.

(2) Pp. 17-19.

(3) *Ibid.*, 17, lines 9-13.

And the second proof that the world has one who gave it temporal existence is that, if the world existed by its own essence, no instant in it would be truer (*aḥaqq*) than any other, no state (*ḥāl*) more appropriate (*aulā*) than any other, no characteristic (*ṣifa*) more seemly (*alyaq*) than any other. But, since it exists with instants, states and characteristics which differ from one another, it is proven that it does not exist by its own essence.

Furthermore, if it did, it would be possible that each thing would create for itself such states and characteristics as are the best and most beautiful, and, so, by doing this, it would be false to say that moral and physical evils (*al-shurūr wa' l-qabā'iḥ*) exist. But, the fact of their existence (*wujūdu dhālika*) shows that the existence of the world came about by something other than itself (*bi-ghairihī*).

The editor himself notes that this proof is highly unusual, saying that he does "... not find in the works of any of the philosophers or theologians who preceded him." such proof.⁽¹⁾ The extent of my own research has not revealed any thinker after him who picks up the thread and the style of this arguments. The very unusualness of the arguments merits an attempt to explicate it.

The form of the argument in both of its parts is a species of the *reductio ad absurdum*, in which the granting of the protasis of a contrary-to-fact condition would lead to the necessity of an existentially impossible conclusion. The proof has two parts, the first of which deals with the implications of essential existence. Al-Māturīdī, in agreement with both Plato and Aristotle,⁽²⁾ holds that essential existence, i.e., that which exists necessarily, of necessity implies perfection in its being. In this first part, he turns his consideration to the cosmos as a whole. What proves to al-Māturīdī that the cosmos is not self-existent is the presence in it of degrees of "more" and "less." In self-existent being, the all would simply be perfect in regard to points of time, states of being and qualifications of being. But, in the world as it is, al-Māturīdī notes that all of these are *mukhtalifa*, different and varying. The question naturally arises at this point, different from what?

(1) *Ibid.*, XXV.

(2) This statement is not made with particular references in mind, although it is evident to any reader of the *Tawḥīd* that al-Māturīdī is particularly acquainted with Aristotelean doctrine in a number of areas.

Certainly the idea does not refer to the difference of one being in its aspects from another, for, though this is true, the point is irrelevant in terms of the argument. Rather it seems to mean different from what it would be if the being in question were self-existent. It functions virtually as a synonym for imperfect. Thus, in the first part, the imperfections of the universe show that the universe is not self-existent, i.e., eternal, but that rather it exists temporally (*ḥadatha*). So it follows that there must exist someone who gave it that temporal existence (*muḥdith*). Since the Qur'ān speaks of God as the creator of every thing, it follows to al-Māturīdī's satisfaction that the *muḥdith* of his proof is but another name for the *khāliq* spoken of in the Book.

The second half of the proof continues his analysis of the implications of necessary existence. No being which had complete control of its own being would will for itself anything other than the best for itself in all respects. As Aristotle said before him: (1) "Goodness is what all desire." Now, if it were true that each thing were the controller of its own being, it would follow that no evils of any sort would exist. Since they do, it must be that things are not the controllers of their own being. By the same process already described, though not made explicit, al-Māturīdī identifies the being who gave them being with the God of the Islamic revelation. In the second half of the proof, then, the existence of evils, moral and physical, is made the explicit basis for coming to know that there is a God and that He is a Creator. In such fashion does al-Māturīdī use evil as a means for what may be called the epistemology of the modes of being.

The same approach may be seen when al-Māturīdī confronts another question, that of God's oneness. He says: (2)

The third way to prove God is one is to see that no one substance exists to whose substance one can relate only one quality, such as harmfulness or benefit, or evil or goodness, or blessing or trial. Rather, each thing is characterized by evil which then, from another point of

(1) See the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1.

(2) *Tawḥīd*, 22, lines 9-17.

view other than the one under which it was judged evil, is good. The same is true for the rest of the attributes of created being, as well as for all the states of things. They are not beneficial in every state, nor harmful in every. Thus, it is proven that the one who directs all that must be one. Indeed, it is He who combines aspects of the harmful and the beneficial, for He did not make anything which possesses but one category so that one could know that it must exist because of one principle to whose substance its existence must be related or because of the directive control of more than one (*'adad*), each one of which makes each aspect separately. If the latter supposition were true, the principles involved would inevitably contradict each other because each would be making singlehandedly the aspect which exists from it...

You also see that all substances fall under the category of material and are an assemblage of mutually opposed natural elements whose real nature should lead to mutual aversion and estrangement because mutual hostility exists among them. Were it conceivable that their nature abandon their being together, that would cause the destruction of the whole. Thus, it is proven that the one who directs the union among them must be one, joining them together because of His benevolence toward the world and keeping the potential harm of each one from the other by an act of remarkable wisdom which human imagination cannot comprehend...

In another place ⁽¹⁾ he adds:

Thus, in that creation of things which combine the beneficial and the harmful, there is the wondrous manifestation of His wisdom, that He combines the harmful and the beneficial in one being, as well as good and evil, in spite of the mutually contradictory natures of both, as the indication for His oneness (*'alā waḥdāniyatihi*) and the testimony that His Lordship is one.

The notion of the argument is that, if there were more than one god, there would be potentially destructive rivalry (*al-tamānu'*). This point is not peculiarly Maturidian. What is, is the direct mention of the harmful and the evil as explicit examples. Once again the union of these with the beneficial and the good points to the epistemological use of the harmful and the evil as a means of rising to the knowledge of the unicity of the divine. This usage may be called essential epistemology.

Lastly, there is what may be termed eschatological epistemology, the means by which we come to know the truth and

(1) *Ibid.*, 109, lines 11-12.

the true nature of God's Promises and Threats for the world to come. Al-Māturīdī puts it in this way: (1)

...Even though human understanding is incapable of comprehending the nature of the wisdom of Lordship, the wisdom of God regarding the creation of good things and harmful substances is known from the aspects of trial (*al-miḥna*) by what is harmful and the benefits to be derived from present realities so that by both one may know the pleasure of the reward for obedience and the pains of punishment for disobedience. This is in accord with the preceding statement about each thing, as God created it, being necessarily an act of wisdom, even if its quiddity is not known. Since creatures were created to face the consequences of their actions, God made from what can be seen an exemplar for these consequences so that what was promised could be pictured in man's imaginations and the way to Paradise thereby made easy for him...

This third perusal of the place of evil in the universe points up al-Māturīdī's concern with this question. To the best of my knowledge no other Islamic writer so boldly asserts both the reality and purposefulness of harmful substances in the divine scheme. (2) Here they, along with the good, serve as a likeness (*mīthl* or *maṭhal*) for that which has been promised and that which has been threatened. In this view the present world is a testing ground, and evil has its purpose as a means to the epistemology of the Last Things.

There remain several points to be considered, two objective, referring to the nature of the Maturidian process, and one subjective, referring to al-Māturīdī's reason for adopting his approach.

First of all, there is the question of how al-Māturīdī's position affects the whole question of God's own goodness or evil in

(1) *Ibid.*, 108, lines 15-20.

(2) This statement seems true of Jewish and Christian treatment of the question also. However, I have found in Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith (Summa contra Gentiles)*, transl. V. J. Bourke, (New York, 1956), Book III, Part I, section 10, 240-241, a similar line of approach :

Now, with these considerations we dispose of the error of those who, because they noticed that evils occur in the world, said that there is no God. Thus, Boethius introduces a certain philosopher who asks : "If God exists, whence comes Evil?" But it could be argued to the contrary: "If evil exists, God exists." For, there would be no evil if the order of good were taken away, since its privation is evil. But this order would not exist if there were no God. It should, of course, be noted that Aquinas' view of evil is not that of al-Māturīdī.

willing the existence of evil in the world. Al-Māturīdī confronts this question in a chapter concerning the act of volition (*al-irāda*): (1)

Someone may say: It is evil to command acts of disobedience, why is it not equally evil to will their existence? One should say in response: It is not evil to do this for several reasons. First, to command disobedience would be a contradiction, but that is not the case in willing its simple existence because action is sometimes done according to command and sometimes against it. But to command disobedience would be absurd because that action done by order would then become an act of obedience. So the idea of disobedience would be non-existent since it would be done in accord with the command to be disobedient. That is not the case with willing something's existence. Do you not see that every agent may be said to be a willer to his act, but it is absurd to say: The agent commended himself to do what he did? Thus, it is proven that the two ideas are different.

As with so many *kalām* arguments, this one seems, at first sight, to be but one more debater's point. In this case, the aspect of mere verbal fencing is increased because, as is also usual, a key premise has not been mentioned. This missing argument may be stated as follows: On the evidence of the Qur'ān God is the creator of every thing. In terms of the actual creative act of Bel, this is the divine decree. Whether it be moral or physical, evil is a thing, inasmuch as it is an act or a being which exists. Therefore, inasmuch as it exists as a thing, it must be willed by God, not in the sense of ordering it, which would imply consent (*riḍān*), but in the sense that no thing that exists can be outside the divine power (*qudra*). Yet, how to handle the problem of the attribution of such evil to God? This al-Māturīdī treats in two ways. First, the actual doing of evil is not God's doing it, but man's the doctrine of *al-kasb*, which, regardless of any obscurities in it, is nevertheless the affirmation of the reality of human action as the human agent's, not God's. (2) God's role in this is to create

(1) *Tawhīd*, 304, lines 3-7.

(2) On this question see R. M. Frank, "The Structure of Created Causality", *Studia Islamica*, 25 (1966), 13-75, and the articles by Michael Schwarz, "Acquisition (*kasb*) in early Kalam," in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* (Walzer Festschrift), eds. Stern, Hourani and Brown (Cassirer, 1972), 355-387, and "The

the capacity that enables man to perform that which he has decided to do. It is in this realm of the decision that the acquisition takes place. The intellect, possessing through reason and revelation the information necessary to act, seems to be the basis for positing that man's choice of action may be called free choice, *al-ikhliyār*. Since man's choice need not correspond to God's command, so the theory runs, human freedom is preserved, even in the face of the metaphysical problem to be found in the analysis of human action in the world of the *kalām*. Thus, the doctrine can be stated that, in man's doing evil, God is responsible for the act of doing as doing, but man's own choice for the doing of evil rather than good. The second way of treating this problem may be found in al-Māturīdī's analysis of the divine names (*tasmiyat* or *asmā' Allāh*).⁽¹⁾ Once again a Qur'anic principle is invoked. This time that there is no thing like God. Evil, being a created thing, cannot then be like God, or, to put it in terms of naming, it is not a name that can be applied to God. The general principle behind the process of naming God is that the proposed naming must be sanctioned by the Qur'ān itself or, more liberally, by reason. But the evidence of the latter is acceptable only if the name under consideration is one which implies glorification or majesty (*asmā' al-ta'zīm wa'l-jalāl*). These restrictions are not, as has been suggested⁽²⁾ based on a matter of esthetics, but on two theological principles: first, that the revealed must ultimately determine what is intellectually acceptable in religious expression, and, second, that no name derived from created reality can accurately express the divine reality. This latter principle, it seems to me, applies even to those names given by God to Himself in the Qur'ān, for, addressed as they are to the human mind, they will be understood in terms of the

Qādi 'Abd al-Ġabbār's Refutation of the Aš'arite Doctrine of 'Acquisition' (*Kasb*)," in: *Israel Oriental Studies*, vol. 7, 229-263. I also refer the reader to my study in *JAOS* 104.1 (Jan.-March 1984) "*Irāda, Ikhliyār, Qudra, Kasb*, the view of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī."

(1) *Tawhīd*, 38-49; 107-108.

(2) As, for example, R. J. McCarthy's comment in his translation of al-Ash'ari's *Kitāb al-Luma'* (Beyrouth, 1953), 100, note 8. Hereafter cited as *Luma'*.

human experience. Al-Māturidī alludes to this problem in his chapter on the indicative value of what is seen for what is not seen, when he says: (1)

Therefore, analogical reasoning (*al-qiyās*) is necessary in the affirmation, based on evidence found in the world, that the world has one who fashioned it, by means of wonders and things whose existence is conceivable only if they received their existence from one who is all-wise and all-knowing. But, thereby, one does not necessarily come to know (*ta'arruf*) His modality (*kaifiya*) or quiddity (*mā'īya*).

These points on the relationship of God to evil are not tangential to the alleged epistemological use of evil in al-Māturidī's system. Rather, the reason why evil can be used is that its existence precisely as evil or harmful cannot stain God's honor for the reasons just described. Secondly, and a result of keeping evil from God, al-Māturidī is able to discuss the question of evil under the rubric of the divine uniqueness (*al-tawḥīd*) and not, as the Mu'tazila does, under that of divine justice (*al-'adl*). Indeed, al-Māturidī accomplished this by giving both wisdom and justice the same definition. (2) In removing the question of evil from that of justice, as defined in Mu'tazilī terms, al-Māturidī has removed the possibility of seeming to put God on trial. Evil becomes a function of wisdom, and the personal problem it may present becomes one of a lack of full understanding, rather than one of felt injustice. Again, in this approach, al-Māturidī succeeds, by his implied analysis of evil, in dealing a blow against the dualism which was one of his major theological and philosophical concerns. Evil, as he analyses it, is perfectly capable of being assigned to God on the basis of the relationship of created to Creator. Moral evil, which, in this context, means what is done in violation of the divine command is assigned to man's decision and subsequent acquisition of the action as his own. There is thus no metaphysical or moral reason to posit the existence of a second principle to account for the existence of evil.

(1) *Tawḥīd*, 27, lines 8-10.

(2) See *supra*, p. 000.

Granted that the foregoing analyses are sound, on what evidence does one base the claim that one may call al-Māturīdī's approach to the question of evil unique in Islamic speculative theology? It has already been made clear how al-Māturīdī's approach differs substantially and procedurally from that of the Mu'tazila. There remains, however, the question of its relationship to that of the Ash'ariya, to which group al-Māturīdī is so close. For purposes of comparison one may take two works, close in spirit, content and time to the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. I refer to the *Kitāb al-Luma'* of al-Ash'arī and the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* of Abū Bakr al-Baḳillānī. The *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* seems chronologically mid-way between them.

The *Luma'* directly discusses evil in only one place in two brief *responsa*.⁽¹⁾ The first affirms that anyone who wills evil in such wise that he is unjust is worse than the evil willed. And, in answer to whether he holds that evil is from God, al-Ash'arī replies:⁽²⁾

But I maintain that evil is from God in the sense that He creates it as evil for another, not for Himself.

Though the wording may seem odd to the modern reader, al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī here agree. No attempt, though, is made by al-Ash'arī to use the existence of evil as a means to prove anything. It may be stated that al-Ash'arī and his school discuss evil simply in Mu'tazilī terms, and thus the discussion of evil becomes a discussion of the propriety or impropriety of imputing such evil to God. Of the larger concerns of al-Māturīdī there is no trace.

This assertion is confirmed upon examination of a much longer and more comprehensive work, al-Baḳillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*. Once again any direct mention of evil is restricted to the question of its being imputed to God or not. In his proofs for the existence of a Fashioner (*ṣāni'*) for the world, of which he offers three,⁽³⁾ there is no evidence that the existence

(1) *Luma'*, 67-68.

(2) *Ibid.*, 68.

(3) Al-Baḳillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* (Beyrouth, 1957), ed. R. J. McCarthy, 23, paragraphs 39-41. Hereafter cited as *Tamhīd*.

of moral and physical evils in the world suggested to him either its contingent existence or the basis for positing its source outside itself. In his one proof⁽¹⁾ that there is but one god, only the point that more than one god would entail rivalry so that one or the other would be deficient in power is used as proof. It is a far cry from al-Māturīdī's use of opposition as a remarkable proof for God's unity. Neither al-Ash'arī nor al-Baḳillānī essays to assign reasonability for the existence of harmful things in this life. They are there but are given so sign value at all. The lack of evidence for any similar attempt to use evil in any epistemological way by these two minds, so congenial in doctrinal matter and method, strongly suggests that such a venture is peculiarly Maturidian. For al-Māturīdī the fact that something is already gives it potential sign value. As he say:⁽²⁾

...And the principle to be observed in viewing the visible as a sign of the invisible is that the sign value (*dalāla*) of the world varies according to the different aspects of it... Its harmony and right order and the preservation of opposites in one substance point to the power, wisdom and knowledge of the one who directs it. But the aspects of the sign value in regard to how He exists differ from the indication given by sense perception... Thus the existence of the visible as the sign of what the invisible is like is by way of the difference between them, not their agreement

In line with this approach to reality, al-Māturīdī can use the evil in the world as yet another and perhaps more spectacular indication of the difference between the visible and the invisible and as a means to move from one to the other. For, to al-Māturīdī, what is rational, to some degree, precisely because it is. The Ash'arites do not hold to this view in all of its practical applications.

This is not to say the thought of al-Māturīdī on evil, or any question, should be viewed as a rationalistic exercise. Significantly, as his discussion on the defense of reasoning comes to a close, al-Māturīdī states his knowledge of the glories and

(1) *Ibid.*, 25, para. 45.

(2) *Tawḥīd*, 29, lines 11-12; lines 15-18.

the pitfalls of human reason. It is fitting to close this study on the use of evil as an epistemological tool with his words on what may be gained by a study of such questions: (1)

He who reasons, in terms of what his idea will arrive at, belongs to one of three classifications. Either his reasoning about the world leads him to the conclusion that it is temporal and has one who gave it being in time, who will reward the doing of good and punish the doing of evil. In this case he will strive to avoid what displeases this being and will embrace what will please Him. Thus will his desire be happy, attaining thereby high rank in both abodes. Or, by reasoning, he will come to reject what we have mentioned and so strive to enjoy all sorts of pleasures here. Yet punishment will await him in the world to come. Lastly, he may come to the knowledge that the doorway to know the true nature of that to which man has been summoned is incomprehensible. If this be the result, his heart will be at peace and the anxiety which descended upon him will cease to exist, since the thoughts which frightened him will be no more. Thus, let anyone who is fair-minded know that, from all points of view, there is profit in his reasoning.

This, in brief, is the defense, not simply for the subject of this discussion, but for all of the *kalām*.

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(1) *Ibid.*, 136, lines 16-22.