

**T.C.  
SAKARYA ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ**

**THEOLOGICAL-ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY: THE  
EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA AND THE METAETHICS OF AL-  
MĀTURĪDĪ**

**DOKTORA TEZİ**

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**Enstitü Ana Bilim Dalı : Felsefe ve Din Bilimleri  
Enstitü Bilim Dalı : Din Felsefesi**

**Tez Danışmanı: Prof. Dr. Atilla ARKAN**

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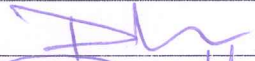
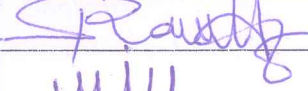



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**YÜKSEK LİSANS/DOKTORA İNTİHAL YAZILIM RAPORU BEYAN BELGESİ**

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Yukarıda başlığı belirtilen tez çalışmamın toplam .297.. sayfalık kısmına ilişkin *Sakarya Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Yönetmeliği Madde 28* uyarınca aşağıda belirtilen filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan ve ..03../.08../.2017.. tarihinde Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü tarafından şahsıma iletilen *Turnitin* intihal tespit programı raporuna göre tezimin benzerlik oranı % ..5.. 'tır.

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Bu bilgiler doğrultusunda tez çalışmamın herhangi bir intihal içermediğini; aksinin tespit edileceği muhtemel durumda doğabilecek her türlü hukuki sorumluluğu kabul ettiğimi ve yukarıda vermiş olduğum bilgilerin doğru olduğunu beyan ederim.

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## Preface

The main problem of theological ethics is determining the source of morality. The matter has ancient roots and remains a major issue of division in theology for Abrahamic religions. In the Islamic tradition, Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī represents a middle position between opposing sides of the debate. He is a neglected figure in contemporary English literature that deserves greater attention, especially because of the unique maturity, sophistication and modern applicability of his thought.

Elements from Aristotle, Kant, and Derrida form a substantial part of the background to this investigation. The unity I find to exist among the three above mentioned philosophers, no doubt controversially, consists in various rationalistic approaches to epistemology that connect reason to morality. Together their ideas and methods have directed my interests in al-Māturīdī. That is why, though utilitarian philosophers, such as J. S. Mill, shall receive some attention, their influence here is not as profound. In contrast, from Aristotle, Kant and Derrida I have learnt what it is like to realise one has entered a unique vista of enquiry with the promise of grasping a fundamental truth; and from al-Māturīdī I have seen how beautiful a philosophical scheme can be.

I wish to thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Atilla Arkan for his encouragement and optimism during the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank my teachers at Sakarya University, especially Doc. Dr. Muammer İskenderoğlu, whose comments on draft submissions resulted in vital revisions, and Doc. Dr. Kemal Batak, whose guidance was instrumental to me finding a subject that I love. I am indebted to many other individuals too numerous to mention and in ways greater than I can comprehend. I would like to thank my teachers at the Istanbul Research and Education Foundation, Prof. Dr. Recep Şentürk, Prof. Dr. Necmettin Kızılkaya, Prof. Dr. Şükrü Özen, Prof. Dr. Murteza Bedir, Maşuk Yamaç Hoca, Prof. Dr. Zekeriya Güler, Mehmet Fatih Kaya Hoca, Doc. Dr. Cüneyd Köksal, Dr. Bilal Aybakan, Hasan Canseven Hoca and the staff at the foundation for the knowledge and support they gave me. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Rahim Acar, Yrd. Doc. Dr. Emrah Kaya and Yrd. Doc. Dr. Hümeysra Özturan, and Prof. Dr. Recep Alpyağıl, whose advice critically improved this work.

Moreover, my gratitude belongs greatly to my dear fiancé Merve Özdemir; an immediate and perpetual source of joy, strength and inspiration. Her clarity of thought and keen spirit proved to be contagious. And, finally, I would like to declare the incalculable love, patience and support shown to me from by my parents Hasan and Nuran. They have instilled in me respect for knowledge and hard work; have been by my side always with their love, and to them I am forever grateful.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Bk.** : book  
**ca.** : circa  
**cf.** : compare with  
**ch.** : chapter  
**dept.** : department  
**DİA** : Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi  
**edn.** : edition  
**ed(s).** : editor(s)  
**EI<sup>1</sup>** : Encyclopedia of Islam, First Edition  
**EI<sup>2</sup>** : Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition  
**et al.** : and others  
**ff.** : and the following (pages, paragraphs or sections.)  
**fn.** : footnote  
**n.d.** : no date  
**no.** : number  
**op cit.** : optional citation  
**p.** : page  
**pp.** : pages  
**ref.** : reference  
**rev.** : revised  
**sect.** : section  
**SEP** : The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy  
**trans.** : translation  
**vol.** : volume

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**Tezin Başlığı:** Teolojik-Etik ve Epistemoloji: Euthyphron Dileması ve al-Māturīdī'nin Metaetiği

**Tezin Yazarı:** Kayhan Özaykal

**Danışman:** Prof. Dr. Atilla ARKAN

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Euthyphron Dileması, bu değerın kaynağını nereden aldığını sorarak ahlaki bir değere sahip bir tanrıya inanan teistlerin karşılaştığı kafa karıştırıcı bir duruma dikkat çekmektedir. Platon'un kendi adını taşıyan diyalog, tanrının ahlakın kaynağı olduğu şeklindeki tanrı merkezli iddianın bariz sorunlarını tartışır ve ahlakın rasyonel bir biçimde tamamlayıcı bir tanımına dair bir arayış sergiler görünür. Bununla birlikte diyalog, genellikle ne böyle bir tanıma başarılı bir temel sağlamış ne de tanrı merkezli iddiayı kesin olarak çürütmüş kabul edilmez.

Akıl merkezli düşünme ve tanrı merkezli düşünme tutumları arasında meydana gelen çekişmede, tamamıyla farklı epistemolojilerin tarafların kendi tutumlarının belirleyicisi olduğuna ve dolayısıyla belli kabullerle yola çıktıklarına dair bir varsayım var görünmektedir. Sonuç olarak, tartışmaya karar verebilmek için dilemmanın sınırlarının dışından olumlu bir desteğe ihtiyaç gerekli görünmektedir.

Akıl merkezlilik-tanrı merkezlilik ikilemi, İslam teolojik-etik geleneğinde sırasıyla Mu'tezile ve Eş'arî kelim ekolleri tarafından benimsenen bakış açılarıyla paralellik arz etmektedir. Her bir ekol kendi uzmanlık ilgileri nedeniyle kısmen farklı bir epistemoloji kullanmaktadır.

Māturīdī, hem tanrı merkezli hem de akıl merkezli tutumların boyutlarını birleştiren sofistike bir orta yol sergiler. Onun teolojik-etiği, tanrıyı ahlakın nihai kaynağı olarak sunar, ancak bir bütün olarak alemin tanzim edilmiş olması ve insanın ahlaki değerleri idrak etmesinin temel vasıtası olması temelinde akla referansta bulunur. Māturīdī'nin sofistike bir metaetiği oluşturmasında tecrübeye dayalı ve akli unsurları bir araya getirişine Jacques Derrida'nın epistemolojik çalışmasının olumlu bir destek sağladığını fark ettim. Bu ise yaratılışın, tanrının mutlak hakimiyetinin göstergesi olmaya devam ederken nasıl vahiyden bağımsız olarak objektif ahlaki bir değer kazandığını açıklamaya yardımcı olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Al-Māturīdī, Derrida, Rasyosentrik, Teolojik-etik, Teosentrik,

**Thesis Title:** Theological-ethics and Epistemology: The Euthyphro Dilemma and the Metaethics of al-Māturīdī

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The Euthyphro Dilemma highlights the perplexing situation that confronts theists who believe in a God in possession of moral significance, as it asks where the origin of this significance lies. Plato's eponymous dialogue discusses apparent problems with the theocentric claim that God is the source of morality and seems to present a search for a rationally integral definition of piety. However, the dialogue is generally acknowledged to neither successfully establish the grounds for such a definition nor conclusively refute the theocentric claim.

In the ensuing debate between ratiocentric and theocentric positions, there appears to be an assumption of radically different epistemologies that are determinant of the respective positions, which hence assume what they set out to prove. As a result, the need for positive support from outside the confines of the dilemma appears to be required in order to decide the debate.

The ratiocentric-theocentric dichotomy is paralleled in the Islamic tradition of theological ethics (theological-ethics), with the respective stances held by the Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī schools of kalām. Each school utilizes a different epistemology, in part due to their professional concerns.

Al-Māturīdī represents a sophisticated middle position that combines aspects of both the theocentric and ratiocentric stances. His theological-ethics presents God as the ultimate source of morality, but refers to reason as the basis upon which creation as a whole is ordered and as the ultimate means by which human beings come to comprehend moral values. I find that the epistemological work of Jacques Derrida offers positive support for al-Māturīdī's juxtaposition of empirical and rational elements in the creation of a sophisticated metaethics. It helps explain how creation acquires objective moral significance independently of revelation, while remaining indicative of God's total sovereignty.

**Key Words:** Al-Māturīdī, Derrida, Theocentric, Ratiocentric, Theological-ethics

## Introduction

Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī was the eponymous founder of the Māturīdī School. Estimated to have been born near Samarkand in 853, he was educated in kalām, tafsir, and fiqh by a long list of teachers. When al-Māturīdī was growing up, there was an emerging reaction against some schools within Islam, notably the Mu'tazila, Qarmati, and Shi'a. In this context, the Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools are fellow movements; a contemporary to al-Ash'arī, al-Māturīdī targeted the same family of opponents. While al-Ash'arī sought to refute the Mu'tazilis of the Islamic heartlands in Iraq, al-Māturīdī, quite independently, sought the same end in the relatively remoter regions of Samarkand, focusing mainly on the tenth century Mu'tazilah of Bagdad, each reaching largely similar positions and ultimately being recognised together as main representatives of Islamic orthodoxy.

Nevertheless, the Māturīdī School, especially when compared with early Ash'ari thought, has a distinctly rationalist orientation. While al-Ash'ari's traditionalism can perhaps be attributed to his Mu'tazili training and wholesale break away to quite different methodological bases upon comprehending the weaknesses of that school to be fundamental, Al-Māturīdī, appears to have had a rather different education at the feet of the Hanafī scholars of Samarkand, the school well-known for its greater openness to rational deduction, though eschewing the conclusions reached by the Mu'tazili's. However, very little is known about al-Māturīdī's life, so the charting of his scholarly development must remain speculative. In addition to the different personal intellectual leanings and history of their respective founders, the dissimilarities that exist between the two schools may be attributed to the fact that while opposing the Mu'tazili's, al-Māturīdī also faced the doctrines of Daulists, such as the Manicheans, in addition to Brahmans and philosophical sceptics, who lead to discussions that his counterparts in Iraq did not partake in. This of course gave cause for the establishment of different conclusions to those of al-Ash'arī. Some of these are directly metaethical and some indirectly so. These represent the basis for an Islamic theological tradition that builds upon jurisprudential approaches of the Hanafī School in order to address the same basic issue that the Euthyphro dilemma poses.

My interests in this work are systematic rather than historical. Two separate but related lines of investigation motivated me along this path. One was a perceived requirement for an alternative ethical theory to the law-based deontology and utilitarianism due to their common weaknesses and the recognition that the problems inherent to those theories stemmed more or less directly from their respective epistemological foundations, which in turn provisionally suggested the need for a more carefully considered moral epistemology. The second was al-Māturīdī's habitation of a place between traditionalism and rationalism, which suggested a substantive affinity towards the intentions of this dual ethico-epistemic inquiry. Upon further examination, the lines happily revealed mutual support, thus bringing theological support to an ethical theory and ethical support to a theological one along lines of epistemological orientation.

The metaethical theory resulting from the first line of investigation took encouragement from the revitalisation of virtue ethics, which has great affinity with the Islamic moral tradition in the first place, and pointed towards an understanding of morality so radically different in character from deontology and utilitarianism as to be open to an epistemological basis that avoided previous problems. However, the subject of virtue ethics' relation to epistemology was not taken up in this study given the realization that, firstly, al-Māturīdī's comments do not appear to present a virtue ethics alone, and secondly, that specifying the epistemology of virtue ethics was in fact unnecessary to resolving the more basic problem that this work addresses.

I offer the final metaethical conclusions drawn at the end of this study as a possible philosophical development and clarification of al-Māturīdī's thought that hopefully will be convincing or, at least, contribute to opening up western metaethical thought in relation to Islamic ethics, even if only by provoking disagreement and contrary intellectual developments.

### **Thesis Subject**

A central concern in the Islamic scholarly tradition is the *ḥusn-qubh* issue; and this is the issue that we are concerned with here; as it exists both in Islamic and Western thought and most particularly as addressed by al-Māturīdī. The issue is neatly

summarised by Plato in *Euthyphro*: ‘Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?’<sup>1</sup> What is the source of morality? And when we ask this question, we are also asking: What is the nature of morality, both ontologically and epistemologically? For the source of morality has direct significance for the terms in which morality exists and how we can know it.

Yet exactly what level significance epistemology or metaphysics has must be clarified. The significance of epistemology’s moral significance may be rather limited or underdetermining; there are many different moral theories that draw on the same epistemology. For example, both ethical egoism and utilitarianism can have empirical bases. More importantly for us, the same under-determination will apply to the religious sphere. So it is important to remember that though a close connection appears to exist between the epistemology of moral theory and the supposed source of morality, it is not to be assumed to be simple or direct. Divine command theory, for example, will entail a broadly empirical epistemology, while a formalist theory will, in the Kantian fashion, be rationalist. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the epistemology may be rational and yet have theological foundations, or it may be empirical and secular. Thus, the final determinator of morality’s content may be something other than epistemology, such as metaphysics, or theology.

Each of the two possible answers to the dilemma, as noted above, has various problems, hence the stubborn difficulty that the dilemma has displayed over the long history of philosophy. The relation between religion and morality is a subject of key disagreement (*ikhtilaf*) between the three main schools of Sunni Kalām, the Mu’tazilah, Ash’ariyyah, and Māturīdīyyah as well as between Christian and Jewish theologians.

The English language has no concise term to denote the corresponding subject. The term ‘theodicy’ refers neatly to the justification of God’s actions to answer the problem of evil, but to express the meeting of theology and ethics I suggest the term theological-ethics.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted also that I draw a distinction between two terms largely

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Euth*, 10a. All translations of *Euthyphro* are from Benjamin Jowett, *The Four Socratic Dialogues*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945).

<sup>2</sup> The term ‘ethico-theology’ (or even more simply, ‘moral theology’) would initially seem a better choice as it is already in use, but in addition to commonly signifying ethics derived from theology, as in Christian ethics, it refers to theology derived from ethical considerations, as in Kant’s philosophy of

treated as synonyms: ethics and morality. I use the term ethics to denote the philosophical study of morality, and the term morality to denote what is thought good and bad, in other words, moral contents. The question of theological-ethics asks whether goodness and badness exist in things themselves or if things are good and bad by divine decree. The query about which one of these is the ultimate source of goodness and badness naturally arises when at least two different sources of ethical knowledge appear. Here one of the sources in question is ‘secular’ and the other divine.

Metaethics is the field one enters by, for example, studying the relationship between God and morality specifically. This is because, more generally, metaethics is the name given to the confrontation of ethics with other branches of philosophy, such as epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of language, psychology, or religion as well as theology. It involves asking, as primary examples, what the source and foundation of ethical values are, and the type of reality to which ethics is thought to refer to. In short, metaethics denotes the attempt to discover what the very nature of morality is by reference to other fields. This makes it a ‘second-order’ type of inquiry. The term was coined in the early twentieth century within the analytic tradition of philosophy and the field hails therein hails at least as far back as British moral philosopher George Edward Moore, who first distinguished between discussions that utilized moral values and discussions of those values as such.<sup>3</sup> While consideration of other branches of philosophy is secondary to the aims found in ethics, it is essential to those in metaethics.<sup>4</sup> But as far as theological-ethics is concerned, the area for special consideration is a deity’s relation to normative claims.

That the context of the question is clearly theological does not mean theistic belief is necessary to take the question seriously. First, there is the possibility that one treat the question hypothetically, that is, in terms of what conclusions would follow in regard to morality if God existed, in order to find out, for instance, whether morality would be

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religion (See, Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 308-346). My hope is that the term theological-ethics does not express any such hierarchical relation.

<sup>3</sup> See, “Metaethics”, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaethics/>, accessed, 16/10/2017

<sup>4</sup> See, “Metaethics”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/metaethics/>, accessed, 16/10/2017

improved. Second, theological-ethics allows one to ask whether the existence of morality implies the existence of a divine being, because if we find that things are not good or bad in themselves; then, amongst other views, the one that morality has a divine source becomes all the more pressing.

In contrast, the philosophy of morality, or ethics, denotes the work of specifying and systematising right conduct for the validation and refutation of certain decisions, attitudes and or practices. It thus translates into theory that has practical importance for a fundamental given state of the human being, that is, the normative experience of our relation to others. In a sense, the work of ethics is to fill out what the dictionary definition of the term ‘morality’ lacks, that is, substantive contents. A phrase like ‘the principles or conventions of good conduct’ does not tell us what is actually moral, or, what is good or bad. Yet this is precisely what people need to know to understand morality, and the aim in ethics is to find out what is moral. Because of its direct concern with solving moral problems and directing the choices people make in life, ethics is known as a ‘first order’ realm of investigation.

In this regard, religion is defined as the ‘worship or reverence of a supernatural being that is held sacred,’ and, in fact, the religions of the world demonstrate great variation. Even the basic assertion that religion involves belief in a higher power is not without issue. Indeed, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism can all be named as nontheistic religions without fear of nurturing an oxymoron. Rather than an essence, the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblances offers some help. It describes ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.’<sup>5</sup> Thus, to explain how the radical variety that religions display does not preclude them all from being included under the rubric of that term is via the concept of family resemblance. More pertinently, just as many ethical philosophies are presented without any reference to a deity, religion does not by definition need to teach people how they should morally behave. For example, in religions such as shamanism, the central practices are magic, medicine, and techniques

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<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations: German text with a Revised English Translation*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), Sect. 66, p. 27<sup>c</sup>.

of ecstatic experience.<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the diversity of shamanism across different societies, it does not present us with an official body of moral teaching. On the contrary, moral relations between humans in the relevant geographies tend to be determined independently via cultural and societal factors.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the dictionary definition of religion does not say much about morality.

Of course, that does not rule out the possibility that religion and morality connect with or include each other in some way, but this is a rather weak basis for serious evaluation. The religion that shall be considered here, Islam, like all the Abrahamic religions, includes moral teachings thought to be essential to the establishment of goodness in human life. Like other creeds, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, clear guidance is given on what acts should be performed and how one should lead their life. Thus, we can say that in addition to a divine supernatural order of being, these religious traditions contain teachings that involve values and practices meant to establish life in accord with doctrine that aims to impart knowledge on the ultimate meaning of life and existence. In short, both morality and these religions claim to be action guiding, though with the latter in a larger context of divine and cosmic significance.

The Qur'ān is replete with recommendations, commands, and prohibitions, which fall under either a moral or legal classification. For instance, arrogance, fornication and backbiting all receive admonishment or censure, while benefiting others, charity, freedom of belief and courtesy get commendation. Surat al-Hujurat, for example, warns the believers against speaking ill of one another and using offensive nicknames.<sup>8</sup> Surat al-Nahl commands the Prophet to invite people to Islām 'with wisdom and good teaching' and to dispute 'in the most courteous way.'<sup>9</sup> A general indication of morality presented in the Qur'ān is given by the following verse, known as *Ayat al-birr*:

Goodness does not consist in turning your faces towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angles, the Scripture, and the

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<sup>6</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 6-8.

<sup>7</sup> Rodney Stark, "Gods, Rituals, and the Moral Order," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40:4 (2001), pp. 619-636.

<sup>8</sup> *The Qur'ān*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49:11, p.339. All further citations of the Qur'ān are from this translation.

<sup>9</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 16:125.



prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them, who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.<sup>10</sup>

What is more, the Qur'ān is supplemented by the example of the Prophet in regards to morality. Surat al-Ahzab reads, 'The messenger of God is an excellent model for those of you who put their hope in God and the Last Day and remember Him often.'<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a wealth of moral teachings is to be found in the *sunnah* of the Prophet, which no serious attempt to represent Islamic morality could do without, for the *sunnah* is a living embodiment of God's message to humankind.

What is more, it is stated on a number of occasions in the Qur'ān and hadith traditions that God possesses the most beautiful names (*asmā al-ḥusnā*). Surat al-Hashr reads:

He is God: there is no god other than Him. It is He who knows what is hidden as well as what is in the open, He is the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy. He is God: there is no god other than Him, the Controller, the Holy One, Source of Peace, Granter of Security, Guardian over all, the Almighty, the Compeller, the Truly Great; God is far above anything they consider to be His partner. He is God: the Creator, the Originator, the Shaper. The best names belong to Him. Everything in the heavens and earth glorifies Him: He is the Almighty, the Wise.<sup>12</sup>

In a famous hadith, the Prophet states that there are ninety nine names belonging to God.<sup>13</sup> Being called the most beautiful already tells us the names have special value. In addition to names such as the Lord of Mercy (Ar-Rahman), the Giver of Mercy (Ar-Rahim), and the Wise (Al-Hakim), God's names include the Judge (Al-Hakam), the Just (Al-'Adl), the Forgiving (Al-Ghafoor), the Loving (Al-Wadud), the Friend (Al-Walee)

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<sup>10</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 2:177.

<sup>11</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 33: 21.

<sup>12</sup> *The Qur'ān*, Surat al-Hashr, (59: 22-24). Other notable Qur'ānic verses in this regard are al-Isra' (17:110), p.182, al-A'raf (7:180), p.107 and Ta Ha (20:8), p.196.

<sup>13</sup> 'Narrated Abū Huraira: Allah has ninety-nine Names, i.e., one hundred minus one, and whoever believes in their meanings and acts accordingly, will enter Paradise; and Allah is Witr (one) and loves 'the Witr' (odd numbers).' <http://www.gowister.com/sahihbukhari-8-419.html>. It should be noted that the phrasing is meant to suggest the number is not all inclusive; there may be more than ninety nine names, and in fact many Muslim scholars attest to the fact that there is.

and the Guide (Al-Hadi) — names whose moral import is undeniable. In sum, according to Islamic sources, God is of moral significance not only by His normative declarations, but also by His specific names.

On the theological level, just one moral announcement from God or His possession of just one such name is significant enough material to raise metaethical questions, because once it is clear God is a possible source of moral knowledge or reality, metaethical questions about the moral importance of the divine emerge. But in Islamic faith, God is a Being of moral significance for various reasons: He is interested in human affairs and favours humans to do certain actions instead of others, declaring some good and others evil, and He has names of ethical significance.

It is largely because both religion and ethics make authoritative moral claims that the *ḥusn-qubh* issue is so unequivocal. The issue being dealt with is not simply a meeting between opposing schools of ethical thought. If this were the case, then debate would likely remain at the level of first-order inquiry. Indeed, what is good and what is bad can often be learnt directly from Qur'ānic injunctions — notwithstanding that *usūl al-fiqh* and other sciences are needed to systematise this knowledge; the source goodness and badness is another matter — and the subject of this study. Rather, where religion and morality meet, questions about the nature of morality itself arise because we are presented with two radically different supposed sources of knowledge on the same subject matter.

In studying this subject, key ethicists such as the philosophers Aristotle, Immanuel Kant and Jacques Derrida are in the theoretical background, and sometimes foreground, of the discussions here. Each has a rather different stance on the relation between epistemology and ethics and not typically thought of as theologians. Does al-Māturīdī fit into this group that he can be treated in similar terms? The empiricist-rationalist divide often cited in epistemology is paralleled in Islamic theology by traditionalist and rationalist orientations. The traditionalist puts a greater amount of their trust into the particular words of the Qur'ān and hadīth than their rationalist counterpart, relying less on reason; indeed viewing the latter's influence with suspicion, while the rationalist gives a more generous role to reason in forming an understanding of the meaning of the texts and learning their teachings. Of course, this contrast is one of degrees, within

rationalist and traditionalist traditions are various positions, and the Muslim rationalist may be more concerned about textual evidence than reason despite giving the latter greater sway than a more textualist scholar would. Nevertheless, in the field of *kalām*, the Ash'arī School has come to represent the main traditionalist school, standing opposed to their usual target, the Mu'tazilah, who firmly represent the rationalist camp.

Possessing a divine command theory and rationalist morality, respectively, the Ash'ariyyah and the Mu'tazilah stand opposed in ethics. For al-Ash'arī, the consequences of one's actions in the next life alone are what grant them value. God's commands therefore are the source of moral significance. The reason for obedience is not merely prudential however, as obedience to divine revelation is morality itself, regardless of the results. Hourani calls this stance theological subjectivism, perhaps to emphasise the seemingly arbitrary nature of such a moral structure.<sup>14</sup> The term divine command theory serves just as well, and is more common. The Mu'tazili position, in contrast, states reason is the sole means of distinguishing good and bad. The controversy of their position involves, among other things, holding God accountable to the rule of morality. The basis for this overriding supremacy is morality's expression of an objective, if not absolute, truth. Thus, there is a subjective-objective opposition stemming from traditionalist and rationalist methodologies.

This epistemological aspect to the *ḥusn-qubh* issue is the key focus of this study. By underlining the different epistemological foundations and resources that each school adopts, both in the western and Islamic traditions, I can more clearly clarify the nature of the issues itself and hope to provide an answer on this subject.

Theological-ethics, specifically, provokes interest for a variety of reasons, but in so far as to what will be discussed in this work, it is necessary to simultaneously take into consideration: the relation between epistemology and ethics and religion. Firstly, what exact relation of priority between exists between these three subjects must be established. There is a great danger of assuming one as basic and continuing study based on that assumption, rather than making this precise issue of priority the subject of critical examination. We have to establish whether it is epistemology, religion or

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<sup>14</sup> George Hourani, *Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of Abd al-Jabbar*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 3, pp. 8-13.

something else inherent to ethics that determines the identification of what is moral and immoral. Thus, each possibility must be addressed in sequence, and the results found from the discussion of one will provide evidence towards the final answer.

The Euthyphro Dilemma sets the scene for us; it addresses the question: Is morality based on revelation? Of course, what the Euthyphro Dilemma tells us about God in relation to morality will help us to answer what relation exists between morality and epistemology. This is our first question; in Chapter One we discuss Socrates' arguments in *Euthyphro* to clarify the problems and advantages that appear to exist with the idea that God is the source of morality, which is also known as Divine Command theory, as well as the prospect of an alternative explanation. Typically, the source is taken directly to be God's commands, but some authors prefer to use terms such as God's will or God's desire. For this reason we shall call such theories more generally, theocentrism. We also survey the Euthyphro dilemma as it has been treated in later Western thought in order to see how far thinkers have come to resolving the basic problems that it poses. Next we shall survey the same matter as it was treated in classical Islamic scholarship, where it is known as the *ḥusn-qubh* issue. This will reveal the degree of similarity and difference between the schools of thought across religious traditions and also provide the historical context for our study of al-Māturīdī's own thought. This chapter in sum points the way to where a solution to the problem of Euthyphro may lie by the signals raised of a more basic problem to that of the relation of God to morality.

While Chapter One deals mainly with a theocentrist claim, it also discusses alternative views; and this makes way for the second question we wish to address, that is, the prospect of epistemology as having substantive moral significance. For then we first ask: What is the relation of epistemology to morality? Of course there are multiple views on this matter, and our study will be restricted to views that are related to theological-ethics. There is, of course, the possibility that epistemology is merely a secondary, though essential, aspect to morality's form and content. This is because every moral theory will necessarily have an epistemological dimension, a way of explaining how it is that we come by moral knowledge on the one hand, and also, whether that knowledge is categorical or conditional, on the other. For this reason,

Chapter Two will categorize how the various ethical theories considered in Chapter One relate to epistemology in this sense.

However, the ultimate goal of Chapter Four is more radical. It is to consider the existence of a basic epistemological problem that points directly to the source of morality. In other words, the reason for such a switch in our point of departure is due to the possibility that epistemology is itself indicative of what morality is, rather than morality determining its attendant epistemology as a mere corollary. This goes back to the basic question of theological-ethics: Do goodness and badness exist in things themselves or are things good and bad by divine decree? Epistemology may be the key to understanding how goodness and badness are determined by non-divine sources, that is to say, are good and bad in themselves.

The final area of investigation is the possibility that there is something other than revelation and epistemology that identifies morality's content. Thus, for example, we can ask: Given what we know to be moral, what is the source of this knowledge? What this question does is to place certain moral contents at the foundation of inquiry, for we cannot start an investigation this way without first assuming that we know what is moral. This means learning which epistemology could possibly allow for the moral propositions in question, and will to some extent depend on how we consider morality to exist. If we consider morality to consist of unconditional imperatives, then an epistemology that will allow for such propositions will be necessary if we are to have moral knowledge rather than mere ideals and postulations. For then morality would have a very different form of existence. Here, metaphysical considerations might also be in order: How does metaphysics impact morality? How exactly does morality exist? For if we say that there is moral knowledge, and it is objective, then the implication is that there is some reality from which moral facts are derived. This reality need not be a material one; it can be transcendent or ideal. The existence or non-existence of such a realm in light of al-Māturīdī's comments should be determined, as such an aspect of theological-ethics arises naturally, and any epistemological account is neither complete nor satisfactory without the metaphysical question being addressed.

This takes us to the following chapter, which considers al-Māturīdī's metaethical thought. For the religious believer there is the question of revelations epistemological

and ethical message. This is because revelation may be approached as a direct source of moral knowledge and, indeed, as specifying the source of morality itself when such subjects are therein addressed. The question is: What type of ethical theory is implied given the contents of revelation? Does revelation signal a single coherent ethical theory or multiple different theories? Or alternatively: Are there conflicts between the contents of morality and religion respectively? These questions, however, I have chosen to avoid answering directly. The introduction of al-Māturīdī serves as an interpretative medium of revelation, and leaves the task of directly referring to the ethical significance of revelation to someone of historical eminence in the Islamic tradition.

It is not our aim, then, but al-Māturīdī's to establish whether he seeks to decide, firstly, what morality actually is and, secondly, what is moral given the contents of revelation, or, alternatively, to establish a theory about the epistemological dimension of morality and then ask questions about what the metaethical significance of the contents of revelation is, interpreting the meaning of sacred texts accordingly.

### **Thesis Aim**

The aim of this thesis is to construct a theological-ethical theory on the basis of al-Māturīdī's thought. The problem I wish to tackle at the first level of analysis is the Euthyphro dilemma; to overcome both horns of the dilemma in way that mitigates at once the usual charges levelled at each respective side of the debate. However, at the second level of analysis, the solution is to be accomplished in way that transcends the basic epistemological empiricist-rationalist divide that is fundamental to the dilemma itself.

Al-Māturīdī's navigation between traditionalism and rationalism makes use in different ways of both empirical and rational principles. Overall, however, he gives reason an eminent place in ethics; reason distinguishes humans from animals and through it no less than monotheistic faith and moral principles are realised independently of revelatory knowledge. A basic affinity to Mu'tazilism is evident, but al-Māturīdī's thought features significant nuance and qualification, giving it a rather distinctive character. While there is certainly a shift in the source of morality from God and revelatory knowledge to an essential aspect of the human intellect, the shift is neither

total nor accompanied by complete guarantee in our ability to acquire precise moral knowledge independently.

But it is not enough to say that reason identifies what is right and what is wrong, or even to suggest why this is so, one must also show *how* this is so, with the use of examples, arguments and consideration of counter examples and criticism. Such detail is lacking in al-Māturīdī's writings. Yet filling in the gaps by trying to reconstruct the reasoning behind his work is not my ultimate goal. Given the extant works, al-Māturīdī's contribution to epistemology, though pioneering, is small; his comments on ethics numerable but disorganized. Constituting an interpretively challenging corpus, in philosophical terms, one does not find a well-developed ethical theory like those offered by Aquinas, Aristotle or Kant in his writings. Yet they do display various contours that are cause for interest and inspiration, and if one remains faithful to these contours, they can act as a guide to produce a robust theological-ethical system. Certainly, al-Māturīdī's work has not been sufficiently mined for insights in the construction of a systematic metaethical theory.

As indicated in the "thesis subject," we have three main issues to consider before a conclusion can be made: the respective relationships between revelation, morality, and epistemology. It is our aim to clarify these relationships and more fundamentally, the order of priority between them – according to which the chapters of this study have been broadly arranged. In short, this study deals with a number of interrelated and mutually dependent issues, meaning the resolution of one affects the resolution of the other. These issues are the relation of religion to morality, and the connection of ethics to epistemology and vice versa, studied in light of Western thought and finally the thought of al-Māturīdī. The aim is to clarify these relations to identify the epistemological, ethical and theological-ethical truth in so far as the sphere of those relations extends. All these issues will be discussed in Chapter Five on al-Māturīdī. Finally, Chapter Six discusses the metaethical conclusions we have reached over the course of the previous chapters in so far as they address the question that we have mentioned. Chapter Six in fact acts as a detailed conclusion for this study, bringing together the results of the previous pages into a single chapter.

## Thesis Method

I utilised English translations of Plato's works for the subject of the first chapter as well as throughout the book, along with primary sources from Western Anglo-American philosophy on his text *Euthyphro* and theological-ethics in general. My choice to mostly use modern resources allows a comparison to be drawn and conclusions to be in regards to al-Māturīdī's theological-ethics in a way that engages the latest philosophical work. This has the advantage of not merely addressing his thought as a historical artefact, but something that can be of influence in the contemporary field of philosophy.

In this regard, the eminent figures arguing for the strength theological-ethical theories have been my main references. Figures such as Christian philosophers of religion Robert Adams and William Alston who are responsible among others for the revival of the philosophy of religion in analytic philosophy, Christian philosopher Tim Mawson, a prominent advocate of arguments for the existence of God, and moral sceptic Richard Joyce are major authors to whom I refer my observations.

With regards to the Islamic tradition outside the Māturīdī school of *kalām*, I have admittedly sufficed largely with secondary literature. This is due to the scope of this study. I have only needed to describe in broad outline the division within Islamic thought in the framework within which it is tackled here. The evidence suggests that the dilemma has produced just two main schools of thought over the course of Islamic theological-ethics. For the Mutazilite school, this reached its theoretical zenith with 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad (935-1025), who offered a somewhat nuanced rationalist position. In contrast, with the Ash'arī school, I have remained content with referring to the teachings of Abū al-Hasan al-Ash'arī, the eponymous founder of the Ash'arī school. Despite some significant changes later on in the development of that school, al-Ash'arī advocates in clear terms the most basic doctrine of Islamic divine command ethics.

As for al-Māturīdī's work, I made use of the latest critical editions of the two works uncontentionally attributed to him: *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. Other works allegedly written by him, such as the *Risalah al-Aqida* published in *Al-Sayf al-*



*Mashhur fi Sharhi Aqidati Abi Mansūr*,<sup>15</sup> I have chosen to leave out due to their dubious authorship and fear of criticism for using unreliable sources.

Over the course of this study, I have treated the thought of all those discussed critically. As a result, what I have found true in the philosophers I have taken, and what I have found true in al-Māturīdī I have taken, and I have tried to make what I have taken into a coherent whole with the aid of some independent theses. Indeed, it would be unfair to have al-Māturīdī answer modern philosophical questions unaided; especially those that were neither his concern nor that of his contemporaries. It would be equally unfair to force oneself to produce an ethical theory on the basis of his writings, limiting oneself to those alone. This work is not so much a mere presentation of al-Māturīdī's ethical position, but a metaethical theory that seeks to remain within the tradition of Māturīdīan thought by drawing ideas and guidance from it. To this end, in order to determine what the source of morality is, I have taken the Euthyphro Dilemma as indicative of the fundamental problem, and then consider responses from philosophers and theologians from the West and the insights of al-Māturīdī set within the larger context of the different Islamic schools of thought on this issue.

Methodologically, critical evaluation of western theological-ethical thought acts as the means by which I address al-Māturīdī's thought, with additional attention given to his Ash'arī and Mu'tazili opponents. Al-Māturīdī's comments will therefore be compared with the theories we considered in Chapter One and assessed according to our evaluation of those theories. At the same time, I also look at al-Māturīdī for answers more specifically of Islamic concern. Thus, for example, the epistemological question noted above arises because morality seems to admit profoundly dissimilar epistemological sources.

Any one attempting to address the question of how God relates to morality will in some way have to choose the way they wish to approach the *ḥusn-qubh* issue, whether they start from the contents to the relation or vice versa. The route chosen will depend on the epistemological principles chosen, and is an issue subject to debate. It is generally a question of whether one starts first with a theory to explain the particulars, or begins

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<sup>15</sup> Yeprem, Mustafa S. trans. and ed., *Māturīdī'nin Akide Risalesi ve Şerhi*, Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2011.

with the particulars to form a theory.<sup>16</sup> This then is a basic question that the scholar of *ḥusn-qubh* and theological-ethics will address. Indeed, we can see how epistemology is doubly tied up in the *ḥusn-qubh* issue, that is, in the matter method as well as moral knowledge.

Additionally, we would next have to ask whether what we learn through revelation is actually of the same class of knowledge as that which ethics seeks. There are issues of content, method and status. The content provided by ethics and revelation may well both be of moral import, but while in ethics what is good and what is bad is discovered by empirical research, intuition and or theoretical speculation, in the case of religion, morality is learnt from revelation. If there is ethical truth to be discovered, it may be that the two reveal different kinds of knowledge, and a confusion of the particular types of knowledge they provide would set up futile endeavours.

Then there is the more concrete question to the *ḥusn-qubh* issue: Are the claims of ethics in agreement with revelatory statements? In other words, do the two sources provide mutually harmonious claims? Of course, this question is only allowed to arise if we accept, at least provisionally, that ethics and revelation independently grant access to moral truth, as we would not have two separate sets of information for comparison if only one of them did so. The question also requires a specific stance in terms of first-order ethics. This is because the exact meaning assigned to an action will depend on the interpretative principles and ideas one approaches it with. For whether an act it is moral or not depends on the ideas that are identified with it. These ideas are dependent upon philosophical, cultural, religious, and or political factors. Without knowing the specific contents of morality, it will not be possible to determine how ethics relates to religion in this matter with any precision. So the ethical school one adheres to will determine whether one believes that ethics and religion agree in their substantive claims.

In addition, we must also ask what kind of validity morality possesses. Is it objective? Is it absolute, binding universally? And, more specifically, is God bound by morality? This constitutes the final question included in the *ḥusn-qubh* issue. Its answer seems depend to a large degree on whether one believes morality is independent of God or not.

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<sup>16</sup> Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

But even if morality is independent of God, whether it is binding upon Him still represents a different question. This question can be approached in metaphysical and epistemological terms. Metaphysically, we can first ask if morality is a creation of God, is itself divine, or something independent. Epistemologically, we can then ask whether the knowledge that follows is binding upon God as well as the about nature of its authority over human beings.

With all of the questions above, as a methodological rule, I have tried letting al-Māturīdī answer first; barring strong philosophical grounds to go in a different direction, I do not take issue with his answers. Due to this caveat, the final presentation perhaps disguises the methodological rule. For example, Chapter Two on epistemology precedes consideration of al-Māturīdī's comments on epistemology. This is simply because there is so much more in the philosophical sources to set up grounds for a sophisticated epistemology. That is not to say, however, that al-Māturīdī makes no contribution in this area, which should be clear later on in Chapter Three. It also does not mean the input of the philosophical sources are ideas or arguments al-Māturīdī would have disagreed with or do not harmonize with his thought. My intention, naturally, was to produce an integrated whole between philosophical and *kalām* resources while tackling the epistemological aspect of theological-ethics and suggesting a corresponding theory. Al-Māturīdī does not, however, advance an ethical theory but does make numerous moral comments in his extant writings. Since any Islamic ethical theory must refer to the Qur'ān and example of the Prophet as recorded in the *ahadith* (reports, sing. *hadith*), any proper treatment of this subject would require reference to both the Qur'ānic and hadith commentaries, which falls outside the scope and requirements of this study. Even so, it is unfortunate that we do not have a book of al-Māturīdī's on the *ahadith* of the Prophet, as we are limited to what there is in his two extant works, especially his Qur'ānic commentary, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*.

The advantage of giving al-Māturīdī priority is that the connection between us and the primary sources of Islām remains an eminent Muslim scholar, trained to interpret and explain those sources. As mentioned above, studying Islamic ethics from the primary sources calls for significant expertise, and we leave this work of exegesis to al-Māturīdī. No doubt, other great Muslim scholars will disagree with him in places, but they are not

the subject of this study, and the scholar in question is no less than the eponymous founder of a main school of *kalām*. The methodological rule also means that I am less likely to be accused of seeking what Islamic evidence there is to support my theory after it has already been formed.

In addition, I am confident that readers will not fault this effort for subjecting a theologian's work to philosophical assessment, given that al-Māturīdī makes comments more philosophical than theological, and, also, if one believes in the guidance of reason, as al-Māturīdī does, for then such an assessment must be justified. Conversely, readers might object to giving al-Māturīdī such privilege rather than starting 'clean,' but the choice to start with al-Māturīdī, was made on the back of much study and critical thought, and this did not end once the selection was made. And, of course, everyone must start somewhere; what happens after that is, at least, just as important.

### **Thesis Importance**

Al-Māturīdī's thought is of interest, firstly, for shedding light on the complexity of Islamic theological thought and breaking the possibility of mere binary analysis, where one school is understood relative to a single rival. In this respect, al-Māturīdī's stance represents a prominent *via media*, and, as far as can be ascertained, one uninfluenced by Greek philosophy and hence in possession of originality once unfortunately believed absent in Islamic ethical thought.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, and more importantly for this work, al-Māturīdī's stance provokes interest by offering a classical approach forging a path between two poles of central philosophical importance represented by the empiricism and rationalist divide in epistemology that is paralleled in Islamic theology by traditionalist and rationalist orientations. The epistemological work to be considered is crucial to the metaethical dimension of this work, and crucial to solving the Euthyphro Dilemma, in particular.

His unique position more specifically is important because of the problems that his thought may help us solve. The importance of this study is aptly described by Jowett. Commenting on Socrates' *Euthyphro*, he states that realising the harmony of religion

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<sup>17</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*; Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, pp.xix-xxi.

and morality as ‘the universal want of all men.’<sup>18</sup> Apart from being a prominent point of disagreement both in Western philosophy and Islamic theology, a resolution to this question would clarify the nature of morality itself and our ability to gain knowledge of what is moral, and thus in turn strong external support from certain ethical theories.

## Literature Review

For Plato’s *Euthyphro*, I have used Benjamin Jowett’s translation in *The Four Socratic Dialogues*.<sup>19</sup> There are enduring works on the *Euthyphro* text as studied by scholars of Greek philosophy. Much of the literature, does, indeed, single out the deficiencies in Plato’s text. John Brown’s “The Logic of the Euthyphro 10a-11b” makes telling criticism of Socrates’ arguments based on flaws in the latter’s logical inferences.<sup>20</sup> His own arguments support the claims contained in Richard Joyce’s examination of *Euthyphro* (see below). Some of these criticisms are responded to by Marc Cohen, whose own article attempts to string together the points of the argument with different possible meanings applied to the key terms in order to clarify what valid conclusion can result in the most general terms.<sup>21</sup> His analysis is also partially supported by John Hall, though with less encouraging results.<sup>22</sup>

A significant amount of work has been carried out on the problem of the dilemma and more generally on divine command ethics over the last two decades. Among the most prominent and influential work has perhaps been Richard Joyce’s, “Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma” which attempts to dispel some of the common criticism made against Divine Command ethics.<sup>23</sup> The essay then turns to where Joyce believes the problems with Divine Command ethics actually lie. This article is cogently responded to by Scott Hill, who cogently argues that the new objections Joyce attempts to make against Divine Command theory are flawed. These come under three respective

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<sup>18</sup> Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato translated into English with Analyses and Introductions*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd ed, (Oxford University Press, 1892). 14/10/2015.  
[http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/766#Plato\\_0131-02\\_649](http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/766#Plato_0131-02_649).

<sup>19</sup> Jowett’s, *Socratic Dialogues*, pp.10-36.

<sup>20</sup> John H. Brown, “Euthyphro 10a-11b,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14/54 (1964): pp. 1-14.

<sup>21</sup> S. M. Cohen, “Socrates on the Definition of Piety: Euthyphro 10A–11B”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (1971), pp. 35-48.

<sup>22</sup> John C. Hall, “Plato: Euthyphro 10a1-11a0,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 18/70 (1968) pp. 1-11.

<sup>23</sup> Richard Joyce, “Theistic Ethics and the Euthyphro Dilemma”, *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 30/1 (2002): pp. 49–75.

headings. The first regards the arbitrariness of different means of epistemic access to the same moral source in relation to the identity of that source, the second regards the status of moral authority and plausible variations in understandings of wrongness, and the third is about the selective destabilization of moral intuitions concerning moral agency that are used to oppose Divine Command Theory.<sup>24</sup> The force of Hill's is powerful, yet Joyce's article is as important for its defence of Divine Command Theory and deflation of the Euthyphro Dilemma as it is for its attack.

A fellow attempt to overcome the Euthyphro Dilemma is attempted by Tim J. Mawson in "The Euthyphro Dilemma." Mawson addresses each horn of the dilemma by clarifying the scope of morality as accessed by rationality and that which is revealed by God in a way that serves to preserve God's sovereignty while also maintaining the objectivity of morality.<sup>25</sup> The article reiterates some of the ideas here presents in "God's Creation of Morality," where a similar demarcation is presented. The argument concludes that God's commands are not arbitrary once we adopted a form of moral objectivism that does not determine the contents of morality as such, but grants the contents, as determined by God, a non-arbitrary status.<sup>26</sup>

A similarly middle-road theological-ethics is presented by Kelly James Clark and Anne Poortenga in their *The Story of Ethics*. The book is meant for undergraduate studies but also iterates an interesting theory that has affinity with virtue ethics and an objective theory of morality in relation to the natural condition of the human being.<sup>27</sup>

The tone taken up by Joyce, however, correlates with William Alston's "What Euthyphro Should have Said," where the author defends the view that moral obligation is constituted by God's commands.<sup>28</sup> By his own admission, Alston in turn is building on the work of Robert Adams, who offers a defence of Divine Command Theory in two

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<sup>24</sup> Scott Hill, Richard Joyce's New Objections to the Divine Command Theory. *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 38 (2010): pp 189–196.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," *Think* 7/20 (2008): pp. 25-33.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Mawson, "God's Creation of Morality," *Religious Studies* 38/1 (2002): pp. 1-25.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly James Clark, and Anne Poortenga, *The Story of Ethics*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> William P. Alston, "What Euthyphro Should Have Said", in William Laine Craig ed., *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 283-298

consecutive attempts.<sup>29</sup> The first attempt draws on epistemological work in Analytic philosophy to present a theory in the context of Judeo-Christian discourse where immorality can only be said to derive from disobedience to divine commands when it is assumed that God is a loving being and loves humanity. In the second of these works, Adams again makes references to recent epistemological work — specifically theory of “natural kinds” advanced by American philosopher Saul Kripke — to make a distinction between “real” ethics and what is merely its derivative values. This has the extra scope to reduce the values that people in general, rather than just religious believers, refer to when they talk about morality to commands revealed by God. In “Moral Arguments for Theistic Belief,” Adams reiterates the idea that essential to morality is the idea of a loving God, such that morality thereby achieves objective status.<sup>30</sup>

In *Finite and Infinite Goods*, Adams offers a systematic presentation of his theological ethics that develops further and combines ideas already contained in his previous work. The objective nature of good is raised as a result of his arguments for the explanatory superiority of a transcendent good to which all other finite goods are dependent. This transcendent good is God, Whose own goodness explained by the concept of moral excellence. A key distinction is made between obligation and goodness, where the former is possibly non-moral in nature. Adams original argument is that with without a transcendent source of morality, and infinite good, then obligations will always be open to doubt and criticism. The only way to avoid this is to hold that obligation is fundamentally related to morality source from infinite goodness.<sup>31</sup> His book makes original distinctions and relations between the concepts rationality, obligation and value.

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<sup>29</sup> Robert M. Adams, “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness” in *The Virtue of Faith and other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 99-127; “Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again,” in *ibid.*, pp. 128–143; originally published, respectively, in Gene Outka and John P.Reeder, Jr eds., *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1973), pp. 318-77 and *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7/1 (1979): pp. 66-79.

<sup>30</sup> Robert M. Adams, “Moral Arguments for the Existence of God” in *The Virtue of Faith and other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 144-163, Originally published in *Rationality and Religious Belief*, C. F. Delaney ed., Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979, pp. 116-140.

<sup>31</sup> Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1999).

“A Trilemma for Divine Command Theory” written by Mark C. Murphy attempts to refute the claim, defended by Adams and extolled by Alston and Joyce (see Chapter One), that moral obligation is simply identical to the commandment of God.<sup>32</sup> Murphy’s “Ethical Voluntarism” is an excellent theoretical overview of the strengths and weaknesses associated with Divine Command Theory.<sup>33</sup>

Despite his importance in the history of Islamic thought, al-Maturidi is rather neglected. The modern Turkish literature offers ample studies, but treatment of his metaethical thought has often been superficial, and repetitive; reiterating familiar truths, uncritical in approach and lacking philosophical rigour. There is only one book length Turkish work devoted specifically to his ethical thought.<sup>34</sup> Some splendid exceptions notwithstanding, those writing in Arabic and English have contributed much less in quantity, and usually little more in substance. By far, the greatest share of scholarly attention has been given to the Ash‘ari and Mu‘tazili schools, most likely due to their greater impact and prevalence on Muslim thought in general. It also may be due to the fact that only within the last few decades have al-Maturidi’s works begun to see publication and therefore become infinitely more accessible to students and scholars.

Most of the work on al-Maturidi remains rather superficial. Ali M. Ayyub provides an introductory overview of al-Maturidi’s thought.<sup>35</sup> Similarly brief overviews are provided by R. Martson Speight and Wilfred Madelung.<sup>36</sup> Oftentimes al-Maturidi is cursorily brought up in general histories of Islamic theology. Prominent examples are Tilman Nagel’s *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*,

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<sup>32</sup> Mark C. Murphy, “A Trilemma for Divine Command Theory,” *Faith and Philosophy* 19/1 (2002): pp. 22-31.

<sup>33</sup> Mark C., Murphy, “Theological Voluntarism,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>.

<sup>34</sup> Sami Şekeroğlu, *Maturidi'de Ahlak: Felsefi Bir Betimleme*, (Ankara Okulu: Ankara, 2010).)

<sup>35</sup> A. K. M. Ayyub 'Ali, *Aqidat al-Islam wa'l-Imam Maturidi* (Dhaka, Bangladesh: Islamic Foundation, 1983).

<sup>36</sup> R. Martson Speight, “al-Maturidi,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*. M. Eliade ed., Vol. 9. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 285–286; Wilferd Madelung, “Māturīdī,” In *The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition*, C. E. Bosworth ed., Vol. 6. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1991), pp. 846–847.



Montgomery Watts' *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* and the Tim Winters edited *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*.<sup>37</sup>

Currently, the most comprehensive works on al-Maturidi are Mustafa Ceric's *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*, which unfortunately for our purposes only contains a few pages on the *husn-qubh* issue to give a simple outline,<sup>38</sup> and Ulrich Rudolph's exceptional book, originally published in German, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*.<sup>39</sup> The second division of part three to this work, as found in the Turkish Symposium collection *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matüridi ve Matüridilik: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı*, is utilised significantly.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, reading the English literature, a student of the field might be forgiven for believing that nothing like a significant alternative, barring the notable Sufi and Athari lines of thought, existed to the Mu'tazili and Ash'ari schools of kalam. The reduction of kalam to a binary opposition between rationalists and traditionalists is, needless to say, highly simplistic and misleading; if not ignoring significant internal differences and development, then the middle road tread by al-Maturidi, his followers and others. Yet, given the preponderance of the Ash'ari-Mu'tazili opposition in the literature, al-Maturidi's residence between these two schools would otherwise be thought novel or unique, offering an intelligent synthesis on rationalist grounds.<sup>41</sup>

There has been a tendency in modern scholarship on kalam to attempt to vindicate Mu'tazili thought, perceived as having been unfairly treated by history and worthy of reappraisal. This is understandable given modern sympathies and recognition of the dangers common to textualism and traditionalist approaches, which some have blamed

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<sup>37</sup> Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*. Thomas Thornton Trans., (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 2000); W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985); Tim Winter ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam: A Study of the Theology of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)*, (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: ISTAC, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, Rodrigo Adem trans., (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Ulrich Rudolph, "Al-Maturidi's Concept of God's Wisdom," in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matüridi ve Matüridilik: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı*, (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı, 2012), pp. 45-53.

<sup>41</sup> Sophia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

for problems in the ongoing history of Islamic thought.<sup>42</sup> Thus, in the current climate Mu'tazili thought has been sympathetically revisited by leading scholars of kalam.<sup>43</sup> Yet, amidst this urgency to prove that divine command theory never predominated in Islamic theological-philosophical thought and undermine its authority, some recent scholars perhaps did not anticipate that in western philosophy the theory is making a comeback. And what such endeavours require is a deliberate direct and specific response from an Islamic viewpoint.<sup>44</sup> What is more, haste towards the Mu'tazili position seems to neglect the Maturidi alternative, which in addition to showing great maturity, is in fact as McDonald reported long ago, much closer to and perhaps responsible for later Ash'ari doctrine, and so comes with an added bonus some theological reconciliation.<sup>45</sup>

Fathalla Kholeif's critical edition of Kitāb al-Tawhīd, published in 1970, has been the main reference until recently. In place of this I have used Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi's edition of the book, published recently, first in 2000 and 2003 in Ankara, then later in 2007 and 2010 in Beirut, which has better organisation and clarity. The first publication of the massive commentary Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān, also took place under Bekir Topaloğlu as editor, from 2005-2010.

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<sup>42</sup> See Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>43</sup> Mariam al-Attar; *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought*, (New York: Routledge, 2010); G. Hourani; *Islamic Rationalism*; Vasalou, *Theological Ethics*.

<sup>44</sup> For a recent example of such admirable work, see Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi*, (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

<sup>45</sup> D. B., Macdonald, "Māturīdī", in: EI<sup>1</sup>, eds. M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann. Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1913-1936, Vol. 3, pp. 457-477.

## Chapter 1: The Euthyphro Dilemma in Western and Islamic Thought

Abrahamic religion has an undeniable moral dimension that demands the attention of the theologian. Yet the human being seems to have an innate moral ‘instinct’ or faculty of normative assessment. The basis of normative appraisal is a matter of great philosophical controversy, a subject constitutive of its own field, namely, moral epistemology. What the Euthyphro Dilemma brings into focus, however, is a general problem: is moral truth derived from revelation or is it derived from secular capacities?

In Plato's *Euthyphro*, Socrates asks, ‘Is the holy loved by the gods because it is holy, or is it holy because it is loved by the gods?’<sup>46</sup> This question expresses the Euthyphro Dilemma. A couple things are presupposed for the dilemma to arise: Firstly, God is a being with moral significance and, secondly, He issues moral teachings. This might raise the question of what, in substantial terms, one understands the specific content of morality to be, but the Euthyphro Dilemma avoids this problem. The question is not about morality’s actual contents, but rather its source and authority. Interestingly, the word for ‘moral’ is not used in the Greek original, and it is worth changing the question to escape commitments bound up in the religious phrasing. For though the term ‘holy’ implies religion, morality is not by definition connected to any particular faith. So, we can rephrase Socrates’ question thus: Is an action commanded by God because it is moral or is it moral because it is commanded by God? Only two options seem to appear; there is no third. Specifically, the dilemma forces us to decide whether the contents of morality are determined by God or whether they have a different source. This alternative source is usually taken to be reason. For convenience sake, therefore, the first view will be called ‘theocentrism’ and the second ‘ratiocentrism’.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Plato, *Euth*, 10a.

<sup>47</sup> This term is also used by John Cottingham (*Philosophy and the Good Life: Reason and the Passions in Greek, Cartesian and Psychoanalytic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), for whom the term is embedded in a dispute regarding rational hegemony in ethics (p.36), but essentially denotes the rational identification of the good life and developing the ability of living accordingly. (See also his, ‘What is Humane Philosophy and Why is it At Risk?’ in *Conceptions of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 223-255). In a rather more basic way, though with perhaps more sympathetic ends, I use the term only to point out an intellectual principle rather than revelatory teachings as being viewed as playing the major or most basic role in determining good and evil.

## 1.1 An Analysis of the Arguments in *Euthyphro*

In the text, the religious figure Euthyphro offers a successive number of definitions of piety under the pressure of Socrates' questioning. Each definition is easily dismissed until Euthyphro is led to one that evokes the most substantial discussion: what all the gods love is holy, and what they all hate is unholy.<sup>48</sup> To this Socrates answers with the above noted question. Here, in an attempt to analyse the theocentric claim, Socrates proposes an analogy between things that are loved with things that are carried. He observes that things are called 'carried' not because of any intrinsic attribute, but merely because they are bought about by the externally acquired attribute of being carried. Led things are so-called because someone leads them and not the reverse. Similarly, loved things are 'beloved' because they are in the state of being loved.<sup>49</sup> In sum, we have an act that brings the object into a certain state or grants it a certain property. In line with this general rule, Socrates now introduces the statement he seeks to prove:

- i. Something is loved by the gods because it is holy; it is not the case that it is holy because it is loved by the gods.

This statement does not exactly fit the pattern of the ones before. In the three preceding examples, the passive participle of a transitive verb is related to an extrinsic action represented by the transitive verb, as in 'beloved' because of 'loved', but here the extrinsic cause is expressed with an adjective, namely, 'holy', while the result is the active form of a dissimilar transitive verb, 'love of the gods'. Hence, 'love of the gods' because 'holy'. In other words, while the relation remains one of causation, the predicates have not just been changed, but their types have transformed. Indeed, inspecting the Greek text, Cohen states the problems arrives with the introduction of term love even in the preceding examples, since there that the first distinction is between active and passive voices, while the second is between two different passive forms.<sup>50</sup> What is more, the predicates have been reversed. So instead of saying 'Something is holy because it is loved by the gods', the participle is replaced by the

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<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 9c-9d.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 10A4-10C12. For the breakdown of the argument given here I am greatly indebted to Joyce's "Euthyphro Dilemma," though my explanation differs from his in places.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, "Definition of Piety," p. 4.

transitive verb and vice versa. This should raise doubts about the strength of Socrates' analogy.

Ignoring these concerns for the time being, what is also revealed is the fact that holiness is not associated in linguistic usage with a transitive verb, such as 'to holy' or 'to holify'. There is no act that causes the state of holiness, as in the case of the passive participles 'led' 'carried' and 'loved'. That is not to say that the argument relies on linguistic evidence alone, however. Even if there were such a verb such that, contra the line of enquiry taken in the text, one might recognise the gods' love as a kind of sanctifying force, giving us the act that causes the property of holiness, we would still have to ask why the gods chose to make that specific thing pious and not another, which again gives us reason to believe that there must be something specific in holy things themselves that endears them to the gods. For most important of all, the analogies show that for all the properties mentioned a preceding act is necessary, with the implication that there is a reason for something to be loved, led or carried that has to do with the object itself. This being the case, it appears that Socrates is saying 'If holiness is indeed, as we have already accepted, in a causal relationship with some external act, it must be the cause of the act and not the result of it.' So now we see how holiness fits the pattern of 'loved', 'led' or 'carried.' For all these properties a preceding act is necessary, with the implication that there is a reason for something to be loved, led or carried that has to do with the object itself. Hence, according to the standard reading of Socrates' argument, holy things must already be in possession of a feature that brings the gods' love, and the rejection of the gods' love as causing holiness implies that the reverse must hold: holiness causes the love of the gods, or rather, the holy is loved by the gods because it is holy — as per the dilemma's first disjunct.<sup>51</sup>

To follow the argument more precisely (and critically), however, we must break it down. To begin, in line with the basic pattern set by the analogies, we can simply express the statement (i) as follows:

(1) L because H;

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<sup>51</sup> Robert G. Hoerber, "'Plato's Euthyphro,'" *Phronesis*, III (1958): pp. 95-107, esp. n. 1, p. 102, p. 104; Cohen, "Definition of Piety," pp. 1-2.

(2) Not: (H because L)

Now Socrates does something rather strange, the goal of which seems only to become clear later on. On the same pattern he introduces two new statements, ‘Something is dear to the gods because it is loved by them’ with its converse:

(3) D because L;

(4) Not: (L because D)

With this, Socrates announces, perhaps prematurely, that being dear to the gods cannot be the same property as being holy.<sup>52</sup> At this point new questions strike the reader of *Euthyphro*: why was the predicate dear to the gods introduced at all? How it is supposed to be different to the predicate loved by the gods? And, what are (3) and (4) together supposed to signify, especially in relation to (1) and (2)? By simply following Socrates’ lead and putting (1) and (3) together, we get the following chain:

(D because L), (L because H)

It should be clear at this point that Socrates is trying to explain the direction of the causal relation between three distinct predicates.<sup>53</sup> In answer to the questions just raised above, it appears ‘dear to the gods’ was introduced to clarify what the result of the gods’ love is, given it is not holiness. What is more, logically (even if not semantically), ‘dear to the gods’ plays the role of a passive counterpart to ‘the love of the gods’, something equivalent to ‘their beloved’. Thus, all that is loved by the gods is also ‘dear to them’, given the association between the two predicates. With (3) and (4) we are not told the cause (or reason) for the love of the gods, but (1) tells us holiness is at least one such cause. Naturally, Socrates is arguing that love cannot cause anything except passive predicates, and that Euthyphro’s idea to the contrary must be mistaken.

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<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 10e.

<sup>53</sup> The phrase ‘dear to the gods’ is unfortunately sometimes substituted for that of ‘pleasing to the gods.’ This makes the causal direction of (3) and (4) baffling, as to be pleasing has the possibility of, and is often linked with, causing an effect, such as love. With this, (3) would be quite mysterious and (4) inexplicable, for while both confusingly use two closely related, if not interchangeable, terms, (4) reverses the most plausible relation between them, namely, love because of pleasure. Grube uses god-loved, which at least expresses the passivity that seems necessary here (See, M. A., Grube, *Five Dialogues: Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo*, Cambridge: Hackett, 2002). The problematic wording appears to derive from Jowett, who also, however, uses the more felicitous ‘dear to the gods’ (Plato, *Euthyphro*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Oxford, 1903, pp.3-4).

At this point, Socrates strives to explain the matter further to Euthyphro, who looks to have simply agreed with what Socrates said so far without noticing the implications. Socrates does this, as Richard Joyce claims, by means of explaining what problems would follow if the predicates holiness and being dear to the gods were treated as the same thing,<sup>54</sup> Socrates continues with two conditionals:

(5) If (H=D), then if (L because H) then (L because D)

(6) If (H=D), then if (D because L) then (H because L)<sup>55</sup>

So to treat holiness and being dear to the gods as identical, as Euthyphro claims we should, would make their respective causes and effects, which Euthyphro has already agreed to in (1)-(4), muddled up. That is to say, the causal direction is broken by the false consequents at the end of each syllogism. Given the identification H=D, and given the causal relation of (1) and (3) (antecedents here in the two conditionals), then (2) and (4) would have to be negated (as per the consequents here). But given that (2) and (4) hold, the equation H=P cannot, and so Euthyphro's claim appears defeated.

At this point, another reason becomes clear for introducing the predicate 'dear to the gods'. With this predicate, Socrates can identify holiness with something it is not in a causal relationship with, for such things are necessarily distinct entities, and in this way he is then able to contrast holiness with the other predicate by means of comparing their causal relations. As a result, he finds holiness is not the same predicate as 'dear to the gods', which means it is not a result of the gods' love – and must therefore be something else.

Commentators have noticed a number of problems with Socrates's argument, however. The first objection concerns the semantic investigation at the beginning of his inquiry. Suspicion is raised here, as Joyce notes, with the 'mixing' of predicates. 'Beloved' and 'love' stand in a causal relation to which Socrates wants to substitute the terms 'love of the gods' and 'holy'.<sup>56</sup> However, the initial propositions demonstrate a limited pattern, to which holiness does not fit. As Brown notes, Socrates draws the parallel on the basis

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<sup>54</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma", pp.51-52.

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 10e-11a.

<sup>56</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 53.

of a principle more general than the terms specified in the text, and it is only applicable to an unspecified range of terms.<sup>57</sup>

On the one hand, this is exactly what Socrates was going for, because it suggests that holiness cannot be a caused thing, and must therefore exist autonomously from the gods' love. In this regard, Socrates' apparent aim is to show that holiness cannot be adequately explained in terms of an extrinsic action. The circularity that would result seems especially clear when only a single root term is used for both the property and the action that explains it. So if Thomas helps by Zeyd, to answer 'why does Thomas help Zeyd?' with 'because Zeyd is helped' is clearly circular; only a response pertaining to the reasons for Zeyd's helping is satisfactory. Hence, 'Because Zeyd is injured' is a more obliging answer. On the other hand, Socrates' argument faces a fundamental problem in having proposed that the relation is a causal one at all. Again, the problem begins with the analogies he applies. Joyce claims the analogies Socrates uses to discredit the theocentric claim involve him unfairly pushing Euthyphro to turn his assertion that the holy is that loved by the gods into a 'because' relation.<sup>58</sup> Above we saw how circularity results if a mere iteration of properties is given in answer to a question that seeks the reasons for an action. However, with a different kind of question, the answer is not so circular after all. Thus, to answer the question 'why is Zeyd helped?' by merely saying 'because Thomas helps him' is adequate since we have learnt by what means or, as Joyce says, 'in virtue of what', Amr gains the property of being helped. Here, an answer pertaining to reasons is unnecessary, and so for the question: 'in virtue of what are there holy actions?', Euthyphro's, 'because (in virtue of the fact) they are loved by the gods', would be satisfactory, and, hence, defining holiness by identifying it with a different term, to wit, love of the gods, avoids circularity.<sup>59</sup> In sum, a problem only persists if the question requests the reasons behind the gods' love, and though not as informative, the assertion of identity between holiness and love by the gods still suffices as a definition. Yet, Socrates refuses this equation. Effectively, the claim 'what all the gods love is holy, and what they all hate is unholy' is rendered by Socrates to mean 'what all the

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<sup>57</sup> Brown, "Euthyphro 10A-11B," pp. 3-4.

<sup>58</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," pp. 53-55.

<sup>59</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 52.



gods love is holy *because* they love it, and what they all hate is unholy, *because* they hate it’.

This expresses a relation that Euthyphro need not have meant. ‘Holiness’ and ‘loved by the gods’ could denote two co-referentials, that is, two names for objects sharing a number of properties, or they could denote identical things, two names for objects that have exactly the same properties. As Joyce explains, without knowing to what kind of object holiness refers to we cannot tell.<sup>60</sup> Either way, Socrates would have no argument to force Euthyphro to change his claim into a causal form and as Brown states, ‘the argument is correct only if Euthyphro is logically committed, on the strength of what he explicitly concedes or clearly presupposes, to the conclusions reached.’<sup>61</sup> Hence, Euthyphro’s definition might suffice as an identity claim, holiness being just that which the gods love, and therefore cognitively synonymous with what is dear to the gods. As such, however, there seems a lack of deservedness for the additional name, unless holiness is more than simply what is loved by the gods; that is to say, a distinct entity. And as a distinct entity it will have essential attributes to accompany the accidental ones, including the gods’ love. This would warrant a search for them just like Socrates’. But of course, there is rarely any problem with an object having more than one name. Coreferents signify the same thing, that is, they have the same extension.

What is more, if Euthyphro was indeed making a co-referentiality claim, then even admitting a causal context, or rather, precisely because of it, Socrates could not state (H=D), and his argument would fail again. This obstacle stems from the fact that co-referentials cannot legitimately be substituted across all possible contexts. Had the context been extensional then there would have been no problem. Extensional contexts allow terms with the same extension to replace each other without a change in the truth value of the statement. This can be expressed as follows:  $a=b$ , Pa; therefore, Pb. For example, the terms ‘Jocasta’ and ‘Oedipus’ mother’ have the same extension; so whoever slept with Jocasta slept with Oedipus’ mother. Oedipus slept with Jocasta, therefore Oedipus slept with his mother. The extensional context conforms to the principle of inter-substitutivity *salva veritate*. That is to say, as Leibniz’s law dictates,

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<sup>60</sup> Joyce, “Euthyphro Dilemma,” p. 54.

<sup>61</sup> Brown, “Euthyphro 10A-11B,” p. 6.

two terms are the same if they can replace each other in any statement while maintaining the truth value of that statement.<sup>62</sup> Thus an extensional context allows the substitution of identicals to operate faultlessly and ‘save the truth’.

There are multiple constructions, however, that will make a context opaque in that the meaning to be made of the referents is rendered indiscernible. These include constructions featuring quotation, indirect speech, propositional attitudes, temporal designation or modality.<sup>63</sup> Temporal designation, for example will make it impossible for us to substitute Frege’s famous coreferents, Hesperus and Phosphorus, even though they both refer to Venus.<sup>64</sup> And it is propositional attitudes that feature in Quine’s example of Barbarelli (also known by the nickname Giorgone, Italian for ‘Big George’).<sup>65</sup> Indeed, propositional attitudes are the more popular example of opaque-rendering terms, involving verbs like want, know, and love, and for the sake of clarity we shall continue with our Oedipus example in order to express the problem. Winning her hand in marriage, Oedipus sleeps with Jocasta. Now add the propositional attitude of ‘knew’: Oedipus knew he was sleeping with Jocasta. Jocasta is Oedipus’ mother. Therefore Oedipus knew he was sleeping with his mother. The fallacy concerns an illicit substitution of identicals, as the intensional construction derails the reasoning behind the substitution in question. In other words, the object is referred to by one name, or under one description, and not another existing one, making substitution illegitimate. So when intensional statements are appended to extensional ones, the result is almost invariably an intensional context, restricting the manner in which the referents are related to subjects denoted in a sentence.

In this light, Socrates’ application of Euthyphro’s (H=D) will not work in an opaque context, because we do not know if the two terms pick out the same thing in the same way. Applying this back to Socrates’ argument, look at the conclusion:

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<sup>62</sup> Gottfried W. Leibniz, “Mathematical Logic,” in Dirk Jan Struik, *A Source Book in Mathematics, 1200-1800*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 124.

<sup>63</sup> L. T. F. Gamut, *Logic, Language and Meaning*, Vol. 2, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp.45-46.

<sup>64</sup> Gottlob Frege, “On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*,” in *The Frege Reader*. ed., Michael Beaney, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.138.

<sup>65</sup> V.W. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp.139-140.

1)  $H = D$

2) D because L

Therefore

3) H because L

This is meant to show that Euthyphro's identity claim is false via *reductio ad absurdum*, because it results in (3) (which Euthyphro already accepted is false). But the problem here is that within an opaque context, (3) is a falsely derived conclusion. So the *reductio ad absurdum* Socrates aims for fails.<sup>66</sup>

What is more, the hindrance of an opaque context will apply even if the coreference concerns a single property. . The fallacy still applies since what is understood or elicited by the different names is externally determined and not dependant on the relation of the properties. Or in other words, the identity of things does not hold as an identity of names.

Now, there is some debate about what the identity conditions for properties are. One position, perhaps ascribable to Frege, is that properties are identical if they are instantiated by the same objects. But the problem here is that we might confound distinct properties that just happen to have the same coextension. All mammals have a heart, all mammals have a kidney, but a heart and kidney are distinct properties nonetheless. A more popular view is that properties are identical if they are necessarily instantiated by the same objects. Even this view has its detractors, however, because these properties may feature different causes and effects from each other to bestow the instances they have, thus distinguishing them.<sup>67</sup> So how precisely one is to interpret the nature claims like Euthyphro's  $H=D$  is a vexed question. But whatever the answer is, it must at least provide both the necessary and sufficient conditions for property H and property D to be one and the same. Thus, while not as strong as an identity claim, the

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<sup>66</sup> Ironically, therefore, rather than anything that is supposed to be absurd, identifying the error in the syllogism actually proves the falsity of concluding H because of L. But this, of course, is little consolation to Socrates, since we arrive at the wanted conclusion by faulty reasoning, specifically, by assuming  $H=D$ , which is the very thing he wants to reject.

<sup>67</sup> See, Elliott Sober, "Why Logically Equivalent Sentences may Pick out Different Properties," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982): 183-89.

co-reference assertion takes the form of a biconditional: for any  $x$ ,  $x$  is holy if and only if  $x$  is loved by the gods.

This weaker assertion allows for the possibility that H and D refer to distinct properties. Will it matter to the substitution principle if two properties have *a priori* coextension, rather than just an *a posteriori* one? This is tempting, since one begins to wonder how the two could be confused. But, of course, what we have said about the single property will *a fortiori* hold again here. Joyce shows this using the standard example of such a relation, specifically that of ‘triangularity’ and ‘trilaterality’. These denote different properties satisfied by exactly the same objects *a priori*. The fallacy still applies since what is understood or elicited by the different names is externally determined and not dependant on the *a priori* relation of the properties. So a machine that picks out objects because they are triangular cannot be interpreted as one that picks out objects that are trilateral when viewed in terms of the criterion according to which the machine operates.<sup>68</sup> Socrates will not be able to get the conclusion that he seeks.

What is more, Euthyphro does not concede any ground to Socrates by taking up the biconditional. Though not as strong as an identity claim, the co-reference assertion still leaves no space for an alternative definition of holiness to be made. Since both sufficient and necessary conditions are in place, were the claim a mere necessary conditional, there would still be some warrant for the investigation Socrates wants for the essence of holiness by making it clear that H might involve more attributes than D, though, admittedly, without guaranteeing that there are any. But as a biconditional, noting D as both sufficient and necessary for H, any further possible properties attributable to all things holy would, like Aristotle’s *propria*, constitute no part of the things definition, just as, for example, breathing does not for the definition of humans.

There is one more problem with Socrates’ study. Even if there is a causal relation, as Socrates would have it, we cannot know for sure which way the relation is supposed to hold. It may be that holiness causes the gods’ love, or it may be the reverse. Again, explaining the claim will depend on what the context is. Why should we find the pattern of the analogies reversed, or even continued, when it is precisely what powers the terms

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<sup>68</sup> Joyce, “Euthyphro Dilemma,” pp.54-55.

are supposed to denote that is being debated and remain unconfirmed? In other words, exactly how Euthyphro's claim 'what all the gods love is holy, and what they all hate is unholy' is meant to hold is not clear.<sup>69</sup>

In sum, whether Socrates is able to show a legitimate justification for dismissing the theocentric claim is doubtful. Firstly, he has no grounds to reject an identity claim of holiness with the gods' love and frame the discussion in 'causal' terms. Secondly, his argument makes use of a substitution principle illegitimately in an opaque context. Finally, even conceding a causal relation does not entail what way the causal direction will go. To treat holiness as a cause or being caused comes prior to the work of analogy. All this points out that Socrates' efforts against Euthyphro's theocentrism are fundamentally flawed.

Nevertheless, there is a clear process to Socrates' inquiry. Success in showing the negation of 'H because L' would open up the question of asking what the essence of holiness is, as Euthyphro's definition then merely describes an attribute or result of holiness, rather than anything essential to it. Brown argues that Socrates' argument does not distinguish a relational (are externally acquired) from a non-relational (internally possessed) property.<sup>70</sup> This is correct, but such a distinction is already implied by the active and passive contrast.<sup>71</sup> Brown's claim also seems to ignore the attempted connection of holiness with justice. Either way, Socrates' proposition 'L because H' does not tell us what holiness is, only that it cannot simply be defined as whatever the gods love. Indeed, Cohen argues that this is the one thing Socrates' argument does prove, that is, the fairly self-evident claim that holiness cannot be defined as what is loved by the gods as long as the gods' love what is holy for the reason that it is holy, as the dilemma first distinguishes. If the God's love what is holy for rational reasons, then no matter the authority God has, the holy cannot be defined in terms of that authority but rather the reasons for it.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the negative claim must be followed by a positive one. Indeed, the analogies are intended to suggest that holiness is not a caused thing at

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<sup>69</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p.55.

<sup>70</sup> Brown, "Euthyphro 10A-11B," p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> See, John Burnet, *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924) p. 48; A. E. Taylor, *Plato, The Man and His Work* (London: Methuen, 1949), pp. 151-152.

<sup>72</sup> Cohen, "Definition Of Piety," p. 13.

all, and the assertion ‘L because H’ is merely the preliminary to another more profound second investigation that is only begun towards the end of *Euthyphro*.

In any case, Socrates sought a different approach to his interlocutor and so changes the direction of the inquiry. If the gods’ love the holy because it is holy, then naturally he wants to know what this thing that the gods’ love exactly is. But herein lies the problem, if Euthyphro simply asserts an identity claim, and Socrates has no way of forcing him to change his claim, on the other side of the coin if Socrates wants to assert a ‘because’ claim then Euthyphro has nothing against him to change his mind either. (Indeed, Euthyphro himself does not seem to know what his claim entails, being swayed by Socrates without much resistance that it involves a causal rather than an identity or co-referential claim.) The point is that both characters start with claims that the other cannot overthrow. So though we have established that Socrates finds no way of showing that Euthyphro is mistaken, neither does Euthyphro prove the opposing claim is false. This being the case, there is on the one hand, no real debate at the most fundamental level of the dialogue. On the other, though he may not have provided an adequate justification for abandoning Euthyphro’s position, until a problem with Socrates’ own approach is given, he has the grounds to continue with his investigation by default.

Certainly, Socrates appears to favour an exclusively ratiocentric view of morality and implements his famous dialectic method, often directed at notions devoid of concrete foundation. Socrates’ dialectic aims to elicit claims from an opponent through conversation and subject their answers to analysis in order to see if they result in some element of contradiction. The purpose is to solve any contradictions and reach a satisfactory conclusion. This was begun with the examination of Euthyphro’s claim.

The second investigation begins when Socrates asks Euthyphro if all that is holy is just but not all that is just is holy.<sup>73</sup> Through the dialectic method, his task was to reach a definition by the process of division. This means progressively eliminating any non-essential contents to reach a suitable definition free of everything superfluous. As a result, he tentatively proposes that holiness is a form of justice, though the latter is left incompletely defined. In logical terms, he asks whether the two are identical or have a

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<sup>73</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 12a.

general-specific distinction, that is to say, that all that is holy is just but not all that is just is holy.<sup>74</sup> Socrates' analysis, however, is not going down the chain of classes from genus to multiple species, as was Plato's wont in later dialogues, but is, at least to begin with, attempting to go up by subordinating holiness to the more general notion. Thus Socrates' approach towards holiness essays a form of conceptualisation different to a causal or identity claim. Indeed, by the analogies, he not only questions the theocentric view, but also appears to point to its inherent vulnerability. Specifically, because it gives no rationally justifying account of goodness, if holiness is of such a nature that the best way to explain it involves a comprehension-orientated approach, then the theocentric view is at a disadvantage, and one will have to side with Socrates' ratiocentric endeavour.

However, though Socrates is not suggesting justice and holiness are identical, he is proposing they belong to the same class before we even know what either justice or holiness is. If he had provided a definition of justice first, then the attempts to understand what holiness was would have been more successful. But from what we know of Socrates' career, he never offered a definition of justice, nor, indeed, according to Plato's *Republic*, even saw the benefit of looking for one until the setting of that dialogue.<sup>75</sup> And given that the *Republic* is a late work of Plato's and unlikely to be based on a real conversation, the definition of justice provided in the *Republic* is no doubt Plato's own. The implication is that Socrates never offered a precise definition to his pupil and Plato's comment in this regard is an indirect criticism his old teacher. That is not to say that Socrates had no chance of success. Whether Socrates had a complete definition at hand or not, Socrates points out that the circumstances under which an action takes place makes an important difference concerning its meaning and the same is true with reference to the motive that was involved.<sup>76</sup> And of course, he was confident enough of reaching a solution to suggest a relation with holiness.

The point is that no precise definition is given in the dialogue, as would seem necessary for the investigation to proceed.

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<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 12d.

<sup>75</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) Bk. 2, 368c-369b, p.49; Terence Irwin, *Plato's Ethics*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.200

<sup>76</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 11e ff.

So whence the association between holiness and justice? Notwithstanding the possibility of an historical basis to Euthyphro and his father's case,<sup>77</sup> rather than a mere literary framing device, the complex circumstances it contains appear philosophically significant to the text. At the beginning of the dialogue, Euthyphro reveals that he is to bring his own father to trial for murder. Socrates is naturally surprised at Euthyphro, who proceeds to explain the matter. A poor dependent working as a field labourer for his family got into a quarrel with one of their domestic servants while drunk, subsequently killing him. Euthyphro's father bound the culprit and threw him into a ditch, where he was left neglected for a number of days while messengers were sent to the diviners in Athens for instruction on what to do with him. Before answer arrived, the man died from exposure, for which Euthyphro holds his father guilty. It should not seem surprising that Euthyphro's family is angry at his decision to take his father to court.

Firstly, the case makes clear, as one would expect from an introduction, the problem being faced and the extent to which morality, piety, and law are bound up with one another. Whatever else the connection, Socrates drawing an association between holiness and justice stems from the fact that Euthyphro proposes to use the notion of holiness as plaintiff to get a conviction and achieve justice against his father. Euthyphro makes statements early on in this regard, to wit, of treating no man any different to another; be he a family relative or stranger.<sup>78</sup> So evidently, the connection between holiness (and piety) with justice is first made by Euthyphro. Now, we do not know how the court ruled in Euthyphro's case, but one might expect Euthyphro to have given better answers to Socrates over the course of their exchange based on these initial comments, and, indeed, to have been supportive of Socrates' thesis.

Secondly, Euthyphro's court case also shows the ambiguity surrounding how morality, piety, and law are interrelated. For example, the gods' love loyalty to one's family, on the one hand. In this regard, we indirectly hear a basic defence of Euthyphro's father and the rest of the family in Euthyphro's confession to Socrates: 'They say that he did not kill him, and that if he did, the dead man was but a murderer, and I ought not to take

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<sup>77</sup> Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato*, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 5b.



any notice, for that a son is unholy who prosecutes a father...'<sup>79</sup> Yet, as Euthyphro contends, the gods' love the implementation of justice, on the other hand. In short, the gods' love loyalty to family, and they love justice. So when ones father has committed murder, what does one do? Evidently, just saying that holiness is whatever the gods' love will not do.

Now (as we know) it is Euthyphro's claim that justice is what matters. But in the case of the murder other issues abound. The labourer was drunk as opposed to clear headed and sober when he committed the murder, he himself was killed via neglect as opposed to deliberate and direct violence and Euthyphro's father sent for the messengers as opposed to passing immediate judgement, indicating that he sought a just and informed end to the matter and that the death was not predicted. Each of these adds an ethical quandary to the case, and though Jowett writes that for the Greeks, there was little difference between killing and letting die,<sup>80</sup> the inclusion of this detail in an account brimming with moral ambiguity suggests it too was meant to denote a certain difficulty, notwithstanding the added complication that the deceased was to be punished for murder. In essence, the circumstances of the death show extreme moral complexity, indicating that a range of issues about the case were in need of consideration. Little wonder that Socrates appears to have been hesitant in defining justice, well aware of the difficulties involved.

These difficulties justify the second inquiry as a natural part of the dialogue and more importantly, as a requirement of the philosophical investigation. The suggestion is that only a ratiocentric approach will be able to provide an account of holiness and morality that will be able to guide people in addressing complex cases, which are a reality of human experience. It is evident from the beginning of the discussion that the requirement is to produce a sophisticated answer to the question concerning the nature of piety and holiness and that the requirement for such an answer is what spurred Socrates into his line of enquiry in the first place. Such an achievement would allow us to understand what it is that the gods' love so that complicated matters exactly like the ones Euthyphro and Socrates both faced in the king-archons court can be settled.

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<sup>79</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 5d-5e.

<sup>80</sup> Jowett, *Dialogues of Plato*, p.7.

So with the hypothesis that holiness is a part of justice, Socrates asks what part it is, to which Euthyphro answers it is the part that concerns the care of the gods.<sup>81</sup> By a second use of analogies, Socrates claims that care of the gods seems to mean something that benefits the gods and makes them better, which must be incorrect. So he asks Euthyphro again what he means.<sup>82</sup> Euthyphro replies holy acts involve knowledge of how to sacrifice and pray to which Socrates questions again how this benefits the gods. Through honour, reverence and pleasure, says Euthyphro; these acts give the gods the things that are dear to them. To Socrates' lament, they are back where they started: H because L; and as Euthyphro rushes away, he leaves Socrates to face the courtroom lacking the knowledge he hoped to use in his defence.<sup>83</sup>

## 1.2 On the Horns of the Dilemma

Plato's *Euthyphro*, of course, was not the last word on the matter. In his 'Advice to Christian Philosophers', of ethics Plantinga writes, 'Perhaps the chief theoretical concern, from the theistic perspective, is the question how are right and wrong, good and bad, duty, permission and obligation related to God and to his will and to his creative activity?'<sup>84</sup> Theological-ethics is home to an ongoing debate in western philosophy and multiple different positions, though most of these are of either of a theocentric or ratiocentric orientation. Some others that we will examine combine aspects of both. Each of the choices presented, however, entails certain difficulties within the context of Abrahamic faith and western moral philosophy.

As one would expect from a dilemma, the Euthyphro dilemma has two horns, but each horn has more than one prong. To begin with the theocentrist view, four main problems appear to exist. The first problem is that if an action is morally good because it is commanded by God, and its moral status is derived solely from God's having commanded it, then it appears to allow many actions we would normally take to be evil to be good. For example, if the slaying of new-born children were a God given

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<sup>81</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 13a.

<sup>82</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 13c.

<sup>83</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 14a-16a.

<sup>84</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*, 1 (1984), p. 269.

command, then it would ipso facto be morally good to do.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, the only reason that it is not morally good, but evil, is because God has prohibited it.<sup>86</sup> The result appears to be that any action whatsoever could in theory be morally good or evil. This is named the modal vulnerability problem, as the status of any moral content appears vulnerable to reversal despite the fact that *our* moral intuitions posit *particular* moral values an unconditional status and cannot be other than what they are.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the problem is one that hits the divine command theorist, for whom God is the sole author and foundation of morality.

The second problem affecting theocentrism results from the apparent tautologies that result from making God the sole source of morality. To say 'God is good' or 'God's actions are good' means no more than saying 'God is whatever He says is moral.' the emphasis here is on the 'whatever' because such statements appear empty of moral content. This is the emptiness problem.

A third and closely related problem points to our moral awareness. The human being seems to have a moral intuition or, in more neutral terms, capacity for normative assessment.

Yet, if morality was derived from God alone, then the human arrival at corresponding moral conclusions would be a pure coincidence.<sup>88</sup> Admittedly, the basis of our moral capacity is a matter of great philosophical controversy, a subject constitutive of its own field. But the fact remains, if we had no moral faculty, the commandments of God would appear very alien; they would not be communicating anything familiar or certain to us. The question here is: How do we understand the import of Gods commands if we have no ethical insight? For divine commands to be understood as belonging to this

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<sup>85</sup> One of the earliest writers to articulate this problem was Ralph Cudworth, *A Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (London: J. and J. Knapton, 1731; réimpression en fac-similé, New York: Garland, 1976), pp. 9-10.

<sup>86</sup> This matter is related to another interesting question as to the status of actions without revelation. With God the source of morality, one view is that if God did not exist, then all actions would be permissible. See, Philip L. Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 30. For a book-length study of the Islamic tradition, which asks what would follow had revelation not existed rather than God, See, Kevin Reinhart, *Before Revelation: The Boundaries Muslim Moral Thought*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> For the names of this problem and the next one I have adopted from Joyce, *Euthyphro Dilemma*.

<sup>88</sup> Eric D'Arcy, "'Worthy of Worship': A Catholic Contribution," in G. Outka and J. Reeder, Jr., eds., *Religion and Morality* (Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1973), p. 193.

distinct class, of being distinguishable in such terms, is again evidence that we have a moral faculty, and our very ability to conceive of things as belonging to a distinct class of propositions for very specific and revelation-independent reasons implies that our moral faculty targets something that is revelation-independent too. In short, God and His commands cannot be considered good unless we have a moral faculty capable of independently deeming them to be so. This might seem like a mere extension of the emptiness problem above. But the implications of this denial of a moral faculty are more basic than that. It would deny not just our arriving at moral knowledge on our own, but our capacity for being taught moral knowledge, or rather, comprehending moral truth. This problem we shall call the problem of moral inaccessibility.

A fourth problem facing the theocentrist is the arbitrariness problem. If God is the sole determiner of morality, and if the modal status of morality is therefore contingent, morality then is arbitrary and lacks objective validity. Unlike the modal vulnerability problem to which it appears closely related, the arbitrariness problem says that *whatever* morality may be in substantive terms, there must be a rational and objective basis to it, which God's authority cannot be. In essence, it is a problem that results from the modal vulnerability problem but at a higher-order, as one might accept that something is not necessarily good (or evil), but worry about it being arbitrarily so.<sup>89</sup>

Now for problems that face ratiocentrism. Firstly, if God commands certain actions because they are good, then morality has validity independent of God's commands. The result is that the basis of morality's validity resides elsewhere and that moral goodness predetermines His will; that God is neither its author nor foundation. Given a moral order that is valid externally to God, He is also subject, as it were, in His actions to an eternal moral system, the substance of which He is forced to recognise and affirm rather than establish. This is actually just the reverse side of the independent validity problem, noted above, because it appears possible that a single resolution will apply to both theo- and ratiocentrism. Yet what concerns the two centrism is different, and therefore likely to lead to different accounts. What is more, the independent validity problem for ratiocentrism appears with greater severity and complexity, since it has two prongs, as we have just seen, one that transfers moral authority away from God, and another that

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<sup>89</sup> See Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma", p.57.

places God under the authority of that same moral system. Both assertions result in claims contrary to theological belief. The implication that there is a moral order that stands externally to God and above Him in authority limits divine sovereignty. Naming each of these issues in terms reflecting their theological nature, we can call them the non-authority and non-sovereignty problems, respectively.

Secondly, morality, as source of knowledge existing independently from God suggests that He was not its creator, curtailing the extent of His power. Of course, the objection assumes that truth is, in some form, a created thing, which is itself controversial. Nevertheless, given that validity exists independently from God, it would seem to follow that it exists independently from creation too. Many theists would find problematic the idea that God is not the Creator of all existence. This appears to be the reverse of Kant's celebrated observation that existence is not a real predicate, as it cannot be deduced from the idea of a being, even if a perfect being.<sup>90</sup> The reversal lies in the fact that there existence was to be deduced; here, instead, truth is to be derived from existence, or more precisely, the creation of existence. Is such a position as that of the theist plausible? This points to time-honoured debate stretching back to ancient Greece in relation to nominalism and continued in the Christian and Islamic worlds, for example, regarding the primacy of being (*asala al-wujud*) and the primacy of quiddity (*asala al-mahiyya*) in so far as that conversation refers to the concept of essence rivalling existence for a more basic logical status. Addressing this problem then may involve theories from other areas of philosophy and the philosophical tradition.

In order to reflect on the theological significance it has here, however, the problem shall be referred to as the metaphysical curtailment problem. The reason for the inclusion of this problem, which might seem to be first and foremost a problem of metaphysics, in a study that aims to examine theological-ethics from an epistemological perspective is the undeniable importance that must be attached to a field that proposes to explain the overall nature of truth and knowledge. This is also because such information would be crucial to understanding the nature of morality vis-à-vis God.

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<sup>90</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Div.2, "Transcendental Dialectic", Ch. 3 Sect. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 563-568.

In sum, the ratiocentric approach faces at least two problems and the theocentric faces at least four. For purposes of clarity, I have chosen to illustrate horns of the dilemma this below:

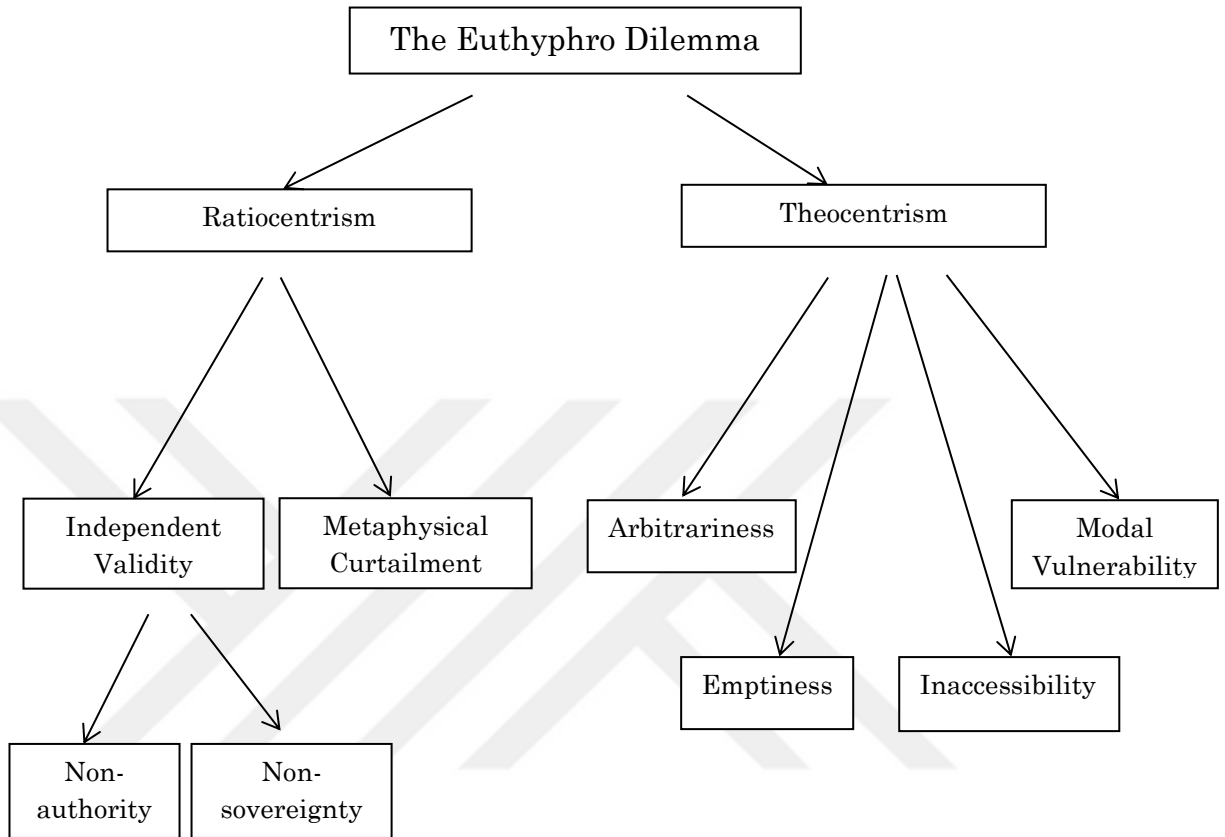


Figure 1: The Horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma

This diagram is not supposed to depict an exhaustive list of the problems that the Euthyphro Dilemma presents — as shall be seen from the discussion below, more problems crop up — but it does at least show the main problems associated with the dilemma and the ones that are mainly responsible for its historical and continuing interest.

### 1.3 An Assessment of the Dilemma

To assess the validity of a dilemma it is helpful assess the strengths of the answers proposed. In that way, a better assessment of what kind of problem we are dealing with can emerge. For example, if we find that the answers are plagued with a basic unresolved issue, one can conclude that this more basic issue is bound up in the original dilemma and that those other problems are also at bottom not the problems that they

initially appeared to be, but rather dependent on their answer for the resolution of something else. Nevertheless, Philosophers are still dealing with the horns of the dilemma, and these appear valid problems, despite some proposals that dismiss them as such. It is evident from the above that what faces the theocentric position are largely ethical issues, while the ratiocentric position faces theological ones. The following discussion is not an attempt to conduct an exhaustive assessment of the various theories advanced in the theoethical literature, but to look at prominent authors in the field and how well the problems that each position faces have been dealt with.

### **1.3.1 The Predicament of Theocentrism**

There are various theories that go under the divine command label. The most basic asserts simply that the good is identical with what God commands.<sup>91</sup> A version close to this states that God acts not as an authority determining what is right, but rather as an expert moral guide.<sup>92</sup> Another version says that the commands of God constituent obligations under the circumstances in which we received them, that is, as beings of His creation and recipients of His provision.<sup>93</sup> The positions we will consider here are Euthyphro's definitional claim and theories that assert the basic view that morality exclusively derives from God's commands, such as that advanced Mortimer. Other, more moderate theories are considered later in the section.

Divine command theory is the main theocentric position in ethics. The theory states, similar to Euthyphro's claim, that the good is exclusively what God states it to be. Mortimer writes: 'there is a real distinction between right and wrong that is independent of what we happen to think. It is rooted in the nature and will of God.'<sup>94</sup> Divine command theorists have offered a number of different divine properties to form versions of the theory, including divine 'approval', 'will' and 'decree' as well as 'love' and 'commands'. Its essential claim is H because L, and this can be safely read as meaning that what is good is good simply by virtue of having been identified as such with divine

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<sup>91</sup> For example, Robert C. Mortimer, *Christian Ethics*, (New York: Hutchinson's University Library, 1950).

<sup>92</sup> Richard J. Mouw, "The Status of God's Moral Judgments," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 16 (1970): pp. 61-66.

<sup>93</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), Ch. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Mortimer, *Christian Ethics*, p. 8.

authority. Such a claim was associated with Euthyphro, above, and we saw that Socrates musters little grounds to reject it. Thus, God's love, as an example of something capable of forming such a relation, would not cause the morality of the object but rather constitute it.

### 1.3.1.1 Emptiness

The emptiness problem faces the divine command theorist when statements like 'God is good' appear tautological. The problem arises since on divine command theory God becomes at once the origin and object of morality. Because the theocentrist says we cannot know for ourselves what is moral, the term good must be just an empty signifier that is filled with whatever God commands, and yet to be good, God must act in accord with those commands. Making an assessment of the emptiness problem, Joyce examines each version to find that the threat is less than formidable. Interpreting divine love as divine approval, he says that it is not trivially true to say that God approves of Himself and or His own actions, depending on how one reads the theory to extend. The same applies to God's commands, as saying that God acts according to His commands (as well as divine will, which Joyce discusses as signifying God's desires, then values, before finally settling on God's judgements) is not trivially true. Thus, Joyce fends off the problem by observing that there are various ways in which the phrase is not *a priori* true, but, rather, genuinely informative. Admittedly, Joyce is working with a very plain idea of God, wherewith tautology is avoided in the claim 'God is good' by merely not being *a priori* true. Much of what Abrahamic believers would hold to be rather ordinary, are here offered as philosophically significant — but perhaps with some justification. This is understood more clearly by noting the beliefs attending to God (or gods) that exist in other religious traditions, such as those of ancient Greece, where it cannot be taken for granted that a god would fail to act according to the values they hold.<sup>95</sup> In any case, what results from this examination, is that the claim 'God is good' distinguishes Abrahamic faith while allowing divine command theory to avoid the problem of emptiness.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 199c–201c, 201d–212b.

<sup>96</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," pp.58-62.



A more informative examination would require reading the 'good' in 'God is good' in a special sense, attributable to God alone rather than worldly beings. Alston takes this approach and identifies the type of goodness being referred to as of such a special kind. He draws a distinction between the type of morality that human beings perform compared to that of God's, citing this as expressed by the difference between duty on the one hand and goodness on the other.<sup>97</sup> And what are the actual contents of this special kind? Surely it is a matter of mere theologico-philosophical speculation. Indeed, Joyce leaves it for the divine command theorist to come up with one that sounds valid.<sup>98</sup> But it is exactly the question of whether anything plausible can be given within the terms provided that will tell us whether this defence of divine command theory is worthwhile. While both philosophers agree that the problem can be addressed, they do so in rather different ways, and the emptiness problem has forced divine command theorists to abandon 'command' as the central term and adopt a different concept. While one might think that because the strength of the problem depends on the statement 'God is good' being tautological, and with this having been found not to be the case, that the problem is solved, the fact remains that when conceived as commands, we are lead back to the problem we sought to solve. For instance, while God may indeed follow His own commands, since He is the source of morality, He need only give another command, so to speak, and act in a different way to what He commanded before. And no one can say that He is not being moral unless we make consistency across all times a moral criterion and apply it to God himself. If that is the case, then we seem to end up with a ratiocentric theory rather than a theocentric one.

Alston offers a different argument as to why command should not be the central concept. He states that commands are only meaningful for beings that have the possibility of acting in immoral ways, and that therefore, since God is morally perfect and there is no chance of Him being anything less than that, divine commands cannot relate to God Himself.<sup>99</sup> It is not the emptiness problem that Alston cites as much as a metaphysical one about freedom. Nevertheless, his argument rests on God not being

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<sup>97</sup> William Alston, "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists," in Michael Beaty, ed., *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1990), pp. 309-316.

<sup>98</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 59.

<sup>99</sup> William Alston, "Divine Command Theorists," p. 315.

subject to His own commands and presents a serious problem to divine *command* theory's status as the central theocentric theory.

By choosing an individual exemplar over a principle, one avoids the emptiness problem also because what is good can be defined in terms of specific moral content. This is particularly clear with the divine motivation theory offered by Linda Zagzebski, with a central place given to the emotions, defined in the case of God, as intellectual affections free from a sensory component. The emotions in this way are definitive constituents of divine motivation, according to which all morality is measured.<sup>100</sup> But one need not assume the existence of divine emotions to explain the goodness of God. Wierenga, for example, simply notes that God is worthy of praise for acting in kind, loving and just ways, and also because He would not act in ways that are bad.<sup>101</sup> Such theories such as Alston's and Zagzebski's gain support from the complexity morality appears to have and the great difficulty that a single principle would have to explain it, when the various virtues of God, (or in Islam, all His names), are a sure resource to clarify morality's complexity.

### **1.3.1.2 Arbitrariness**

Another problem facing the theocentrist is the problem of arbitrariness. If God can command anything whatsoever because there is no moral standard that He is subject to, then morality appears vulnerable to having no principle or necessity. In *Euthyphro*, for example the theocentric claim was that the holy is constituted by the gods' love; they did not love the holy for any particular feature about it. Thus morality appears to be based on divine whim.

However, Joyce objects that this problem is commonly overstated. Just because God determines what is good, does not mean that just anything will become good. God can choose to act according to a set of coherent principles. If for example the divine criterion is utilitarian, then those things that maximise happiness will be deemed moral.<sup>102</sup> There may even be a set of non-moral principles according to which God

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<sup>100</sup> Linda Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 185.

<sup>101</sup> Edward Wierenga, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory," *Nous* 17 (1983): pp. 399-401.

<sup>102</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 57.

determines morality.<sup>103</sup> But the theocentrist must be careful in specifying what the divine standard is. To discard an intrinsic quality of the good as the reason for God's love will ultimately end in arbitrariness of a very 'moral' kind, if a thing is loved for reasons other than moral ones. This is because while there may be other specific reasons for the relation, as far as morality is concerned, that love will indeed be arbitrary. Some specifically moral reason must persist whether it takes a utilitarian, deontological or some other form. Utilitarian reasons, for example, would not face charges of *moral* arbitrariness, given that utilitarianism justifies its idea of morality.

What is more, though we have a stable divine criterion of truth according to which morality is set, the adoption of that criterion is still arbitrary. Had God wanted a different set upon which to confer moral status then He could have used that instead. And again, if the criterion is set via non-moral reasons, then arbitrariness persists as far as morality is concerned unless an essential relation between the non-moral and moral is established. And, indeed, the establishment of such a relation would render the theory more ratiocentric than the theocentrist may want to admit.

Furthermore, this discussion has here so far been continued in highly hypothetical terms, but it is the task of the divine command theorist to plausibly establish within the context of the religious tradition that they are working a criterion such that the arbitrariness problem can be fended off. Admittedly, this identification may be an impossible task of speculative theology: one where various answers can be given and none with any certainty. In such circumstances, the mere fact that such an answer is possible will suffice to defeat the arbitrariness charge. But what is possible for a Christian may not be for a Jew, and what is possible for a Jew may not do for Muslim. This is significant for the religious theologian who wants to know what goodness is in the eyes of God. What is known as situational ethics, for example is a highly Christian theocentric conception that may not be easily adopted by another Abrahamic tradition. So this horn of the dilemma will not be rounded by simply changing the manner in which the relation is understood without raising specific theological questions.

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<sup>103</sup> Cohen, "The Definition of Piety," p. 13.

But more radically, perhaps the objection of arbitrariness simply begs the question. The charge can only be made along with the belief that a moral law in comparison with which God's commands are arbitrary actually exists, and this is something the theocentrist rejects. There is no moral standard independent of God for the theocentrist, so why should they be held to conform to some non-arbitrary moral law? And what precisely is the problem with arbitrariness in-itself once we reject the existence of such a standard? Does there still remain a problem? Surely not. So the problem seems to boil down to whether an independent moral standard exists or not.

Helpfully, Alston's advice to advocates of divine command theory attempts to make the position as strong as it can possibly be.<sup>104</sup> Firstly, he says that we must not understand goodness as mere obedience to God's commands, for then God's goodness becomes His obeying His own commands. This issue we have discussed above under the emptiness problem, but Alston goes further by offering a particular sense in which a resolution can be made. Because divine goodness must be different to God's commands, we are left asking what, then, constitutes God's morality. Alston says that unless we are to set a moral order external to God, we must make God Himself the ultimate condition of goodness. On the one hand, this appears to succeed in protecting divine sovereignty, but on the other arbitrariness remains. Alston sees this, and replies that there must be some final stopping point, and it is either a general principle (which he has ruled out) or an individual paradigm (i.e. God's).

Thus, Alston tries to avert the danger of arbitrariness by asserting a particularist epistemology, whereby God is the supreme example of moral predicates, and thus the ultimate source of morality.<sup>105</sup> A similar line of argument is adopted by Zagzebski, as we have seen; God's motives that become the template for morality itself. Both use the metre stick as an example to explain this circumstance. Something is moral solely because of its equality or approximation to the standard set by the individual God.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Alston, "Divine Command Theorists," pp. 303-326.

<sup>105</sup> Alston, "Divine Command Theorists," pp. 320-322.

<sup>106</sup> Alston, "Divine Command Theorists," p. 320; Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*, p. 185.

Moreover, Alston points out that arbitrariness remains even if the ground of morality is a general principle, as what is ultimately basic cannot, by definition, be explained.<sup>107</sup> This is indeed, a fair point, but it also goes to show that there appears a radical shift in departure to avoid the problem. This is clear when Alston rejects the idea that an individual cannot act as the original template or morality without arbitrariness, saying that this objection presupposes ‘Platonist predilections’.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Wierenga observes, arbitrariness only applies assuming an independent moral standard.<sup>109</sup> It appears, then, that one’s presuppositions settle the matter in advance.

Others have tried to go further than Alston in finding a solution. Robert Adams claims that a modified version of divine command theory both protects God’s sovereignty and avoids arbitrariness.<sup>110</sup> He argues the goodness of an action will not depend simply on God’s commanding it, but His omnibenevolent nature. And this ensures He does not command cruelty for its own sake, as it would be impossible for a loving God to do so. Moreover, because God’s character is the source of morality, there is no law external to Him. By this means, God’s unrivalled moral and metaphysical status is maintained. But if anything, we only push the problem back one stage. For we must still ask, why is God’s goodness one way and not another? What is the ground for this particular morality? The problems are not solved by transferring the moral law from outside to inside God, as it were. In the end, arbitrariness remains, just as Alston states.

We have seen, as Alston claims, that it will affect both the theo- and ratiocentric theories. But are they arbitrary in the same way? Arbitrariness comes in two forms, one of which need not be given much weight. There is a supposed problem of arbitrariness in a radical sense and one in a more limited sense. The first can refer to any system or subject of knowledge in general by simply pointing to a lack of overall context, while the second refers to an arbitrariness that holds directly in relation to some law, principle or goal. The first form of the problem is the one that will affect both theo- and ratiocentric theories, because it is ‘supra-contextual.’ The first instantiation of morality

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<sup>107</sup> Alston, “Divine Command Theorists,” pp. 321-323.

<sup>108</sup> Alston, “Divine Command Theorists,” p. 321.

<sup>109</sup> Wierenga, “Divine Command Theory,” p. 401.

<sup>110</sup> Robert Adams, “A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness” in *The Virtue of Faith and other Essays in Philosophical Theology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 97-122.

will always be arbitrary precisely because it is the first instantiation. This super-arbitrariness, however, lacks strength as a criticism against the substance of any theory, precisely because it can be applied so broadly. It relies on making reference to a first principle that would explain all laws and principles that follow. The problem with this is that any first principle will itself be unable to draw upon a higher one to explain itself. While Alston is right that the problem affects both orientations; super-arbitrariness lacks force since it refers to an obscurity that applies to all things, whereas something seems to be meaningfully arbitrary only according to a standard and thus a certain specificity, which a theory or definition will provide.

Accordingly, the limited form of arbitrariness will apply to any theory that displays an internal incoherence vis-à-vis the principles it is based on, making only limited arbitrariness a real problem. Of course, a ratiocentric appears much less likely to be accused of limited arbitrariness because the whole purpose of referring to a principle, law, or goal is to bring some form of structure to the body of things we call moral. The success of any particular theory in this undertaking will depend, among other things, on how well it explains and supports our most basic moral intuitions and beliefs in line with its fundamental principles, and organises or reconciles them when they conflict. This does not seem to be something that divine command theory can do. Indeed, the theocentric theory results in arbitrariness, since according to divine command theory *any* set of things that God approves is moral simply because God approves it; and even if that set of things shows some form of order, the theory will fail to explain.<sup>111</sup> In opposition, Wierenga argues that it is untrue that God would command or will simply any action, and hence admits that some actions simply are wrong and bad. He also states that the problem of arbitrariness though applicable in the general sense, is not applicable even in the limited sense. Because God possesses certain virtues, internal constraints apply to what He will command, and this therefore means His actions must ‘comport well’ with His attributes.<sup>112</sup> But how Wierenga assumes that these attributes can be deemed to be good without reference to a moral standard appears unclear without

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<sup>111</sup> This deficiency applies even to the identity claim that Euthyphro could have made, because such an identity claim between God’s love and morality would suffer from leaving our moral intuitions unexplained (see problem of moral inaccessibility, below).

<sup>112</sup> Wierenga, “Divine Command Theory,” p. 401.

assuming something special about their attributes being possessed by God (see below). Indeed, a ratiocentric claim, may be able to avoid this problem, but the point is that this criticism only appears to be made with the assumption of the need for a principle to explain the morality that God gives, and so again the debate here is thwarted by a difference too fundamental to address without begging the question.

But before we move on, we would do well to recall that reference to a set of principles is not the preserve of ratiocentrism alone. We observed above how the accusation of arbitrariness might be overstated, and that some principled relation between the things that are divinely beloved and God can hold. God may love certain things for specific reasons decided by Him without an external reference. Now since both the theocentrist and the ratiocentrist can make this claim, and given that arbitrariness will apply to any ultimate principle just as it will the decree of God, neither theory now seems to be more vulnerable to this objection than the other. Indeed, both seem to overcome it. Nevertheless, while the rationalist begins with an ultimate principle or criteria, the theocentrist begins with God as the source of morality. It has been argued by John Chandler that with the adoption of a divine criterion we then see not God doing the work of organising morality, but rather the principle He displays. Under such circumstances, the theocentric theory will collapse into a ratiocentric one, further suggesting that the initial complaint of arbitrariness against divine command theory is well-founded.<sup>113</sup> But it would be wrong to assume that the introduction of some specific value or standard removes God from the centre of morality. Edward Wierenga observes that we can have morality derived fundamentally from God while still displaying a principle or coherence, since its value is dependent specifically on being possessed or decided by God.<sup>114</sup> In such circumstances, therefore, both positions admit a moral criterion of some kind and the difference between the two theories seems to simply boil down to whether we want to cite God as the source of morality or not. But whether or not God is claimed as the source of morality, the problem of arbitrariness is defeated.

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<sup>113</sup> John Chandler, "Divine Command Theories and the Appeal to Love," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 22 (1985): pp. 231-239.

<sup>114</sup> Edward R. Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 223-225.

For what distinguishes the theocentrist from their opponent is a metaphysical extension that will not alter the status of the metaethical theory it is part of.

### **1.3.1.3 Moral Inaccessibility**

As for the problem of inaccessibility, we saw that without being able to internally comprehend the truth of morality, that is, understand its truth by virtue of its actual contents rather than merely its source, the divine commands of revelation could never be appropriately understood. Of course, that the theocentrist denies there is such a thing as independent morality does not mean that they deny the existence of a moral faculty or that God's moral revelation displays an intuitively comprehensible criterion of morality. Nevertheless, if there is a coherent and objective set of criteria, we will be lead to ask why we must place God as their source rather than some transcendent validity — the problem just noted above. Indeed, the commands of God may be incomprehensible to humans because of their finite minds, their worldly condition or simply ignorance of the divine and greater design of which those commands are a part. Had we the noetic abilities to fathom this plan, the principles in use would also be revealed.

Unless the theocentrist accepts that we can know the truth independently of revelation, it seems a denial of our ability to think in accurately moral terms is required. This scepticism denies not just our arriving at moral knowledge on our own, but our capacity for understanding the morality taught via revelation. For if we are unable to independently know what is right and wrong then we cannot be in a position to assess and confirm the normative validity of divine decrees. Indeed, if our moral capacity is faulty, then regardless of whether there is objective moral truth or not, we would not know even if God revealed it to us Himself. But this need not detain us, since the theocentrist that we are considering here denies the existence of an objective moral truth. This is a problem because divine commandments to humans would be as programming to computers, executable but not understood. In such a situation, revelation would have no audience to know the truth of its moral contents.

But does this objection beg the question? On the one hand, the theocentrist may be a kind of moral sceptic. They can deny morality's independence from God; deny there being an objective moral truth, so comprehending such truth is out of the question in the first place. It seems enough that we understand what God commands us to do and that



we do it. Yet, on the other hand, this simply seems inaccurate; revelatory commands do not (usually) seem strange or alien and their goodness is not incomprehensible. If it is possible, at least to some degree, to accurately make sense of morality *without* recourse to theology, then we shall know that the divine command theorist is burdened with explaining this fact. Given that we have a capacity for moral judgements and given that this capacity often recognises the morality of the message that is communicated in revelation, why must we doubt its accuracy? Conversely, what would be the purpose of being created with a moral capacity that was unable to understand and acknowledge, or even rejected, the moral essence of revelation? It is in this context, for example, that we can ask: are people who do not believe in God or are ignorant of revelation necessarily behaving immorally? Or even if they act in accordance with revelatory prescriptions, is merely a coincidence? Thus, the theocentrist is confronted with the possibility that a person ignorant of revelation may be following God's moral decree due to the nature they have been given as part of the divine creation of the world, and entirely separately from revealed knowledge. Alston, for example, says that our moral awareness, arrived at independently of knowledge of God, is provided by the way God created us, and so opens the way for a rationalistic, or rather, systematic explanation.<sup>115</sup> This position, in fact, appears necessary to avoiding the problem of moral inaccessibility.

Of course, there are various reasons why the theocentrist might reject such a stance. Adams, for example, makes a distinction between morality and moral authority, such that doing the good only becomes an imperative by divine commandment.<sup>116</sup> Thus we admit the existence of a moral faculty that is at work at the level of comprehension even if it is not authoritative. This line appears to be presented by Wierenga, who writes: there is the property of being wrong, a property distinct from the property of being forbidden by God or from any other theological property.<sup>117</sup> A critic, however, may argue that once we attempt to define what exactly authority is, it becomes difficult to maintain that obligations only hold from a command by a moral authority rather than simply an obligation as such and hence rational concepts alone. For an obligation can be

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<sup>115</sup> Alston, "Divine Command Theorists", p. 322. This claim appears to make Alston a moderate divine command theorist (see below).

<sup>116</sup> See, for example, Robert Adams, "Divine Commands and the Social Nature of Obligation," *Faith and Philosophy*, 4 (1987): pp. 262–275; and Adams, *Virtue of Faith*, pp. 231–258.

<sup>117</sup> Wierenga, "A Defensible Divine Command Theory," p. 396.

defined as something that an authority gives, but constitutes an imperative on its own regardless of its source.<sup>118</sup> Alternatively, perhaps there are multiple different valid moral ‘essences’ or messages, and what the human lacks is an inability to apply them correctly, that is, in the right context, for which reason revelation is sent to teach humankind and spare them groping for the truth about their collective application. But this would make the theocentrist admit the existence of objective morality, and that is not the kind of theocentrist we are considering here.

In contrast to the ‘top-down’ considerations noted here of God’s commands to humankind, let us now observe things from ‘the ground conditions’ of human thought. If it is impossible to truly grasp the reasoning and meaning of divine revelation *without* reference to native human noetic and moral conditions, then God’s relationship to morality is not as the divine command theorist believes. As Beilby notes, the deliverances of non-native cognitive processes (such as revelatory ones) have the potential to be unfamiliar, alien, or even indecipherable, and therefore rejected by their recipient.<sup>119</sup> Thus, study of how God’s commands relate to native human faculties surely appears necessary and may throw up problems for the divine command theorist if we find that God cannot command just anything and be likely to be understood at the same time.

#### **1.3.1.4 Modal Vulnerability**

Another serious problem for a divine command theorist is the modal vulnerability problem. Given H because L, divine command theory comes with the acceptance that what is cruel can be made virtuous via divine decree. Whatever is good is only good by what appears an arbitrary dictate; whatever is good could have just as easily been evil. For the idea is that there is nothing holding God to commanding one moral law or value over any other, and this is contrasted with the strong moral intuitions people have about things being wrong as such, that is, necessarily.

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<sup>118</sup> Mark, Murphy, “‘Theological Voluntarism.’”, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/voluntarism-theological/>>.

<sup>119</sup> James Beilby, “Plantinga’s Model of Warranted Christian Belief,” in *Alvin Plantinga*, ed. Deane-Peter Baker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 151.

One response to this is to say that God's commands are not contingent in a universal way. He loves the particular actions that are performed by actual individuals but given that humans are free beings, these particular actions need not have been performed and therefore God's love for them is contingent. What stands behind this divine approval, though, is nevertheless a universal morality that is the basis for each particular contingent instance of moral approval. Firstly, as Joyce notes, this twin-level theory is no solution to some theologians because God's will remains constrained in the more universal way. Secondly, by maintaining the idea of a universal morality, the idea would seem to imply that God was radically unable to choose what is moral. This would take away from His praiseworthiness, as a god that is compelled to obey moral laws is not therefore estimable for following or even commanding them.<sup>120</sup>

The formidability of these objections lies in pointing to the unsatisfactory results of what appears an effort to restore a stronger modal status to morality and only a half-measure to restore sovereignty to God. The first objection highlights that morality's independence from God is ultimately left unaddressed, while the second claims divine freedom remains curtailed as a result of morality's independence. Because both problems concern a relation between divine freedom and moral value according to Abrahamic theology, both can also be addressed by simply dealing with the modal status of morality itself. In essence, if we find that the morality of certain actions, qualities or states does not hold intrinsically or necessarily, then God cannot be said to be constrained in any way. Accordingly, it is to this subject that we now turn.

The solution lies in a more radical response that begins, firstly, by stating everything moral is relative and conditional. Of course, there is a venerable Kantian tradition that argues otherwise. A famous example used by Kant features someone being asked by a would-be murderer for the location of their intended victim. The respondent knows the prospective murderer's aim, but Kant claims one must tell the truth, since lying would treat the murderer as well as oneself as a mere means and not a rational being. Thus, the responsibility for the outcome cannot rest with the truth-teller, whatever it may turn out

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<sup>120</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," pp. 62-63.

to be.<sup>121</sup> But on the other side of the debate are moves that test just how far this ‘whatever the outcome’ statement will go, often with harrowing examples, spanning from ones endangering the lives of several innocent people to the entire human race.<sup>122</sup> We shall suffice with noting Joyce’s observation that whatever the outcome of an action, altering the circumstances within which it took place and or the intention behind it constitutes a different action, and demonstrates everything is contingent upon what the will of the agent is.<sup>123</sup> This we saw above in the case of Euthyphro’s father. Leaving a man outside so long that he dies of exposure is surely evil, but if that man was guilty of murder, and or if his death was not foreseen and or if one’s intention was to first learn on what the right thing is to do, then things become rather blurred. Nevertheless, it suffices to show that our moral intuitions intrude and object against this consequence of divine command theory only in so far as they accord with the moral conditions in which we actually live, rather than some external and absolute moral standard. Imagine, for example, that being stabbed caused pleasure or that failure resulted in joy. In this light, the humans who occupy those possible worlds where the commands of God differed so drastically that they incorporated what we in this actual world consider evil would not even be aware of any following problem; with different laws of nature, for them different moral ones will follow too, and our moral laws would not apply.

Secondly, we may add the proviso, as Adams does under Ockham’s influence, that it is only *logically* possible for God to order cruelty; not something He would actually do.<sup>124</sup> As Joyce says, the ‘possible worlds’ where the God of theology orders cruel actions are so remote that they barely warrant consideration.<sup>125</sup> An apparent issue with the proviso is that it seems to imply discomfort with contravening a standard of morality that is still supposed relevant. Indeed, according to the theory, even the need for the initial proviso is unwarranted, given that what is good and evil depends solely upon God’s word and so whatever He orders will necessarily be good, making it, *ipso facto*, impossible for a

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<sup>121</sup> Immanuel Kant, ‘On A Supposed Right To Lie from Philanthropy’ in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>122</sup> Philippa Foot, ‘The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect’ in *Virtues and Vices*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978 (originally appeared in the *Oxford Review*, Number 5, 1967).

<sup>123</sup> Joyce, “Euthyphro Dilemma,” p. 63.

<sup>124</sup> Adams, *Virtue of Faith*, p. 99.

<sup>125</sup> Joyce, “Euthyphro Dilemma,” pp. 64-65. See also, Wierenga, “Divine Command Theory,” pp. 390-394.

divine decree to be cruel. Divine command theory advocates have sought to overcome this implication by reference to God's character as essentially loving, or in reference to God's actions, as Adams does.<sup>126</sup>

So there are two ways of dealing with the problem, the first is to unsettle our ideas of what is good and what is bad, and the second is to point out that even if there are things that are bad in themselves, then as a moral being, in reality God will not be related to such things, or at least, not without some place in a grander moral scheme where goodness reigns. However, there appears a problem with each solution. Firstly, once we admit fixing the relevant intentions and consequences in line with natural laws, then badness or goodness can be found to securely inhere within an act. Make stabbing cause pain and death, failure cause sadness, and fix these as natural laws then moral judgements can be safely applied. Accordingly, Mawson offers an account resisting the destabilization and defending the attribution of intrinsic or necessary properties. He argues pain, torture and lying, for example, are bad in-themselves. His position is one we shall consider more fully below, but it is supported by the indication that some things are good- and bad-in-themselves that arises when we consider how moral ambiguity occurs. Putting aside the ambiguity that results in cases like that of Euthyphro's father and a great many others besides, we are still operating on the basis of stable ideas of right and wrong, clearly visible, for example, when one person kills another for no reason other than the achievement of self-gratification and against the will, interests and or desires of the other. Where ambiguity does result, it is when these core moral constants appear to conflict, and however much we wish to change the context or imagine other possible worlds to alter the meaning of any particular act, it is these constants that are still operating and determine why the alteration of context matters.

Dealing with the problem therefore requires a change of tack, since if certain actions do carry stable moral qualities, and yet God can still command whatever He wishes, then the objectionable consequence the critic of divine command theory was looking for here will have been found. The second way to overcome the problem is then to assert that a mere logical possibility of God commanding an evil action should not worry the theist

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<sup>126</sup> Adams, "Ethical Wrongness," p. 323.

any more than the possibility that one's brother, known always to have been good and law-abiding, is actually a serial killer.<sup>127</sup> This means moving away from undermining the notion of unconditional moral essences to pointing at the probabilities of meeting certain properties or attributes. However, this reference to extreme unlikelihood announces a retreat to a different argument — even as ratiocentric thinker like Thomas Aquinas made the same condition. For why else would God have to refrain from ordering certain actions unless the meaning of those actions is constituted by something other than divine decree? This retreat, in other words, signals an admittance of the very thing that the theocentrist is wont to deny, namely, an independent moral order, because they thereby admit that our comprehension of morality forces us to attribute 'essential' normative properties to actions. The answer to this problem would be the particularist epistemology noted above. This makes God the origin and source of morality, as the exemplar and standard of all that is good, without some reference needed to explicate the nature of that goodness.

Another promising line is to back and refute the possibility of good- and bad-in-itself-type moral statuses, as this would take the ground away from under the problem completely. Here the theocentrist has some hope. As we shall see, Mawson's position, for example, appears unable to overcome the is-ought gap, or, at least, it is not clear how it would be able to do so. Nevertheless, this problem is one that applies to the theocentrist too, as it does all ethical theories, and so has no particular advantage in this matter. The problem we wish to cite against here against the opponent of theocentrism is one that is a threat to both theocentrism (as defended by Joyce) and ratiocentrism (as represented by Mawson), unless a way of addressing the ought-is gap is found. However, this problem does, point to the relative contingency of our ideas of good and bad and thus appears to favour the theocentrist via this destabilisation of morality

What remains for the divine command theorist to do, however, having fended off at least one of the main objections, is to demonstrate the theory within the framework of a particular religious tradition as per the relevant theological commitments.<sup>128</sup> But as we

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<sup>127</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p.64.

<sup>128</sup> See Philip L. Quinn, "The Recent Revival of Divine Command Ethics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (1990), pp. 345-365.

have said, Socrates' ratiocentric approach is not ruled out either, and this approach will leave space for offering some substantive idea of how goodness is to be defined.

### **1.3.2 The Predicament of Ratiocentrism**

#### **1.3.2.1 Independent Validity**

Moving on to the problems that face ratiocentrism, we can first mention that of independent validity. Specifically, accepting that morality constitutes an independent standard would mean God is subject to laws that therefore constrain His will, which should be impossible for an omnipotence being. This problem is a formidable one in that it appears we can avoid it only by sacrificing what appears an essential part of morality, that is, objectivity, or an essential part of theology, that is, God's moral authority and sovereignty.

What we have rather liberally been calling ratiocentrism is seen in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas begins by treating morality in relation to the divine attribute of omnipotence. It is within the power of God to do all things, and yet this extends only to things we consider possible. Thus, in order to save the objectivity of morality and the authority and sovereignty of God, he claimed moral principles are akin to logical ones.<sup>129</sup> Since it is absurd to expect the realization of what amounts to a contradiction in terms, the inability to do the logically impossible takes nothing away from God's omnipotence. The creation of square circles, for example, is simply unthinkable; its logical impossibility expresses a basic law about what can coherently be said of reality, meaning that the impossibility is supposed to lie not with the ability of God but the nature of existence itself. Thus Aquinas claims that the validity of morality is like that of logic and therefore both unalterable and inoffensive to either of the aforementioned aspects of theological belief.

It seems, however, that the extent to which this position succeeds depends on the stringency of one's moral and or theological belief. There are two divergent (mutually incompatible) objections why this defence might not hold. Firstly, the claim that to

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (1911; reprint, Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1981), First Part, Question 25, Article 3.

command cruel action is impossible for God seems to refer to a different manner of impossibility than the creation of square circles. Indeed, it does not appear that it is impossible for God to order cruel action at all. For example, it is logically conceivable that God order us to harm small children for no apparent reason, but inconceivable to create square circles. In response, Aquinas says though it is conceivable that God act immorally, such a thing is ‘repugnant to omnipotence’ as it does not agree with perfect action.<sup>130</sup> In making this claim, Aquinas ties God’s omnibenevolence directly to His omnipotence, as if immorality denoted a kind of metaphysical weakness and therefore something unpredictable of God as a perfect being. But such a relation between these two dissimilar divine perfections is bound to be controversial and depends on agreement with Aquinas’ idea of sin. In other words, with Aquinas, morality comes to be subject to laws conceived as absolute and metaphysical, and omnipotence thus entails omnibenevolence.<sup>131</sup> However, these appear to be quite different types of relation, lacking a commensurable element to bind them, and unless a valid connection can be made to tie metaphysics to morality, Aquinas’ position will not hold, and we are limited in what we can say about morality’s modal status.

Secondly, since our understanding of reality and God’s power is limited by our finite minds, there may be possibilities which exceed our powers of comprehension, making it illegitimate to say an action is impossible for God.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps laws of thought, such as the one of non-contradiction, are contingent upon others that we do not have epistemological access to. This would make applying restrictions derived from the laws of thought to directly God illegitimate. That is to say, if logic is only applicable to certain possible worlds, including our own, or only applicable to certain fields and not metaphysical ones pertaining to God, then it would be wrong to hold Him to such laws. What is more, if God can alter the nature of logic and morality, then again Aquinas’ argument will not hold.

Admittedly, this is a speculative point, but it is based on the fact that we have limited philosophical knowledge of God’s existence, and therefore anything that is said about

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<sup>130</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* First Part, Question 25, Article 3.

<sup>131</sup> Michael W. Austin, “Divine Command Theory”, *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, accessed 23.01.2016

<sup>132</sup> George F. Hourani, *Islamic Ethics*, pp. 17-18.



our world is only speculatively applicable to Him. In short, God's reality may be radically different to our own. Thus, for example, if power is of the highest philosophical order, and even truth is therefore a result of its determinations; *a fortiori*, moral truth will be decided by power; and since God is omnipotent, He will determine in what manner its particular form of validity holds (As we shall see below, this would also point towards answering the metaphysical curtailment problem.) In such a context, power is not subject to morality; it is the basis of morality.

The point here is not simply that by of the possible world's argument considered above; where moral truth was shown to depend on what kind of world we live in, but is more radical; a logical law, rather than a law of nature, is what is being considered as alterable and created. One might take exception to this assertion and say that though logic and truth apply to reality and are therefore in a sense dependent upon reality for application, the conditions of truth are not themselves determined by reality. On this view, even if nothing existed, those conditions would still remain valid and exist in some transcendental sense. (This, of course, would still leave us facing an order of truth separated from God and His creation, as in the independent validity problem.) But to what exactly does 'truth itself' refer to if not the conditions that allow logical relations to hold? For fear of falling prey to an Aristotelian third man argument, where we would need to explain the connection between both the truth of particular things and truth itself in reference to a third form of truth, and these, in turn, by another and so on *ad infinitum*,<sup>133</sup> we have rather to draw the line somewhere and say that truth, like the Platonic forms Aristotle contested, does not have a separate existence. Rather God created truth to the same degree He created reality, that is to say, *ex nihilo*.

But nevertheless, a problem seems to apply to this idea of truth also, leaving the claim that the truth of the relations of logical validity and soundness exist in a way that is independent of God's creation. Just like it is held impossible for God to create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it, the poverty of the omnipotence paradox appears here too. Various theologians have rejected such paradoxes since they only arise if one assumes a

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<sup>133</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 990b17-1079a13, 1039a2; *Sophistic Refutations*, 178b36 ff.

no-limits understanding of omnipotence.<sup>134</sup> It applies again to truth. It appears impossible to create the validity of the truth of His being without already making use of the truth of validity. That is to say, God cannot create the truth of His existence simply by the fact of his existence, as truth is a property of propositions and its validity exists according to independent relations. By analogy, then, just the principles of truth cannot be created as such, then neither can the principles of morality.

Having noted that there are two different views possible here, we may conclude that the best position will be determined by debates outside of theological-ethics and in metaphysics and epistemology in relation to a theory of truth. Thus, for example, the correspondence theory of truth, where truth is described as a relational property, is often associated with metaphysical realism, while coherentist, verificationist and other theories of truth, such as those of the deflationary type, are associated with idealism, anti-realism and relativism, such as the case might be.<sup>135</sup> But perhaps more importantly, the debate here will be determined on whether one holds morality to hold objectively. For if one does, then they must explain God's relation to this objectivity. That is not to say that a theocentric theory will be impossible on these lines. This takes us to the next section below.

### **1.3.2.2 Metaphysical Curtailment**

The metaphysical curtailment problem is perhaps more complicated because it points to issues more metaphysical than ethical in character. Specifically, if God did not create morality, then the extent of His power is curtailed. How morality is created is rather a theological issue and how it is constituted is also a philosophical one, with questions pursued outside of theological-ethics. Naturally, advocates of a causal divine command theory have offered arguments that overcome this problem. Thomas Morris offers an interesting argument describing how truth itself depends directly on God. He states that as the absolute Creator, the very existence of abstract objects and more importantly their status of truth is dependent on God. This would then include the existence of an

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<sup>134</sup> See P. T. Geach, "Omnipotence," in *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, 3rd ed., eds. William L. Rowe and William J. Wainwright, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 63–75.

<sup>135</sup> See, Michael Glanzberg, "Truth", SEP (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), sect. 4. Realism and anti-realism, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/truth/>>.

‘objective, unalterable and necessary’ form of moral truth.<sup>136</sup> But what would the details of this dependence be specifically? Michael Loux treads this path and provides an explanation based on the concept of God’s omniscience and necessary truth. While with humans our beliefs are dependent on objective existence, for God it is the reverse: ‘the facts are necessarily as they are because God has the relevant strong beliefs.’<sup>137</sup> Of course, the beliefs humans hold are not always true, but with God the truth correlates to His beliefs, with a technical distinction included to explain necessary truths as dependent on strong divine beliefs, that is to say, truths whose contrary is not even entertained by God. So,  $2 + 2$  is necessarily 4, because of the beliefs that God has. Quinn considers the application of this theory to morality to find that it leads to positive support for divine command ethics. Specifically, God’s beliefs about what people should and should not do results in the existence of moral facts. In this way, morality itself is dependent on God’s will, for which reason the theory gains support from the doctrine of divine sovereignty. Quinn goes on then to provide arguments connecting divine beliefs with divine commands on the basis of the doctrine of divine simplicity, such that God’s doxastic states encompasses His will, and hence all His commands. Thus, he attempts to show how this doctrine supports divine command theory specifically.<sup>138</sup> While the theory may explain how moral behavior is obligatory to humanity, it does not however tells us much about how morality is obligatory to God. It does, however, eschew the need of a Platonic realm to explain the existence of morality.

But the rationalist need not assume such a Platonic realm, and it is natural, to suppose that morality is not a created thing, but exists as an objectivity that holds like logic, that is, in way that is distinct from existence, then divine power would not be threatened. The problem depends on what metaphysical commitments ones theory of truth and objectivity has. For one thing, as suggested by the possible worlds argument put forward by Joyce (and also Mawson, below), the kind of world we live in will determine what is moral; what is moral in one possible world might not be moral in

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<sup>136</sup> Thomas V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 163-171.

<sup>137</sup> Michael J. Loux, "Toward an Aristotelian Theory of Abstract Objects," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy II*, eds. P. A. French, T. E. Uehling and H. K. Wettstein (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 510.

<sup>138</sup> Quinn, "Divine Command Theory," pp. 359-363.

another due to different physical laws. To illustrate, Joyce cites four different contexts in comparison with a horrific murder. In the first, the horrific murder will save hundreds of innocent lives, in the second, the murder is an accident, in the third, it's commanded by God and in the fourth, the victim goes to heaven and is grateful for being killed. Just as in the murder case of Euthyphro's father, the morality of the situation appears to be dependent upon the natural and metaphysical laws, personal intentions and consequences of action. For example, in some distant possible worlds torture is impossible because of a metaphysical law that renders all actions intended to inflict pain or harm instead deliver pleasure or benefit, or, for example, all humans are of the highest moral character so that torture is not necessary or possible. Yet, a response in this direction would miss the point. For the issue at hand is not about the variables that moral interpretations are subject to but about whether interpretations hold objectively or not. If moral objectivity is refuted, then the way is open for God by His commands to make torture something good. So how can this objectivity be refuted? Perhaps objectivity holds, but contingently as a part of creation. Alternatively, and perhaps more plausibly, appeal to the epistemological is-ought gap could signify a breach between objectivity and morality itself. Such a move steers toward subjectivism, supporting those thinkers that believe morality is nothing but based on human inclinations or the command of God.

The assumption here is that if logical laws are created, they are therefore contingent. Even accepting this, we may still ask if they are therefore alterable. Is there any possible world where the logical laws we know to hold necessarily do not apply? There are two possibilities: One is that God could alter logic so that the laws that hold might be other than what they are; the other, is that they are contingent in themselves but necessary in relation to their causes. In other words, they follow necessarily from contingent acts of creation, and only given the reality we live in do the logical laws we know hold necessarily. We have not seen any such account offered in the discussion above, yet such a line of investigation is surely significant to what theological-ethical position one adopts, and, what is more, if logic is not something that can be created, then the metaphysical curtailment problem will not arise at all.

It appears while the divine command theorist has no problem making God the ultimate condition of moral obligation, their opponents hold to the idea of intrinsic moral significance. As we shall see, an advantage of the alternative solutions offered by Clark and Poortenga and Mawson lies precisely in their softening the rationalistic strictness with which the validity of morality applies in the ratiocentric positions considered above. Rather than transcendent rational laws, the two both point to the particular features of our world in order to understand how the validity of morality holds. What this does, or at least, is meant to achieve, is leave God as morality's author and sovereign. This is more likely to work, it seems, when proposals of absolute or necessary moral laws are dismissed in favour of contingent ones, for in that way God's commands are not rivalled by an immutable and independent moral system.

### **1.3.2.3 Arbitrariness**

Of a more fundamental nature is that threatens us here is the arbitrariness problem we initially designated as facing the theocentrist alone, bearing some support to Alston's statement that regardless of whether the solution depends on God or a principle, arbitrariness will follow.<sup>139</sup> The threat is due to the fact that if existence precedes truth in such a way that the latter depends upon creation like all else, then it too is contingent and, ultimately, arbitrary.

Alston's assessment here appears to contrast with Joyce's conclusion that taking away the goodness of an object as the reason for divine approval does not mean God has no good reasons whatsoever. For Joyce, some other manner of calculation will grant God's approval a specific pattern.<sup>140</sup> Of course, some order is naturally guaranteed with a ratiocentric theory and so is not a threat there. In short, whether we adopt a theo- or ratiocentric theory, Alston says arbitrariness will result either way, Joyce says arbitrariness follows with neither.

However, two points need to be made here. Firstly, the arbitrariness that Alston points to is of a special class. In making the case for divine command theory as strong as it can be, he in effect shows us its ultimate weakness; the problem which remains after all

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<sup>139</sup> Alston, "Divine Command Theorists," pp. 303-326.

<sup>140</sup> Joyce, "Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 57.

others have been removed: its arbitrariness. The idea that we can avoid arbitrariness perhaps stems from the belief that if the source of morality is from something within itself rather than an 'outside' power such as God, then it would hold a genuine integrity. However, much like Alston says, the first instantiation, or rather, the source, of morality will always be outside and arbitrary, precisely because it is the first instantiation and there is no preconceived notion, law or criterion of what it is. This type of arbitrariness should be distinguished from other more particular types, such as those which result from lack of purpose (*telos*), law, or reason, relative to a certain system of thought. Events that involve such a feature display only limited arbitrariness, while the basis for the charge of arbitrariness in the case of morality's source is the mere conceivability that it could have been another way from what it is; in essence, a lack of necessity in the most radical terms. That is, while limited arbitrariness depends on the lack of a certain principle, radical arbitrariness depends on the *tout court* possibility of such lack.

The second point continues directly from the first. The crux of the matter being that the philosophical usefulness of radical arbitrariness seems suspect precisely because it appears 'supra-contextual' and can be applied to almost all contexts and things as well as the fact that it depends upon the postulation of absolute necessity. If something is applicable in all instances then it becomes a ubiquitous feature of reality rather than a distinguishing feature any particular that can be an object of either criticism or commendation. What is more, to state, as Alston does, that things moral are always ultimately arbitrary is likely the result of a confusion about morality and the epistemological claims that can be made about it, since to call something arbitrary in such a manner assumes the possibility of absolute necessity by way of cause, reason, or principle, or at least that we could grasp if such a thing were so. Even the claim of arbitrariness is relative; something must be arbitrary according to some criterion, and the one used here is devoid of substance. So we would be better off changing our frames of reference. More specifically, it is notable that Alston does not bother to explicate goodness 'in-itself', as deontologists are wont to do, and essentially prioritizes reality (in the form of God) over rationality. Without a proof of goodness in itself, however, there is no grounds to posit absolute necessity of a moral kind. Therefore, we must suffice with contingent necessities, and contingent moral validity.

### 1.3.3 The Predicament of Alternative Solutions

As noted above, the dilemma limits us to only two options; if the disjunctive premise that limits the choice between two mutually exclusive options is false then what we have is a *false* dilemma. As for a *moral* dilemma, that is where both options are problematic or undesirable, but not therefore impossible. In short a dilemma denotes a disjunctive choice.<sup>141</sup> But is the crucial question of *Euthyphro* a genuine dilemma? The only way to establish either of the options are possible or impossible, exclusive or inclusive, is philosophical work, and *Euthyphro* omits the possibility that morality has two (or more) different but simultaneous sources that are relatively independent.

The possibility of more than one source is not something philosophers and theologians have ignored. Accordingly, some philosophers have offered solutions that tread between the theo- and ratiocentric, though perhaps closer to one than the other. Thus, broadly speaking, there are three types of position at hand: theocentric, ratiocentric, or some union of the two. These might be called ‘moderate’ or ancilarist versions of either position. We call these theories, ‘ancilarist’ because they propose that morality derives from an ‘ancillary’ to God’s revelation. This will influence the way epistemological issues will apply to them, and how well they are positioned to respond to epistemological requirements. That is to say, the adjustment or affinity of such positions to the claims of morality’s status will not depend only on reference to the status of the laws that rule reality as we know it. Rather, it may be achieved more directly by questioning the strictness in which reason can be said to apply in general and or to morality in particular. Instead of divine commands, perhaps morality is not ultimately based on logic or reason, but rather on something else, or other things in addition.

If rational proofs constitute ones basis for making revelation the sole or main source for moral doctrine then one is a moderate theocentric, and if one believes reason is the sole or main moral guide for scriptural reasons then one is still theocentric.

One response to the dilemma of a moderate ratiocentric stripe is to argue God’s creation of the human with a specific design entails that a certain moral system is most suited to

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<sup>141</sup> Cf. Joyce, who claims that a dilemma denotes a disjunctive where neither choice is possible (“Euthyphro Dilemma”, p. 50).

our nature. Because of this foundation, morality is coherent, stable and not open to arbitrary changes.<sup>142</sup> This position has two advantages. Firstly, by tying morality in a substantial way to human nature, it avoids the prospect of profound arbitrariness both to what God will command and to what can be accepted as moral. Secondly, on the same basis, it avoids treating morality as an exclusively rational or logical body of knowledge that discounts the particulars of human nature and human existence from the outset. Such particulars, though accidental to morality on some views, would seem to be significant to moral experience.

Nevertheless, having designed us a certain way, though it may seem that God would reveal a moral code in harmony with that design, there seems little reason to say He must do. Indeed, it may be part of the divine plan to ask of humans to do things against their nature, or at least, things that do not come easy to them, for reasons of a higher order, which we are informed about externally by revelation and are able to comprehend. In other words, there is an assumption that our physical and mental design is the sole basis of morality, yet there is no proof of this. One might object that God commanding humans to do things opposed to their nature would mean Him commanding things that from a human point of view amount to evil. But if the divine command theorist is right in saying there is no basis to morality other than God's decree, then this objection is a non-starter. Actually, even if we allow that our design does come with some moral obligations, it is wrong to assume the way we are designed constitutes a form of divine moral decree more basic than the divine word. What is more, the task of interpreting what moral system, if any, follows from our nature would not seem to be a simple matter. This is because, firstly, any basis to such interpretation in essence becomes the moral principle we follow before our design is even considered, and, secondly, the results of interpretation will be underdetermined by our design.

Even more fundamentally, it leaves unanswered the question of why we humans were created with our given nature and not another. Without an account to answer this, a charge of arbitrariness remains; there must be something of special value to human nature to justify the attending morality. Yet any answer in this direction has two likely

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<sup>142</sup> Kelly James Clark and Anne Poortenga, *The Story of Ethics*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003).



drawbacks. Firstly, it would seem vital to locate value ‘in-itself’, unconditional goodness, independent of human nature and the human condition; the as yet uncertain Holy Grail of deontological moral theory, and something we have already suggested should be dismissed above. On the other hand, there are reasons to dismiss such a charge of arbitrariness as constituting a genuine problem, as we have seen above, by reference to distinction between limited and radical arbitrariness, only one of which is reasonably acceptable as a sign of deficiency in a theory.

Moving on, therefore, to the second issue, the request would seem also to take us into theology, rather than philosophy, as here it would become necessary to understand the divine plan, the best resource for which is most likely revelation; while to say philosophically why humans were created one way rather than another is at best a supplement to a theological position based on revelation rather than an independent enquiry. In short, philosophy here can only serve theology and is unlikely to be persuasive to non-theists. This suggests that our concerns should be of a more fundamental character, not just to establish some common ground for dialogue in ethics, though that is no doubt important, but because what is of most fundamental significance should be the concern of the philosopher in the first place.

In contrast to Clark and Poortenga, instead of forging a third option and softening the ratiocentric claim, Mawson simultaneously goes for the two options already on the table, attempting to open a place for both theo- and ratiocentric ideas to occupy. In other words, Mawson rejects the either or version of the question, seeking the benefits of both orientations, though risking the dangers of both horns of the dilemma too.<sup>143</sup> On the one hand, and in a way reminiscent of Aquinas, Mawson proposes that moral laws hold with as much necessity as those of logic, while, on the other, he claims all those moral laws that do not hold such necessity constitute a category wherein all other divine commands are to be located. The advantage sought by this position is to protect God’s moral commands from charges of arbitrariness, while constraining neither His power nor action nor sovereignty.

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<sup>143</sup> Mawson, “The Euthyphro Dilemma,” *Think* 7 (2008), p. 26.

To this end, he refers to the contents of some certain concepts we have. Mawson claims that some concepts “entail of logical necessity that the thing picked out is bad.” Agonizing pain is one example cited, it is bad in-itself, or, in other words, bad in all possible worlds. Circumstances where agonizing pain must be suffered for some better end, as, for example, in a medical operation, do not constitute counter examples, since the pain is but an unfortunate accident to task of treating an injury. Hence, pain is bad even in exceptional circumstances, and it follows, therefore, that things like torture, for example, cannot be good in any possible world.<sup>144</sup> The same thing is said to hold with regard to lying. Mawson argues that aiming to attain true beliefs is an essential feature of human beings.<sup>145</sup> If that is right, then it is not a logically contingent feature of humans that they aim at true beliefs and thus we cannot but think that true beliefs are good for people. This therefore rules out lying as a good or moral action.<sup>146</sup> By this means, Mawson seems to succeed in neatly tying down what we can call ‘bad’ in an unconditional sense, by taking a morally bad action and fixing its consequences and intentions in order to commit God to moral laws on a logical basis.<sup>147</sup>

As with Aquinas, however, Mawson requires a theory to show that moral laws have the same kind of innocuous objective validity that logic does. The first thing to point out is that the examples he uses appear to presume what they wish to prove. Note the description ‘agonizing’ pain. This prevents us from saying that some pains are constitutive of pleasure, for then it would not really be pain – and that seems the point of calling pain agonizing. But, as with any analytic statement, the predicate concept is contained in the subject concept. The concept ‘murder’, for example, already presupposes a degree of moral reprehensibility, quite unlike the concept of ‘killing’, though in strict physical terms they refer to the same thing. That leaves us begging the question of why the moral judgement accompanying the concept exists in the first place. The result is that it does not appear we have actually arrived at any knowledge about the

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<sup>144</sup> Mawson, “The Euthyphro Dilemma,” p. 27.

<sup>145</sup> Mawson, “The Euthyphro Dilemma,” p. 28.

<sup>146</sup> There may a significant distinction between the accuracy of these two examples of pain and lying, but we shall skip it for now to continue with the current point of discussion.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Joyce, “Euthyphro Dilemma,” p. 64. In response to the modal vulnerability problem, Joyce noted the virtual impossibility of God commanding something immoral, while stating it was still logically, but only logically, possible for Him to do so.

actual world, or in this case, any knowledge of morality, but only what we initially started with, which was a presupposed value judgement.

The second point is merely an extension from this: In assuming that pain is *morally* bad, rather than just, say, physically unpleasant, Mawson is clearly making a jump from an 'is' statement to an 'ought' statement, and therefore risking the fallacy so famously detected by David Hume, Scottish empiricist philosopher and advocate of a descriptive utilitarian theory of morality. A reason must be given 'for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.'<sup>148</sup> Indeed, Mawson's assumption here in attempting to demonstrate pain is bad appears to be utilitarian. In any case, he does not give an argument for this association, but the point is that any such association is only as powerful as the moral theory which lies behind it.<sup>149</sup> And when he says that God could not make torture good in just the same way that God could not make bachelors married, he is surely purporting a tenuous analogy, wishing to traverse a distinction between natural laws and logical ones all the while carrying moral baggage.

A third observation is that we are restricted here from the beginning to what *our* moral intuitions tell us. But these are relative. They may vary from person to person (a 'murder' to one person might be a 'killing' to someone else; 'torture' to one, 'enhanced interrogation' to another; a 'lie', a 'miscommunication'), as they might from one rational species to another (humans might not be the only rational creatures that exist, and there is no guarantee other rational creatures will view things as we do). On the one hand, we seem limited to what we can intuit though there may be other kinds of moral truth we cannot, and, on the other, our intuitions may lack objectivity. If we make our intuitions the standard of morality, how can we show them to be truthful? What gives us grounds to say that they are? What is more, some intuitions conflict with others. For example, the need to speak the truth, might conflict with that of avoiding pain. It follows, therefore, that we have to determine a way of justifying and organising these

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<sup>148</sup> David Hume *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L. ed. A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Book III, Part I, Section I, pp. 469-70.

<sup>149</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 27.

intuitions if we want to bring objectivity to the moral prepositions of each individual person and human thought in general.

This is clearly meant to solve the independent validity problem in a way reminiscent of Aquinas. It does this while assuming that the laws of truth and logic are not subject to alteration. However, if the hypothesis (touched upon above) that just like the world the truth too was created *ex nihilo*, or even exists contingent in itself but necessary in relation to its causes akin to the way Avicenna proposed the world itself existed pre-ternally alongside God, then such efforts will have been unnecessary.<sup>150</sup> The matter regards the ontological status of truth itself and constitutes a subject of central importance in the history of Islamic and Christian philosophy.<sup>151</sup> The point is that if all necessities are but a creation of God, then God is not Himself subject to those necessities in the same way we are, if at all, and this means that the status of their validity limited to reality as we know it and or relative to our finite minds. Admittedly, doing away with our intuitions would alienate us quite radically from our most fundamental moral beliefs — but that is what part of understanding what morality is might involve. Perhaps it is a mystery like nature is to the same degree, in a radical but not limited sense, and we are just observers of truth as much as participants in its cognitive reality. Schopenhauer observed how a cause can be established for each particular effect of a thing to explain the precise time and place of its occurrence, and that there is yet no cause to explain the particular manner of its action or its action in general.<sup>152</sup> The same could be said about reason and logic in regard to morality, even of the most rationalistic kind. Why we think the way we do in moral terms might be explained in a limited sense, but there will remain a permanent mystery to its nature. In any case, it appears that as owners of finite human minds we cannot recognise logical laws with any surety that those laws are themselves are not the mere product of finite minds and or a physical reality to which God is not subject.

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<sup>150</sup> op. cit. Ibn Sina, *al-Shifa', al-Ilahiyat*, vol. 2 , p.404; Ibn Sina, *al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Vol. 3, p. 97.

<sup>151</sup> See, John McGinnis, “The Eternity of the World: Proofs and Problems in Aristotle, Avicenna, and Aquinas,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 88 (2): 271-288 (2014).

<sup>152</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, Vol. 1, trans. and ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 200.

A final point now turns to those values that Mawson says lack necessity. Mawson posits two kinds of necessity. Conceptual necessities that hold before any divine creative act, and another set that hold only after God's creative will has been exercised to create a specific set of natural necessities. The first set cannot, however, be said to constrain God, because as abstract necessities they are but an expression of logical laws.<sup>153</sup> As for the second set, Mawson regards them as substantive moral truths and the direct result of God's creative will; logically necessary consequences of contingent facts.<sup>154</sup> So besides the necessities that hold pre-creation validity are others that hold post-creation. These are the claims that it would not be counterintuitive to suggest could have been other than good (or bad, such as the case may be). For example, unlike torture, perhaps passing a high voltage of electricity through a person could have been good. It is certainly not logically impossible that it could have been, had humans been created differently.<sup>155</sup>

Categorising moral concepts as holding such necessity was an effort to protect God's commands from the charge of arbitrariness. In doing this, Mawson appears to have established a means of explaining the reason that the radical arbitrariness problem is harmless by making morally irrelevant any particular question of why human beings were created one way rather than another. This is because such a question does not pertain to the basic pre-creation laws that are the foundation of morality post-creation, and therefore the charge has no leverage against his position. In fact Mawson states clearly that for everything other than what is logically required before creation, there is nothing to say it is good apart from the fact God willed it.<sup>156</sup> While this may seem to beg the question why God wills this world and not another, according to Mawson's theory such particulars are irrelevant to the morality of the created world.

One might object, however, that God's command cannot be anything but in line with some conceptual necessities because the laws of nature created by Him constitute a form of order. To subject every aspect of a given religious tradition to such a strict criterion threatens to oppose a large section of practices and their particulars. If one

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<sup>153</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," pp. 29-30.

<sup>154</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 32.

<sup>155</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 30.

<sup>156</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 32.

could justify prayers, then what about the specific number that is required? The same will apply to charity. We seem to lack a way to gauge or confirm any particular amount that God commands is given. The attempt to avoid arbitrariness, therefore, does not seem to have been entirely successful because God's commands range beyond those that Mawson identifies as having conceptual necessity. If ten percent of one's income is the required amount of charity to be paid each year, does this follow from some particular natural law? And if it does not, there appears no way for us to call any such particulars moral. This is the kind of problem that deontological theories face generally; a utilitarian may happily thrash out calculations to solve it. Admittedly, this criticism could be made of many an ethical theory, but unless a way of evaluating these particulars is found, then Mawson's position may still suffer from the more serious 'limited' arbitrariness noted above. Without the kind of justification that Mawson attaches to the morality that arises necessarily from the fact of our being human beings, it appears that there is no kind of justification left for any other type of moral proposition, be it divine or not.

On the reverse side of the coin is a more serious criticism which strikes at the basic reliance Mawson's theory appears to have on conceptual necessities alone. We may begin by observing that the definition of what a substantive moral truth is remains rather negative, being something predetermined by abstract concepts. Thus, torture is wrong in itself (or, at least, partly because pain is bad in-itself). The particulars of *how* torture is inflicted are contingent and lack moral significance, but these particulars are evil as a logical and necessary consequence of *what* our physical form and the concept of torture itself are.<sup>157</sup> The moral significance elicited by an action is due to a confluence of contingency as well as necessity; so we find three main components to the way morality stacks up in Mawson's account. We can express this composition as follows:

#### Conceptual Moral Necessities

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<sup>157</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 31.

## Contingent Natural Facts

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## Substantive Moral Necessities

The substantive moral necessities do not possess conceptual necessity in a pure logical sense.<sup>158</sup> The burden of moral significance is on the conceptual necessities; they alone carry the source of moral laws. What this means is that the substantive moral facts are ultimately just particular realisations of the conceptual moral necessities. They are not good or bad in-themselves, or, in other words, in all possible worlds. They are, in short, merely the material expression of moral significance, and of derivative status. Thus, the theory seems to collapse entirely into a ratiocentric theory, because the source of morality is made up of conceptual necessities alone, over which God has no influence. So while, on one side of the coin, God commands too much when it comes to the particulars of religious practice, there is nothing really left for God to do when it comes to morality, on the other. The result is that the independent validity problem arises in two ways at once. In the first instance, in terms of non-sovereignty, as God is deemed unable to command whatever He wills, and in second instance, in terms of non-authority, as God is deemed no longer able to act as the basis of morality. As we have seen, due to our particular moral intuitions this problem plagues theocentric theories too, but it is particularly acute with ratiocentric ones, of which Mawson's theory now appears to be.

One form of validity that might be offered to attend God's commands and grant them a unique form of authority is the omnibenevolence of God, perhaps realised via divine love. This was Adams' proposal.<sup>159</sup> However, without a way of formulising what exactly the moral contents of divine love are and how it is not arbitrary, the theory will remain deficient.

Having set up a kind of moral order in separation to God, as with any ratiocentric position, there is also now the possibility of a more or less direct confrontation with the moral teachings of any given religious tradition. If the particular teachings of revelation

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<sup>158</sup> Mawson, "The Euthyphro Dilemma," p. 29.

<sup>159</sup> Adams "Metaethics Modified Again," pp. 128–143; Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, pp. 252–258.

are found to be contrary to the moral laws or necessities presented by the ethical principle or principles in question, they will be either unwarranted or even evil. This is a particular instance of the arbitrariness problem. In such situations, one might respond that any dubious moral teachings found to exist in a given religious tradition must be the result of erroneous understandings and in need of sound reinterpretation. However, to what extent such clarifications will be plausible is a matter decided on a case by case basis and beyond the scope of this study.

#### **1.4 Plausibility**

There are two fronts on which any theory must be able to stand up to scrutiny if it is to gain the acceptance as a real contender by any student of ethics. The first concerns internal integrity and the second external explanative strength, and the latter cannot be decided except by a consideration of the theory's main rivals. Therefore, a final problem faces all ethical theories even when they do not suffer from any internal contradiction, incoherence, or rocky foundation and thus prove able to stand on their own feet. More specifically, in order to succeed an ethical theory must ultimately be convincing and preferable to all others as an explanation of morality and our particular moral beliefs and inclinations. For in its own terms, its own internal logic, a theory may be entirely defensible, but how it will do against contrary explanations of morality as a defining aspect of human awareness.

How and why exactly one theory is preferred to another is likely to have something to do with or theological inclinations in addition to our intellectual orientation more generally. Under Aristotle's influence, Quinn says that merely refuting the main objections and leaving common opinions undisturbed, is sufficient for a successful theory.<sup>160</sup> This opinion is fair enough, but it would be unfair to say that theocentric theories will automatically become the preferred metaethical theory on a religious believer. Theocentric theories have rarely been the main-stream theory favoured by philosophers of any particular theological or philosophical tradition, perhaps, significantly, with the exception of Islam.<sup>161</sup> But the point is to say that theocentric

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<sup>160</sup> Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics," p. 353.

<sup>161</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 59.



theories will have to make a strong case to win adherents even amongst religious believers.

So, with little grounds to prefer one theory over the other in this matter, neither one has to relinquish their position on the basis of the problem of arbitrariness. But of course, one must ask if there is an explanative advantage to including God or a principle as supreme. It is said that when French physicist Pierre-Simon Laplace presented his work on the system of the universe to Napoleon, the First Consul asked its author how he had not managed to mention its Creator. The physicist curtly replied, ‘I had no need of that hypothesis.’ The ‘hypothesis’ referred to was Newtonian one of divine intervention to keep the universe stable. The exchange was shortly after reported to Italian astronomer Joseph-Louis Lagrange, to which he countered: “Ah, it is a fine hypothesis; it explains many things.” The student of theological-ethics confronts a similar situation, and must ask whether there are ‘many things’ the theocentrist is able to explain by making God part of his moral theory that the ratiocentrist cannot. Perhaps it simply allows the theologian to remain faithful to the sacred texts of his religion, depending on which religion that is. Thus, for example, Quinn cites the case where God orders Abraham to slay his son Isaac, contrary to the divine prohibition on murder. He notes that three Christian thinkers (St. Augustine, Andreas de Novo Castra and Thomas Aquinas) view the case of showing God as a lawgiver, capable of determining exceptions by His divine decree. Wierenga overcomes the problem by a rather different means. He states that via a distinction between God’s command and God’s will, we may conclude that though God commanded Isaac’s killing, He did not will it, and that the command was rather made for a different reason, that is to say, that Abraham only prepare to kill Isaac.<sup>162</sup>

We may admit, however, that though sacred texts are open to interpretative differences, certain texts are likely to encourage one theory over another. What is more, the theocentrist and the ratiocentrist are likely to cite different principles as explanative of morality in accord with the concerns they must address and the resources they are allowed to draw upon by their respective backgrounds. A theory that cites love as the basis of morality, as in situational ethics, is perhaps easier for a theocentrist than

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<sup>162</sup> Wierenga, “Divine Command Theory,” p. 390.

someone else who must refer to and account for the mixed assemblage of finite and worldly faculties possessed by mankind.

## 1.5 The *Husn-Qubh* Issue in Islamic Thought

### 1.5.1 The Tale of Three Brothers and Divine Justice

A famous eschatological discussion related in the Islamic literature speaks of three brothers, one of whom is good, another bad, and one of whom that died in childhood. In the hereafter, the first brother gains entry into heaven, the second enters hell, and the third is in limbo. According to the story, the third brother is considered as asking God if he can enter heaven alongside his righteous sibling, the first brother. The request is denied, however, because he did not perform righteous deeds or avoid committing sin, having been insufficiently grown for the responsibility of obeying sharia law. The brother is considered to protest: Had I been given the time, I too could have been good. God, however, foresaw his becoming evil and entering hell, so to spare him from that terrible fate caused him to die early. At this point, crying from the hellfire the second brother is now considered as demanding to know why he was not given an early death too and also saved from hell. But, troublingly, no answer is forthcoming.<sup>163</sup>

The account is given as the contents of a discussion between Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī and his teacher Abū ‘Alī Muhammad al-Jubbā‘ī. It depicts the point of al-Ash‘arī’s fateful break with the school as the student questions his teacher and reveals a deficiency in Mu’tazilī thought.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, Watt states the account is more likely to have contained a criticism of the Bagdadi Mu’tazilī’s by their Basrian counterparts.<sup>165</sup> Watt’s regard of the tale as originally being an inter-Mu’tazilī criticism most likely stems from the fact that it highlights a problem with a specific doctrine held by the Bagdadi members of the school, namely, that claiming the obligation of God to do what is best (*al-aṣlah*) for each human individual. But, of course, the implications of the criticism contained in the tale above appear to go much further than refuting the *aṣlah* doctrine and right to the heart of reasons ability to grasp divine justice altogether. This

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<sup>163</sup> Ibn, Asākir *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī*, Damascus, 1347 A.H., pp. 38 f.

<sup>164</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 210.

<sup>165</sup> Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p. 67.

is clear because abandoning the doctrine of *aṣlah* does not remove the basic difficulty of explaining how the divine justice could *ever* be possible in the first place, given the nature of the theological conditions of human trial. Saying that a child, for example, will go to heaven because of their innocence, means they would essentially get a free ticket to heaven, while others live entire lives of trial and hardship to get the same reward. In short, the consequences are profound and threaten the very possibility of ultimate justice being realized for the theist. This will unravel any chance of laying hold on an overarching principle to account for the conditions and discrepancies regarding the tests and rewards we are believed to receive from God.

The issue that the above conversation expresses is not exactly equivalent to the one Socrates put to Euthyphro, but it shows a comparable concern with the objectivity of justice in relation to God, and one that ultimately impacts on how good and bad are to be defined. Unlike the Islamic conception of God, the gods of ancient Greece were not believed to be perfect beings. Socrates is well known to have disliked stories such as Homer's that portrayed them doing questionable things, but that does not deny there were multiple Greek gods or that they were known to have different views on things, as Socrates himself points out in *Euthyphro*.<sup>166</sup> Therefore, what the Islamic, and Abrahamic context in general, adds to theological-ethics is a question of final coherency between two distinct orders or levels through the addition of a single divine entity that is also the ultimate source of a revelation pregnant with moral significance. Of course, a resolution to the matter would depend, to some degree, on whether the body of moral teachings is coherent regardless of whether it is believed to descend from a single God or not, because coherency denotes unity, even if that unity is one extended across different beings or objects. But in monotheism there is no question of an extended group of divine beings cohering through a unified moral system; there is just one God to consider as morality's possible source.

With the matter of morality itself, however, things are different. Morality might be internally disparate in nature, or it might not. It might spring directly from God alone, or it might not. In fact, Muslim scholars accepted that revelation contained teachings not themselves logical in appearance or mutually congruent. For example, one wipes the top

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<sup>166</sup> Plato, *Euth.*, 8a-c.

of the sock (*mash*) rather than the bottom when making ritual ablution and unlike her free counterpart, the slave woman is not required to cover her hair though she may be beautiful.<sup>167</sup> These are particulars concerning ritual and law, but the law might still contain an overarching moral harmony, and this matter has to different ends been explored by various Muslim scholars via reference to the objectives of the revealed law (*maqāsid al-sharīah*).<sup>168</sup>

There seems to be two issues here, one of morality itself forming a coherent whole, and another, the relation between God and morality being coherent. In this matter there are two basic possibilities: either morality denotes a unified and coherent body of propositions or it does not. The bottom line seems to be that if ultimate justice will always be allusive, it makes us wonder what justice and morality really is. The matter depends on how justice is defined. If morality is coherent in itself as a first-order entity, the prospect of God's relation to it being coherent would also seem close at hand, for a rationally intelligible morality would seem to imply that a rational principle will explain not just morality, but theological-ethics as well. And the prospect is further supported if revelation also displays a coherent body of moral teachings. In reality, however, the interrelation of the first- and second-orders cannot be settled in such a direct way. In fact, the two denote quite separate types of affirmation. That is to say, a rational system revealed by God does not logically imply that God is morally rational. It can still be asked, for example: Is moral coherency due to God or not? Or: Is God's revelation of a rationalistic morality an act based on reason itself? That is to say, the existence of moral coherency does not explain God's moral status.

If morality is not coherent in itself, the result is the same. God's relation to a discordant body of knowledge can only be coherent on a second-order level. What is more, moral discordance in general does not necessarily denote support for a theocentric theory. This is because a principle need not necessarily result in a rationally explicable body of

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<sup>167</sup> See, for example, Abdul Ghani Al-Ghunaimī al-Maydānī, *Al-Lubāb fī Sharh Al-Kitāb*, ed. Bashar Bakri Arrabi, Damascus: Maktab al-Umayyah, 2003, Kitāb al-Tahārah, Bab al-mashī 'ala khuffayn; Muhammad Ameen Ibn Ābideen ash-Shāmī, *Radd al-Mukhtār alā al-Dur al-Mukhtār*, (Beirut, Dar al-Fikr, 1992), Vol. 1, Matlab fī satr al-awra.

<sup>168</sup> Abū al-Maali al-Juwainī, *al-Burhān fī Usūl al-Fiqh*, Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, n.d. ; Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Mustasfā min 'ilm al-usūl*, (Cairo: Maktabat al-Jundī, n.d.); Abū Ishāq Al-Shātībī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt fī Usūl al-Sharīa*, (al-Khubar, al-Mamlakah al-'Arabīyah al-Sa'ūdīyah: Dār Ibn 'Affān, 1997).

propositions. Perhaps the source of morality is a confluence of various principles which together form a kind of mutually sustaining tension, or it may be a single principle that leads to multiple and divergent logical results. In any case, the point is that morality need not be rationally explicable in order to remain real or valid, unless morality's existence can be proven to depend on reason in such terms. Either way, there will remain the same irrelation in regards to answering the question of whether God is or is not the source of morality as would follow the discovery of moral coherence, because of the gap between first- and second-order ethics. Truly, a second-order explanation of morality is not really a moral explanation at all.

In short, regardless of whether morality is coherent or not, we will need a specifically second-order resolution; an epistemological, metaphysical or some other kind of philosophical explanation to clarify the relation between God and morality. And as the tale of the three brothers demonstrates, in this regard we cannot count the afterlife as a kind of second-order failsafe for the wrongs of this world. This is because the afterlife is not a second-order entity. In Islam, the life of this world and the afterlife are but different stages on a *single* journey; deficiency in one must be measured together with reward in the other. This means a final assessment or explanation must be given of justice *beyond* the proclaimed outcome to be realized by divine judgement and heaven and hell.

### **1.5.2 Ash'arī versus Mu'tazilī**

Understanding the respective strengths of the various Islamic schools on *ḥusn* and *qubh* depends in part on understanding their place within Islām specifically. Religion comes with its own particular doctrine and sources of legal and ethical knowledge. This makes theological thought different from philosophy in general and religions different from each other in particular. What constitutes a major difference between Islām and Christianity, for instance, is a vast body of information regarding the Prophet that is available to Muslim scholars (*'ulamā*) to utilize, address and acknowledge in their scholarly endeavours. Recall the fact that in almost every religious tradition other than Islam, a rationcentric system has held sway.<sup>169</sup> To modern minds the course of Islamic

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<sup>169</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 59.

thought can seem strange. Indeed, Hourani was led to wonder how the theocentricism, or as he calls it more specifically, the ‘theistic subjectivism’, of the Ash‘arī school met with so much success.<sup>170</sup> Astutely, he observed that three different types of reason must be taken into account: ethical, theological and extraneous.<sup>171</sup> The latter makes way for historical circumstance, government and politics, which shaped the direction of Islamic theology in an immeasurable way. This is not something very special or unique in intellectual history. Extraneous factors, no doubt, might seem rather superfluous to our aims (we did not mention such factors in the discussion of western philosophy above), but intellectual history is easily linked to things one might call arbitrary to pure theoretical considerations and understanding the course and shape of Islamic thought, especially with regards to the establishment of orthodoxy, makes acknowledgement of political factors necessary.

While the Mu‘tazilah distinguished themselves, for one thing, by their ratiocentrism in morality, the jurists (*fuqahā*), on the other hand, varied in inclination depending on which particular school of jurisprudence (*madhhab*, pl. *madhāhib*) they belonged to. The Hanafī School in particular showed a greater affinity for rational proofs than the Shāfiī, Mālikī, and Hanbalī Schools. In this regard, geographic as well as methodological proximities resulted in a general tendency for Hanafīs to become Māturīdī, the Shāfiīs Ash‘arī and the Hanābilah Atharī.<sup>172</sup> Along with the Ash‘ariyyah and Athariyyah, the majority of the Shāfiī‘i, Mālikī and Hanbali jurists regarded *ḥusn* and *qubh* as applying to a thing via divine designation and not an essential characteristic of anything.<sup>173</sup> The philosophers (*falāsifa*, sing., *faylasuf*), who inherited ancient works of Greek philosophy and science and continued the investigations they found therein, wrote books that often attempted to reconcile philosophical knowledge with Islamic doctrine. But they rather neglected the *ḥusn-qubh* issue.<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, they and their

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<sup>170</sup> The term subjective theism can be misleading, since the commands of God are from the human perspective objective entities and some writers prefer to refer to divine command theory as presenting an objective moral standard for humanity.

<sup>171</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>172</sup> In regard to theocentric thought of al-Shāfiī‘i’s metaethics, see John Kelsay, “Divine Command Ethics in Early Islam: Al-Shāfiī‘i and the Problem of Guidance”, *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (1994), pp. 101-126. As a member of the Shāfiī‘i school of law, al-Ash‘arī’s break from the Mu‘tazilah is perhaps explainable in terms of his legal training.

<sup>173</sup> İlyas Çelebi, “Hüsün ve Kubuh,” *DİA*, Vol. 19, p. 60.

<sup>174</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, p. xv.

writings sustained a long-term dialogue with the theologians that applied pressure on the latter to adopt the use of reason, and the methods of logic in particular, more expansively. They likely did not read *Euthyphro*, but did hold a strong ratiocentric position as the successors to the Greek tradition.<sup>175</sup>

Plurality within the schools and common ground between their varied members is highlighted by Emon in regards to natural law theory, summed up as expressing the search for the divine principle governing creation.<sup>176</sup> Of course, the good might be defined simply as what God has created and maintained, or the good might be an independent concept by which study of creation brings us closer to understanding God. In any case, members from the same school sat on both sides of the divide while those of different schools also stood in agreement.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, in a study of how the *'ulamā* regarded morality to hold prior to revelation – a matter basically depends on how far one deems the capacity of reason to extend – Reinhart has shown that in the early period each of the main schools included *'ulamā* of different opinions, with Hanbali and Mu'tazilī sometimes united.<sup>178</sup> While the concern of this work is not so much the particularity of the beliefs in question as it is their philosophical strength, the subject of both Reinhart's and Amon's studies is closely related to ours and their work reveals the superficiality of the general overviews so common to the literature, notwithstanding the expedience such overviews provide. What is more, many if not most theologians, Mu'tazilī's included, were also jurists, on the one hand, and over the course of their history most of the schools of jurisprudence moved towards a more ratiocentric position, on the other.<sup>179</sup>

Van Ess suggests it is impossible to gain an accurate picture of Islām and its intellectual growth without reference to Islamic theology, *ilm al-kalām*.<sup>180</sup> The Mu'tazilī's are generally credited with having been the first to introduce into the Islamic world rational thought of a systematic type to formulate a comprehensive worldview. As Goldziher

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<sup>175</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 58.

<sup>176</sup> Anver M. Emon, *Islamic Natural Law Theories*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>177</sup> Emon, *Natural Law Theories*, p. 10.

<sup>178</sup> Reinhart, *Before Revelation*.

<sup>179</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*; MacDonald, D. B., "Māturīdī."

<sup>180</sup> Josef Van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology*. Translated by Jane Marie Todd. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p.3.

says, they were ‘the first to expand the religious cognition of Islam’ with the hitherto shunned element of reason (*‘aql*).<sup>181</sup>

Yet, in Islam, creed (*‘aqīda*, pl. *‘aqāid*) is to be distinguished from *kalām*, translated variously as ‘speculative’, ‘dialectic’ and ‘scholastic’ theology. The basics of faith are given in the Qur’ān, and include belief in God’s angels, books and messengers,<sup>182</sup> alongside certain points of law deemed essential to Islam.<sup>183</sup> The task of *kalām*, however, is to demonstrate the acceptability of what the *‘aqāid* demanded and what it implied as well as provide reasons for being intellectually and wholeheartedly committed to it.

Many early Muslim scholars are known to have distanced themselves from the science as whole.<sup>184</sup> The most notable early figures to oppose the Mu’tazilah in via means of *kalām* itself are Abū al-Hasan al-Ash‘arī (260–324 AH; 874–936 CE) and Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (239–333 AH; 853–944 CE). This is in general contrast to the Atharī school, said to hail back to Ahmad ibn Hanbal,<sup>185</sup> though many of his follows did write sophisticated works of *kalām*.<sup>186</sup> Certainly, if there is an internal philosophical void, on the one hand, and external confrontation with a range of sophisticated belief systems, on the other, the need to conceptually shore up Islamic doctrine is imperative.<sup>187</sup> Simone Weil states ‘a doctrine serves no purpose in itself, but it is indispensable to have one if only to avoid being deceived by false doctrines’.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. A. Hamori and R. Hamori, ed. B. Lewis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 87.

<sup>182</sup> Qur’an 2:285, p. 33.

<sup>183</sup> See, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīh al-Ghayb*, (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2002), 2.42.

<sup>184</sup> Nuh H. M. Keller, *Kalam and Islam*, <http://www.masud.co.uk/ISLAM/nuh/kalam.htm>

<sup>185</sup> Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Safārīnī, *Lawāmi ‘al-Anwār al-Bahiyya wa Sawāfi ‘al-asrār al-Athariyya li-Sharḥ al-Durra al-Maḍiyya fī ‘Aqd al-Firqa al-Marḍiyya* (Damascus: Mu’asasat al-Khāfīn wa Maktabatuhā, 1982), p.73.

<sup>186</sup> See, Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998; al-Azmeh, Aziz. “Orthodoxy and Ḥanbalite Fideism,” *Arabica* 35 (1988): 253–266.

<sup>187</sup> See, Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 20.

<sup>188</sup> Simone Weil, “Fragments et Notes” in *Ecrits de Londres et Dernières Lettres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).



The main theological-ethical beliefs of the Mu'tazilah are neatly summarized as follows:<sup>189</sup>

- 1) Good and evil are objectively real; they exist as entities independently of what people think and believe. This applies according to three predicates: essential predicates, like the intention to perform an evil act; mode of occurrence, such as purposelessness; and circumstantial mode of occurrence.
- 2) God knows good and evil in its general and particular realities. All that He commands humankind to do is for their good, and He wishes the best for them. Thus God knows morality as an objective existence.
- 3) There is an everlasting afterlife wherein God justly and eternally rewards the good and punishes the evil individuals of humankind.
- 4) Human beings are free in their action and responsible for their actions due to their freedom and moral knowledge.
- 5) Many instances of good and evil are knowable by the human intellect in rational terms, through the maturation of the mind (*ikmāl al-'aql*). Those people that have not received revelation are thus able to know good and evil in those instances.

The relation between *kalām* and *fiqh* is complex. Biographers recognised the connection of *kalām* and *fiqh* two sciences, as like that between a branch and a stem, and scholars who mastered them as masters of *al-aslayn* (the two bases).<sup>190</sup> In this regard, the main *ayat* of the Qur'ān believed to give a list of doctrinal requirements, *Ayat al-birr*, is actually an intermixture of faith and virtuous deeds, indicating the close association of creed with praxis (*'amal*), and by implication, theology with jurisprudence. Finally, and most importantly of all, *fiqh* itself demands philosophical reflection directly related to

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<sup>189</sup> The lists that follow are from Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, pp. 69-71, also in George F. Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Mu'tazilite Ethical Rationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1976), pp. 61-63. I have changed the order of contents slightly, along with some additions from Richard M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 11, 2 (1983), p. 206.

<sup>190</sup> M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Early Islamic Theological and Juristic Terminology: "Kitāb al-Ḥudūd fi 'l-uṣūl," by Ibn Fūrak, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 54/1 (1991), p. 15.

metaethics, in the form of the discussions about its basic methods (*usūl*). Indeed, though this aspect of Islām took precedence over the more abstract discussions of theology, leaving the latter science a secondary status, in terms of theological-ethics, the relation between *kalām* and *usūl al-fiqh* is one of different ends over the same subject. The relevance of fiqh and its bases to ethics is highlighted by Kevin Reinhart, who advises the study of Islamic ethics through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence rather than either philosophy or theology.<sup>191</sup> This is a large claim that we will not assess here, but theological-ethics is a subject that is certainly shared by both sciences. As Frank explains,

Insofar as the objective or material structure of human actions is concerned, ethical reflection both with regard to general rules and to particular actions, whether public or private, belongs to the discipline of jurisprudence and the study of its basic procedures (*usūl al-fiqh*). Here rationalization in terms of reasons (*'ilal*) and ends is demanded in order that one possess the rules of the *shari'ah* in their generality and know how to apply them, even though absolutely speaking the command and prohibition of God cannot be rationalized [according to al-Ash'arī].<sup>192</sup>

More generally, John Kelsay attentively writes,

... "ethics," understood in a broad sense as the study of practical justification, has no single analogue in Islam. Instead we find a variety of literary and intellectual genres within which Muslims consider questions of the shape and nature of the good life. Among these genres, fiqh, or as people have been conditioned to say, "Islamic jurisprudence," stands out as a particularly important discipline, the special interest of which is the discernment of guidance for life through the interpretation of divinely approved sources. *Usūl al-fiqh*, the theory of the "sources of jurisprudence," is the means by which Muslims discuss the interrelations of these sources and the methods of interpretation appropriate to them.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Kevin A. Reinhart, "Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 11/2 (1983): pp. 186-203.

<sup>192</sup> Frank, "Moral Obligation," p. 214.

<sup>193</sup> Kelsay, "Divine Command Ethics," p. 102.

The formulation of the law to unify the Muslim world and consolidate the identity of the Muslim community remains imperative to Muslim identity.<sup>194</sup> Even within the first century of Islam, during the reign of the rightly guided caliphs, newly established garrison towns saw legal rulings developing quickly from the relatively arbitrary judgements by those whom Hallaq calls ‘proto-*qadis*’ to the learned and technical decisions within a couple decades under their next-generation successors.<sup>195</sup>

With the resources of *usūl al-fiqh* and *fiqh* at hand, no doubt a considerable amount of Muslims must have wondered at the need for such a science as *kalām* and questioned the principles behind it. There are *hadith* attributed to the Prophet that report his admonishing those who asked about what seemed to be contradictory statements in the Qur’ān.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, Ibn Hanbal harboured a wariness of reason that extended even as far as *usūl al-fiqh*, the field his teacher al-Shāfi‘ī is taken to have pioneered, which Ibn Hanbal resembled to *kalām*.<sup>197</sup> Hence, there is a case, it seems, that some early Muslims were not much for quibbling over theological particulars.<sup>198</sup> But of that early period Hourani says, ‘the sources recede into an inarticulate, almost indiscernible past’.<sup>199</sup>

Mu‘tazilah unfortunate were historically dismissed due to political factors. Their doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān offended the basic Islamic belief in the divine nature of the sacred text and was most likely enforced by the caliph, during was is known as the *mihna* (lit. *trial*) only in order to assert control over the increasing authority and independence of the ‘*ulamā* as representatives of religious knowledge and the prophetic legacy.<sup>200</sup> The following unrest is cited as one possible reason for the transference of the Abbasid capital to Samarra, in 836.<sup>201</sup> After the *mihna*, the Mu‘tazilah found themselves on the receiving end of political persecution and their

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<sup>194</sup> Andrew Rippin, *Muslims Their Religious Beliefs and Practices Volume 1: The Formative Period*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 75.

<sup>195</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins And Evolution Of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 40.

<sup>196</sup> Goldziher, *Islamic Theology and Law*, p. 69.

<sup>197</sup> Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law: 9th-10th Centuries C.E.*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 181.

<sup>198</sup> Goldziher, *Islamic Theology and Law*, p. 69.

<sup>199</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 69.

<sup>200</sup> J. A. Nawas, “A Reexamination of Three Current Explanations for al-Ma'mun's Introduction of the *Mihna*,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26/4 (1994): pp. 615–629.

<sup>201</sup> Matthew S. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra* (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.), (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000).

survival as a theological school in Sunni Islām waned considerably. That is not to say the school would have flourished or even survived via the more proper auspices of scholarship and debate. Al-Ash‘arī’s departure from the school in 914 in Basra, and the independent but harmonious endeavours of his contemporary al-Māturīdī in Samarqand, signalled the beginning of work that bestowed the Sunni world two refined theological responses to Mut‘azili thought. As we noted above, al-Ash‘arī had himself been a Mu‘tazilī. More importantly, if the tale is to be believed, an initial seed that grew with him into orthodoxy was theological-ethical in nature, though Bekir Topaloğlu observes that the relevant sources do not point to a single issue as responsible for the break.<sup>202</sup> According to al-Attar, the difference between the Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘ari schools did not remain as great as may have once been believed; with the inclusion al-Ghazali, the late Ash‘ara were not theocentrists.<sup>203</sup> Perhaps, by this means, the adherents of al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine took a course of continued theological development, heading somewhat away from the original understanding of its founder and, in fact, closer towards the position of the Māturīdiyyah. In this regard, MacDonald long ago observed the stance of the later Ash‘arī school to be identical with that of the Māturīdī on the subject of morality.<sup>204</sup>

By contrast, al-Māturīdī belonged to the Hanafī School of law, saw himself as continuing the doctrinal understanding of Abū Hanifa; and the followers of al-Māturīdī largely stuck to the teachings their master had espoused.<sup>205</sup> Even with the thirteen major differences said to exist between them,<sup>206</sup> the twin historical path of these two schools resulted in theological-ethical unity.

Al-Ash‘arī’s theological-ethical doctrine is summarized as follows:<sup>207</sup>

- 1) Good and evil are determined by God, and therefore not objective entities, as such.

<sup>202</sup> Bekir Topaloğlu, *Kemal İlmüne Giriş* (Istanbul: Damla Yayınevi, 2014), p. 259.

<sup>203</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, Ch.6.

<sup>204</sup> Al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*; MacDonald, D. B., “Māturīdī.”

<sup>205</sup> MacDonald, D. B., “Māturīdī,” cf. Philipp Bruckmayr, “The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics”, *Iran & the Caucasus*, 13/1 (2009): pp. 59-92.

<sup>206</sup> Wilfred Madelung, “Māturīdiyya,” *EI<sup>2</sup>*, eds. C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, and Ch. Pellat. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1990): Vol. 6, pp. 847-848.

<sup>207</sup> Hourani does not mention the developments in thought that took place under the adherents of al-Ash‘arī. Hence, the late Ash‘ariyyah are not all to be considered as holding the positions ascribed to their master here.

- 2) There is no moral order that restricts the will of God to compel His doing only what is good for humankind and not what is evil.
- 3) God's decisions, whatever they may be, are always just, because He is the Lord of all creation and subject to no standard of justice produced by humankind.
- 4) All an individual's decisions and actions are the result of God's will; their destiny is determined by His grace.
- 5) Good and evil can only be known to human beings either directly via revelation or indirectly via rational thought based on revelation. It is impossible to arrive at knowledge of good and evil by independent reason.

As can be seen, the positions of each school are made up of a number of different types of claim, with al-Ash'ari's position being practically an inversion of that ascribed to the rationalist on each point. The first in each list regards the question of morality's existence, the next two are theological, the third metaphysical, as a matter of freedom of the will, and the last is a question of moral epistemology.

### **1.5.3 The Dilemmas facing Mu'tazilī and al-Ash'arī's Theological-ethics**

Naturally enough, some of the problems noted in reference to the debate in western philosophy emerge again quite clearly in the Islamic context. Al-Ash'ari's position falls prey to the problem, emptiness problem, as follows from (1). Human moral categories simply cannot apply in place of divine ones. This is to ensure that the afflictions and trials we see can be explained in terms that must justify them, and more than that, to avoid the establishment of a standard over God (2). Indeed, for al-Ash'arī there can be no reason ('illah) for God's actions.<sup>208</sup> The problem, of course, with the moral standards that we have it that they can be said to simply be human moral standards such that their application to God makes God fit human standards (3). A portion of the problems follow from the doctrine of free will established by the murji'a. Given that human beings are responsible for their actions, God cannot be attributed any evil, whereas for al-Ash'arī, God was directly responsible for the realisation of human actions, and therefore also for their consequences (4). The ability to then disassociate Him of any

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<sup>208</sup> Frank, "Moral Obligation," p. 209.

moral liability arising from the evil in world was to deny the applicability of morality as we know it. Epistemologically, then, the Mu'tazilī position is also diametrically opposed, reason is a God-given faculty that allows us to reach objective knowledge. Contra the Mu'tazilī claim that moral good and evil acts can be recognised with necessary knowledge (*'ilm ḍarūrī*) and that the duties of God and humankind can similarly be known, the later Ash'arī *mutakallim* al-Juwainī (d.1084), points out that the Mu'tazilah differ amongst themselves on this point, and their opponents also differ from them, when had this knowledge been necessarily a consensus would have been achieved.<sup>209</sup> Of course, objective knowledge need not be necessary knowledge, but given the difference in opinion between people on moral matters, this type of criticism is often cited in philosophy,<sup>210</sup> and of course was raised by the Ash'ariyyah.<sup>211</sup> Yet with al-Ash'arī's position, the problem of moral inaccessibility clearly follows from (5), as it essentially denies that humans have the ability gain moral knowledge. This falls afoul, firstly, of the initial normative standards that human seem to universally hold, such as immorality of the gratuitous harming of innocents, secondly our ability to intuitively understand the truth of revealed moral contents. The problem is doubly severe since al-Ash'arī rejects also that God in some manner had created objective morality to which humans can gain access, thus forgoing a moderated version of divine command theory. Finally, the modal vulnerability also follows, because good and evil are created by God, and are not objective entities. In sum, al-Ash'arī's theological-ethical stances together constitute a strong theocentrism that faces the full force of the right (theocentric) horn of the Euthyphro dilemma – with these being ethical type problems. The advantage of this position is largely doctrinal; it protects God's authority, sovereignty, and power of creation to the fullest extent.

Here the stakes are raised somewhat because the idea that God is not limited in what He can command in Mu'tazili eyes verges on profanity. It is true, as Hourani notes, that 'Abd al-Jabbar, the most sophisticated Mu'tazilī scholar known to us, made a distinction on the matter, and allowed for the logical possibility that God could act

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<sup>209</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 20/1 (1993), p. 29.

<sup>210</sup> See, for example, Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, p. 248, cf. Clyde Kluckhohn, "Ethical Relativity: Sic et Non." *Journal of Philosophy* 52 (1955): p. 672.

<sup>211</sup> Frank, "Moral Obligation," p. 208.

unjustly (though holding that in reality it would be incorrect on both a moral and rational basis – indeed, to say God has done evil would be blasphemous), meaning that it would not be a contradiction in terms for God to behave unjustly. The purpose for this was to make sense divine mercy and justice, which would otherwise become empty terms.<sup>212</sup> As such, ‘Abd al-Jabbar’ position contravenes, on the one hand, the position of other Mu’tazilī theologians who rejected the mere conceivability of God’s doing wrong because it would contradict His essence and, on the other hand, al-Ash’ari who, in a mirror inverse, would also note it’s inconceivability because there no law external to which God can be subject in the first place. ‘Abd al-Jabbar’s stance was made to protect the omnipotence of God and thus avoid the non-sovereignty problem, just like al-Ash’ariyyah; whether he is successful, however, in avoiding the modal vulnerability problem that can easily be level at the Ash’ari position is another matter.

In relation to this issue is another. The Qur’ān states that no soul will be burdened with more than it can bear, but the doctrine of justice was held as denying predestination too, though the latter also finds easy support in the Qur’ān.<sup>213</sup> The Mu’tazilah were famous (or infamous) for holding that the doctrine of divine justice meant God must give everyone a fair chance to enter paradise and that this chance must be equal for each individual. The issue is related to the problem of evil but also relates back to the tale of three brothers noted above. Surely predestination, which must be distinguished from fatalism, would be able to explain the situation of the three brothers after death. In fact, this doctrine directly replaced the Mu’tazili doctrine of divine justice as the sixth in the list of the orthodox articles of faith because of rationalisms seeming inability to explain such a scenario.

Parallel to this stands some internal problems with the Mu’tazili thesis. Hourani explains how given the idea of eternal happiness in the afterlife, the Mu’tazilah could have begun formulating a eudaemonist moral theory, but that an inability to explain the consequence of actions resulting in happiness conceived as divine *reward* rather than a straight forward cause-effect relationship or even a logical implication, would have

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<sup>212</sup> George Hourani, “Mutezile Kelami Ahlakta İlahi Adalet ve Beşeri Akıl,” trans. Fethi Kerim Kazanç, in *Din Felsefesi Açısından Mutezile Gelen-ek-i* Vol.2 ed. Recep Alpyağıl, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2014), p. 16.

<sup>213</sup> Hourani, “Mutezile Kelami Ahlakta,” p. 17.

undermined such an effort.<sup>214</sup> Another ethical problem is that the Mu'tazilah would have had to identify exactly where the decisive value of morality lay from among the diverse contents of revelation's commands and prohibitions, though the plurality of objectives found in the sharia seem to defy the identification of an overarching moral principle that would lend the substance of the law to rational explanation.<sup>215</sup> This is a general problem by no means specific to Islam, but it is specific to ratiocentrism, and we may call it the irreducibility of contents. It is, in fact, an aspect of the arbitrariness problem.

Just like Mawson, 'Abd al-Jabbar states that though reason is able to get at the essence of things and know good and evil, revelation is still necessary for the specifics of religion that reason could not possibly find, such as the value of prayer, and the rituals it involves. This admission was meant as a response to the traditionist criticism that rationalism made revelation redundant.<sup>216</sup> What is more, the theocentric *mutakallim* will also have to explain the meaning of goodness in a way that avoids making those terms empty, and in this instance it does not appear the Qur'ān offers them much support, quite the opposite.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, 'Abd al-Jabbar will face the same problems that Mawson does, namely, the aspects of independent validity.

Alongside this, two specifically Islamic problems with ratiocentric system are observed by Reinhart. The first concerns the specifics of religious law and practice. On the one hand, a ratiocentric will very likely contradict revelation if it finds nothing wrong with such things as eating pork and drinking wine, for example. On the other, it will contradict things that are proscribed, such as fasting one day and not another in the sense that they seem to have no rational explanation. This is but another instance of the arbitrariness problem noted above. The second problem Reinhart notes is that rationalism reduces the significance of revelation in general and Islām specifically. By claiming an ability to determine good and evil before revelation, the significance of God's word to humankind ushers in less of a break with the pre-revelatory world and

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<sup>214</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 62.

<sup>215</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 62.

<sup>216</sup> Hourani, "Mutezile Kelami Ahlakta," p. 19.

<sup>217</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, pp. 23-48.



this is something that a certain Islamic impulse to draw a rather stark contrast between the situation that existed before the Qur'ān and the one after.<sup>218</sup>

Perhaps more damaging for the rationalist view is that the sacred texts of Islam do Islām did not offer as much support as they seemed to do their opponents. The Qur'ān and *hadith* contain instances of phraseology more conducive to theocentric interpretations. Nevertheless, in defence of the Mu'tazilah, Hourani points out the Qur'ānic command for humans to use their reason, particularly in regards to reaching and or strengthening faith, apparently in a manner independent of revelation — something observed by many modern commentators. Hourani cites values, such as *al-islah*, 'doing good', that feature in the Qur'ān as arguably objective entities. Furthermore, Qur'ānic evidence is backed up by numerous *hadith*, a most famous one of which quotes Mu'adh ibn Jabal answering the Prophets question regarding what he would do if he found no guidance in the Qur'ān or *hadith*: 'Then I shall use my own judgement.' But all these can reasonably be interpreted more conservatively, as Hourani explains, in revelation-dependent terms, with *al-islah* as subjective, reason as working in subordination to sacred text, and judgement merely as *qiyās*.<sup>219</sup> Hence, the evidence in no way offered the rationalist '*alim* a solid refutation of his traditionalist opponent.

In the end, revelation was a source of ethical knowledge and as the primary source for them professionally, perhaps predisposed the jurists to a theocentric theory. Here, Qur'ānic verses offered stronger support for the theocentric claim than the ratiocentric one.<sup>220</sup> But perhaps more compelling from a logical point of view are further reasons cited by Hourani, these being the feebleness of the human intellect next to the power and knowledge of God, alongside what we have called the non-sovereignty problem that threatened to show its head upon claims to the ethical insight of independent reason, and the loss of a powerful defence versus the age old problem of evil — if justice and goodness are constituted by God and His actions, as theocentrism holds, then He cannot possibly be evil.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Reinhart, *Before Revelation*, p. 39.

<sup>219</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 63.

<sup>220</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 64.

<sup>221</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 65-66.

But some of these points are rather circumstantial to the matter at hand, that is to say, discovering the truth value of ratiocentrism. It appears clear that the Mu'tazili position raises the independent validity problem and its corollaries. Some traditionists seem to have only deemed reason's capacity for reliable moral thought as limited to being revelation-dependent — and this is the real point of debate. Were they right? If they were, then theocentrism takes centre stage. If they were wrong, then one must judge what to do given the existence of God as the Creator of the world and perfect moral being, on the one hand, and the validity of ratiocentrism, on the other, as studied by Reinhart.<sup>222</sup> But that is a different issue. For us the goal is to resolve the matter so neatly summed up by Socrates' question in *Euthyphro*. When the grounds on either side of the debate are equally unassailable, the matter is not decided by simply adopting one side and interpreting the issue accordingly; it is decided by assuming the existence of either an alternative position or category to explain the situation, or a more basic underlying matter to be accounted for. And when the grounds on either side are not secure? Then the solution lies in seeing what the kinds of problems afflicting each side seems to indicate.

Prelusive to the theory we shall present, what is striking is the theoretical space for a middle path between the respective theological-ethical positions of the Mu'tazilah and al-Ash'ari. Notwithstanding that without scriptural support the theory remains just that, merely theoretical. The requirement here is balancing the tension of the two sources, and offering a framework to both build and maintain that balance. What the Mu'tazilah did not do was show that a relation exists between reason and revelation such that reason does not simply overwhelm the distinct message and content of scripture. Having two different sources in tension is more difficult to bear than just one to which the other is a mere supplement.

## **1.6 Chapter Conclusion**

In the first section of this chapter we can see that the debate between Euthyphro and Socrates does not really provide a satisfactory level of illumination in regard to the reasons for the adoption of their respective stances. Euthyphro says the holy is that

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<sup>222</sup> Reinhart, *Before Revelation*.

which the gods' love, and taken as an identity claim it simply slips past the kind of assault that Socrates makes with the analogies. Because of Euthyphro submitting to understanding his claim as referring to a 'causal' relation, we do not hear the arguments he could make for the establishment of a relation of identity. Consequently, there is insufficient means for Socrates to defeat his position. On the other side of the coin, Euthyphro has little grounds to change Socrates' mind about how the relation between holiness and the gods' love should be conceived. The result, therefore, is a stalemate. Indeed, it seems like the required discussion cannot really occur within the limited framework of the dialogue. This suggests that if any proper dialogue is to be had at all it must utilise different concepts and terminology than those shown in the text to allow the two sides to mutually engage the other.

However, Socrates goes on to make another proposal and the text displays three different associations of piety with justice to form a background understanding that precedes Socrates' own relation of the terms. Firstly, though neither Socrates nor Euthyphro openly identify the respective trials to be matters of justice rather than piety, the association stems from these circumstances of the meeting in the form Socrates' and Euthyphro's court cases. A court of law seeks justice under the terms of the laws and concepts society provides, and in this setting this includes holiness and piety. Secondly, Euthyphro's basic conviction is that no criminal, even if that includes one's own father, is to be treated with exception. Thus, holiness and justice in this basic way appear to coincide, giving basis for Socrates' second inquiry.

Thirdly, with all its complexity, Euthyphro's trial displays that justice in any given instance may not be easily defined. Hence, no matter what nominal definition of justice Euthyphro and Socrates may share, the case highlights the kind of difficulties any philosophical conception of justice – and any theocentric morality, for that matter – will be subject to resolving. Thus, this suggests another advantage that the ratiocentric approach adopted by Socrates has. It provides some prospect for addressing issues where the divine commandments are obscure, ambiguous or even non-existent. This is further grounds for accepting Socrates' approach and challenge to conduct further investigation. Yet, Socrates' second investigation seems to have been deficiently prepared. He proposes that holiness is part of justice and this tries to explicate one

concept (holiness) in terms of another that is of no less, if not greater, complexity (justice). In any case, where he fails others may succeed.

What is more, *Euthyphro* does not contain a philosophically commanding representation of theocentrism. Alongside the meek theocentric argumentation, with the underlying intertwining of holiness and justice in the background of ancient Greek legal thought, the character Euthyphro seems to confuse theo- and ratiocentric commitments. This limited textual and conceptual basis for both theo- and ratiocentrism and the conversation possible between the two therefore invites us to look at later philosophical developments in order to seek assessments of wider theological-ethical importance.

From the discussions in sections 2-4 we can see that a variety of problems are associated with each of the horns of the dilemma. The emptiness problem shows the difficulty in using commands as the central term in theocentrism. Joyce shows us that the theocentrist cannot be accused of defending a tautology, but his argument leaves us with fairly banal knowledge of God. Prospects remain for other terms such as love or will, and as Alston shows could be used to establish that the morality that applies to God is not the same that which applies to humans. With the arbitrariness problem, it appears a stalemate ensues, since it will apply to both the theocentric and ratiocentric positions, but in a way that will bother neither the theocentrist nor their opponent. This is most important for the theocentrist against whom the complaint is usually levelled, but they require the adoption of a particularist epistemology in order to free themselves of the problem. The problem of inaccessibility relates to the sceptical side of theocentrism. The problem that the theocentrist faces is disregarding the moral awareness that we have as either faulty or lacking authority. And yet if it is faulty we must dismiss every intuition that what we are ordered makes moral sense. And when we define authority, it appears that it depends upon articulating the concept of obligation, which then is able to stand on its own independently of commands from an authority. When it comes to the problem of modal vulnerability, the theocentrist finds some hope in the intractable problem of the is-ought gap that works to destabilise our concepts of morality and open the way for divine commands to apply without rival moral concepts, as Joyce attempts to show. This, however, was not Alston's response. Rather he admits that humans have an inherent moral awareness due to the way that they have been

created, holding though that morality finds its source in God, and exemplars individuals such as God and Jesus.

As for the ratiocentric position, the problem of independent validity was addressed by rendering the independence morality inoffensive to divine sovereignty in the same way logic is supposed to be. But in regard to the attempt we studied, morality does not appear to have the same objectivity as logic does, so the parallel does not hold. What is more, the possibility of finding a resolution is further threatened because the objectivity of logic also appears contingent; logic could be a created thing, like existence. This idea portends a deep philosophical topic, namely, theories of truth, and also the nature of morality's status, as either objective or subjective. In this instance, again we arrive at such a fundamental level of concern that great care must be taken to avoid begging the question. One may hold a subjectivist theory of truth as a direct result of the wish to protect divine sovereignty, whereas one may hold a ratiocentric theological-ethics as a direct result of belief in morality's objectivity. In such circumstances, the real issue is decided by issues outside our original field of concern.

This is related to the metaphysical curtailment theory. For however one views morality to subsist will shape what theological-ethics they hold, just as one's theology will. If one deems it necessary to advance the idea of self-existing essences, forms or transcendent realm to moral values, then making the relevant one contingent on God in some way will be necessary to avert the problem of non-sovereignty.

In the Islamic literature, both the alternatives to the Euthyphro Dilemma are separately represented classically by the Ash'ari and Mu'tazili the schools of thought. Either way, however, we have found that each stance appears unable to avoid the respective horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. This applies especially because both appear strong versions of theocentrism and rationcentrism respectively, and cannot apply to some ancillary in order to parry the problems involved.

Indeed, throughout this chapter, I have referred to the fact that some of the issues are determined by assumptions that do not necessarily come under direct scrutiny in the debate and more, importantly, are so fundamental as to be difficult to draw positive support. The problem of arbitrariness is particularly interesting, however, because of how well it makes clear the fundamental level at which disagreement stands. It appears

that one cannot decide the matter by recourse to internal incoherence; both positions are equally strong and weak in this matter. External support is needed, for example, either in the strength or fall of a particularist over a methodist epistemology or vice versa, and or through reference to sacred texts. This is where the issue of plausibility comes in; for the credence one can give to a theory depends on the positive support one can give it once it can stand on its own two legs.



## Chapter 2: The Euthyphro Dilemma in relation to Epistemology

### 2.1 Dialogue and Incommensurability

What should be clear, having studied the literature tackling the Euthyphro problem and the parallel discussion regarding the *husn-qubh* problem in Islamic thought, is that none of the proposed solutions considered so far really manage to achieve the fundamental level of dialogue that we were hoping for after having studied the deficiencies in *Euthyphro*. Euthyphro and Socrates never had the debate that would or could determine whether an identity, coreference or causal claim was the most suitable. This omission is repeated again in the theologico-ethical literature. There are those, usually rationalists, who take epistemology to be basic, and those who take theologico-metaphysical concerns to be basic, once this decision is made, a fundamental divide separates the two. On the one hand, the matter appears to hinge on belief in the existence of the God. This of course is virtually a necessity for theocentrism; few if any thinkers have held to a theocentric system merely on the *concept* of God alone. So if given the existence of God, the plausibility of theocentrism seems simply to depend on dealing thereafter with the theological and ethical issues that crop up afterwards with the Euthyphro dilemma. And if these are solved, then we have a viable ethical theory. But this is to merely deal with the symptoms of the problem rather than its root cause. Of course, the truth of many a doctrine can only be evaluated by what problems follow once it is supposed. Yet, the truth of a doctrine is measurable also by comparison to the plausibility of alternatives and their resolution of existing problems. And, the more basic the problem, the more powerful attraction the remedy has.

Thus, for those who already have a distinct inclination towards one of its two disjuncts, the dilemma is meant to test the confidence one had in their original conviction by showing it to be highly problematic. But it seems doubtful that this is actually how the dilemma works, since the initial finding is the decisive one; the matter is unlikely to be decided for *post hoc* reasons. The problem of starting from fundamentally different positions means attempts at synthesis face the danger of being relatively superficial in addition to being ad hoc. For example, a main problem facing the ratio-centric position results from the independent validity of morality, that is, the logical threat to God's sovereignty and authority. Now, many students of the issue will just say that if morality

has independent validity, so be it; theology and theistic belief will have to simply deal with it. For in that case the matter is, indeed, already decided, and the remaining task is to deal with the theological fallout. But just as equally, the theo-centrist will state that if we establish that Divine Sovereignty makes it necessary that morality (however one conceives of it) can only derive from divine commands, then it is up to ethical theories to make way for that fact, and thus the subsequent horn of the dilemma will not really be a problem as much as an afterthought (even if one worthy long consideration).

Of course, one may reconsider their stance as a result of the problems it brings, but more conclusive evidence will likely be found from positive support. Reconsideration may come from epistemological or ethical discoveries, which would lead to reassessment for reasons rather independent of theological concerns.

More fundamentally, unless the base of the problem is not found, the requisite philosophical conversation needed to achieve a solution fails to come about. Without the parties looking at the matter of debate out of which their respective and contrary views derive, then they will be merely talking past each other in an essentially futile effort at persuasion. In sum, the ratiocentric has just as little ground to dismiss theological concerns as the theocentric has to dismiss ethical ones, unless they first set out the philosophical support for adopting their position in the first place, that is, prior to addressing the resulting problems. This situation is particularly important for theological-ethics because while both positive evidence and criticism are normally equally important for the evaluation of a theory, we have found that the criticism levelled at each position stem directly from the more basic evidence and indeed do not appear to favour one theory over the other. Rather a stalemate results.

The issue is in fact so basic that it has priority over the ones asked in theological-ethics because it effectively reevaluates the validity of the dilemma as a disjunctive. And this is precisely our aim; to get to the fundamentals of the matter at hand, because as it stands, the dilemma makes only two radically different option available, and offers no reconciliatory one. That is to say, the debate surrounding the Euthyphro Dilemma seems to have been deemed resolvable by simply taking one of the two positons, rather than look at the cause of the opposing problems they respectively bring. The task is really to look at what the original beliefs or convictions on each side of the debate are based on



or what they imply; and this may, indeed, simultaneously undermine both positions for some common or connected reasons. Moreover, given the epistemology-ethics relation, any faulty epistemology is likely to result in a faulty theological-ethics and some of the positions adopted by the schools may prove shaky on this basis. Thus the need to show what a correct epistemology looks like is in order, and this takes us to question three, which shall be studied in following chapters.

It is not the task of the present chapter to offer a direct solution to the profound issues that constitute the dilemma and the incommensurability it harbours, but merely to point to where the source of the dilemma lies. The types of problems that are held to result from holding either a ratio- or theo-centric claim have been identified as ethical and theological ones, that is, they are problems for either the Abrahamic concept of God or moral philosophy. There are, however, problems that could be interpreted to inhabit a more basic conceptual level to these both, at least in so far as working through the issue is concerned, and just as important to theological ethics. The conclusion to be made here is that upon examination of the discussion philosophers and theologians have had regarding the Euthyphro dilemma suggests each resolution or outstanding problem requires an epistemological account if a satisfactory resolution to it is to be found. Put simply, even though the problems afflicting the theocentric position appear to be mostly ethical, and those afflicting the ratiocentric position appear to be mostly theological, the main issue at the heart of the dilemma is epistemological. Why the case suggests the need for epistemological treatment can be seen by looking at the causes behind the intractability of the problem and where the unsettled issues lie.

## **2.2 Epistemological aspects of the theo- and ratiocentric positions**

The aim of this section is fairly modest. It is to show the epistemological issues behind the Euthyphro Dilemma. The Euthyphro Dilemma is a meta-ethical problem, and we might hope that we can solve it by drawing upon the resources of theology, the philosophy of religion and ethics alone. But having started on the path of metaethics we enter upon a related set of problems and cannot satisfactorily complete our task without addressing them all together. More specifically, in determining the relationship between morality and God, it is essential to fully take into account the findings of epistemology and other relevant fields. If, for example, we find that the 'good' resists definition, as

some have argued,<sup>223</sup> or that foundationalism as a theory of knowledge is critically flawed, as some have claimed,<sup>224</sup> then the Euthyphro dilemma must be reassessed to take account of these findings. But before we can do that, we must learn where each stance stands vis-à-vis epistemology. Why epistemology in particular?

This should already be clear from the previous sections, having observed how in both the western and Islamic contexts the respective sides of the debate typically assert different epistemologies, and that these form a basic part of their positions. Further examination here will make clear what kind of role they play may specifically in regard to each position and the respective problems they face.

Epistemology is central to metaethics because it investigates our ability to make moral judgments, and how (if at all) we are able to know moral truths. Moral epistemology can be divided into three questions: What is moral knowledge? How can moral beliefs be justified? And, where does moral knowledge come from? All these shall receive treatment in the following chapter and those to follow. The study of the western theological-ethical tradition in the previous chapter revealed that epistemology is fundamental to theological-ethics, but we did not establish any further specifics apart from this general claim. There are in fact, two questions in regard to these specifics that interest us here. Firstly, what are the epistemological affinities of each of the theological-ethical stances? And secondly, are these affinities essential to each respective tradition? The second of these two questions would take us beyond the scope of this study, because we would be required to make in depth study of the latest epistemology movements, especially given the relatively recent shifts that have occurred since the pioneering work of V. W. Quine among others, which has for example undermined the classical distinction between analytic and synthetic knowledge. Indeed, proving the essentiality of the either theological-ethical position to a particular epistemology would be a significant claim, worthy of an entire separate study, for history itself is a testament to the intellectual ingenuity of philosophers to make varied

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<sup>223</sup> Op. cit. G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 58-59; See also, Andrew Fisher, *MetaEthics: An Introduction*, (Durham: Acumen, 2011).

<sup>224</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 85; William Alston, *The Reliability of Sense Perception* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 126-127.

links between the first- and second-order realms of ethics. For example, we find J.L. Mackie beginning his *Ethics* with a chapter arguing for scepticism or relativism at the metaethical level, and the rest of the same book elaborating a Utilitarian ethics.<sup>225</sup> Even more alarming, George Berkeley, John Stuart Mill, G.E. Moore, and R.M. Hare, all advocated a Utilitarian moral framework but with fundamentally different metaethical positions. Clearly, there is no easy or straightforward derivation or relation between the first and second orders of ethics. Nevertheless, our concerns are somewhat more specific and what I believe we can do is show that the basic epistemological commitments each theological-ethical school appears to make are constitutive of the problems they face and a relative impasse in the debate.

### 2.2.1 Three Questions

In so far as the three stances that we have encountered (ratiocentric, theocentric and alternative solutions) are related to epistemology, there are three questions that require an answer. The first question concerns how the source of morality is identified. More specifically, what epistemology identifies revelation, human character or rationality as the source of morality and with what degree of necessity must it identify this source as the *only* source? To some extent, this concerns what definition of knowledge one begins with, that is to say, the extent of information and certainty one requires in ethics to be confident that we can know what is right and wrong as well as the extent to which research yields or resists giving this knowledge. For if one defines knowledge, and, thus, moral knowledge, in terms that require certainty and objectivity, then what one deems the source of knowledge must provide those things. Subsequently, this concerns not just the nature of knowledge but also the epistemological status of what can be known in a given field.<sup>226</sup> If ethics, for example, does not yield objective knowledge, then one may end up a moral sceptic, depending on their definition, or, shall we say, expectation of knowledge. Finally, it involves ruling out in some way the other methods, whether empirical or rational, and therefore contains both positive and

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<sup>225</sup> John L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, (London: Penguin, 1990).

<sup>226</sup> Peter Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/rationalism-empiricism/>>.

negative claims, as only by this means can one's answer be presented as the strongest among the alternatives.

The second question asks: what epistemological status follows from the choice of making rationality, revelation, or some aspect of nature the source of morality rather than the other two and what implications does this have for the status of morality? That is to say, for example, if God and revelation are the sole source for moral knowledge, then does an empirical or rationalist method of acquiring moral knowledge from this source imply subjectivity or objectivity as a result? This status, of course, will apply to moral knowledge, and the authority it has.

Yet the status of moral truth should be distinguished from moral contents. The contents, or substance, of a moral theory will say what is good and what is bad, whereas the status concerns the modal validity substantive statements possess. Murder might be wrong independently of what people think, making it objectively immoral, or, perhaps, it is only wrong according solely to peoples' attitudes and beliefs and therefore subjectively immoral. What is more, objectivity should not be confused with absolutism, which states that the particular moral proposition is valid at all times and places. The opposite of absolutism is relativism.

The first two questions are fairly straightforward. There is also a third and just as basic question: what determines which epistemology one adopts? As Mackie notes, neither moral principles nor ethical theories exist in a vacuum, but degrees of mutual determination with beliefs in other fields.<sup>227</sup> Determining the definition of knowledge and what is required from a given field, such as in ethics, to say it yields knowledge is important to the final theological-ethical stance will have. If ones epistemology has no less than a deciding role in determining ones theological-ethical position, then critical assessment of what determines ones epistemology will be in order, at least because ones theological stance may determine what ones epistemology is. This question, however, is simply too big to answer here; ultimately each thinker is held to explain and justify their epistemological commitments. Thus, it is important to keep this in mind as we study al-Māturīdī's thought in the next chapter. But here we may note that this third question is

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<sup>227</sup> Mackie, *Ethics*, p. 203.

actually intimately related to the first two. It essentially asks: which of the answers to the respective two questions above is more basic? By way of clarification of what is meant here, and by way of preliminary to the study that shall take place, we may note that the issue is set within the context of the relations between theology, ethics and epistemology. One reason why the Euthyphro Dilemma seems so intransigent is because most people who believe in God, or at least allow for the possibility of His existence, will be able to simultaneously follow two equally valid-appearing logical paths going in contrary directions. That is to say, that one may see cogency in the belief that God is the author of morality, and yet also strongly believe that morality is directly accessible through the faculty of reason.

Both metaphysics and epistemology have often been taken to determine what our ethics will look like. The result is that ethics is more or less a mere outcome of how thinkers and theologians have interpreted the first two to be. The most obvious example here is the theocentrist, who, in order to protect the sovereignty of God and other divine attributes, declares that ethics is determined only by what God commands and prohibits. As for an epistemological determination of ethics, one need only look at Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, which bears the subtitle: *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects*. The first book of the *Treatise* deals with human cognition, wherein Hume circumscribes the powers of reason in a more precise and narrower way than ever before for the empiricist cause. Corresponding analyses are carried out regarding the power of reason over passion, before in the final book Hume concludes that morality is essentially a matter of impressions rather than ideas. The close connection between epistemology and ethics means that in addition to understanding theological beliefs about God, we also have to know exactly what the theological-ethical positions say about the modal status of morality, what their conceptions of goodness entail epistemologically. However, other thinkers have taken epistemological issues in concert with ethical findings to determine how theology should be framed and how revelation should be interpreted. For if the nature of morality itself is not suitably understood, any investigation into whether it is constituted by God's commands risks misconstruing the issue. This is perhaps the case with Kant, who's *Critique of Pure Reason*, arguably a response to Hume's *Treatise*, was motivated by the belief that human moral consciousness was directly dependent on the existence

of a non-sensible world. This concern is evident in Kant's earlier text *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, a transitional work that represents the philosopher's gradual realisation of the indispensability of metaphysics, not only to human cognition, but morality too.<sup>228</sup>

With two different tendencies then, the question that immediately arises concerns which field is more basic, for we have a triangle of sources (epistemology, ethics, and metaphysics or theology) and their interrelation stands in need of clarification. In fact, I shall argue that these fields are rather inseparable; to make one more basic is always already bound up with substantive judgements about that which is the less basic. In other words, what lead to the original decision might be exactly what follows from it. Nevertheless, to begin with, we shall proceed as if they were separate questions and, as we shall see, each theological-ethical position has different epistemological affinities.

### **2.2.1.1 Theoethical Positions and Epistemology**

What epistemology identifies revelation, human character or rationality as the source of morality and with what degree of necessity must it identify this source as the *only* source? In other words, is an empiricist by necessity either a theocentrist or ancilarist, assuming, that is, belief in the existence of God and morality? All knowledge derived from sense experience is empirical, or *a posteriori*. This is so even though reason is necessary for the analyses and inferences required to process the input from the senses, transforming the data from our sense organs into knowledge. Such knowledge extends from the colours, textures, and shapes of objects to the features of particular animal species and systems of government, as it does to revelatory sources, whether verbal or textual. Perception describes the basic action of the senses in obtaining information about the world, and the model of empirical investigation is natural science, which is characterised by the observation and classification of phenomena in the world as well as experimentation and explanatory theory.

Theocentrism is empirical when the basis of morality is constituted exclusively by experience of revelation, be it in the form of a sacred text, prophetic teaching or spiritual experience. It may be that those revelatory sources impart a moral principle

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<sup>228</sup> Sebastian Gardner, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Kant and the Critique of Pure Reason* (Taylor and Francis. Kindle Edition, 1999), p. 12.

that believers follow and from which they independently and rationally work out what ought to be, but given that the principle is adopted because it is found in that source and not because of the rational or intellectual validity found to support and inhere within the principle, then their moral system remains at the basic level empiricist.

Yet, under the rubric of empiricism are a number of different theses, not all of which are held by every empiricist. But the basic thesis essential to be an empiricist is that for a given subject, sense experience is exclusively basic to knowledge and or the concepts used. This thesis can be held in two ways, regarding the source of knowledge and its validity. The first holds that all concepts humans are capable of having in a given field are from experience or are derived by the application of rational processes, such as comparison and abstraction, upon those concepts. The second holds that for any belief to have justification it must be connected to some experience. The first position is called concept-empiricism, the second belief-empiricism.<sup>229</sup>

Strictly speaking, however, the basic empiricist thesis does not contain the belief that, in all or any particular subject, we have knowledge. One might be a sceptic, but with empiricist commitments, saying that *if* we had knowledge, it would be empirically gained. What is more, one might be an empiricist in one subject and not in another. One might believe, for example, that moral knowledge is empirical, but that metaphysical and logical knowledge is rational. Rationalism and empiricism are at odds only when proposed for the same area of knowledge though it may even be possible to hold that the same subject allows for both empirical and rational knowledge, meaning that we can know the same thing through the senses and through reason, though perhaps not in the same way. But what the empiricist thesis does say is that *if* in a given subject area knowledge is possible, then it must be by experience.<sup>230</sup>

In contrast, the rationalist thesis may take the following form: knowledge in a given subject is known either intuitively or derived from intuited propositions via the process of deduction. Intuition, being the key word, denotes a noetic feature allowing us to grasp the truth of a proposition on a rational basis such that it is warranted to believe in

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<sup>229</sup> Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, "Empiricism," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Robert Audi, ed., (Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition, 2005), p. 263.

<sup>230</sup> Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism."

it. Examples pertaining to such insight extend from logical truths, like the law of non-contradiction, to abstract metaphysical claims. In addition to this, and not necessarily exclusive to it, another rationalist claim is possible: knowledge in a given subject originates from our rational faculties and is known innately. That is to say, knowledge of ethics, for example, is something we know from birth. A third additional thesis is also contained in the rationalist store: concepts we apply in a given subject are to some degree innately contained in our rational faculties but come into operation or are known upon the advent of experience in that subject. In all cases, the knowledge is *a priori*, that is, acquired before experience and an empiricist will necessarily deny these theses in the context of a given subject. These three theses are respectively called the Intuition/Deduction Thesis; the Innate Knowledge Thesis and the Innate Concept Thesis.<sup>231</sup>

In the rationalist position, at least one of the above three theses must be held regarding moral knowledge. That is to say, we may be held to know what is good and bad intuitively, innately and or through an innately given concept. It need not be assumed that the rationalist must deny a divine being from playing a role within their moral system. For example, one may determine rationally that God's existence is necessary for morality to exist, and also by rational investigation identify what morality is. What is clear is that holding any one of these theses in regard to morality denies revelation exclusivity as a source of knowledge and grants reason the ability to identify what is good and bad. The rationalist is able to say that such knowledge can be transmitted to others in an empirical fashion but will only be understood rationally and originates in reason.

Having briefly acquainted ourselves with the theses involved, we are now in a position to answer our question - What epistemology identifies revelation, human character or rationality as the source of morality and with what degree of exclusivity? Assuming belief in the existence of God and morality, we can conclude empiricism must lead to one of only two things: theocentrism or ancilarism. A similar necessity holds for the moral rationalist in regard to ratiocentrism or ancilarism. However, the ancilarist position is unique in that it makes use of an additional element to explain aspects of

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<sup>231</sup> Markie, "Rationalism vs. Empiricism."



morality than cannot be explained using the main or basic source. Hence, it is possible that it employs to different epistemologies at the same time.

The empiricist theses noted above aptly describe the stance of the traditionalist *fuqahā*. Firstly, in line with concept-empiricism, they held that all the moral concepts humans are capable of validly having in ethics are derived directly from the *ahkam* found in revelation or are derived by the application of rational processes, such as comparison and abstraction, upon the said *ahkam*. Secondly, in line with belief-empiricism, they held that for any moral belief to have justification it must be connected to revelation. As for the Mu'tazilah, they held that human beings using their rational capacity could intuit what was right and wrong. Indeed, Hourani concludes that 'Abd al-Jabber's work anticipates modern intuitionist ethics.<sup>232</sup> Thus, the survey of the *husn-qubh* debate above outlines significant epistemological connections, and reveals that certain epistemological and ethical stances share some connecting philosophical affinity.

Of course, one might argue that the theological-ethical positions take necessarily only an epistemological *aspect*, and are not determined by epistemology at all, just like a statue must by necessity have three dimensions, but is not determined by the mere fact of those dimensions as such. But such a sceptical thesis is what we have argued against by revealing the pattern shown in the *husn-qubh* debate as well as the signs of the epistemological *basis* to the Euthyphro dilemma. That is to say, a substantive connection exists. Nevertheless, despite their being a relationship of influence, the question rather complicated because we cannot suppose that any hard and fast determining connection holds between epistemology and ethics (let alone, theological-ethics), even after surveying the ethical developments of a particular religious tradition. An empiricist has the options of being either theocentrist or an anciliarist. Thus, one particular epistemological stance might be related to various ethical readings.

### **2.2.1.2 Theoethical Positions and the status of Morality**

Despite the different positions philosophers have taken, in each case the matter seems to boil down to where ethico-metaphysical priority is given, and the following epistemological implications. Like al-Ash'ari, Adams sees God as the author of

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<sup>232</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, Ch. 7.

morality, thus giving precedence to Him, while the centrality of human nature to Clark and Poortenga signifies a filter in the connection between humans and God that limits the possible moral commands appropriate to us. In this way, they grant human nature metaphysical priority; it determines the truth that morality corresponds with. But since God is responsible for our creation, He is, in this sense, the author of morality and therefore still has ultimate precedence. Whether it is revelation or human nature, our knowledge of both is gained by experience and despite the differences between the views offered by Adams and Clark and Poortenga, since both include God as the ultimate determiner of morality, both give morality a subjective status. The difference, though, is Clark and Poortenga deem the subjectivity to stem from a concrete form subject to natural law, namely, human nature, which entails first-order (as opposed to absolute) objectivity removing the prospect of morality being subject to arbitrary divine commandments.<sup>233</sup>

In contrast, rationalist methodologies will naturally result if all knowledge in a given subject is deemed to be independent of all experience. Thus, the view of Thomas Aquinas' and the Mu'tazilah, where morality has objective validity akin to that of logic, and to which, therefore, the decrees of God must accord, is rationalist in its outcome.

Accordingly, these three positions each grant a different status to moral truth which can be expressed by the terms in the following list respectively:<sup>234</sup>

1. theistic subjectivity
2. anthropic subjectivity
3. rationalistic objectivity

Unlike ratiocentrism, having an empirical method makes theocentrism subjective, because God directly and exclusively determines morality's contents. Though the basis of morality is 'objective' in so far as God's commandments are external from the view of the human mind, it is still ultimately subjective because its contents are dependent upon God completely. Anthropic subjectivity might be theocentric, given that God is

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<sup>233</sup> Clark and Poortenga, *Story of Ethics*.

<sup>234</sup> With the exception of 'anthropic subjectivity', the terms used here are borrowed from Hourani's *Reason and Tradition*.

taken to have created the human being a certain way with ensuing moral stability and that He therefore remains the original source of morality. But because the immediate source for formulating an ethical theory is humanness rather than semantic revelation, though ultimate priority might be given to other features of the human being, the theory has the possibility of also being ratiocentric, because of the human ability to reason. In any case, God is not the direct determiner of morality because features of humankind themselves are the material of moral knowledge in so far as ethics is concerned. Indeed, anthropic subjectivity can just as validly hold for atheists, in that they may reject rationalist objectivity alongside theistic subjectivity while holding that the world is not a divine creation. Finally, because a rational base is primary, ratiocentric is objective, and radically so if truth, in the form of logic or reason, is taken as independent or autonomous to God's creation.

In sum, what the answer to question one tells us, above all, is the status that morality has when conceived according to the different approaches listed here. Subjective theism conceives of morality as simply the individual decrees of God and ultimately without any comprehensible basis insofar as nothing is or can be the base and authority behind those decrees apart from revelation. Anthropocentric subjectivity again conceives of morality as lacking objectivity, yet morality does become something open to comprehension because its source are human faculties which can be investigated inductively and in rationalistic terms in order to form a coherent understanding of how morality holds in terms of those faculties. Rationalistic objectivity gives morality the greatest authority in that morality within this framework holds not just for humans but for all rational creatures in whatever shape, form, time and place they may exist.

### **2.3 The Epistemological Dimensions of the *Husn-Qubh* Issue**

The positions found in the Islamic context parallel the ones in Western thought due to the basic field of epistemology, which both traditions depend upon, whether explicitly or not. We noted above that the Ash'ari position has to address the modal vulnerability problem, the arbitrariness problem, the emptiness problem as well as having to explain why it is that people seem able to reach reliable moral conclusions without revelation to assist them – even if they do err regularly, and fail to act according to their principles even more. The Mu'tazili position, on the other hand, faces the independent validity

problem and its derivatives as well as the metaphysical curtailment of God's creative power. The problems assailing both positions are the same *post hoc* issues that affect the theo- and ratiocentric positions of the Western thinkers considered above. And we have found also that the disagreement between these positions cannot be settled in these terms. Indeed, the continuing support that the Mu'tazili position still garners from certain scholars perhaps results from the less than decisive and historically arbitrary manner in which it was defeated. The Ash'ariyyah view morality as being subjective, revelation-based and conditional, while the Mu'tazilah as objective, super-revelatory, and unconditional. Beginning from such diametrically opposed stances, debate can either point to the problems that follow each stance or the strength (and weakness) of the positions that lead to them. As argued above in relation to the dilemma, the former are rather arbitrary; it is the latter considerations that will allow us to approach the matter in way that can get to the heart of the matter and what really divides the two positions. The doctrine of utmost importance is the one that states what the source of morality is, for that one is most basic, and determines the others. Believing God is the source of morality, makes morality subjective, revelation-based and conditional, believing that reason is the basis of moral knowledge will move thought in a contrary, if not opposite, direction. But it is precisely that particular and most basic doctrine regarding the source of morality that is least likely to be affected by the *post hoc* considerations usually taken as the prime material for debate on the matter.

The epistemological, and, as we shall see, even metaphysical, foundation to the matter of theological-ethics is even more pronounced in the Islamic context. We already know the particular theological-ethical stances adopted by the Mu'tazila and al-Ash'ari and that a cluster of philosophically varied doctrine forms the general picture of their individual positions. The question is, therefore, did epistemological considerations lead them to those stances and what were those epistemologies specifically? Finding a link between their stances and epistemologies of certain kinds may help us understand what underlying division between the two groups lead to their particular theological-ethics and also provide a basis at this more fundamental level for a comparative assessment between them and modern ethical theories of a less theological stripe. The purpose of this is to be able to later talk about morality in general, beyond the confines of the

Islamic context and even that of Abrahamic theological-ethics. This will allow us to make conclusions of wider import.

In regards to *kalām*, it is likely that the Mu'tazilah learnt some of the tools needed for sophisticated speculation from outside sources. A major foreign intellectual current with which *kalām* contended was the *falsafa* of the Greeks. In translations of Greek philosophical works, it appears the name 'kalām' initially came about because the theologian was the person who could make dialectical discussion possible in regards to a particular theological issue; the word *mutakallim* (lit. 'speaker') designated a person involved in theological speculation and debate that aimed at making dogma digestible in logical and rational terms.<sup>235</sup> What is more, building upon tools taken from *usūl al-fiqh*, the Mu'tazila adopted syllogism and Aristotelian analogy.<sup>236</sup> In terms of doctrine, Greek philosophy presented a comprehensive explanation of the universe, and in the face of this an Islamic account was needed to satisfy the intellectually inclined Muslim. Goldziher claims, therefore, that *kalām* began with decidedly 'anti-Aristotelian postulates' as a genuine 'philosophy of religion'.<sup>237</sup> On the other hand, several theories from Greek philosophy are listed by Wolfson as candidates for study as influences on *kalām*.<sup>238</sup>

Indeed, a structural divide is observed by Reinhart between the Mu'tazilah and the jurists, resting on the contrasting centrality that ontology and epistemology respectively have in their ethical approaches. This loosely translates into intellectual endeavours fundamentally opposed across a rationalist and empiricist divide. Whether methodological or theoretical, it should come as no surprise if the *mutakallimun* felt able to use the resources supplied by the philosophers before them because of the former's metaphysical and rationalist commitments. In the Mu'tazili theological-ethical world, metaphysics is central; morality is deemed to consist of mind independent things that are good or bad in themselves. Reason merely perceives the moral value of things according to their own specific attributes, existing independently of human thought and

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<sup>235</sup> Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 1.

<sup>236</sup> Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 19-23.

<sup>237</sup> Goldziher, *Islamic Theology and Law*, pp. 85-86.

<sup>238</sup> Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 64-66.

revelation.<sup>239</sup> Even if they did not take their specific moral doctrine from philosophical or other foreign sources, their belief that moral value existed in terms detectable by reason meant that the certainty and purity reason provided must also have been true of morality too. For the jurists in general, however, good and bad is known quite differently, that is to say, by what is contained in revelatory sources. However, the jurists were at odds on how they should behave regarding the sources of legal evidence. In this matter they loosely divided into two groups, those that would permit judgments made according to what was deemed appropriate for the circumstances, and those that limited the use of reason to analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) in reference to the Qur’ān and Prophetic practice (*sunna*). As inheritors of the ancient law schools of Madinah and Iraq, the first group included the classical law schools founded respectively by Imam Mālik and Abū Hanifa. Scholars in Iraq used *ray* (sound opinion) or *istiḥsān* to make law and this was the practice of Abū Hanifa. The term *istiḥsān* is derived from *hasan*, which means ‘to be good’, being a form of *ijtihād*, literally meaning ‘an effort’ (to find God’s will). This versatile source of law did not precede the Qur’ān and *sunna* in importance, but is recognized to have become established as a legal tool principally by the Hanafī School. An associated approach is *istislah*, the ‘general interest’, which is based on the local living tradition (*‘urf*) and the consensus (*ijmā*) of the jurists, as represented by Mālik, and this was found mostly in the Hijaz. By contrast, the traditionalists amongst the *‘ulamā* lent strongly on scripture and prophetic narrations to reach all judgements, shunning the application of reason as much as possible.

Al-Shāfi‘ī offered a kind of middle way between these two approaches, though leaning still clearly towards the traditionalist stance. His famous *al-Risalah fī Usūl al-Fiqh*, which for the first time presented in a systematized way the sources of law, subordinated the practices of *istishan* and *istislah*, which Faruki notes still had the possibility of taking priority to the Qur’ān and *sunna*.<sup>240</sup> Al-Shāfi‘ī intended to limit the scope of reasoning and local tradition in order to protect positive Islamic law and divine authority. For example, before Islām the word *sunna* in Arabic had had a neutral meaning. It denoted merely social custom or tradition. Because it was the place where

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<sup>239</sup> Reinhart, *Before Revelation*.

<sup>240</sup> Kemal Faruki, *Islamic Jurisprudence* (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1975), p. 25.

the Prophet had lived, for Mālik, the Medina of Muhammad was the ultimate ideal of Islamic practice.<sup>241</sup> Al-Shāfi'i was a student of Imam Mālik and learned Mālik's methods of deriving legal judgments, but following a trend that most probably preceded him by some fifty years,<sup>242</sup> begun distinguishing between the local tradition of Medina and the *sunna* of the people that was practiced during the Prophetic reign, since the two threatened to become indistinguishable.<sup>243</sup> With this distinction in place, in his *Risalah*, al-Shāfi'i also offered an understanding, or *al-ta'wil*, that 'encouraged the acceptance of many a Prophetic tradition that would have been in danger of being rejected,' claiming any contradiction between them could only be apparent.<sup>244</sup> Such moves helped secure *ahadith* teaching the *sunna* of the Prophet as a highly valued source of legal knowledge. As a student of al-Shāfi'i, Ibn Hanbal took this approach to hadith even further, rejecting *istihsān*, *istislah* and even *qiyās* as valid sources of law.<sup>245</sup> Opponents to this approach were quick to point out the traditionalist practice of arguing from a weak tradition rather than a strong analogy.

In matters where the '*ulamā* could not find evidence in the Qur'ān or practice (*sunna*) of the Prophet, another source of law was consensus, *ijmā*. Again, it seems, responding to the methods of his teacher Imam Mālik, al-Shāfi'i's concept of consensus included the entire community and not just the people of a specific region. But this position was abandoned even by those belonging to the inevitable Shāfi'i *madhhab*, and came to refer to the '*ulamā* alone. What is more, for various notable thinkers *ijmā* referred merely to unanimity among the companions (*sahāba*) of the Prophet on a certain subject, retrospectively observed to constitute a form of legal proof.<sup>246</sup> While this position made for a rather conservative source of law, for other equally renowned scholars *ijmā* in reality worked largely on a regional basis only and meant that diverging interpretations

<sup>241</sup> J. Burton, *The Sources of Islamic Law*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>242</sup> Wael Hallaq, *The Evolution of Islamic Law*, p. 50.

<sup>243</sup> Faruki, *Islamic Jurisprudence*, p. 25.

<sup>244</sup> Majid Khadduri, *al-Shāfi'i's Risalah*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987), p. 37

<sup>245</sup> Ibn Abī Ya'la, *Tabaqāt al-hanābilah*, ed. Muhammad Hamid al-Fiḍī 2 vols, Cairo: Matba'at al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiya, 1952, 1:31, 241, 2:19, in Christopher Melchert, *The Formation of the Sunni Schools of Law: 9th-10th Centuries C.E.*, Leiden: Brill, 1997, p. 179.

<sup>246</sup> Necmettin Kızılkaya, "Fıkıh Usulünde Sahabe Fetvasının Kaynaklık Değeri ile İlgili Yaklaşımlar ve Bunların Tahlili," *İLEM Yıllık*, 4/4, (2009), pp. 30-31.

amongst the law schools introduced by *ray* gained some protection and authority.<sup>247</sup> Indeed, *ijmā* is rather unique in that it does not fit neatly into either an empiricist or rationalist approach to epistemology. Though consensus is ultimately a reflection to the dominant intellectual persuasion of professionals in the group concerned, which may be either rationalist or empiricist, the particular stance of the individuals who have reached a consensus cannot always be known and may indeed vary. Those individuals may also make their judgements on less than objective, that is to say, historically and culturally determined influences. Thus, what is true in one society might not be true for another. In this sense, *ijmā* is really only a reinforcement of separately determined conclusions.

Putting this exception aside, we find that even amongst the *fuqahā*, a ratio- and theocentric division was evident. And this division is largely independent of *kalām*. That is to say, a Shāfīī *faqīh* could be a Mu'tazilī while a Hanafī could be an Ash'ari, despite the fact that theoretical affinities go the other way around. Even more, a *faqīh* with rationalistic persuasions did not have to be a *mutakallim* at all. Yet, the *fuqahā*, within the context of their internal divisions are still to be contrasted with the Mu'tazilah as sole representatives of *kalām* during the early period. For at that time, though *mutakallim* and Mu'tazili were synonymous, the science of jurisprudence was separately divided.

One might wonder what the Qur'ān and *ahadith* themselves say about how Qur'ānic and traditional evidence be used, and what prospect it laid out for the use of reason to define what is right and wrong. Certainly, the Qur'ān gave a new meaning to the word *hasan*, which before had simply meant 'beautiful'. The word is used in terms of *basirah*, the eye of the heart or intellect, thus giving it a more transcendent meaning. As for the term *qabih*, it had the meaning of 'ugly' to the eye and also denoted emotionally disturbing practices and behaviour. It is used in the Qur'ān just once, however. The terms commonly used for immorality are *su* and *sayyia*. Nevertheless, in the Islamic literature, *hasan* and *qabih* are used as moral terms, more equivalent to good and bad than beautiful and ugly.<sup>248</sup> Whether the Qur'ān and *hadith* declared good and bad as

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<sup>247</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali. *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2003), p. 229; Ahmad Hassan, *The Doctrine of Ijmā in Islam*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, International Islamic University, 2010.

<sup>248</sup> Çelebi, "Hüsün ve Kubuh," p. 59.



things people understood independently of revelation, however, is precisely a matter the *'ulamā* were divided on and one which they no doubt were in a good position to evaluate. One respected orientalist conducting a study of the Qur'ān concludes that the sacred text presupposes the existence of objective values.<sup>249</sup> The same author also observes that there appear no non-Islamic sources for Mu'tazili ethics, meaning that the rationalist and ratiocentric stance they accepted was born entirely out of Islamic resources and the uniquely Islamic scholarly context.<sup>250</sup> So if one were to ask whence the Mu'tazilah and their rationalism arrived, the answer would be from Muslim endeavours to draw up a picture of reality and knowledge motivated entirely by revelation.

What is clear is that had the Mu'tazilah remained the dominant force in the Islamic intellectual world, the sources of knowledge may have been evaluated quite differently. The Mu'tazilah harboured a general mistrust for the reliability of the procedures meant to protect the authenticity of *hadith*.<sup>251</sup> A single tradition included a chain of transmission (*isnād*) in addition to its content. Both oral and written methods were used in their dissemination, though written forms took longer to establish. Methods included dictation, memorisation, and transcription. None was guaranteed perfect accuracy. Nonetheless, the Mu'tazili's adhered to a strict criteria of truth. As far as they were concerned, Wasil ibn 'Ata, a forerunner to their school, if not one of its founders,<sup>252</sup> had formulated what Van Ess cites as a 'discourse on method' that included an inventory of the bases of knowledge.<sup>253</sup> This represented a rival approach to that of the jurists written a generation before al-Shāfi'i, and was most likely a target of the latter's *Risalah*. The method ascribed to Wasil lists the sources of knowledge, in order of importance, as the Qur'ān, propositions or reports (*akhbār*, sing. *khbar*), and judgements arrived at with sound reason (*bi-'aql sālim*).<sup>254</sup> Immediately obvious is the absence of *ijmā*. More importantly, perhaps, was Wasil's condition that a report is sound only if narrated by

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<sup>249</sup> Hourani, "Ethical Presuppositions of the Qur'ān," in *Reason and Tradition*, pp. 23-48.

<sup>250</sup> Hourani, "The Origins of Mu'tazilite Ethical Rationalism," in *Reason and Tradition*, pp.67-97. In this, Hourani must be credited for having eschewed the unwarranted assertion hitherto held by several orientalists, including Von Kremer, de Boer, Macdonald, Goldziher, Arnold, and Becker, that any Muslim belief in free-will must have been derived from non-Muslim sources (al-Attar, *Islamic Ethics*, p.55).

<sup>251</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 157-164.

<sup>252</sup> Watt, *Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>253</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, p. 155.

<sup>254</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, p. 157.

several people who could not have come to a prior agreement. Indicative of his role as a jurist, Shāfī‘i narrows the scope of *khavar* to only those found in *ahadith* attributed to the Prophet, and does not apply Wasil’s strict criterion. This was brought about by necessity. Due to the importance and necessity of the Prophetic example in the formulation of Islamic law, and the importance and necessity of the law in establishing the Muslim identity, *fiqh* established beyond question the importance of *hadith* in its transition towards the centre of Islamic scholarly endeavour.<sup>255</sup> Indeed, both *hadith* and *ijmā* followed a similar course of initial neglect from the *mutakalimun*, and later general acceptance.<sup>256</sup>

While the *fuqahā* had little choice but to make the most of the *hadith* of the Prophet, the *mutakallimun* had by necessity to rely to a greater extent on the use of reason. It would be impossible to convince a Christian, for example, of the truth of Islām by appealing directly towards scripture, that is to say, the very truth and authenticity of which is in question for them and all other non-Muslims. Van Ess claims that for the Mu‘tazila, therefore, the Qur’ān was never the central piece of evidence. They had a different task to the *fuqahā* and different audience; their mission was to a significant extent apologetic and their audience non-Muslim.<sup>257</sup> That said, the Mu‘tazila were scripturalists, noted for their fondness of writing commentaries on the Qur’ān. What is more, Hourani observes that firm Mu‘tazili adherence to the spirit of the Qur’ān accounted for their ‘cool reception’ of Greek philosophy and, indeed, their ability to defy ‘any non-Muslim system’.<sup>258</sup>

Another important distinction between the two sciences is that in *fiqh* the truth is often determined according to context, answering specifically: what is the right thing to do in the circumstances? This would apply, for example, to situations when one needs to make ablution but water cannot be found, or when prayer is due but one does not know the direction of prayer. The nature of the subject itself allowed quite clearly for disagreement and, consequently, a liberality in regard to the acceptance of opposing views. What is more important is that the jurists had less, if any, need for the concept of

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<sup>255</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, p. 161.

<sup>256</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 166-167

<sup>257</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, p. 158.

<sup>258</sup> Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, p. 97.

absolute truth; they were much more like detectives, seeking out textual and oral evidence in order to gradually put together a picture of what the law required. This also involved making sense of *ahadith* that seemed to be at odds on a single subject or whose implications were not clear. In this sense, there was, as they well knew, the possibility of their being wrong; the competing claims among them being only a matter of greater or less strength and thus lacking the presumed sureness of logic and reason. This is encapsulated in a famous catchphrase of the *fuqahā*: ‘Our opinion is correct with the possibility of being a mistake and the opinion of those who differ with us is a mistake with the possibility of being correct.’<sup>259</sup> Contrary to the main Sunni schools of law that have survived to this day, such a liberal view of things was not something the Mu’tazilī’s were inclined to countenance.<sup>260</sup> What is more, in *kalām*, the types of truth being discussed were transcendent and timeless, making disagreement, as Van Ess observes, the thing of scandal.<sup>261</sup> So confident was belief in the power of reason that the *mutakallimun* had no worries about failing in debate, since Islām was the truth and only needed rational explanation. This meant that the theologians opposed whoever’s opinion appeared too personal.<sup>262</sup> Clearly, they did not accept *kalām* as a speculative science.

What appears clear is that the respective theological-ethical stances of both the *mutakallimun* and the *fuqahā*, the Mu’tazilah and the Ash’ariyyah, were determined by the epistemological and subsequent methodological characteristic of their particular scholarly fields along with the specific goals those fields held. The Mu’tazili theological-ethical position, made reason the ultimate source of knowledge as it was necessary to find a basis for dialogue and debate that could refute the arguments non-Muslims and win them over to Islam. In contrast, al-Ash’ari was a theologian who could speak for the jurists; he did not have to be a jurist that spoke theology in order to represent their cause. Of course, he was speaking for the Shāfiī and Hanbali branches of *fiqh* more than the more rationally inclined Hanafī and Mālikī schools, and such facts prevent generalisations being made regarding the *fuqahā* as a whole. Indeed, the

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<sup>259</sup> This is a quote from Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī’s *Al-Musaffā*, given in Ibn Nujaym al-Hanafī, *Al-Ashbāh wal-Nazāir* (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyya, 1999) Vol.1 p. 330.

<sup>260</sup> Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2013).

<sup>261</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>262</sup> Van Ess, *Muslim Theology*, pp. 28-29.

Hanafia do not seem to have gained a theological champion sensitive to the character of their particular methods of jurisprudence until the arrival of al-Māturīdī. Nevertheless, al-Ash'ari's stance represents, to this day, the theological orthodoxy for much of the Islamic world. In taking up theology from a traditionalist point of view, al-Ash'ari was setting up a theological-ethical stance of a profoundly and strictly empiricist character. The jurists, of course, were working in order to discern what the will of God was regarding the practices of Islām and their legal status. In this sense, moral and immoral, legal and illegal acts are not divided from the start but in degrees located merely at different points on the spectrum of acts identified as forming the subject matter of their discipline. For them, therefore, morality, as much as law, was precisely their domain of endeavour, and the way that it was to be known was via reference to the relevant sources in their established order of priority. This essentially meant empirical investigation constituted the greatest determinant of what was good and what was bad as far as could be discerned from revelation. This alone does not rule out the existence of other sources of morality in principle, but it did in scholarly practice. All that was needed, therefore, was the dismissal of reason as an alternative source and morality was made entirely dependent on revelatory sources. And this, we know, is what the *fuqahā* essentially did by demoting reason to the last resort of jurisprudence, and limiting it to making analogical connections with judgements (*ahkām*, sing. *hukm*) found in revelatory sources. The question is, therefore, which approach, rationalist or the empiricist, is most capable of gaining an accurate theological-ethical understanding.

#### **2.4 The Fundamentality of Epistemology to Theological-ethics: An Evaluation of the Epistemological Aspects of Answers to the Euthyphro Dilemma**

There are two types of evidence, positive support for a given theory, and arguments that fend off criticism. Defeating the horns of the dilemma is just about proving that the theory in given, whether theocentric or ratiocentric is plausible in its own terms. That is to say, they demand arguments that prove the theory does not fall into contradiction or incoherence, and will hold as long as it faithfully corresponds to and explains some reality. Positive support on the other hand will arise from arguments that give reason for defending such a theory in the first place. If, for example, the theory explains and coheres well with the contents of a certain field of inquiry, then there is reason for

adopting it. Similarly, there are two reasons then for rejecting a theory, the first is that it simply does not cohere with reality, the second is that the theory falls into contradiction. Positive evidence is more basic and encouraging, since it is the first set of reasons for adopting a theory, and while a theory may fall into contradiction, so long as there is positive support for the theory, resolutions of those contradictions where possible will remain worthwhile if the theory has enough external support for it.

Now positive support may come from a variety of areas: ethics, metaphysics, and theology or religion and finally, epistemology. Let us deal with each of these in turn. In this section I will attempt to show that ethics is not able to provide positive support in and of itself because it is determined by another field of enquiry more basic to it, and that is epistemology. The same will be said in this section about metaphysics, what we can say about reality beyond what we see is again down to epistemological principles. Theology and religion are important, and we must be rather specific about the conception of God we refer to. In the philosophy of religion, until recently the norm has been to talk about doctrines at a high level of abstraction so that the findings can be applied to a number of various religions. But it seems this leads to some unfortunate inaccuracies relating to the specifics of individual religions, and many careful students of Islam, for example, will notice simplifications, omissions and quick dismissals of key parts of Islamic creed in the discussions to be found in the English literature, since the latter typically speaks more accurately for a tradition informed by Christian thought. This is to be expected in terms of scholarly expertise, for a heavy burden is placed on any author who seeks to make claims perfectly applicable to multiple traditions, even if those traditions are related. In short, the problem lies with the approach itself. And if one is to find a solution to the problem that faces the theological-ethicist, then they must do so within the framework of the particular theology that itself is constitutive of the dilemma. Our context is Islamic. But the positive support to be gained from the Islamic sacred texts is a task that we shall leave to al-Māturīdī for reasons explained in the introduction.

Finally, there is epistemology. It will pay to look at the outstanding problems or, rather, the ones that look the most trenchant, to identify and summarise the core problem. In this regard, I propose the problems of arbitrariness and modal vulnerability, alongside

the general lack in dialogue and commensurability to be indicative of the core issue and would like to present the work of Jacques Derrida, Post-modernist French philosopher, who is famous for the idea of deconstruction, as indicative of the root of these problems and hence the core issue of which these problems are the result. In addition, the following discussion aims to support the claim that both ethics and metaphysics are subordinate to epistemology in fundamentality. In this way, his work acts as positive support concerning our claim that a theological-ethical resolution lies in epistemological considerations rather than the secondary issues that constitute the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma.

As we have seen, each of the theological-ethical stances — the theo-centric, ratio-centric, and ancilarist — has particular epistemological implications. In this regard, as a prime example of theocentrism, Alston's position is the most radical, because he essentially questions the weight of the charge of arbitrariness altogether. The upshot is that there is no ultimate explanation that morality can possess. That is not to say that Alston sees morality as being entirely subjective, but there is a danger that having eschewed the notion of ultimate explanation via super-arbitrariness, we will also forget about limited or relative explanation that holds within a given context. Thus, by pointing out that arbitrariness will always haunt the original source of normativity, Alston does not thereby identify a means of vindicating the modal status of simply anything and everything that God may command. That would be to fall back into arbitrariness of a limited kind, but arbitrariness nonetheless. No doubt, the tendency to associate morality with objectivity and divine commands with subjectivity is brought into question by Alston when he points towards more fundamental issues regarding the state of our relationship to morality and claims an inescapable arbitrariness is present whatever its ultimate source may be. This seems to shed doubt on Socrates' challenge to find a means of understanding morality in internalist terms, for there is always an unexplained basis to every principle. But there must be a coherency or harmony to revealed ethics if it is to be comprehended by the human mind in anything more than superficial terms, or rather, in terms that do not condemn the human to follow revelation just blindly.

Generally speaking, on some level, a priori knowledge is held to be necessary and analytic, while a posteriori knowledge is not. Alston's claim in fact undermines this at the basic level because a rational principle that governs our forms of comprehension, be they a priori or otherwise, will remain inescapably arbitrary; so we may also ask: does the existence of necessity have only a specific context, outside of which it does not exist? As we have argued above, this is not merely to point out that there will forever remain an open question regarding necessity, but rather that this very possibility points to a particular source of destabilisation to conceived notions that need only be identified and spelled out.

Secondly, giving up on the objectivity of morality appears to be suggested by the modal vulnerability problem, which is an ethical problem rather than a theological one. The complaints about this vulnerability rest on ideas and intuitions concerning the status of morality. Morality is not typically considered something whose character can simply change at the whim of an authority. If something is good, then it is good for a reason that holds objectively, and if something is bad, it is bad for no less a reason. That, at least, is the given intuition of most people. It assumes that we know what good and bad are and that they have an intrinsic reference. But what happens if we find that objectivity does not lie on solid ground? There are in fact two different views about how morality holds: one leaning towards an objective and or absolute morality, and another subjective, probable and or relative.

The question of whether we can know the essence of good and evil (or bad), or rather, define it them a way that allows rational comprehension of their contents is Socrates' challenge. He is asking: Is goodness something that we can understand and comprehend? The important question we leave with after studying contrasting lines of reasoning adopted by Socrates and Euthyphro is how do we know whose approach is better. The analysis of the text in question, just like the discussions that it provoked, suggests this is an epistemological question as much as a theological-ethical one. This is because the two interlocutors speak past each other, with the approach of each one deciding the matter before it has begun — as we saw with the analogies Socrates makes and the less than helpful responses Euthyphro gives him. Until we know what kind of thing holiness, justice and goodness are we will not know whose approach is better, and

until we know what epistemology allows us to say about morality we will not know what it is either. That is not to say that epistemology defines the contents of morality, but it does define what we can say about it, and that is crucial to deciding whether it is determined by God or reason. In a sense, then, we must look at epistemology, because, as it stands, the approach (whether theocentric or ratiocentric) ends up defining the subject to be studied, not the reverse. What we are dealing with, essentially, is two different approaches to the issue and what we have found is that the context must be clear for us to prove the point either way.

Various philosophers across history have attempted to put morality into terms that are comprehensible in a way quite independently from theological considerations. Hume, for example, identified morality entirely with human social bonds, sentiments, and disposition to form general rules, while Kant based morality entirely on pure rationality. But the matter is complicated by how the status of morality is conceived, and that is really a question of what types of knowledge there are, or what kind of status the things of knowledge are believed to hold. This of course, is a separate issue, but one very closely related to the ethical one. So if Quine, for instance, is right when he says ‘Necessity resides in the way we talk about things, not in the things we talk about,’<sup>263</sup> or if Derrida is right when he writes “‘objectivity’ ... imposes itself only within a context,”<sup>264</sup> it will have profound implications for ethics and our understanding of good and bad.

Since philosophy, like every other discourse, makes use of language, Derrida identifies philosophy also to be first and foremost a kind of writing. However, philosophy has traditionally been radically distinguished from writing, more specifically, from literature. Plato, for example, rejected the idea that rhetoric had any place in philosophy (most famously in *Gorgias*). The fundamental basis for this assertion is that Western philosophy has traditionally distinguished ‘reality’ from ‘appearance’. Signs and

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<sup>263</sup> Willard v. O. Quine, *Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*, (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 174.

<sup>264</sup> Jacques Derrida. *Limited Inc.* trans. Samuel Weber (Evanston, Il.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), pp. 136-137. The full quote reads: What is called "objectivity," scientific for instance (in which I firmly believe, in a given situation) imposes itself only within a context which is extremely vast, old, firmly established, or rooted in a network of conventions (for instance those of language) and yet which still remains a context.’



representations are, in this view, a way for us to get at reality, truth, or ideas, and they should not, therefore, get in the way of that process nor should they affect or infect the meaning they are supposed to represent. In other words, to claim that its statements are logical, reasonable, truthful, and not merely rhetorical ‘expressions’, philosophical discourse defines itself against writing.

Therefore, Derrida identified literature to be philosophy’s other. However, at the same time, this position Derrida undermines, or rather, opens up to new possibilities, by examining Western philosophy’s fundamental premises. It is precisely the notion of logic, reason and truth that is the main target of Derrida’s work. We have already noted one binary opposition to, that between reality and appearance, are related countless others, e.g. internal:external, true:false, good:evil, father:mother, life:death, and within each of these pairs the former term is always privileged over the latter. These are all related to, in fact derived from, what Derrida identifies as a ‘metaphysics of presence’ that underlies the whole edifice of Western philosophy, and is the same principle behind the reason why writing is perceived negatively as opposed to speech. The metaphysics of presence, keeps the sense of unity within a text, it acts as the center from which stability is derived, where presence was granted the privilege of truth. It was the condition of possibility, a structural feature. Thus ‘Saussure, for essential, and essentially metaphysical, reasons had to privilege speech, everything that links the sign to the phone. He also speaks of the ‘natural link’ between thought and voice, meaning and sound. He even speaks of thought sound’. ‘From this point of view, voice is consciousness itself.

The binary oppositions constitute ‘violent hierarchies’. The privileged term is the one most associated with the logos (speech-thought). Unity, identity, immediacy, and spatial and temporal presence are privileged over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment’. Derrida writes

It would be possible to show that all the terms related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated the constant of a presence – eidos, arche, telos,

energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject), aletheia, transcendentality, consciousness or conscience, God, man and so forth.<sup>265</sup>

Derrida termed belief in this self presentation 'logocentrism'.

However, Derrida attempts to show that the very possibility of opposing terms on the basis of the opposition between presences and absence is an illusion. In order to undermine the truth of these hierarchical binary oppositions, Derrida sets about, first, overturning them, thus revealing their contingency, and then, secondly, neutralising them by introducing a third term. This 'double gesture' or what Derrida more specifically calls a 'double science' constitutes a kind of 'general strategy for deconstruction', which we also will consider later. Here, what is to be pointed out is that by examining founding premises, deconstruction, as Johnson claims, is a form of critique, as opposed to criticism. A criticism is an examination of flaws or imperfections and is thereby designed to make the system better, whereas a critique focuses on the grounds of the systems possibility in order to show that these things have a history, a (cultural) construction, usually blind to itself.<sup>266</sup> The differences ultimately responsible for meaning did not simply fall from heaven but are themselves products.<sup>267</sup> Every theory starts somewhere, every critique exposes what that starting point conceals. The critique does not ask 'what does this statement mean?' but 'What does it presuppose?' This 'incurs a shift in perspective that literally makes the ground move' and thereby displaces all the ideas that follow on from it.<sup>268</sup>

However, that is not to say that since Derrida seeks to undermine the assertion that being is presence or that he denies the possibility of truth. Derrida's task is not simply to say there is no truth, since, to do that, he would have to assert that there is in fact error, which would imply that there is a truth. Rather, what Derrida undermines is the notion of Truth (capital T). Derrida's reading of various texts and the construction of his own texts are explorations of logocentrism. These texts can be shown to affirm and undermine the metaphysics of presence, can be shown to give rise to paradoxes that

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<sup>265</sup> Derrida, *Writing and Difference* cited in Damien White, 'Jacques Derrida' in John Sturrock (ed.), *Structuralism and Since*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.161

<sup>266</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. xv.

<sup>267</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 40.

<sup>268</sup> Johnson, *Dissemination*, p. xv-xvi.

challenge the coherence and consistency and therefore challenge the possibility of determining or defining being as presence.<sup>269</sup> Rather than presence, deconstruction, points to absence. What is brought to mind depends on a certain presence of absences, and absence of presences; nothing is simply present or absent. This works by what Derrida calls traces. He explains,

The play of differences involves syntheses and referrals which prevent there from being at any moment or in any way a simple element which is present in and of itself and refers only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each 'element' – phoneme or grapheme – being constituted in the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system ... nothing neither among the elements nor within the system, is anywhere ever simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.<sup>270</sup>

If then we try to think of the beginning of language, we see that the trace was necessary for the first term to signify as the presence of difference was there alongside side the first term at the beginning and allowed it to occur. As White explains 'For a cave man to successfully originate language by making a special grunt signifying something like 'food' is only possible if we assume that the grunt is already divided into categories of food and non-food'.<sup>271</sup> Thus the first term was never, simple but complex, and the difference that made itself relied on an event, or act of will to become present. Acts of signification are necessary to create signifying differences, and at the same time signification always depends on difference.<sup>272</sup>

Thus, the existence of the difference has a dual aspect, which Derrida collectively names *differance*. It designates both passive difference already existing as the condition of signification and an act of differing or deferring that produces differences. Deferral, on the one hand, is the notion that words can only be defined through synonymy, through the appeal to additional words. Thus, meaning is forever 'deferred' or

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<sup>269</sup> White, "Jacques Derrida," p. 161.

<sup>270</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 26.

<sup>271</sup> White, "Jacques Derrida," p. 164.

<sup>272</sup> Culler, *On Deconstruction*, pp. 40-41.

postponed through an endless chain of signifiers. Difference, on the other hand, concerns the force which differentiates elements from one another and, in so doing, engenders binary oppositions and hierarchies which underpin meaning itself.

Ultimately there is no synthesis, if we focus on events one has to concede the priority of differences, and if one focuses on differences one has to see their dependence on prior events. As White states, ‘signifying events depend on differences, but these differences are themselves the products of events’.<sup>273</sup> This is pure an epistemological perspective; it regards our comprehension and articulation of events and structures.

The same situation describes the nature of the Euthyphro dilemma, while the rationalist believes that an objective or necessary relation holds between events and their goodness, or rather, that goodness is expressed directly by the thing itself, the empiricist leaves the moral significance of events to their consequences or causes (such as a divine command), hence making them conditional on things different and external to the event or entity itself. Yet, on the one hand, nothing has the capacity to signify in the pure and simple way that the rationalist would hold, and on the other hand, the morality of any event or structure must be decided to come from the thing itself or else there will be an endless deferral. All meaning, and hence all moral meaning, exists via this twin alternation and tension between two aspects of comprehension that are never resolved into a complete unity.

Because the production of meaning depends on logocentrism and results in arbitrary associations of certain elements of binary oppositions with presence, Derrida’s work at the same time highlights a distinction between the arbitrary, which applies to value and privileges, as they have no intrinsic grounds, and the conditional, which opposes the classical conception of the a priori. This undermines the idea that good and bad are unconditional categories and thus would both undermine any ratiocentrism that claims the opposite and provide positive support for the theocentrist, because the latter grounds morality on empirical evidence in the form of revelation. But it should be noted that the commands of God are not automatically a basis for morality without presuppositions. If God commands us to do x, then we also need the judgement that God’s commands

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<sup>273</sup> White, “Jacques Derrida,” p. 164.

should be followed, and this judgement too will be based on something else, and so on, ad infinitum. Because identity and deferral, presence and absence, are both essential to meaning, both the ratiocentric and theocentric are equally undermined and supported by Derrida's explanations.

That is not to say that Derrida denies our ability to arrive at 'knowledge', in fact, in a sense, he seems to say that empirical evidence is all that we have — for all knowledge is conditional and or finite, and therefore its seems a posteriori rather than a priori (unless we say that a priori knowledge is conditional too). But two things are important here that moderate the importance of the empirical vis-à-vis the rational and also highlights the possibility of objective knowledge and necessity. Firstly, though knowledge is admittedly achieved by a logocentric act or decision (as it would be with acknowledgement of God's command), Derrida works from 'within' the rationalist paradigm; his observations are not empirical ones but rational and he uses the rules of reason to reveal the conditionality of reason itself. Thus, logocentrism as a condition of the production of meaning is necessary.

Secondly, necessity is not the same as objectivity. There may be objective knowledge that is conditional, and these conditions will surely place some context to determine what is called good and bad. Derrida says that no interpretation is entirely objective; they are all based on logocentric assumptions that arbitrarily privileges certain terms over others, and hence that no matter what the conditions, varied interpretations are equally possible. So far, the consideration of theological-ethical discussions gives evidence of an assumption that it is possible to credibly define the relation between God and ethics no matter what our conception of morality may be. The deconstructive critique undermines this claim at a fundamental level. It reveals not only that the basis of meaning is biased in favour of presence, but also that any inference from given information is also subjective and open-ended. But we thus reach a situation comparable to the problem of arbitrariness, and if, as we have claimed before, the severity of the arbitrariness problem is reduced to nothing precisely because it captures everything, then its power to limit ethical claims is itself limited. Conversely, if rational principles were not an objective source of morality, then things may seem to shift in favour of the natural world in the widest sense of the term, that is to say, to include things such as

psychology and anthropology. But this shift is illusory. The destabilization of reason will open the door to multiple interpretations of morality and its contents, and none of these will be in a position to win either distinguishing confirmation or refutation. The concept of philosophical plausibility itself will be undermined in this situation, and no interpretation can claim an advantage, even if based on natural or common sense opinions. What we need, then, is a given context with which moral claims can be made objectively, and in this regard attention naturally turns to the given natural world, where nature renders one view point plausible, and others merely possible. But it is in fact only a moral, or more generally, a normative theory, that will be able to dislodge the hold of the deconstructive critique, in the sense of applying a context, or set of conditions, and a centre to the framework of morality, and the basis for the production of moral significance.

Within the confines of the Euthyphro dilemma the theocentric position appears to be motivated solely by theological-metaphysical and theological-ethical claims rather than epistemological ones. However, we may note that they draw upon other claims, such as the seemingly different moral beliefs present in different societies for positive support to prove the subjectivity of morality. The point is that this is a separate inquiry, one which the ratiocentric is inherently involved in. The same can be said, of course, about the 'alternative' solutions that were considered above. Though some of these alternatives, such as Mawson's, ultimately boil down to the ratiocentric, others, such as Clark and Poortenga's, have a genuine two level structure. That is to say, they tie morality to features of the world and or human beings God created. What is more, we also saw that these quasi-ratiocentrisms will have to resort to theology or dogma in order to answer claims about arbitrariness unless we find a more basic form of assessment for dialogue. And that prospect is just what epistemology provides.

## **2.5 Chapter Conclusion**

The main purpose of this chapter was to show that an ethical theory necessarily has a corresponding epistemology that sustains it. The radically different epistemological bases the theocentric and ratiocentric have means that proper debate tends to go unestablished. The horns of the dilemma are merely after thoughts, to what is deemed as more decisive. This applies to both the Western and Islamic contexts. In regards to the

Islamic context, whether the professional goals of the two groups determined their theological concerns is not our main worry, though the correspondence between the two does suggest that that indeed was what happened, but what we can say is that the respective epistemological positions each adopted in the achievement of their professional goals, and the problems of which these are the result, appear to have placed the Mu'tazilah and Ashā'ira at odds on a fundamental level. It appears therefore, that a body of thought that pays due attention to the epistemological aspects of the debate is essential for some resolution. We have not argued that all theocentric stances will be empiricist or that all ratiocentric ones will be rationalist, but our investigation so far indicates that a resolution can be found by establishing some correspondence between these two epistemological bases, without claiming that this is the only solution.

The matter is, then, really a question of what types of knowledge there are, or what kind of status knowledge has in general. This observation applies equally to both the orientations under consideration despite their differences, because the theo-centrist is primarily concerned with where morality comes from. What makes both orientations important to second-order ethics is that they make, imply or hail from specific epistemological positions in their opposition regarding the nature and source of morality. Therefore, ignoring these foundations would be to ignore a telling feature regarding the strength of the positions involved. In order to assess their validity from a more accurate advantage than the narrow confines of the Euthyphro dilemma, we have to go back a step to moral epistemology directly. By deciding how we learn about morality and what we hold ourselves to know about it, we will know what morality expresses in modal terms. In such a situation, consideration of how this will affect God's status is surely arbitrary.

Debate is joined more truly, therefore, by positive arguments for God as either metaphysically or epistemologically the source of morality itself. This might be reached by conditional 'if ... then ...' calculations: given that morality is so and so, its source may be as follows. The reverse simply will not do. To say: 'Given the source of morality is God, morality must be so and so,' simply does not acknowledge the human dimension (in terms of epistemology and signification) of the matter and assumes a direct and uncomplicated link from God's virtues to morality's content and status.

These observations thus undermine the theocentric position, as long as it tends to begin with metaphysical claims rather than epistemological ones.

The question we have answered in this chapter is whether theological-ethics should determine our epistemology or epistemology our theological-ethics. To this end we looked at how the work of Derrida confirms the essential place of epistemology to metaphysics and ethics. We have seen how the deconstructionist critique echoes the problem of super-arbitrariness, and therefore, while pointing out the conditional or contextual framework to all ethical claims, does not rule out that a plausible context will result in a plausible theory, and how it also presupposes the rules of reason in order to reveal the conditional status of its findings. This revalidates the rationalist position, but in a modified form. While highlighting what kind of claims can be made about knowledge and its status, the basic idea that the structure of knowledge necessarily displays a twin rational-empirical aspect, with neither concept- or belief-empiricism are inevitably justified. What is more, we observed how these two aspects are never synthesised, how instead their coexistence is necessary as incommensurable types of comprehension to the production and articulation of meaning. The question then is whether al-Māturīdī's metaethical thought displays a general agreement with these observations — in contrast to the ratiocentric and theocentric positions noted above.



## Chapter 3: The Epistemological and Theological Background to al-Māturīdī's Metaethics

### 3.1 Al-Māturīdī's writings on Ethics and Metaethics

In historical terms, the place of the Māturīdī School, and the thought of al-Māturīdī in particular, is often presented as a middle position between that of the Ash'ari and Mu'tazili, but this is somewhat misleading given how the school developed. Specifically, al-Māturīdī did not attempt to reconcile Mu'tazili and Ash'ari thought; indeed it is believed that he had very little knowledge, if any, of his famous contemporary al-Ash'ari. Rather, he developed a comprehensive *kalām* directly via criticism of Mu'tazili thought and in line with a specific school of fiqh, that is, the Hanafī School, much like al-Ash'ari did for the traditionalists.<sup>274</sup> As such, al-Māturīdī was dealing with a specific set of problems and opponents while forming an alternative body of thought to comment on God, revelation and creation.

Yet al-Māturīdī does not offer a systematic or complete moral theory. Of his two extant works, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* is a book of *kalām* primarily aimed to refute Mu'tazili doctrine and therefore the range of topics addressed is limited to its specific targets. What is more, there is frequent repetition of the same points; more than one would normally find in a work of *kalām*, and the treatise is in fact deemed to likely be a compilation of several smaller works.<sup>275</sup> The second, *Ta'wilat al-Qur'an*, is a voluminous Qur'ānic commentary and not the medium for presenting an organised moral theory. In short, neither work has the specific aim of presenting a full treatment of ethics. The result is a mixture of interconnected ethical ideas and doctrine that refer to various Mu'tazili doctrine and verses of the Qur'ān.

What is more, some of those problems al-Māturīdī was dealing with, or how they are conceived, has changed and an underlining wish behind this study is to avoid treating al-Māturīdī's thought merely as a theological body without contemporary philosophical relevance. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that we here approach al-

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<sup>274</sup> Recep, Kılıç, *Ahlakın Dini Temeli* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), p. 115.

<sup>275</sup> J. Meric Pessagno, "The Uses of Evil in Māturīdīan Thought," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984), p. 62, cf. M. Sait Özervarlı, 'The Authenticity of the Manuscript of Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*: A Re-examination', *İslām Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1997), pp. 19-29.

Māturīdī with questions and categories he may not have recognised in the same way as is done today and there is a danger of imposing on his thought an alien framework of analysis with subsequent anachronism. Hence, there are two sides to this endeavour: to use al-Māturīdī's thought in conversation with modern philosophy and represent it in a historically accurate way. This approach has the advantage of allowing us to engage his thought with modern philosophical questions, which is especially important given that his writings form the basis for an accepted school of Sunni orthodox belief today and therefore must be made to confront developments in philosophy if they are to remain genuinely and openly credible for *kalām*. That is not to say that Māturīdian thought must fundamentally change; alteration or development is required only where weakness or ambiguity is shown, while relevance and strengths, where they exist, should be revealed and celebrated.

In short, by not limiting ourselves to the concepts or questions found in al-Māturīdī's own writings, we are able to use the developments in philosophy and its various branches to bring his thought into conversation with current discussions and draw the connections that show its relevance to problems that have importance and validity not just in Western but also Islamic thought. Otherwise, we limit ourselves to the conduct of theological history and not the actual conduct of philosophy of religion or metaethics.

Meanwhile, we confront a methodological issue that pertains to the order of philosophical fundamentals in ethics and which also points to a basic distinction we may apply to divide al-Māturīdī's ethical thought. Specifically, before the identification of good and evil comes the question of morality's basis: whence obligation, responsibility as well as the contents of morality? While answering the ethical question of what is moral in any particular instance may shed some light on what the source of morality is (and vice versa), the two are nonetheless distinct questions and should be clearly set apart. As we shall see, the primary problem for al-Māturīdī is not a substantive investigation into what is good or bad but a metaethical one into what the source and nature of morality is, and what modal status the contents of morality hold, as per the traditional debate on *ḥusn* and *qubh* (as discussed in Chapter One).

The problem is that because al-Māturīdī's ethics is not expressed as a system (but rather a collection of arguments situated within the wider context of *kalām* debate and

characterised by certain themes, topics and explanations), it is up to us to put his variously interconnected claims into some type of logical order. However, as any student of the al-Māturīdī's writing will notice, the ideas prove extremely difficult to disentangle and present in a linear fashion – a task which perhaps is only incompletely achieved in the present and proceeding chapters. And on the other hand, it would be highly misleading to split apart the mesh of connections these ideas have. As a result, I have here chosen to present his thought in a grid-like arrangement, where units include mention of the other sections necessary to aid comprehension of where the individual claim in question stands in relation to the rest of al-Māturīdī's thought.

This act of putting al-Māturīdī's thought into some sort of logical order, signals a possible start to making his ethico-theological thought comprehensible as a system rather than a mere mosaic of related ideas. It is essential, however, to show the theoretical structure, from the basic ideas to their culmination in a full-scale metaethical theory that determines the world to be a normative system of divine creation within which humans are a fully integrated though unique part. And yet, throughout, the positions reached are based on, or meant to accord, directly with revelatory sources. This raises the question of whether scripture or reason was the principle guide in the construction of al-Māturīdī's thought; whether he rationalised theology or theologised reason. Either way, as we shall see, reason for al-Māturīdī is only the measure, evaluator and connector of the all the other parts of creation and its place is always already entwined with the subjects of its operations.

In this chapter, the aim is to specify as precisely as possible al-Māturīdī's position on the various sources of knowledge and conditions of morality. The chapter is made up of two main divisions. The first seeks to give an account of his epistemological thought and has been deemed necessary not only as an introduction also because of the dominant place epistemology has in his thought generally and to his ethics specifically. The second looks at what we may describe as theologico-moral fundamentals. Al-Māturīdī presents a philosophical take on the structure and material of reality that is steeped with moral implications. The attempt to present this account in its various aspects is made along with the significance it holds for morality.

### 3.2 Cosmology toward Belief in the Existence of God

*Kitāb al-Tawhīd* begins with an epistemological discussion that is introduced by observations asserting an obligation to know religion on the basis of evidence. Al-Māturīdī is in fact credited with starting the general trend in *kalām* works of beginning with a classification of epistemological sources.<sup>276</sup> But the actual tripartite classification follows a discussion about religious knowledge specifically. The arguments there are important to understanding al-Māturīdī's cosmological view of reality, which includes multiple metaethical elements that are crucial background to our study. Al-Māturīdī observes that although the doctrine of various religions and schools of thought contradict one another, there is a consensus displayed by their every member in that each believes their own views correct and that of the others wrong.<sup>277</sup> What is more, all of them hold that they are following in the footsteps of their ancestors. Blindly following (*taqlīd*) the views of others in this way, states al-Māturīdī, is inexcusable, and the proof of this that such believers can adopt views that oppose those of their counterparts on the very same basis. His point is that there is nothing to guarantee one has reached correct religious belief by simply adopting the views of those who have gone before, and that the radical contradiction between the religious doctrine of different people calls for investigation to determine the truth. Later on in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī notes three types of possible stances towards God and the hereafter: agnosticism, acceptance or rejection of God's existence commands.<sup>278</sup> Given these three possibilities, it is incumbent on those that call others to faith to present proofs of their claims that appeal to reason, whereby religious belief can be justified. And only by this means, also, can the unity of all people in faith be achieved.<sup>279</sup>

Al-Māturīdī identifies two main routes to religious belief, namely, word of mouth (*sam'ī*, lit. to hear) and reason (*'aql*), while he dismisses the idea of inspiration (*ilhām*) as a source of knowledge.<sup>280</sup> He immediately goes on to discuss their respective

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<sup>276</sup> Temel Yeşilyurt, "Ebü'l-Berekat en-Nesefi ve "El-Umde" Adli Eseri", *Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 3 (1997), p. 191.

<sup>277</sup> Abū Mansur al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, ed. Bekir Topaloglu and Muhammed Aruçi, (Ankara: Dar Sader, 2003), p. 65.

<sup>278</sup> al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 205.

<sup>279</sup> al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 66.

<sup>280</sup> al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 69.

trustworthiness and points out that no society can be content with word of mouth alone as a means of achieving correct belief and that even sceptics (*ashāb al-shukūk wa tajāhul*) agree on this along with those that accept the existence and truth of worldly objects.<sup>281</sup> Yet, al-Māturīdī accepts the undeniable strength of the *mutawātir* (continuously recurrent oral reports) (see below). Özcan notes he recognises the fundamental position reports have for religious knowledge and that there is simply no other source that could possibly act as a replacement, while reason provides the trusted means of eliminating the unreliable reports from the reliable ones, and, what is more, evidence of the senses is sometimes needed to remove any doubts as to the truth of Prophetic reports.<sup>282</sup>

In regards to reason, al-Māturīdī offers a passage with what amounts to two separate arguments for the existence of God. Thus, having claimed that all people must reach correct religious belief via sound evidence, he presents his arguments on the basis of the surest means of acquiring knowledge, which is reason. In *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* he states that rejection of monotheism is due to the absence of contemplation (*taāmul*) and rumination (*tafakkur*).<sup>283</sup> In fact, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* makes rather little reference to revelation in supporting monotheism, and virtually none to Prophetic hadith. This is because dualist and sceptic doctrine are his main targets of attack, in addition to Mu'tazili ones, so al-Māturīdī evidently understood the necessity of using a common basis for dialogue to address the claims of people from other faiths. In this way, his method of argumentation and idea regarding the basic epistemological position of reason to religious faith coincide. And yet his stance toward reason cannot simply be explained by the motivation to communicate his arguments ecumenically. This is because it is clear his arguments take inspiration from, even if not based directly on, Qur'ānic injunctions and admonishments, as will be seen shortly.

For al-Māturīdī, reason constitutes the distinguishing nature of the universe itself. He defines it, however, in rather ambiguous terms, as he says the function of reason is 'to

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<sup>281</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>282</sup> Hanefi Özcan, *Matüridi'de Bilgi Problemi*, (Istanbul: Marmara İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), p. 121.

<sup>283</sup> Abū Mansur Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, Bekir Topaloğlu ed., (Istanbul : Mizan Yayınevi, 2005), Vol. 1, p. 35.

join what is to be joined and separate what is to be separated'.<sup>284</sup> This description of the intellects operation is repeated later in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, where he says that the unique function of the 'aql is to differentiate (*mumayyizah*) those things that need differentiation and unite (*muallifah*) those which need unification in answer to the question of how the essences of states and events are known.<sup>285</sup> Neither is particularly enlightening, but the cryptic initial statement occurs within the context of a metaphysical claim, and making apparent that al-Māturīdī understands reason to pertain to the structure of reality, almost suggesting that the description may not only be figuratively in physical terms. For al-Māturīdī, the fundamentals of the universe are based on contrary natural qualities (*tabāi'a mukhtalifah*) and opposed aspects (*wujūh mutadādda*). It is not clear exactly what these opposites consist in or according to what criterion they are identified. Topaloğlu interprets them as the four elements (*al-'anāsir al-arba'a*) of classical philosophy.<sup>286</sup> And this indeed seems to be proven correct by references al-Māturīdī makes concerning a fourfold system of nature (*al-'arba'a nahw al-tabāi'a*).<sup>287</sup> However, they may possibly be a collection of radically different categorisations. Pessagno notes two additional ones that might have been meant: the moral one of ugly-evil versus good-beautiful and the metaphysical one of light versus darkness.<sup>288</sup> Whatever the case may be, the theory that reality includes divergent aspects is central to al-Māturīdī's thought.<sup>289</sup>

It is clear that al-Māturīdī must have been influenced by Mu'tazili thinkers in the adoption of this doctrine. Dirar ibn 'Amr (d. c.200/ 815) and later al-Hudhayl (d. c.227/841) advocated that different qualities distinguish the bodies that make up the universe, stretching from the property of life and animation to mobility and heat. They also noticed that some objects could take on several opposed qualities over time, like heat and coldness, while unable to take on others, like the quality of life. The task for the Mu'tazilah became a matter of explaining how bodies came to be different from each other and display differences over time, to which end Dirar ibn 'Amr adopted an

<sup>284</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67.

<sup>285</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 353.

<sup>286</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67, fn. 9.

<sup>287</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 234.

<sup>288</sup> Pessagno, "Māturīdian Thought," p. 63.

<sup>289</sup> For an alternative reading of these opposites, see below in this section.

atomist doctrine where substances (jawāhir) or atoms (ajzā‘) that compose the bodies of this world are differentiated by attachment to accidents (a‘rad) that are unable to persist over time and are therefore continuously recreated by God. The view was elaborated further by al-Hudhayl and became widespread among Islamic theologians, also setting up what would become a main characteristic of Sunni theology, specifically, the assessment of time not as a continuum but a series of discrete independent units.<sup>290</sup> The view’s popularity within learned circles and similarity to al-Māturīdī’s own stance leads one to conclude he adopted certain essentials of a Mu‘tazili cosmology.

And we do see al-Māturīdī offer the argument for the existence of God from the createdness of the accidents, which is attributed to the *mutakallimun* in general. He states that the accidents (‘*arad*) of objects constitute a proof of the objects being created, because accidents are one of two opposites; and no object can be thought of but with one of these accidents. For example, movement and stillness cannot inhere in the same place at the same time; one, therefore, must have come after the other, and this proves the later one’s temporality. At the same time, however, since they are opposites and belong to the same class of states, by this means the temporality of both is also revealed. Temporality, of course, suggests creation, so the individual nature of the objects in which they inhere is also proven.<sup>291</sup> In sum, the existence of accidents, regardless of their substantive significance, is a sign of temporality and hence a creator.<sup>292</sup>

But this proof is not indicative of the unique character al-Māturīdī’s cosmology has and occurs latter in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. While we see a fundamental similarity in concern with cosmology and shared concepts between al-Māturīdī and the Mu‘tazilah, the specific direction he took gives opposition, variation and divergence a prominent position. The first argument for the existence of God makes direct use of these antagonisms and the role of reason. We shall refer to it henceforth as the argument from opposites. Al-Māturīdī says that the opposites we observe could not possibly come together by

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<sup>290</sup> Neal Robinson, “Ash’ariyya and Mu’tazila” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol.1: pp.519-523; Khalid Blankinship, “The Early Creed,” in *Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winters, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 45-47.

<sup>291</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.78; pp.333-334.

<sup>292</sup> For various iterations of this proof in the Islamic tradition, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 392-409.

themselves, so there must be something that directs them and maintains their coexistence.

While, as we have just noted, the opposites al-Māturīdī refers to are most likely of various types, of these sets of opposites, the one of good and evil is central and occupies the most space in his writing. Regarding nature, al-Māturīdī states that given the universe has been tied to different times and furnished with various states and predicates it is demonstrated that nature did not come to existence by itself.<sup>293</sup> This is because had that been so everything would have possessed its best and most beautiful qualities, and yet it is clear that the world is full of evil and ugliness.<sup>294</sup> Shortly afterwards, al-Māturīdī says, in a parallel fashion, that had nature come into existence by itself, it would maintain its course in an unchanging fashion, whereas we find that this is not the case and so must have been created by another.<sup>295</sup> Hence, the existence of evil is in a sense an unnatural anomaly and thus, good and bad, as one of the central oppositions constituting reality, are causes for reflection and this in turn leads to faith in the existence of a Creator.

A number of presuppositions are in place, however, to produce these conclusions, namely, that nature's inner character is one of monotony and uniformity, that its different elements are in harmony, and that this is the default state of nature. One might well ask how it is possible for al-Māturīdī to make this claim after having asserted earlier that God keeps opposed elements found in nature together. Matters are clarified once we understand him to be referring to a hypothetical version of nature, one that runs its course independently from God. Such an order of nature would and could not have been made up of opposed elements, according to al-Māturīdī, hence the regularity of its course. But the nature that does exist displays various and opposed elements, with change, disruption and development as well as basic order and harmony. Al-Māturīdī therefore concludes that the continuing orderliness of nature is dependent on the act of God and, more importantly, divine knowledge.<sup>296</sup> This gives us two aspects to nature. On the one hand, an order divinely sustained and, on the other hand, an inner divergence

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<sup>293</sup> See section on freedom of God.

<sup>294</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164.

<sup>295</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164.

<sup>296</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 109.



of nature's elements, which becomes manifest in the form of the disruption and irregularity on the basis of the basic coexistence.

What is more, the governing Being of the universe must be rational, in the sense that reason joins what can be joined (*yajma'u bayn alladhi al-mujtam'i*) and separates what should be separated (*yafruqu bayn alladhi haqqah al-tafrīq*).<sup>297</sup> The theory can perhaps be read as granting priority to union over division, so that just as philosophers have traditionally asked: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" we ask why there is individuation rather than union. Thus, in the context of al-Māturīdī's definition of reason, there is also a conjunction of metaphysical and epistemological significance, because while reason is a means to knowledge it is also a means to identify division and hence also a condition to creating it. Thus oppositions extend epistemologically to every aspect of the world in the sense that via opposition we see distinctions and categories by which we comprehend.

Admittedly, it would be simplistic to divide the world up merely into so many binary oppositions, making it essential to keep in mind that there is no reason to assume divergent elements not immediately reducible to binary oppositions are unacceptable in al-Māturīdī's scheme. But oppositions form a home for meaning that mere contrasts and gradations do not. It is important, therefore, to establish upon what these opposites are based, since if they are to be meaningful, opposites must be substantive. That is to say, an opposition is empty of meaning so long as the two opposing terms are merely defined in reference to each other alone. This can be easily seen if we ask: What is x? And are answered with: not y. And: What is y? Answer: Not x. To avoid circularity, reference to some external concept is essential. In line with our observation that these oppositions might be based on different scientific, philosophical and theological traditions, each opposition therefore is substantive depending on the science it belongs to; there is no single scientific principle or framework to explain them all. The same goes for the opposites identified and examined by morality; they gain meaning through the relevant sciences of ethical investigation.

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<sup>297</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67.

This agrees with the view al-Māturīdī held about created objects. Namely, that each existence has God given natural tendencies of its own, rather than the alternative view that every potential change is but directly the result of God's will.<sup>298</sup> The latter view, as held famously by the Ash'ariyyah, has the advantage of theoretical simplicity and perhaps more importantly protects in clearer terms the absolute sovereignty of God over all that exists. Its drawback, however, comes with problems explaining the possibility of freewill in human action, for if everything, mental as well as physical events, is the direct result of God's will, then human decisions too are but an extension of the will of God, and this has serious moral implications regarding the reward and punishment of human actions. By contrast al-Māturīdī's position appears to have fewer difficulties in this regard. It is beyond the scope of this study to explain and or defend his view and the attendant theory of causation, but a discussion in so far as it pertains to morality is given in the next chapter.

What is also important for al-Māturīdī is that the opposites exist objectively and are accessible to the intellect.<sup>299</sup> The second point being that they could not co-exist without an external force to make them do so. This is why contemplation of the world and all its creatures brings one not just to the knowledge of a Creator, but also monotheism. For al-Māturīdī the oneness of God is shown by the natural world to those who reflect.<sup>300</sup> This is because all of creation necessarily exists within a matrix of intricate and opposite states.<sup>301</sup> As for God, because He is uncreated, all these states and hence all opposites must be negated from Him and all that remains is pure unity.<sup>302</sup>

The second argument arises in relation to the first and as what appears to be an elaboration of the theory of opposites. It also makes clear the teleological character al-Māturīdī accords reason, and so shall be referred to as the argument from providence. He writes that each human is but a smaller example of the combination of opposite elements that characterises reality, and hence respectively constitute what the

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<sup>298</sup> Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, "İmam Maturidi'nin Tabiat ve İlliyete Bakışı," in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmam Matürîdî ve Matürîdilik: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı*, ed. İlyas Çelebi (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı, 2012), pp. 54-64.

<sup>299</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 78.

<sup>300</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, Vol. I, p. 68.

<sup>301</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 83.

<sup>302</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 87, p. 170, p. 315. See also Mustafa Koçar, *Matürîdî'de Allah-Alem İlişkisi*, (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2004), pp. 143-44.

philosophers call ‘the microcosm’ (*al-‘alam al-sagīr*). Here he elaborates, stating the human is grounded on divergent inclinations (*‘ala ahwa’ mukhtalifa*) and contrary natural qualities that scatter (*wa tabā’i mutashattata*). Indeed, throughout *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī refers to the fact that humans have various physical, moral and societal needs for their survival.<sup>303</sup> We noted suggestions above regarding the possible contents of these oppositions, namely, the four elements of classical philosophy and good and evil, and light and dark. Establishing on what the oppositions al-Māturīdī writes of rest is important for theoretical reasons, not only because there is the implicit metaphysical theory that certain opposites or contrasts cannot independently co-exist; and require a divine power to make them do so, but also more specifically for the purposes of this study: we must establish what the moral and epistemological aspects of the theory of opposites are. We have already seen that al-Māturīdī emphasises contrasts as much as opposite natures, as he does scattering and divergence, and it is sufficient that he read these elements as being of contrasting types in need of regulation. It is God that is the regulator and sustainer of the balance between these opposing forces in the cosmos. For each individual human being, however, the balance between these opposing forces, in the form of divergent drives, must be controlled through their own freewill. As Şekeroğlu observes, it regards the opposition between reason and the passions in human psychology.<sup>304</sup> In other words, the human being has an exceptional position with the world as a being that can comprehend good and bad and must choose between them. Indeed, the oppositions extend beyond physical ones. As Yavuz notes, some of them are spiritual (*ma’nawī*): To rush, get bored or impatient, to love and to pity; to like what is good and beautiful, to hate lies and evil, to love the life of this world and to fear death; all these are classed as opposites.<sup>305</sup> This tells us that opposition extends to morality and psychology.

Human beings are so heavily laden with desires (*shahwāt*, sing. *shahwa*) that in the attainment of benefits (*manāf’i*) they compete with one another. The result would be hatred and bloodshed and would lead to the breakdown and destruction of humanity at the hands of warring societies. Such a situation, al-Māturīdī says, would nullify the

<sup>303</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67.

<sup>304</sup> Şekeroğlu, *Maturidi’de Ahlak*, pp. 190-191.

<sup>305</sup> Yavuz, “Tabiat ve İlliyete Bakışı,” pp. 57-58.

wisdom of the world's creation and, indeed, have made impossible all the objects that exist within it for the survival of humankind.<sup>306</sup> Given that these things exist, it is clear humanity was not meant to simply come into existence and then quickly perish. Because people have various needs, and because the things for the satisfaction of those needs also exist, it is clear that humankind was created by a being with knowledge of those needs, their fulfilment and who desired human survival.

A word must be said on the logical validity of these arguments for they immediately raise some reservations. To begin with, the argument from providence implies a stringent connection between purposiveness in the world and metaphysical possibility that builds on the view noted in the first argument above, specifically, that reason is a distinguishing part of reality. Here, al-Māturīdī states that the presence of things for the survival of humankind would be nonsensical were humanity to then simply perish for some other alternative factor such as large scale violence. In fact, the claim is a more specific version of a general principle that al-Māturīdī holds for all creation: it is against wisdom to bring something into existence only to destroy it again.<sup>307</sup> No purpose or meaning is gained by such action.

The argument from providence also involves another claim, specifically, that largescale violence would lead to the destruction of humanity unless a basis for harmony exists. In this regard, firstly, the level of violence and hatred need not encompass all of humanity; it appears al-Māturīdī simply ascribes so high an amount of destruction to the violence that would ensue from a lack of this basis that the purpose behind humanity's existence would be thwarted sufficiently to the point of disaster. Thus, a distinction is needed between the bare basics of physical existence from communal life, which requires the preparation of moral, social and legal systems. Secondly, al-Māturīdī does not specify that the base, by which he means religion (*dīn*), must be revealed by God for humanity to survive, but rather than it is unthinkable God would not reveal this base.

As noted above, the argument from providence states that the existence of a wise Creator necessitates the existence of objects that facilitate the survival of humankind,

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<sup>306</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>307</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67, p. 167, p. 395; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 72, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 381.

given that the latter was created. The argument is then immediately continued, *modus ponens*, with the claim that since these objects do exist, the survival of humanity was intended (by a wise Creator). The initial statement, however, is prone to falling under the fallacy of division if the purposefulness of the world is simply taken from belief in a rational and wise Creator. That is to say, it is perfectly possible for such a Creator to create a world of randomness and chaos so long as it serves some other greater purpose of wisdom. As for the second statement, it will fall to the fallacy of composition if we derive the existence of a wise Creator from the mere fact of purposefulness in the world. This is because it is perfectly possible that the various arrangements of the world pertain to no greater purpose or plan than of their own specific interests. What is more, if these two elements of the argument are meant to be mutually dependent then the argument turns out to be circular: the world displays wisdom because there is a wise Creator; there is a wise Creator because the world displays wisdom.

The degree to which al-Māturīdī may have been aware of these problems is open to discussion, but he does not openly recognise or address them. This being so, we are here likely advancing a defence to a question al-Māturīdī did not himself consider. On the other hand, the theoretical resources to counter the problems at least as they immediately stand are evident in his writing. And in this regard another argument for the existence of God, repeated several times in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, is important.

First of all, to solve the apparent problems, the two arguments must be read in separation to avoid circularity. This means that neither the claim: there is a wise Creator because the world is purposeful, nor its reverse, can be established on the basis of the other by al-Māturīdī. Hence, wisdom is evident in the world's natural order on some basis separate from our knowledge of God as all-wise, and vice versa. This leaves us directly facing the two fallacies respectively corresponding to the two arguments just noted above. Now, if one of these arguments can be defended against error while also being established independently of the other it can act as the basis for its counterpart. Of the two, the one that the world displays wisdom because God is wise is dependent on Islamic (or more generally, Abrahamic) revelation and therefore unable to form the basis for interfaith deliberation, which goes against al-Māturīdī's style of discussion.

This leaves the latter argument: the wisdom of God is evident by virtue of the world's natural order.

Now, some basis for this claim can be read in al-Māturīdī's theory of opposites. The opposites and contraries that al-Māturīdī regards as ubiquitous to reality can only be maintained in coexistence by a higher power; one that is rational in the sense that what should be kept separated or united is so. But we have noted that the rationality of the oppositions and their management can only be based on their substantive significance. This is where a third argument advanced several times by al-Māturīdī becomes relevant, and we shall call it, in keeping with philosophical custom, the argument from design — though al-Māturīdī's presentation refers specifically to living beings, and humans in particular, due to their awareness of their ignorance of their own bodies and minds. He writes living creatures are uninformed of their inception, cannot invent even their own like and struggle to mend those organs of theirs that no longer function properly.<sup>308</sup> This means that a being more intelligent, powerful and knowledgeable than themselves must have been responsible for their creation and all other beings that make up creation. Of course, this is not about natural reproduction. That is successfully achieved by the most primitive creatures and requires next to no knowledge. But creation requires full knowledge of the materials and conditions required for the anatomies in question, how all these are produced and maintained; not to mention the means of the body's functioning. Thus, for al-Māturīdī, the human body, with its different states, organs, needs and capabilities is an object of wonder; and contemplation of it leads people to the idea of God.<sup>309</sup>

In more general terms, al-Māturīdī argues in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that there are enough objects in creation that show soundness and precision to indicate they were created with wisdom.<sup>310</sup> And in more general terms still, al-Māturīdī views the order in the universe as indicative of a being of knowledge.<sup>311</sup> In this way, the fallacy of composition is refuted with empirical observation on a case by case basis. And it is perhaps with this in mind as well as the argument from opposites that in the *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* al-Māturīdī

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<sup>308</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 83, p. 246.

<sup>309</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 205; p. 237; p. 245.

<sup>310</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 511, IX, p. 265.

<sup>311</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, XV, p. 245.

states anyone who reflects (*nathara*) on and contemplates (*taāmala*) their own self will know their Creator.<sup>312</sup> As noted above, the human is but a microcosm of the world in general, consisting of opposite and divergent natures that can only be kept together by a power higher than themselves, for this power does not reside in them nor does the knowledge of their own bodies that that would require.<sup>313</sup>

I do not presume al-Māturīdī's arguments to be completely satisfactory. For one thing, the oppositions he refers to appear highly speculative, unless some evidence for the theory can be cited. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī need not prove the that basis of the oppositions he cites so long as the fact of their existence (regardless of whether they are subjective or objective) is evident to everyone; for it is there existence alone that he need cite in order to make his claims (see section below). In addition, the argument from design ignores the theory of natural laws causing a physical equilibrium wherein conditions sufficient for life may occur. But this is not our debate and a question al-Māturīdī could not have faced. The task here has been to make the arguments in question coherent and mutually supportive. In this regard, we have claimed that the argument from opposites can be understood in relation to those from design and providence, especially in granting the opposites some form of meaning. The latter two arguments both refer to some aspect of the world as displaying purpose and thus, in line with his definition of reason, al-Māturīdī can argue that divergence, separation, reproduction and creation denote a knowledgeable being because of the purpose the world displays. On the other hand, when taken independently, the arguments al-Māturīdī presents gain accumulative strength, as separate pieces of evidence pointing to one conclusion.

But what is more important for our purposes are two things. The first is that al-Māturīdī holds it is incumbent upon every person with a healthy mind and fit to be held accountable for their actions to reach correct belief in God and the basis of rational reflection alone, that is to say, without exposure to revelation.<sup>314</sup> This is of significance,

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<sup>312</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, p. 66.

<sup>313</sup> Cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>314</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, II, p. 190.

for as we shall see in later chapters, al-Māturīdī holds correct religious faith to be a basic condition of the ability to be moral.

The second is the cosmological understanding that the arguments invoke in view of the moral contents this cosmology brings, where the findings of one argument quickly leads into the findings of another. More specifically, the argument from opposites is given in terms of ‘the universe in its very basis’ (*al-‘alam biṣliḥī*) besides al-Māturīdī’s definition of reason and the fact of opposites and divergences provides a condition for the moral mission of humankind. Just as the world is in need of a manager to bring things into order, each human has within them divergent drives and needs that must be successfully managed. As in accord with the argument from providence, these needs are provided for by God, Who created the world in such a way that humans may survive and flourish to which end moral guidance was provided through prophets and scripture. All this is necessary given that the universe as a whole, and everything within it, is encompassed by God’s wisdom, according to which creation simply for the sake of annihilation is foolish. Given also the meticulous plan of each object we observe, from the argument of design we derive also a teleological aspect to creation: God created the various natures observed in the universe and directs the world’s opposed and diverse elements for a purpose, meaning that moral significance inhabits the very fabric of reality. As part of that reality, it also means that human beings have a purpose, but unlike the rest of creation theirs is particularly unique because they possess the faculty of reason, by which means they can understand what is right and wrong.

But if that were all we said about reason we would not have given al-Māturīdī’s position fair presentation. So far we have been able to say merely that the work of reason is to manage via combination and discrimination what is already opposite and divergent. Importantly, we have not said, or been able to say, that the constitution of the universe itself is rational, even though we have been able to say that it is wise. And yet this is what al-Māturīdī does say, giving his cosmology and an important additional aspect. Al-Māturīdī’s definition of reason, ‘to join what is to be joined and separate what is to be separated’ is couched in physical description.<sup>315</sup> This alone may not be important since innumerable philosophical terms are, but in the same passage reason is called part of

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<sup>315</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 67.



creation (*al-'alam alladhi al-'aql minhu juzu*).<sup>316</sup> An identical expression is found in one passage of *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* where he also states God created reason as a part (*juz'a*) of the world.<sup>317</sup> What exactly al-Māturīdī meant by this is open to debate. Alper seems to interpret it in a literal sense, so that reason exists physically.<sup>318</sup> But if reason is a part of existence, then is it also an agent that joins and separates items itself, like the Active Intellect of emanationism? This seems far-fetched. What is more, is this existence the same both internal and external to the human mind? Certainly, to attribute a Platonist view of reason to al-Māturīdī on such scant evidence appears fanciful in the extreme.

Yet even if he held such a view, he would have had little to say about it. This is because, according to al-Māturīdī, our knowledge of reason extends only so far as its functions and operations; the essence of reason is beyond the range of reason to comprehend.<sup>319</sup> This limitation would no doubt extend to the nature of any supposed existence it has and, as Alper notes, is perhaps due to a recognition by al-Māturīdī of the problems of circularity that appear to inevitably follow the idea of having reason evaluate itself.<sup>320</sup> On the other hand, al-Māturīdī may just be following the conceptual framework set out by revelation. As Alper notes, the Qur'ān represents reason with a verb and hence as an operation rather than an essence.<sup>321</sup>

For these reasons, the statement in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* is perhaps best understood to mean that reason is constitutive of a law ordering the structure or nature of reality. Indeed, this would again seem implicit in his statements at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* where the definition of reason is given alongside an account of the world's nature.<sup>322</sup> Reason in this particular sense exists both inside and outside the human mind, so the rational constitution of the universe would mean that for al-Māturīdī, not only do the opposites exist objectively in the sense that they are the same for each human being, but also that reality will be directly accessible to the human intellect because the

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<sup>316</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67.

<sup>317</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 368.

<sup>318</sup> Hülya Alper, *İmam Māturīdī'de Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2013), p. 55.

<sup>319</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, VIII, p. 251.

<sup>320</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 54.

<sup>321</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 58.

<sup>322</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 5.

principles and concepts behind the operations of the mind will mirror the principles behind the structure of reality. Essentially, the creation of the world was simultaneously the creation of the laws of reason.

Of course, the mere act of joining or separating, as per al-Māturīdī's definition of wisdom, is not in and of itself rational. This is evident if we are speaking in concrete terms, for example, of cell growth and differentiation. In other words, the mere fact of individuated items is not proof of rationality in the world. Although it is true to say an intellect must conceptually individuate things in order to comprehend them, it is another matter to say that the contrasts and individuations themselves are rational. Hence, al-Māturīdī must point to something else. What this something else is we can here only give a preliminary clue. In this regard, though contrast alone does not seem suggestive of a rational mind, opposites are. And the various opposites that are established by the various attendant sciences will be a testament to the order of the universe created by God with a specific design and purpose.

This is important because the centre of al-Māturīdī's thought is then epistemological rather than metaphysical, in so far as what exists in creation will be comprehensible according to rational concepts and categories. As Alper points out, the constitution of the world on the basis of rational structures has existential significance. Specifically, it establishes between the human, as a rational being, not an 'I-It' relation of contrasting types with the world around them but rather a 'we' relation.<sup>323</sup> The point then is to act within the world in line with the rational structures that govern both the human and the world in an ordained harmony.

A bold examination of al-Māturīdī's cosmology is made by Dorrol, who argues that al-Māturīdī's writings reveal a radical metaphysical doctrine characterising the nature of the cosmos, citing al-Māturīdī's use of the word *taqallub*. Dorrol states the term signifies 'reversal, alteration, variability; or put more simply, flux' and uses it to explain al-Māturīdī's comments on individual natures and the changeability of reality. Another term highlighted is that of states (*ahwāl*), which has two meanings. In addition to its regular use meaning simply 'condition', this term has a specific *kalām* usage and refers

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<sup>323</sup> Alper, *Akul-Vahiy İlişkisi*, pp. 88-89.

to the way a thing is manifested by God in reality. Dorrol states that al-Māturīdī was using the term in the *kalām* rather than regular sense, and together the two terms *taqallub* and state (*hāl*) reveal that for al-Māturīdī, ‘the entirety of God’s creation, the entirety of all things in the universe, fluctuates in this way, constantly under God’s direction.’<sup>324</sup> This position, however, is not present in the tradition following al-Māturīdī, and was purportedly ‘tamed’ by Nasafī in the *Tabsirat al-Adilla*.<sup>325</sup> The concept of flux has also an epistemological aspect in that our perceptions of the world will change according to the states that we find it to be in.<sup>326</sup> But Dorrol argues that this side of the matter is contingent on the metaphysical flux that characterises the world as he says we only view the world from one perspective at a time according to the metaphysical instability in question.<sup>327</sup>

This reading runs against the grain of our reading of God as the efficient cause outlined in the next chapter. More critically, however, it appears to confuse the role epistemology plays in al-Māturīdī’s cosmology with metaphysical propositions. While it is true that the world for al-Māturīdī is in a constant state of change, that our perceptions of it change accordingly, and, what is more, that these changes are brought about by God, to read these as amounting to a profound metaphysical doctrine appears to unduly stretch the import of al-Māturīdī’s observations.

The first concern with Dorrol’s reading stems from its fragile coherency. Either we see different things because our view point changes or because objective changes occur; we do not need both thesis to explain the intended result, but given the legitimate possibility of both, there appears no reason to opt for metaphysics above epistemology. In fact, there seems no reason to hold that either changing perspective or metaphysical flux is alone responsible for the shifts. That is to say, both things are admittedly possible independently, though at the same time. Hence, to reduce the basis of the epistemological context of al-Māturīdī’s observations on perspective to a largely metaphysical framework signifies a mixing of independent considerations.

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<sup>324</sup> Philip C. Dorrol, “The Universe in Flux: Reconsidering Abū Maṣū‘ Al-Māturīdī’s Metaphysics and Epistemology,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27/2, p. 132.

<sup>325</sup> Dorrol, “The Universe in Flux,” p. 135.

<sup>326</sup> Dorrol, “The Universe in Flux,” p. 131.

<sup>327</sup> Dorrol, “The Universe in Flux,” p. 133.

The second concern arises due to the examples mustered in support of the thesis, which appear better explained, again, by epistemology. It is true that, like the Mu'tazila, al-Māturīdī was concerned with metaphysical concepts regarding the manifestation of changes and oppositions within the world. But apart from this abstract metaphysics, which he used above all else to prove the temporality of the objects that make up the world, his emphasis is on the regularity imposed on disparate elements by God. Therefore, the main reason for radical shifts in the nature of an object more likely stems from epistemological alternations. Indeed, even the *essence* of a thing can change by a shift from a metaphysical to an epistemological perspective. This is indicated in the passage where Al-Māturīdī states:

For do you not see that the doctrine of unbelief (*kufr*) is a lie, but that it is, from the perspective of its indicating the foolishness of the one who holds it, a truth?<sup>328</sup>

Kufr denotes a metaphysical falsehood, but from a shift to an epistemological view, signifies the truth about the renunciation. Via this reversal of consideration a new aspect is revealed.

A similar shift is evident in the context of moral judgments. This is made clear when we see that nothing (of the worldly goods) is good or bad in absolute terms. In this context, no intrinsic metaphysical change would explain a change in the moral value of a thing, especially not according to context and circumstance. And that perspective is not simply the result of metaphysical changes is indicated by al-Māturīdī's observations that the goodness or badness of a thing depends on the particular person it concerns by virtue of their specific circumstances.<sup>329</sup> In short, a substantive distinction must be made between physical and ethical dimensions to make al-Māturīdī thought coherent. That is to say, while we have already noted that the good and the bad refer to temporal states, physical changes do not simply and directly amount to moral changes, as if morality itself existed as a physical thing. Rather our judgements and contextual circumstances determine what is good and bad. Thus, to reach the conclusion of metaphysical flux can only be achieved via a confusion of metaphysical, epistemological and moral dimensions.

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<sup>328</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 321 cited in Dorrol, "The Universe in Flux," p. 130.

<sup>329</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 88.

Secondly, exactly what the result of constant metaphysical change to the very essence of a thing would mean is philosophically unclear, if not highly problematic. For one thing, the essence of a thing is what defines it, so in a state of constant flux nothing would be itself; and rather than lead to a constant manifestation of different aspects to the things of the world, our ability to acquire knowledge in general would be taken away because we would be unable to grasp the definitive nature of a thing, providing potent ammunition for the sceptics al-Māturīdī sought to refute. What is more, even if the doctrine could be rendered theoretically coherent, the position would remain an historical mystery. That is to say, an explanation is needed for how al-Māturīdī would have been lead to develop such an unusual theory. And this Dorrol only vaguely manages to achieve, having named no particular topic of *kalām* in the historical milieu wherein al-Māturīdī resided that would give rise to it.

The metaphysical aspect to al-Māturīdī's theory is, I claim, therefore better read as referring to God acting as the efficient cause of every change in the universe. More precisely, the constantly shifting nature of the cosmos is to be understood simply as al-Māturīdī's way of expressing physical, chemical, biological, in sum, all manner of worldly change, which is generally classifiable under the rubric of generation and decay. Thus, the only metaphysical aspect would be God's causing the changes in the world. What was lost in the tradition, then, was not a metaphysical vision so much as the doctrine of individual natures.

Now, not all of creation does exist in the same way. For example, trees have a different form of existence than light; people have a different form of existence to angels. Similarly, corporeality does not encompass all of creation, but temporality, at least in the sense I wish to use it here, does. This use refers back to al-Māturīdī's comments about opposites and accidents mentioned above. Since angels and all incorporeal entities possess accidents, they are all therefore also temporal. In this respect, both corporeal and temporal entities are physical and created. Conversely, metaphysical existence, which includes God exclusively, will therefore be beyond human comprehension. The *mutakallimun* generally held there is nothing metaphysical in

existence, apart from God, not even the human soul.<sup>330</sup> The point here is that in al-Māturīdī's view of existence, reason pertains to everything created and only created things. It does not pertain to some transcendent world or reality – a realm of knowledge that goes beyond experience and even possible experience. Admittedly, al-Māturīdī appears to make a significant exception in regards to the beatific vision, siding against the Mu'tazila in claiming that the 'seeing' described in the Qur'ān cannot be explained away as a metaphor. Nevertheless, his statements reject the conclusion reached by the corporealists (*mujassimin*) that God is a body. Rather, al-Māturīdī says that there are ways of seeing in the next world that are unavailable in this one.<sup>331</sup> This suggests he conceived of the possibility to comprehend without the faculty of reason or for reason itself to be radically transformed or aided to achieve sight of God. In any case, while advancing the centrality of reason and rational principles in understanding reality, al-Māturīdī is not an advocate for some transcendent reality existing eternally next to God like some platonic form, whether in the form of rational truth or morality.

### 3.3 Theology and Moral Fundamentals

#### 3.3.1 The Freedom of God

The freedom of God is closely related to epistemological considerations and essential to understanding the origin of the moral imperative, which is the subject of the penultimate chapter. It is also closely related to the theory of opposites and wisdom; al-Māturīdī derives proofs for the freedom of God from observations on the natural order of the world. In fact, he cites three pieces of evidence that God's actions are performed freely. These are the existence of different essences, the universe's connection to wisdom and its indication of God's oneness. These show that the creation of every individual thing's essence was born out of free divine action.<sup>332</sup> The presupposition here is that had the

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<sup>330</sup> E. E. Calverly, "Doctrines of the Soul (Nafs and Rou) in Islam," *Muslim World* 33/4 (1943), p. 261; Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.20, pp.86-89; M. Marmura, 'Soul: Islamic Concepts,' *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, (New York: Macmillan, 1987), Vol. 13 p. 461-62; Majid Fakhry, "The Mutazilite View of Man", *Philosophy, Dogma and the Impact of Greek Thought in Islam*, (Brookfield Vt.: Variorum, 1994).

<sup>331</sup> A. K. M Ayyub Ali, "Māturīdism" in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, ed. Mian Mohammad Sharif, (Kempton: Otto Harrasowitz, 1963), p. 272, also published by Islamic Philosophy online: <http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/hmp/16.htm>.

<sup>332</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 108.

creation of everything been determined, then rather than varied and divergent essences and attributes, everything would have had harmonious or similar ones.<sup>333</sup> Thus, al-Māturīdī writes that the possibility of objects to come into existence in their various forms proves God's freedom because had the objects of the world been created deterministically, then they would not have taken the divergent and contrary forms that they show. What is more, the creation of each thing at a certain place and time requires preference (*tarjīh*) and allocation (*tahsīs*), which can only result from a will.<sup>334</sup> Whatever the strength of these claims, in addition to showing al-Māturīdī believes the world is based on a free divine choice of knowledge and wisdom.

The key point is that the world results from an act of knowledge, since there is no use of knowledge if it cannot be used to choose one's actions. Thus, knowledge implies freedom. The claim also reiterates al-Māturīdī's belief in the rational or knowledge-based structure of the universe and God's action.<sup>335</sup> This latter claim is important in that as it attributes to God an act of knowledge and freedom rather than necessity, it also indicates al-Māturīdī believes morality and the opposition between good and evil is rationally constituted.

### 3.3.2 Our Knowledge of God

Özcan states that, for al-Māturīdī, God is not an object of comprehension (*idrāk*) since comprehension means to know the limits of a thing. Since all things of comprehension are therefore finite and God is not a finite being, He is not an object of comprehension.<sup>336</sup> This is but another way of saying that humans are unable to know the essence of God (*dhātullah*). Rather, God is known, in some sense, by His attributes (*ṣifātullah*), the essences of which, however, we again do not have epistemological access to. Because God's attributes are unlike the temporal events and attributes of this world, their essence is beyond human ken.<sup>337</sup> Nevertheless, the divine attributes are

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<sup>333</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 123.

<sup>334</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 109.

<sup>335</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 109.

<sup>336</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 127.

<sup>337</sup> Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology: From Muhammad to the Present*, trans. Thomas Thornton (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), pp. 154-157.

understood by analogy with the knowledge that we have of this world and al-Māturīdī states that God can be known by inference from knowledge derived from the senses.<sup>338</sup>

As we have seen, Özcan notes the terms *idrāk* and *ihāta* are said to apply only to what is finite and limited.<sup>339</sup> But from this it should not be concluded that comprehension does not extend to God in any sense at all or that comprehension should be contraposed with speculation. It is comprehension of temporal attributes that we use to understand the attributes of God. This is accomplished by inference, the legitimacy and relevance of which is ensured by the comprehension inherent in the operations of reason. Thus, in short, our knowledge of God is tentatively articulated in language that is representative of worldly phenomena on the basis of rational inferences. In other words, God is known on the basis of what is comprehended by the senses to give a specific (worldly) type content or description to the divine attributes via the operation of reason. This applies to all of God's attributes, including that of wisdom, which is central for al-Māturīdī, as we shall see below. It is also on this basis that we comprehend by reason that God cannot have some attributes, such as the attribute of folly (*safah*).<sup>340</sup>

### 3.3.3 The Definition of Wisdom

The Wise' is included among the ninety-nine names of Allah and occurs in several places of the Qur'ān.<sup>341</sup> But while all theologians have accepted that wisdom is a divine attribute; the matter was specifying what precisely is meant by divine wisdom. On the one hand, al-Māturīdī recognises that there are two things basic to wisdom, namely, knowledge and action. A person that acts according to his knowledge is wise. Thus, the opposite of wisdom for al-Māturīdī, is to act not in ignorance but rather in disregard for what knowledge one has. This constitutes the definition of folly (*safah*).<sup>342</sup> On the other hand, he treats the concept as a moral one, in line with the ancient philosophers' understanding of wisdom as the sound application of knowledge.<sup>343</sup> There is, therefore, another necessary ingredient of wisdom, and that is freedom. Given that wisdom is a

<sup>338</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, fol.17b, 462a in Özcan, *Matüridi'de Bilgi Problemi*, p. 128

<sup>339</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 127.

<sup>340</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 299.

<sup>341</sup> *The Qur'ān*, 31:27, 46:2, 57:1, 66:2.

<sup>342</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298.

<sup>343</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi* p.199. See, Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Boston; Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 36.



moral term, and freedom is essential to moral worth, then wisdom must involve freedom as the correct use of knowledge. The question, therefore, is what is meant by the correct use of knowledge.

The concept of wisdom has rightly been recognised to occupy a central place in al-Māturīdī's theology.<sup>344</sup> However, the term's precise meaning and implications are also highly obscure and careful study by various scholars has been made in order to understand exactly what al-Māturīdī meant by it. Rudolph writes that al-Māturīdī's use of the concept serves to 'reconcile the idea of God's omnipotence with the idea of the rationality of the created world.'<sup>345</sup> In this regard, we have already seen that al-Māturīdī cites the world as being rational in its constitution and the result of divine knowledge, but the division here goes back to our discussion of the Euthyphro dilemma and to the Mu'tazili and Ash'ari positions in *kalām*. As we noted, the Mu'tazilah set up an objective standard to which God was rendered subject, limiting His freedom, while the Ash'ariyyah deemed all God's actions as wise, regardless of what they were, making comprehension of this wisdom virtually impossible, given that God could order or create the opposite of whatever He ordered or created with those still being wise.

In a way that recalls the Ash'ari position, al-Māturīdī holds that wisdom does not depend on objective factors but has its logic in itself.<sup>346</sup> This means God is not subject to any external criterion. Indeed, al-Māturīdī states that it is senseless to ask for the reasons behind God's actions, because there is no authority to be found over God and it is impossible for any of His actions to be unwise.<sup>347</sup> Furthermore, and in line with this, he states that there is no possibility of (ultimate) irregularity in the creation.<sup>348</sup> This means that despite whatever chaos we perceive in the world, as a whole existence follows a certain plan. However, it also follows that we cannot claim that we are able to know the quiddity (*māhiya*) or essence (*kunh*) of the wisdom to God's actions.<sup>349</sup> This is

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<sup>344</sup> Ulrich Rudolph, "Al-Māturīdī's Concept of God's Wisdom," in *Büyük Türk Bilgini*, p.46; Frank, R., 'Reason and Revealed Law: A Sample of Parallels and Divergences in Kalām and Falsafa' in *Recherches d'Islamologie, Recueil d'articles offert à Georges Anawati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et amis*, (Louvain, 1977), p.125 n.2.

<sup>345</sup> Rudolph, "God's Wisdom," p. 45.

<sup>346</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 345-346, p. 349.

<sup>347</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164, p. 203-202

<sup>348</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.183.

<sup>349</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.168, p. 346.

not because wisdom has no essence but simply because humans have no access to it. Either our minds are too limited or the information necessary for us to grasp what wisdom is simply is not available to us.<sup>350</sup> Nevertheless, as Rudolph explains, although we are unable to comprehend God’s wisdom in intrinsic terms, we can still discern its ‘traces and effects’ as constitutive of the nature of the world.<sup>351</sup> On the other hand, al-Māturīdī does note that the intellect is able to comprehend (*idrāk*) the reality of things (*haqāiq al-ashyā*) and the meanings of wisdom (*maāni al-hikamiyya*).<sup>352</sup> As Alper notes, it appears that for al-Māturīdī, via contemplation human reason is able to achieve metaphysical knowledge of the world.<sup>353</sup> The question, then, regards what exactly he meant in this passage, and whether the ‘meanings of wisdom’ pertain to an essence. Remaining faithful to al-Māturīdī’s explicit denial of such knowledge in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, the term must relate to the ‘traces and effects’. This leads to the question of how we can recognise the traces and effects if we do not know what its essence is – a question that shall be considered in the next section.

Wisdom is in places defined by al-Māturīdī as ‘hitting the point’ (*isāba*), which Rudolph takes to mean doing the right things in order to reach an intended target. The second definition al-Māturīdī gives wisdom is: ‘setting each thing in its proper place’ (*wad’u kulli shayin maudi’anhu*), and also giving everyone their due (*wa yu’tā kulla dhī hath hathuhu*).<sup>354</sup> This is read by Rudolph as doing what is right and just and cited as ‘the focus of the whole concept’.<sup>355</sup> In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī appears to hold the terms *isabah* and *wad’u* as synonymous.<sup>356</sup> Either way, the definition serves to bring together in one idea the two central terms of the respective Ash’ari and Mu’tazili theses, describing God’s absolute sovereignty while also noting that the unique characteristics and rights of the objects of creation.<sup>357</sup> The key terms used in the definition are *wada’a*

<sup>350</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, Vol. V, p. 318.

<sup>351</sup> Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” pp. 50-51.

<sup>352</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, Vol. IV, p. 579.

<sup>353</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 79.

<sup>354</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 102, p. 395.

<sup>355</sup> Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” pp. 52-53.

<sup>356</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164.

<sup>357</sup> Such moderation is a hallmark of al-Māturīdī’s work, see Mustafa Can, “Maturidilik” in *Kelam Tarihi*, ed. Ramazan Yıldırım (Istanbul: İşaret Yayınları, 2017), p. 259. For a similar resolution of the problem of freedom, see J. Meric Pessagno, “Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb the View of Abū Manşur al-Māturīdī,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 104/1 (1984): pp. 177-191.

and *maudi'ahu*. The first notes God as Determiner of all things in the sense of being the Creator of each thing in a certain time and place. The second notes that this time and place, rather than any other, is exactly the one proper for the objects of creation and that therefore not the result of divine arbitrariness.<sup>358</sup>

Moreover, and of especial importance to this study as a whole, the definition here proposed is also a miniature of wide philosophical significance. The bipartite analysis sees al-Māturīdī grant the concept of wisdom both consequentialist (with ‘hitting the point’) and deontological (with ‘setting each thing in its proper place’) aspects.<sup>359</sup> The combination is thus brings together radically different ideas, as recognised by the corresponding, age-old demarcation of schools in Western moral philosophy.

In one passage, al-Māturīdī elaborates on the concept of wisdom:

Wisdom has two aspects (*tarafayn*). One is justice (*‘adl*) and the second is graciousness (*fadl*). God’s power of graciousness has no end, so nothing beyond His power of action can be spoken about. In addition, it is not incumbent upon God to be graciousness; He chooses to whom it is bestowed. For this reason divine action cannot be unwise. The same goes for justice; it is to put everything in its proper place. But this has levels; beneficence (*ihsān*) and graciousness (*ifdal*) describe some of it, and justice and wisdom describe the other. Because while graciousness and justice are general names for the actions of the agent, the former gains specificity as it can be given up, and is done out of kindness and favour (*mun’ama muhsana*).

Thus, of justice (*adl*) and graciousness (*fadl*), it is the latter that is bestowed without necessity, and to whomsoever God pleases. As for justice, it is has two parts, and these in fact reiterate the original analysis of wisdom as composed of beneficence (*ihsān*) and graciousness (*ifdal*), on the one hand, and justice and wisdom, on the other.<sup>360</sup> The meaning of the passage is not altogether clear, for originally justice is presented as a part of wisdom, while wisdom is then described as a part of justice. This may have been

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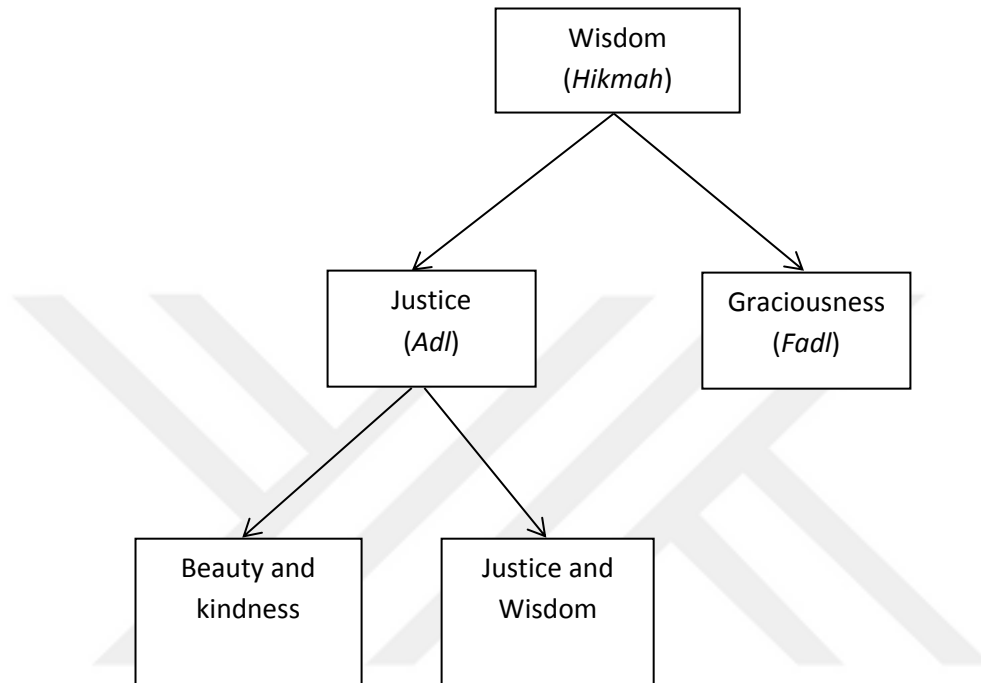
<sup>358</sup> Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” p. 53.

<sup>359</sup> I use the term deontological here in the sense used by Bentham as ‘the knowledge of what is right and proper’ rather than simple reference to the concept of duty. Jeremy Bentham and John Bowring, *Deontology; Or, The Science of Morality: in Which the Harmony and Co-Incidence of Duty and Self-Interest, Virtue and Felicity, Prudence and Benevolence, Are Explained and Exemplified* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Browne, Green, and Longman, 1834), p. 21.

<sup>360</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 193.

a lax in expression or a lax in conceptual arrangement; it is difficult to tell which. In any case, it appears all three concepts are closely interlinked. The purpose appears to be an explanation of each term as part of another in a hierarchy of relations.

The hierarchy of moral concepts



Rudolph admirably identifies *adl* as the key concept and explains it in terms of ‘hitting the point’ and ‘putting everything in its proper place’.<sup>361</sup> What is more, at the very least it can be understood from this passage that wisdom has both contingent and necessary aspects to it. This complicates the idea of our understanding of the world in so far as it includes significantly different divine principles of action in need of being distinguished from each other – a task which is perhaps impossible for humanity to do. In any case, some divine acts are done according to God’s wisdom and justice others are done simply out of His graciousness towards humanity.

Unfortunately, al-Māturīdī has not laid out the details of how these two ideas are combined, for the congregation of two terms under a third does not in itself resolve theoretical distinction, unless there is some kind of subsumption through the contents of

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<sup>361</sup> Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” pp. 52-53.

a third concept. And yet in so far as can be found in al-Māturīdī's writings the meaning of wisdom is itself dependent on these two concepts, so such an option eludes us. The marriage of the two concepts, therefore, can only be made by a joining of their contents without any extraneous addition. Thus, we must ask what rights the objects are due and what these rights are based on. For in an intriguing passage of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī writes that part of wisdom is the creation of every individual thing in a way and station appropriate to its essence.<sup>362</sup> It appears the contention here has to do with the character of the objects such that they are given a specific situation in reality. We have already noted the rather controversial status of the doctrine at play here regarding the individual nature of objects. Together, the ideas of individual rights and natures result in a moral vision that is not immediately unsound or contradictory. Nevertheless, it remains highly mysterious and due to an implied moral element raises the basic question: does God determine the rights or are they determined in accord with an objective rational standard? In this regard, al-Māturīdī states that God is not subject to an authority that has the power to command or prohibit.<sup>363</sup> Accordingly, a hierarchy is suggested, for certainly unless some reconciliation is achieved, we face the prospect of a fallacious definition on the back of self-contradictory terms that that cannot coexist. The mere suggestion of combination in the case of these terms specifically is significant and shall be the subject of discussion in the penultimate chapter of this work.

### 3.3.4 The Meaning of Wisdom and How it is Known

One may ask whether we can know what traces of wisdom look like without knowing what wisdom is. But is to know its essence necessary to have knowledge of a thing? The problem is that on the one hand, al-Māturīdī's asserts that God's wisdom is beyond human comprehension. On the other, he is wont to cite specific aspects of the universe as exemplifying wisdom. Indeed, as noted above, al-Māturīdī talks about the comprehension of the meanings of wisdom (*ma'āni al-hikamiyya*).<sup>364</sup> We know that God is all wise and that therefore His actions are wise but what is it about what we see in the world specifically that we can recognise it is as such? The problem also relates to

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<sup>362</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 395.

<sup>363</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298

<sup>364</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 579.

the common philosophical dilemma of the relation between objects and their definitions: does al-Māturīdī define wisdom in accord with what he saw in the world or does he interpret the world in accord with his definition of wisdom. If it is the former option, then we must ask what criteria he used and what the objectivity of his interpretation is. If it is the latter option, then we end up with the danger of a circular understanding of the world. Hence the definition of wisdom presents a problem when cited in relation to a divine attribute on the one hand and the natural order within the confines of our knowledge on the other.

In fact, it appears al-Māturīdī's position is based on a combination of the two options. In the first place, revelation declares that God is all-wise. And al-Māturīdī infers from this that all of God's actions must be wise also, including the creation in general.<sup>365</sup> This gives al-Māturīdī proof that regardless of what we know, the entire world is expressive of wisdom.

To support this further, as we have seen above, al-Māturīdī's theory of opposites and argument from design proves for him that the world is a result of divine knowledge. This encompasses all objects of the world. However, knowledge and wisdom are not entirely synonymous. While the attribute of divine wisdom is a basis for al-Māturīdī to judge the world and all its contents as expressive of wisdom in a general sense, unlike knowledge, wisdom might not, for example, encompass every individual aspect of creation. This is the reason behind the prospect of the fallacy of division; something true for the whole may not be true of all or some of its parts.

As a result, in the first place, a different form of evaluation is required to prove and interpret the wisdom of the world's individual objects. In the second place, this has to be done on a separate basis to the general claim of wisdom that derives from revelation if the evaluation is to be undogmatic and noncircular. This is where the second of the two options comes into play. As we have noted above, though we may not know the essence of divine wisdom, just as is the case with all of the divine attributes, we gain some form of knowledge of its meaning via analogy in so far as we know how the term applies regarding human events and actions. Thus, like the theory of opposites, the

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<sup>365</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 297.

meaning of wisdom could not have come about but through observations on the established order of nature subject to a recognisable understanding of wisdom. This provides a demonstrative proposition; reached on the basis of empirical study in order to discern the principles explaining the mainstay of nature's course.

Admittedly, it does not appear that this second option was adopted by al-Māturīdī with the intention of avoiding dogmatism or circularity. Rather the main motivation may have indeed been the message of the revelatory sources. Nevertheless, the theoretical scheme he adopts ensures that dogmatic appraisal is eschewed to make way for an independent and philosophical appraisal of the world. Thus we find in his thought openness to questions about the purpose of any individual object in creation on the basis of a particular but credible concept of wisdom. Once this appraisal is achieved, however, the findings link back to revelation and theology. It is in this way, and only in this way, that we can have any idea of what the divine attributes mean and thus a cautious bridge is established between the physical and metaphysical domains. With this resource permitting, al-Māturīdī establishes whether wisdom so understood is plausibly attributable to the world in order to offer us some basis for understanding God's creation. Correspondingly, according to Rudolph, al-Māturīdī's definition signifies 'the operating principle' of God's wisdom.<sup>366</sup> For, surely, if wisdom is in the reality all around us then we can summarise it in some way. Specifically, Rudolph cites al-Māturīdī's references to governance and harmony implied by the coexistence of opposite and divergent elements as reflective of the God's wisdom in the world. In addition, he cites the ability of reason to identify good, bad and 'all fundamental values' as demonstrative of the rationality of the world.<sup>367</sup> And for those aspects of creation that leave us baffled, al-Māturīdī accepts some aspects of the world appear beyond explanation, but we must attribute wisdom to them in keeping with the general encompassment established by revelation and reasoning.

Yet certain epistemological question marks remain concerning al-Māturīdī's thought regarding the specific contents of wisdom. Of course, there is the general definition of putting each thing in its proper place, but this tells us very little about what exactly is

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<sup>366</sup> Rudolph, "God's Wisdom," p. 52.

<sup>367</sup> Rudolph, "God's Wisdom," p. 50.

proper. Without this knowledge, the idea remains rather empty. At one point in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī writes that wisdom requires that punishment corresponds to the weight of an action's evilness and uses this to explain that an eternity in hell is requisite to stubborn denial of God's existence.<sup>368</sup> However, as a piece of knowledge, this is only known *post facto*. That is to say, we do not understand the justice of the punishment except by the fact that the punishment is known as God's decree. The impression of emptiness is only furthered by al-Māturīdī's observation that the whole universe is based on knowledge and wisdom; if we include everything it displays as wise, again the concept becomes overly broad and we will not know what distinguishes wisdom within the plethora of events that make up the world. Thus we meet an incongruous definition.

### 3.4 Chapter Conclusion

Al-Māturīdī begins *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* with considerations of how knowledge is reached in general and how religious and moral knowledge is reached in particular. To this end he stresses that there are only three means to knowledge, the senses, reason, and reports. He then goes on to offer proofs for the existence of God and evidence for a true prophet. These proofs are far from conclusive. But more importantly is the type of universe they describe. Reason is not simply the means knowledge, it also reflects cosmic principles regarding the design and activities of the universe.

The fact that al-Māturīdī regards the universe to be constituted by divergent aspects is perhaps essential also to his moral thought in general. Each entity is attached to accidents, which reveals its temporality. More importantly, the world is constituted by opposites that cannot cohere together except by a being that brings them together.

This reflects the basic division in epistemology shown with our discussion of deconstruction. A certain act is necessary to activate the differences and deferrals that give rise to meaning. This act is comparable to God's act, which creates and maintains the reality of the universe as composed of various opposites. This is a metaphysical act, and yet reflects the epistemological basis of comprehension and meaning. The fact that al-Māturīdī places ethical categories into the structure of the universe and uses them to explain its structure imbues its entirety with moral significance. What is more, this

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<sup>368</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 433, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 457-458.



explains also how epistemology took priority to physics and metaphysics, with the latter two being based on the former. This we see again in the very principles of reason. The creator of the universe is a rational being, in that He articulates and presupposes the essence of reason in the very creation of the universe, which requires the necessary differentiation and unification of objects.

The argument from providence also provides the grounds for the world's persistence and the foundation of ethical thought in general. The rationality of the oppositions and their management is ultimately to be based on the substantive significance suggested by the design of the world. This is suggested also by the fact that the definition of reason in terms of unification and differentiation would not make much sense unless there were already criteria according to which such acts should take place. The design of the cosmos is not however utopic, rather it has been designed for the purpose of testing humankind. In fact, the very existence of evil and imperfection, as well as the existence of differentiation, is for al-Māturīdī evidence of God's existence. Thus moral significance inhabits the very nature of the world.

The rationality of the universe is also further used as evidence of God's freedom, as is explanative of God's attributes, including divine wisdom. The attribute of wisdom is especially significant because of its centrality to al-Māturīdī's thought. It has two aspects; one is teleological and hence also broadly consequential, the other is deontological. The teleology of wisdom is fundamentally independent of any standard external to God. The logic it has belongs too itself, and is displayed in the nature of the world. The essence of wisdom, however, is unknown to us, what we do know of it are its traces in so far as these are displayed by the order and design of the world. The deontological aspect of wisdom consists in each thing people put in its proper place. These also reflect the fundamentals of the production of meaning and comprehension, since teleology is understood by empirical knowledge, while at the same time, the proper place of each thing depends on identifying what is right. This identification is not explained by al-Māturīdī, however, though we may take the teleological aspect of wisdom as basic to what is proper and therefore provide a general basis for what is right in terms of design.

Furthermore, as we noted above, the objectivity of this reading of the universe remains in question. Specifically, by what means can we be sure that this particular interpretation of the natural order is valid; or more generally, is there an objective means by which we may interpret the world and are other readings just as plausible? This is an immense question, and it would be wrong to believe that it stems from belief in a divine creator. The need to explain the events of the universe is a basic scientific one. However, religious belief will of course impact the explanations offered and in this regard the inclusion of a distinctive category of normative reading is one likely effect. Put simply, since God is all-Wise and the Creator of the universe, then the universe is a work of wisdom. The resulting matter relates to the fact-value distinction (is-ought problem) in philosophy: having read the operating principle of the world in moral terms, it seems to necessitate the application of a value claim to the facts that make up the natural order of the universe. An attempt to evaluate al-Māturīdī's position will be given in the next and final chapter. At this point, however, we can observe that al-Māturīdī joins teleological/consequentialist theses with deontological ones in his explanation of wisdom and interpretation of the world and its creation. In sum, his normative reading is two-folded, which raises questions as to how the two aspects stand together.

## Chapter 4: The Philosophical Identity of al-Māturīdī's Ethics

### 4.1 Towards Understanding al-Māturīdī's Metaethics

A fundamental issue is al-Māturīdī's conception of good and evil. The issue is sufficiently complicated to demand a discussion of its own, though this forms the basis for the chapter to follow. To gain an understanding of al-Māturīdī's position, in the first part of this chapter, I have made use of basic concepts in ethics. That is not to say that his thought on the issue can be made to fit neatly into any one school of ethical thought, and as shall be seen, a variety of strands are evident. This may in fact lead to as much confusion as enlightenment, since the task is then to understand how these different threads cohere with one another. It is essential, though, to keep in mind that the identification of these different threads does not bind al-Māturīdī's position as a whole to any of the schools for which these concepts are central. Rather, what defines al-Māturīdī's unique position in *kalām* is how the different concepts in question are brought together.

The last two parts both aim to interpret in basic terms where he stands in the context of ongoing metaethical debates. This is not out of mere curiosity, as valid and important the task may be, but harbours the specific aim of presenting a metaethical theory capable of standing among rival theories today. We will not, in fact, have to work hard in order to achieve the dialogue we wish. As shall be seen, concepts such as virtue, duty, utility, and others have parallels represented in the Arabic terminology used by al-Māturīdī. And though the associated theories of ethics behind them in western philosophy are largely alien, the questions here being asked are still comprehensible within the conceptual framework of al-Māturīdī's thought. Thus, asking the question whether virtue, utility, duty or some other concept is basic to morality, for example, picks out in his writings a cluster of concepts, such as *tab'* (nature), *'aql* (reason) and *shukr* (thankfulness) among others. This section was kept to the end, though it would neatly conclude the first division, which discusses moral goodness, because initial understanding of the concept of wisdom and its implications for morality are crucial to understanding al-Māturīdī's complete ethical vision of the world and humanity. Though a detailed investigation into the position of any one concept is beyond the scope of this study, it is helpful to understand which concepts are doing the theoretical work of

explaining the contents of morality before we go on, in the next chapter, to discuss the theological-ethical problems that al-Māturīdī's arguments resolve. What is more, the identification here is also an essential part of preparing the way to make al-Māturīdī's thought comprehensible, if not systematic, so long as we identify correctly.

#### **4.2 Basic Western Ethical Concepts versus *Husn* and *Qubh***

There are recognised to be three main moral concepts in ethics, the right, the good and moral worth. Each of these alone is able to act, and has acted, as the centre or basis of an entire ethical theory. The concept of moral right concerns whether an action is obligatory, wrong, or optional. These categories are the mainstay of deontology (from the Greek *deon*, 'that which is binding'), as they pertain to what we ought to do, or in other words, our moral duty. The concept of moral good denotes a value theory of morality. If something has a moral value it is either good or bad or neither of the two. This is often aligned with hedonistic ideas, such that the introspective qualities of pleasantness and painfulness are respectively designated as morally good and bad. In fact, a theory of moral value depends on designating something to have intrinsic positive moral significance, and hedonism provides one such designation. By implication, whatever leads to states of pleasure is deemed morally good and whatever leads to pain is deemed morally bad. Thus, somethings are good or bad because of their consequences. These are good or bad for extrinsic reasons. Nevertheless, their value is a mere derivative of the more basic status of pleasure and pain, which are intrinsically good and bad respectively. As for the concept of moral worth, it pertains to the character of moral agents themselves rather than actions or ends. The concept is therefore often closely associated with virtue ethics. The crux of the theory lies in identifying specifically the criteria that determine what constitutes a virtue and a vice as well as making a list of the virtues and vices resultantly acknowledged to exist. The result is a theory that sets out those characteristics that make a person moral.

The concept of moral worth as a component of virtue ethics specifically has ancient philosophical roots, dating back at least as far as Plato and, more especially, Aristotle. Virtue ethics was also the predominant theoretical framework for conceiving of morality in Western philosophy up until the Enlightenment, when deontology and consequentialist theories began to take hold. In the nineteenth century the tradition went

into acute decline but was revived in the middle of the twentieth century in Anglo-American philosophy. Modern versions of virtue ethics have branched out significantly from the Aristotelian roots into different forms. Nevertheless, all versions retain three central concepts, including the one of moral worth associated with virtue. These are *arête* (excellence or virtue) *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing). Despite some overlap between these ideas and those of the right and the good, a major difference between virtue ethics and other ethical theories is that the former does not typically set out universal principles by which actions in general can be appraised. Rather aretaic concepts pertain to issues of wider application regarding how one should live.

Specifying exactly how Islamic ethics relates to this picture set out by the right, the good and moral worth is not without difficulty. This is in part because, as Alper notes, the terms *ḥasan* and *qabih* have been used in different ways within the Islamic tradition of ethical thought. Firstly, the terms have respectively been used to refer to perfection and deficiency. Thus, with knowledge, for example, the greater the knowledge the greater the perfection while the opposite of knowledge is ignorance. The second sense in which the terms have been used is teleological. Whatever is appropriate to achieve a certain end is good and the opposite of this is bad. The judgements here concern the efficiency of the tool or method relative to the end in question; a knife is good for cutting bread, but bad for having soup. Finally, the third sense is thoroughly theological — though (for some reason) two positive terms of different theoretical potential are rendered synonymous. That is to say, whatever is praiseworthy and a source of divine reward is good, whatever is reprehensible and cause for divine punishment is bad.<sup>369</sup> Thus, in the Islamic tradition, we are presented with notions of perfection, effectiveness and divine reward (equated with praiseworthiness) as comprehensive of morality's substance.

The question for us is what sense al-Māturīdī was using the terms. Alper deems it necessary to limit the context of al-Māturīdī's writings exclusively to the third sense of the terms.<sup>370</sup> However, such a move appears to do some harm to the complicated picture

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<sup>369</sup> Alper, *Akul-Vahiy İlişkisi*, pp. 192-194 citing Sayyid Sharif al-Jurjani, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, VIII, p. 202

<sup>370</sup> Alper, *Akul-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 195

that al-Māturīdī's comments on morality seem to present. Even if we were to admit that the context of the discussion is ultimately reducible to theological terms, it sheds little light on the internal complexity of the ideas behind them. In fact, al-Māturīdī's discussion of *ḥusn* and *qubh* appears to point to ideas that match more closely those we have listed above under the three main ethical concepts of Western philosophy.

#### 4.2.1 The Good

Of course, the substance of divine reward and punishment corresponds, at least in part, with pleasures and pains. But that should not force us to recognise these candidates of moral significance as comprehensible solely within a theological paradigm. Just as a geologist can go about doing their work without the need to either affirm or deny the existence of God so too may a writer on ethics analyse the elements of morality both within and outside the confines of theological discourse.

The extra-theological nature of al-Māturīdī's treatment of the good and bad, for example, is made clear at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. The argument from providence given there immediately extends in the text into an argument for the need of morality, or, more precisely, a foundation (*asl*) for human prosperity. Having established that the desires of people will lead them to compete and destroy each other, he writes there is also, therefore, the need for the existence of a foundation for people to achieve mutual harmony and one that it is necessary for them to find.<sup>371</sup> In this passage, al-Māturīdī uses neither the term *ḥasan* nor *qabih*, but it is without doubt that those codes of conduct or factors that contribute towards human survival are regarded as part of religion and by implication, to be good in that they promote this survival. Indeed, the material circumstances of humanity are cited as a condition for the necessity of revelation and religion. Al-Māturīdī states that given there is a Creator Who provided the means of fulfilling the various physical needs of humanity, it is unthinkable that the divine Creator would not send a guide to teach them rather than leave them alone face to face with their ignorance and heavy burden of needs and desires.<sup>372</sup> In this context, the Creator sends someone to guide them and teach them knowledge necessary to satisfy these needs and desires and maintain peace. That the sciences and businesses pertaining

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<sup>371</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67-68.

<sup>372</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 68.

to human survival are taught by God's prophets need not mean, of course, that humanity could not have developed these themselves, but it appears al-Māturīdī is at the very least according them a central place to religion as a way of life, not to mention a necessity condition for its existence. Indeed, later in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, he notes that without commands and prohibitions from God on how to live humankind would be destined for constant warring and destruction.<sup>373</sup>

Another indication al-Māturīdī was using the terms *ḥasan* and *qabih* in the ethical rather than theological sense is his mention of extrinsic and intrinsic goodness. The Muslim *'ulamā* had already made the distinction between extrinsic (*ligayrihī*, lit. for something else) and intrinsic (*lidhātihī*, lit. for itself.) types of goodness and debated what fell under these categories.<sup>374</sup> It is in under such circumstances that we see al-Māturīdī make mention of the terms in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Specifically, al-Māturīdī attempts to repudiate the claim that the slaughter of animals is intrinsically bad. He states the opposite of those things which are intrinsically good are by necessity intrinsically bad. Things that are extrinsically good however are determined by their results or consequences; so in their opposites may be good also. In short, here knowledge of the consequences is necessary for a judgment (*hukm*) to be made. This, in short, shows a clear delineation of ethical concepts, familiar to ones in western philosophy, between intrinsically and extrinsically good entities.

Al-Māturīdī notes that anyone who trusts in their knowledge regarding a thing's status based on extrinsic factors will certainly encounter circumstances that challenge their judgements. In such situations, the need arises to consult a special mind, which in other words means to adopt the practice of the prophets. The idea here is that a prophet will know what the right judgement is regarding an action that has extrinsic value when normal people are ignorant of the consequences to follow. Al-Māturīdī writes that given the slaughter of an animal may be performed to end its pain or to benefit humans, the act cannot be described as intrinsically bad. Rather, it is to be judged either permissible

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<sup>373</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67.

<sup>374</sup> Molla Husraw, *Mirat al-Usūl fī Sharh al-Mirakat al-Wusūl*, ed. Ilyas Qablan al-Turki (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2011), pp. 112; Mehmed Seyyid, *Usūl-i Fıkıh: Medhal* (Istanbul: Işık Akademi Yayınları, 2011), p. 77-80; cf. pp. 437-38, pp. 458-63

or impermissible according to time and circumstance.<sup>375</sup> Al-Māturīdī is here arguing that animal slaughter belongs to the second rather than the first category of moral statuses. This example suggests that the idea of *ḥasan* and *qabih* correspond perhaps most closely with the good and the bad, along with that which is good in itself and that which is good extrinsically, especially since it cites the ending of pain as one factor important to deciding the legitimacy of an act and thus implies some degree of the hedonistic concerns often associated with the moral good.

We have said that the material circumstances of humanity are cited as a condition for the necessity of revelation and religion, but, conversely, those material circumstances were created for specific theological purposes. Al-Māturīdī writes that creation was given the two statuses of benefit and harm and every object was created with capacity for pleasure or pain. What is more, by this means, humanity learnt of hope and fear.<sup>376</sup> This takes us past the utilitarian thesis, where the basic source of morality is the human desire to gain pleasure and avoid pain. This for the utilitarian gives basic moral meaning to life. But for al-Māturīdī these are just a part of a more complex moral picture, as we shall now see.

#### 4.2.2 The Right

Of course, the degree to which the categories intrinsic and *lidhātihī* and their counterparts extrinsic and *ligayrihi* respectively overlap is dependent, however, on the wider context of classification. More specifically, the predominate concept in determining what is *ḥasan* and *qabih* may extend further than hedonistic concerns. The most beautiful action and the greatest good, states, al-Māturīdī, is belief, by which he means more specifically belief in the oneness of God (*al-Tawhīd*). In this regard, the beauty of Tawhīd to the intellect is greater than the rewards in heaven are to the senses.<sup>377</sup> Moreover, that which is beautiful to the senses comes below that which is beautiful to the intellect, for while that which the senses find attractive are liable to change (due to either subjective or objective factors), such a thing is not possible for the

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<sup>375</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>376</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 249.

<sup>377</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 316, cf. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 468, p. 476, p. 486.



things of rational beauty.<sup>378</sup> In contrast, the pleasures of inclination may cease to be objects of desire and al-Māturīdī cites the heavenly angels as devoted believers of God and His oneness that do not have such desires.<sup>379</sup> In this sense, they are quintessential bearers of the greatest good. Such statements by al-Māturīdī point again to an extra-theological context, where moral significance has an objective status based on the rational findings independent of sensory concerns.

What is more, al-Māturīdī holds the beauty of Tawhīd to be greater in value despite that divine reward entails a disproportionately high remuneration from God for our actions.<sup>380</sup> This raises a marked contrast between the quantity of divine reward and quality of belief in Tawhīd. That is, despite the immeasurable gains given to humankind in heaven, their value is still below the goodness accorded the state of correct theistic belief. In essence, the beauty of Tawhīd cannot be explained simply, if at all, in terms of divine reward and punishment. Accordingly, Tawhīd is cited as but another instance of the things that are good in themselves (*lidhātihī*) as opposed to those whose moral status depends on need and the degree of the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of its consequences, as per the distinction al-Māturīdī noted, seen above.<sup>381</sup>

The status of this good is emphasised when al-Māturīdī notes that once comprehended the intellect sees the beauty of Tawhīd. Since reason is responsible for grasping that which is intrinsically good and that every opposite of an intrinsic good is intrinsically bad, we know too that associating partners to God (*shirk*) is forbidden (ḥarām, on the use of this term here see the section on revelation).<sup>382</sup> Thus, the intellect is a specific recogniser of beauty and goodness in way that is separate from beauty based on factors relating to the senses. Such appraisals recall Aristotle's claim that the highest good for a human is contemplation of the divine.

The justification for placing Tawhīd as a form of right rather than good is not only due to the fact that its value is realised by the intellect rather than the senses. Firstly, al-Māturīdī says polytheism reveals as a form of cheating (*mukhādi'ah*) and, by

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<sup>378</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 316.

<sup>379</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>380</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 144, p. 316.

<sup>381</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 284.

<sup>382</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 251.

implication, Tawhīd as an instance of justice specifically.<sup>383</sup> Correspondingly, since every opposite of an intrinsic good is intrinsically bad, it is by reason that we know associating partners with God (*shirk*) is forbidden (*ḥarām*, on the use of this term here see the section on revelation).<sup>384</sup> Secondly, al-Māturīdī states a little further on that an important part of ethics is acceptance of the truth, with reference to a Qur’ānic verse that highlights nothing, not even the most miraculous signs, could sway certain deniers of the truth. This point is also highlighted when al-Māturīdī states no one shall be ignorant of the truth in the afterlife.<sup>385</sup> But categorising Tawhīd as a right rather than a good is not simply because it is ordered in the Qur’ān. For al-Māturīdī it is *necessary* to believe in God and do good works for Him *before* revelation arrives, that is to say. This means that acceptance of the truth as a general category is a duty for humankind, though independent of revelation, showing that the concept of duty may arise due to non-theological concerns. Nevertheless, despite giving examples of justice, such as Tawhīd, al-Māturīdī does not say how in any other individual case we can decide whether something is wise or just. Of course, the question is to discover how we are to decide what counts as just and wise in any given situation, and to answer this al-Māturīdī does not offer much by way of substantive principles.

### 4.2.3 Moral Worth

Teleological notions of moral significance are also evident in al-Māturīdī’s writing. A position he held and which was abandoned by his later students, most prominently by Abūl-Muīn An-Nasafī in his *Tabsirat al-Adilla*,<sup>386</sup> was that each object was created with its own nature and natural tendencies. This puts objects at odds with others, and God maintains the harmony of these opposed objects that would otherwise repulse each other and cease to coexist. But al-Māturīdī must explain how they would repulse each other, if God is not the cause, which seems difficult to explain unless we attribute to them an independent power. That is to say, the theory of natures suggests a constitution that determines what an object can and cannot do, and hence, an underlying power of its own.

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<sup>383</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 472.

<sup>384</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, V, p. 251.

<sup>385</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 145.

<sup>386</sup> Yavuz, “Tabiat ve İlliyete Bakışı,” pp. 45-53.

No doubt a challenging doctrine to hold in relation to God's having power of all things, without Whom no transformation of any kind can occur, the idea is nevertheless prominent in al-Māturīdī's theory of opposites and likely explicable in reference to different types of causation, perhaps of an Aristotelean framework. Certainly, the fact that al-Māturīdī says these natures are created prevents us from reading them collectively as a mere heuristic device used to aid comprehension of the natural order. In fact, there is striking similarity between his position and that of Saint Anselm, writing just a century later, who holds that each object includes teleological content within the internal structure of its own nature, but the nature of each thing along with its teleology is God's creation. In Anselm's system, God is by Himself the efficient cause of each objects being and well-being.<sup>387</sup> Similarly, the individual natures in al-Māturīdī's system explains their behaviour and sets them apart while God maintains the harmony of the opposed objects. Reading, in addition, al-Māturīdī as including within his theory something like the Aristotelean account of different causes, provides the grounds for him to maintain that each object has its own nature (comprised of a formal, material, and, most importantly, a final cause) in view of which God correspondingly causes its actions. Thus, al-Māturīdī says that the human ability to speak does not lie in the organ of the tongue, for if that were the case then other animals would also be able to speak. Rather God created this ability in humans specifically.<sup>388</sup>

The theory of natural abilities would not mean al-Māturīdī denying God's capacity to create miracles; a situation perceived by al-Ghazālī in the writings of the peripatetic philosopher Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina's theory attributes necessitating causal relations to the objects of creation, so the creaturely cause necessarily brings about its effect. For his part, al-Ghazālī explains the order we see in the universe via the concept of *Sunnah Allah*, the way of God. The full implications of this concept for al-Ghazālī, however, remain a matter of dispute, specially, on whether he believed that only a genuine cause must causally necessitate its effect. If not, then some form of secondary cause, possessed by creatures themselves, though not necessitating its effect, would be

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<sup>387</sup> Saint Anselm, *Monologion*, Ch.11; Marilyn M. Adams, "Anselm," *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press, Kindle Edition, 1999), pp. 30-31.

<sup>388</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, XII, p. 102.

possible.<sup>389</sup> The alternative view is that nothing has a nature of its own and everything is directly and totally constituted by God, so that the world is in a constant state of divine recreation, as per *kalām* occasionalism.<sup>390</sup>

In this light, al-Māturīdī's position appears somewhat ambiguous. He frequently alludes to the belief that a cause can be of two types, a necessary (determined) one and a free one.<sup>391</sup> God operates freely while His will necessitates the intended effect.<sup>392</sup> Indeed, God can operate completely without the use of causes (*asbāb*), as He did with the creation of the world.<sup>393</sup> Upon the world's creation, however, God adopts causation as a means to bring about His will.<sup>394</sup> It is clear that all effects in the world are brought about by God, but it is not clear whether all causation is. In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī connects God with the creation of all movement, whether determined or freely performed. With actions specifically, states and causes (*al-ahwāl wa al-asbāb*) are a foundation that require the addition of God's eternal power to be realised.<sup>395</sup> Yavuz observes al-Māturīdī to hold that secondary causes exist, in which case, God intervenes in the natural order to create miracles rather than merely deviating from His typical *sunnah*.<sup>396</sup>

To understand al-Māturīdī's idea of individual natures as having teleological aspects gains plausibility in light of his concept of divine wisdom, noted above. The concept has two aspects, namely a deontological and consequentialist-teleological one, and the world, and each thing in it, was created for a purpose. Since the natures determine the behaviour of objects, they are easily understood as the site of teleological content. This issue is laden with as much moral significance as metaphysical complexity, for it is al-

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<sup>389</sup> David B. Burrell, "Creation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 152-55; Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2007 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2007/entries/al-ghazali/>>; Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas*, (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958).

<sup>390</sup> Cf. Sukjae Lee, "Occasionalism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/occasionalism/>>.

<sup>391</sup> *Op. cit.* Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp.108-109, pp. 357-58.

<sup>392</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 350.

<sup>393</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 241, V, pp. 157-58, VIII, p. 25, IX, pp. 120-21. See Yavuz, "Tabiat ve İlliyete Bakışı," pp. 60-61.

<sup>394</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, pp. 287-88, p. 296, II, pp. 282-83, p. 306, V, p. 8, VII, p. 384

<sup>395</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 358.

<sup>396</sup> Yavuz, "Tabiat ve İlliyete," pp. 61-64.

Māturīdī's claim that just like created natures exist, so too does *ḥusn* and *qubh*, that is to say, in an objective and extra-theological mode.<sup>397</sup> Thus, the two form mutually supporting sister theories of the world's contents.

Of course, merely believing that God created the world and everything in it with an individual purpose does not force one to adopt a teleological framework to explain the events of nature. That is to say, one need not explain phenomena by the purpose they serve rather than by postulated causes simply because God was the originator of their existence. But al-Māturīdī emphasises strongly that the display of opposites in the world is a sign of God's knowledge. And this reflects Aristotle's account of the final cause. More than the actor, Aristotle emphasises the principle involved in the creation of a thing, and the knowledge of this principle rests in the art behind its production. Thus, in the production of a bronze statue, the artisan's role involves simply the manifestation of the specific knowledge necessary for the purposes of making the statue.<sup>398</sup> Similarly, for al-Māturīdī, it is God's knowledge that is responsible for the creation of the world and the specific configuration of all its individual objects. Just as crucially, Aristotle presupposes a concept of goodness in identifying the need for a causal connection to explain natural formations. This concerns both the existence and flourishing of animals, for example. Thus, the good signifies what the animal needs to survive, are benefited by having; and accounts for why, when introducing the concept of the end (*telos*), Aristotle insists 'not everything that is last claims to be an end, but only that which is best' to explain natural processes.<sup>399</sup> Thus the concept of the final cause brings together both teleological and deontological aspects just like al-Māturīdī's account of divine wisdom does.

Aristotle's main reason for defending the existence of the final cause was, however, based on its explanatory power. Without it, the regularity of the events in nature becomes difficult to explain and must be put down to mere coincidence; with the production of natural patterns occurring for no apparent reason.<sup>400</sup> Al-Māturīdī's explanation for the processes of the natural world is, by contrast, thoroughly

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<sup>397</sup> Yavuz, "Tabiat ve İlliyete," p. 56.

<sup>398</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 195 b 21–25.

<sup>399</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 194 a 32–33.

<sup>400</sup> Aristotle, *Physics*, 198 b 19–32.

theological; each thing is but a part of the manifestation of God's wisdom. Nevertheless, everything was created with a nature of its own that explains the manner of its behaviour, and which can therefore act as a basis to predict events.

Yet it may appear that Aristotle's theory of causation applies most easily when there is a conscious agent applying knowledge to achieve a specific result, so that things appear problematic when applied to natural phenomena generally, like rain and flora, where no mind is evident. But the final cause is close in content to that of the effective cause, which denotes the knowledge, principles or laws that went into the production of the object in question. Thus, we do not need a mind to lie behind the final cause; what is needed is the notion of perfection, a model or ideal. In this way, behaviour can be based either on some advantage it secures for the things existence or for its flourishing. The difference between these two is subtle, but both are available to the concept of the final cause to explain an object's fortunes. And these may simply be subsumed under the concept of the thing's 'nature' to fit into al-Māturīdī's scheme. Either his account of nature is teleological in as much as God created everything with a specific purpose and design.

The degree to which this theological aspect must be referred to in the explanation of individual events is an open to further discussion given the existence of individual natures. That is to ask whether al-Māturīdī attributed teleological dimensions only to the acts of God in managing the cosmos or to the nature of things themselves as well. Al-Māturīdī talks about the individual nature of a thing determining the variety of its actions. A duck has swimming in its nature and so swims, a bird the ability to fly and so flies.<sup>401</sup> As for humans, al-Māturīdī is clear, that they are occupy a unique status in creation with the natural ability to reflect upon their own constitution and that of the world as evidence for the existence of a higher power.<sup>402</sup> Humans have an intellect that allows them to deliberately choose their actions and disregard to some degree their natural inclinations. More specifically, because they possess the ability to distinguish *ḥasan* from *qabih*, they are held responsible for their behaviour.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, VIII, pp. 141-142.

<sup>402</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 233.

<sup>403</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunnah*, V, pp. 464-465.

In the theory of opposites we saw that it is the nature of things that makes them opposed. Topaloğlu appears to understand the plethora of opposed things to be constituted by the four elements. As noted above, this has some textual evidence. However, certain doubts in this regard are raised by the fact that al-Māturīdī includes within this framework psychological states, such as haste, boredom, impatience and pity, as well as moral dispositions, such as fondness for beauty and goodness and hate for dishonesty and evil.<sup>404</sup> While explaining the moral condition of humankind, Yavuz makes clear that all these are of a different order, which he names spiritual natures (*manevi tabiatlar*), in contrast to the material natures (*maddi tabiatlar*).<sup>405</sup> Thus, being independent of the material natures, it seems they must also be independent of the four elements. And accordingly, a fuller account for the theory of individual natures is in order.

It is within this light that we can understand teleological content in al-Māturīdī's theory. Because, if each object has an individual nature determined by God, and humans are one of God's creatures, then they too have a model according to which they have been created; and with the moral dimension of human existence, the result is a specifically moral end for each individual. We noted above, under the concept of the right the moral status of correct religious faith. However, correct faith is merely a part of a wider assortment of moral elements. Al-Māturīdī writes:

Now, when the servant is tied from the heart in obedience to his Lord (*i'taqada tā'at al-Rab*) and has attained mindfulness of servitude; and God has caused him to feel in his heart the great blessings and favours He has bestowed upon him, and demonstrates His awesome dominion and power by the means of reminding him of the wisdom in creation and His all-pervading will (*nafadh mashiya*); the servant refrains from directing his obedience (*tā'ah*) to one of whom it is not apposite with obedience of his Lord and protects him from the tendency to worship someone other than Him.<sup>406</sup>

Particularly significant in this passage is the elevated moral state the believer is supposed to reach as a result of the level of faith expressed. This is not simply limited to

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<sup>404</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 352, pp. 354-355; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, pp. 255-56, pp. 501-502; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, V, p. 51, p. 90, p. 352.

<sup>405</sup> Yavuz, "Tabiat ve İlliyete," pp. 59-60.

<sup>406</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 468.

obedience of God, which includes worship and following the sharia, but also gratitude for God's favours and understanding of servitude. By these terms, al-Māturīdī points to aretaic concepts and a transformation in the character of the believer. In addition, he immediately goes on to describe this state as better than a dozen worlds and the afterlife, making clear that he is pointing toward a spiritual and ethical relation with God rather than any hedonistic reward now or in the hereafter.

Thus, when al-Māturīdī discusses the feasibility of applying certain terms to God, such as essence (*māhiyah*), quality (*kayfiyah*) and closeness (*qurb*), of the latter he says:

It is permitted to describe God with the term closeness in reference to divine aid and assistance, and in view of being honoured and chosen, and in view of divine mercy and charity, and success and guidance and things of this type, because these are attributes of the essence (*waṣfu dhātī*). So it is permitted to say: God is always merciful to His friends (*awliyā*); loving (*muhibba*) towards them from the moment they become close to Him, and by the same token scornful (*mubgida*) towards His enemies.<sup>407</sup>

It is this relation to God that is of ultimate significance. And it is on this basis that the believer will earn eternal happiness. Along with this realm of morality go a whole host of the theological terms, such as success (*al-tawfiq*) and virtue (*al-'ismah*) on the positive side and failure (*al-khidhlān*) and abandonment (*al-tark*) on the negative.<sup>408</sup>

The 'anhedonistic' aspect to the constitution of morality is shown again in one of al-Māturīdī's arguments against Ka'bi, where, contrary to his opponent's claim that the term belief (*īmān*) encompasses all actions of obedience to God, al-Māturīdī argues that religious believers do not enter heaven on the basis of good actions, but due to the particular relation between God and the believer. On this basis, even those with great sins will all ultimately enter heaven.<sup>409</sup> In short, the relationship a believer has with God involves aspects that do not concern the parity of one's actions; and these are divine virtues, which subsume other ethical concepts in the final judgment. This is apparent given that there seems no rationalistic way of explaining the reward of eternal happiness for contemptible sinners.

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<sup>407</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 174.

<sup>408</sup> Op. cit, Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 349.

<sup>409</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 441 fn.4.



Teleology with its accompanying deontological aspect comes to the fore when al-Māturīdī judges the correctness of an action. For example, when discussing homosexual acts, he states that both rational and religious considerations are required. From a religious perspective, what is permitted or forbidden under the sharia is evidence of divine blessing and favour. Eating and procreation are essential to the continued survival of humankind; acting on needs and desires is a condition for human existence. But homosexuality is far removed from this aim and only indicative of lust. So even if there is no prohibitive judgement found in revelation, from the view of reason the act is bad.<sup>410</sup> Unfortunately, on this basis, an entire class of relatively innocent acts must be deemed immoral; namely, anything done for fun or pleasure that does not contribute to human prosperity, such as playing a board game or admiring a piece of art. Perhaps these different pleasures must be distinguished, but al-Māturīdī does not provide the basis to do so. Thus, when he condemns homosexual acts for being in this class specifically, he only manages to provide a weak basis to prove its immorality.

Though, al-Māturīdī does not much talk about human virtues specifically, or the perfection of human beings, the ideas are alluded to in significant ways. Thus, in the same passage, for example, when al-Māturīdī lists the errors to Ka‘bi’s use of certain Qur’ānic verses that mention the divine promise (*al-wa‘d*) of reward in the hereafter to support his claim that our actions correspond to our reward in paradise, al-Māturīdī notes that the divine promise belongs to those who actualise faith with the morality that belongs to it and behaviour that is indicative of it (*haqquq ul-īmān biahlaqahu wa ma dala ‘alayhi*).<sup>411</sup> This phrase of course points to an entire field of knowledge and conduct that does not fall under the metaethical discussions al-Māturīdī presents but remains present in his thought.<sup>412</sup> As Topaloğlu admirably points out, this phrase (the morality of faith (*ahlaqahu*)) is a reference to a hadith where the Prophet is asked, ‘what is the best of faith?’ (*ayy al-īmān afdalu*), (by which is meant ‘what are its qualities?’), to which he replies, ‘good character’ (*khuluq ḥasan*).<sup>413</sup>

<sup>410</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, fol. 203b, cited in Şekeroğlu, *Maturidi’de Ahlak*, pp. 161-62.

<sup>411</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 441.

<sup>412</sup> See, Şekeroğlu, *Maturidi’de Ahlak*, pp. 185-212.

<sup>413</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.441, fn.5 citing Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 4/385.

### 4.3 Moral Relativity, Objectivity, and the Worldly Status of Morality

A position most likely inspired as a response to the dualists whom al-Māturīdī devotes frequent parts of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* to refuting is that morality is relative to context and perspective.<sup>414</sup> The dualists, referring to Zoroastrian thinkers, held that good and bad came respectively from two different gods, and that the two moral categories were realised in terms uncontaminated by the other. In contrast, al-Māturīdī recognised that in any one situation there may not be a single clear right or wrong answer regarding its moral status, or rather, that there may be sufficiently numerous good and bad sides to make any moral judgement speculative at best. Of course, this does not amount to moral relativism and is in fact a rather uncontroversial position in ethics. In one circumstance, to kill a person may be murder, in another, justice or self-defence, such as the case may be. The different sides of a situation may derive either from the contrasting significance a single thing or action might have.<sup>415</sup> Alternatively, they may derive from the specific view of the parties involved. Thus, a single thing might have both good and bad aspects to a single party, or be good for one party while at the same time bad for another.<sup>416</sup>

This aspect of morality, which makes moral value relative to one's perspective, appears as a corollary of its temporality. Good and bad are contingent conditions and it is possible for them both to exist at the same time in the same circumstance. (It is unclear whether al-Māturīdī is making the stronger claim that the creation of one necessarily depends on the creation of the other. That is, however, what the argument seems to require. Yet the necessity is simply of an epistemological or logical kind and not a physical one. It is possible al-Māturīdī has conflated the two here). Wisdom, though, allows no possibility of folly after it,<sup>417</sup> and, what is more, is an attribute of God.

The point to be made here is that though God tests humanity via the creation of evil, evilness itself cannot be attributed to God. There are a number of aspects to this claim. Firstly, evilness and other things such as ugliness, corruption and badness, cannot be considered part of God's essence; to do so would amount to *kufṛ*, disbelief.<sup>418</sup> Secondly,

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<sup>414</sup> Op. cit. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 102, p. 155, p. 158, pp. 186-87, p. 188, p. 232.

<sup>415</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 297-98, p. 329.

<sup>416</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 88, p. 239, p.329.

<sup>417</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164.

<sup>418</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 110.

even people would not wish to have such qualities attributed to them, so there is an obvious respect that must be accorded God in this regard.<sup>419</sup> Thirdly, nothing is evil except in its particular circumstances. Whatever evil that is created in the world must be judged in line with the greater circumstance and purpose of humankind's existence; with evilness an aspect of trial. So by trial each human may prove their moral worth and integrity for which they will be eternally rewarded. Fourthly, al-Māturīdī draws a distinction between forming (*takwīn*) and formation (*mukawwan*). The former establishes a relation that does not entail the transfer of quality from the formation to the one responsible for forming it.<sup>420</sup>

Al-Māturīdī's position against the dualists is particularly important precisely because on the surface his position seems so similar to theirs, and their influence perhaps contributed to the formulation of his theory of opposites. Having described the nature of reality in such a way, it becomes crucial then for al-Māturīdī to distinguish his own position from that of the dualists he confronts. At times, however, his comments on the subject are so strong they seem to commit al-Māturīdī to a moral particularist position, whereby a basic moral value or reason may be reversed depending on the situation:

There is no single particle of being (*jawhar*) that refers in its essence to a single characteristic, such as harm and benefit, or evil and goodness, or blessing and tribulation. Rather, each thing characterized (*yūṣafu*) by evil may also be good in a respect (*wajh*) that is different from its original sense as evil, and likewise for all attributes. The states (*ahwāl*) of things are such that they are not a benefit in every state (*hāl*) or a harm in every state.<sup>421</sup>

Nevertheless, al-Māturīdī makes clear that though the moral status of objects and actions will vary or even reverse according to context, justice and wisdom remain moral positives that have a generalizable status across moral contexts. Thus, in regards to the justice of God's actions, he writes:

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<sup>419</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 115, p. 145, p. 327.

<sup>420</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 110-113, p. 239, fn. 12.

<sup>421</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.88, trans. by Dorrol in "The Universe in Flux," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27:2, p.127. See also, Pessagno, "Uses of Evil," pp. 74-75.

The truth of the matter is that injustice and foolishness are reprehensible and that justice and wisdom are good on the whole. However, one thing may be wisdom in one state (*hāl*) and foolishness in another, injustice in one state and justice in another.<sup>422</sup>

Admittedly, there appears some incongruity between these two sentences. But the second makes clear that the positive status of justice and wisdom remains whatever the situation may be. In fact al-Māturīdī distinguishes between the principle or meaning of a moral value, which is not subject to change, and the circumstances that determine whether that value or its opposite has arisen:

And [folly] in terms of meaning (*min haythu al-jumlah*) does not change, and in terms of events (*min haythu al-wuqū'*) it is possible for a thing to be either [wise or foolish] with connection to different states and causes.<sup>423</sup>

Accordingly, al-Māturīdī writes, the goodness of wisdom and the badness of oppression is fundamental to each.<sup>424</sup> And thus whatever reason determines to be good can never be bad, and vice versa.<sup>425</sup>

Of course, the question is to discover what counts as just and wise in any given situation, and to answer this al-Māturīdī does not offer much by way of substantive principles. We have already mentioned that Tawhīd among others things is good in itself (*lidhātihī*) as opposed to things whose moral status depends on need and the degree of the praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of its consequences.<sup>426</sup> And, in fact, al-Māturīdī cites Tawhīd as one instance of justice specifically.<sup>427</sup> Its objective status is emphasised in a different way when al-Māturīdī notes that once comprehended, the intellect sees its beauty. This statement recalls in some sense Descartes epistemological notion of clear and distinct perception, where the mind sees the truth of a concept once it is comprehended. We noted above that reason is responsible for grasping that which is intrinsically good and that every opposite of an intrinsic good is intrinsically bad. Correspondingly, it is by reason that we know associating partners with God (*shirk*) is

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<sup>422</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 297, trans. by Dorrol, in “The Universe in Flux,” pp. 127.

<sup>423</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298.

<sup>424</sup> cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164, p. 297.

<sup>425</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 312, p. 275.

<sup>426</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 284

<sup>427</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 472.

forbidden (*ḥarām*, on the use of this term here see the section on revelation).<sup>428</sup> In addition, al-Māturīdī uses the term *munkar* (lit. unknown) to designate *shirk*, in line with Islamic tradition, and *ma'ruf* (lit. known) for its opposite, *Tawhīd*.<sup>429</sup> Though these terms are usually used simply as synonyms for what is bad and what is good respectively, some Muslim scholars have stated that they also indicate rational appraisal; and it appears al-Māturīdī has used them in that sense also, specifically, that what the respective correctness and incorrectness of these two doctrines is are known via contemplation.<sup>430</sup> Nevertheless, despite giving examples of justice such as *Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī does not say how in any individual case we can decide whether something is wise or just.

What is more, although we operate with objective standards, these do not lead to clear cut conclusions on a single matter. The world itself is not so simple, and a mixture of different elements is often found together within a single circumstance. That is to say, the situations that we deal with are made up of various moral components which together defy a simple appraisal, as we saw in the case of Euthyphro, in Chapter One. Thus, it is impossible to call any particular action or object absolutely good or bad. Accordingly, when there exist more than two possibilities regarding the truth of a matter, al-Māturīdī states more research must be carried out until a definite decision can be made.<sup>431</sup> Some things may, in general terms, be deemed good or bad, but the moral value of any given action or entity is almost always vulnerable to being subverted by changing circumstances. In such situations, doing what is normally considered good in certain circumstances may in fact be bad. So learning what these situations are and when they occur is another aspect of wisdom and rational thought.

In fact, al-Māturīdī seems to argue that the actual cause of evil in the world is human ignorance. In a typically opaque passage, which appears to be of significant importance, al-Māturīdī draws a comparison between God's actions and those of humanity. God is all-wise and all-knowing, and has no need of anything, so all His actions must therefore

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<sup>428</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 251, Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 544-545.

<sup>429</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 410.

<sup>430</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 69, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, V, p. 69; Şekeroğlu, *Matürīdī'de Ahlak*, pp. 62-63; Mustafa Çağrı, "Emir bi'l-Ma'ruf Nehiy ani'l-Münker," *DİA*, Vol.11, pp. 138-141.

<sup>431</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, pp. 349-350.

be described and wise. In contrast, humans suffer from ignorance and have various needs. For this reason, al-Māturīdī concludes that a single thing can be both just and unjust, wise and foolish.<sup>432</sup> The relation here is not immediately clear, but at least two readings are possible. The first is that humans fail to distinguish the good from the bad and for that reason a single thing can appear to have both aspects. The second reading is that because humans are in need and ignorant, their actions are not always wholly wise and just, but rather mixed with folly and injustice. This second reading seems to go fit better with the purpose of the above analogy.

Nevertheless, against the sceptics, al-Māturīdī claims knowledge is possible and the import of his arguments in this regard extend to morality. The sceptics whom he addresses claim that physical change and subversion destroy the possibility of us knowing anything, raising such cases as the scientific revisions to what was once said was true, the disappearance of a taste once savoured, the veiling at night of what is seen during the day. Whatever the value of these examples, the claim is that transition precludes lasting states, truths and therefore also knowledge.<sup>433</sup> Al-Māturīdī first raises the point that the sceptics prove their own contention false, since if it is true, then there exists a truth which amounts to knowledge.<sup>434</sup> In essence, for the sceptics to make their claim there must already be some foundation for the possibility of knowledge. As for the specifics of knowledge, al-Māturīdī considers the sceptics regarding each of the three sources of knowledge and dismisses their claims *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>435</sup> The sceptic of sensory perception, for example, must only be made to feel pain in some part of their body to admit the provision of knowledge.<sup>436</sup> By extension, although circumstances will change whether a thing is good or bad, just or unjust, the fact remains that within the relevant circumstances the value of a thing remains true and objective.

Research is particularly necessary since humans can be lead to make erroneous decisions regarding a matter under the influence of human nature itself. After stating

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<sup>432</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 297.

<sup>433</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 222.

<sup>434</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 223.

<sup>435</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp.70-74.

<sup>436</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.70.

that whatever is good to reason can never be bad, and whatever bad never good, in regards to animal slaughter al-Māturīdī writes:

Each thing that is evil in relation to human nature comes with the permeation of the psyche by the thing perceived; so the individual's nature is instantly repulsed by pain. Later, this [effect] may go away by habituation (*bi al-i'tiyād*) as in the case of butchers and those who acquire the custom of slaying. Hence, it is determined that disapproval of animal slaughter is tied to [human] nature rather than reason, and a change in sentiment is normal.<sup>437</sup>

Subjective judgments are the result of human psychology which is open to adjustment and the very fact that perspective on the matter can change due to habit shows that for al-Māturīdī the judgement lacked rational foundation. It is clear then that al-Māturīdī did not assign the inclinations authority on moral matters, at least in the final analysis. This is but another aspect of his claim, noted above, that what is beautiful to the senses does not much what is beautiful to the intellect in value because the former are liable to change and, ultimately, to eradication.<sup>438</sup> Naturally, the change in assessment here is not a self-deceptive or illegitimate one, but rather arrived at with the removal of subjective biases to allow a better reassessment of reasons findings.

Indeed, al-Māturīdī frequently refers to moral values both by designation and appearance. For example, he states, God created humankind as a people of discrimination (*ahl al-tamyīz*) who know how to distinguish the praiseworthy (*al-mahmud*) from the blameworthy (*al-madhīm*) by the faculty of reason and made the former beautiful (*hasan*) and the latter ugly (*qabīh*) regardless of the ego or inclinations.<sup>439</sup> Equally, God created evil actions with repulsive features as an example of ugliness, by which means the intellect is warned.<sup>440</sup> Thus an aesthetic is attached to actions as something distinct from the actions themselves and denotes an aspect of the recognition of moral events that sits apart from their strictly moral value. The implication is that had God intended He could have made the immoral beautiful and the moral ugly. Al-Māturīdī does not exactly state whether we know the moral value of an

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<sup>437</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 275.

<sup>438</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 316.

<sup>439</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 301.

<sup>440</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 353.

action in separation from its rational aesthetic, but such a capability seems vital because otherwise we would in fact not know whether our intellect is deceiving us.

This objectivity and the attendant aesthetic, however, rests in the events of the physical or rather created world as the determinations of reason pertain to worldly existences. For al-Māturīdī, reason does not pertain to some transcendent world or reality – a realm of knowledge that goes beyond experience and even the possible experience of the unseen world. This is indicated by the fact that al-Māturīdī’s definition of reason is given in physical terms. Indeed, the *mutakallimun* generally held there is nothing other than the physical, in contrast to God, that we can label as part of existence, not even the human soul.<sup>441</sup> In this sense, while advancing the centrality of reason and rational principles in understanding reality, he is not an advocate for some transcendent reality existing eternally next to God like some platonic form, whether in the form of rational truth or morality.

This is accords with al-Māturīdī’s general claim that transformation is a sign of a Creator.<sup>442</sup> In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, for example, al-Māturīdī cites a direct relation between temporal events (*ahdāth*) and the manifestation of good and bad to refute his theological adversary, the Mu’tazili Ka’bi. The latter essentially claims that the legitimacy of attributing a predicate (*ṣifat*) to God depends on whether it is good or bad.<sup>443</sup> As a school, the Mu’tazila go so far as to say that evil does not exist in creation and mention of it is figurative, since to admit of evil would ascribe its creation to God and compromise His benevolence.<sup>444</sup> In response, al-Māturīdī states that good and evil designate not only temporal entities but intrinsically temporal values too and temporality cannot be ascribed to God. Accordingly, there is a crucial distinction between the range of moral concepts we can apply to God and human beings and the limited knowledge we can have of them when associated with God. Thus, the ascription of the name al-Khaliq (the Creator) and the attribute al-Rahman (the Merciful) cannot

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<sup>441</sup> Calverly, “Doctrines of the Soul,” p.261; Smith and Haddad, *Death and Resurrection*, p. 20, pp. 86-89; Marmura, “Soul,” p. 461-462; Fakhry, “The Mutazilite View of Man.”

<sup>442</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 78, p. 170, p. 220, pp. 333-334, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd.*, p. 315.

<sup>443</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 114.

<sup>444</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 238-239



be based on divine acts of creation.<sup>445</sup> Rather, God was pre-eternally the possessor of such titles and the divine attributes are not exemplary of temporal events nor is our description of God with such terms to be taken as expressive of them.<sup>446</sup>

The contention I make here is that, at least at the most basic level, all morality for al-Māturīdī is encompassed entirely by temporality in so far as it is known to humanity. Or rather, reason is able to understand and articulate morality only in terms that belong to the temporal nature of the world. We noted above the impossibility of calling anything absolutely good or bad; this of course does not apply to God because within al-Māturīdī's framework the terms *hasan* and *qabih* are indicative of temporality and contingency, and therefore cannot be applied to God without committing a category error (see next chapter). Immediately, one may wish to make a kind of exception for the intrinsic *hasan* attributed to *Tawhīd*, but since this is based on reason, which is also only an integral and integrated aspect of the world, that does not seem possible. The other category is the moral virtues, which consist in or signify a kind of optimum within various spectrums of behaviour. If they are open to rational analysis and explanation, then they too are but something which belongs to the world. In short, good and evil, they are created things; objective and not transcendent.

Al-Māturīdī writes in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that it is not possible for one who lacks a particular power to bestow that power to another, like one who is ignorant cannot teach another.<sup>447</sup> On similar lines we may observe that God created goodness, granted humans the ability to perform good deeds. But even if we accept that God did create morality, one may observe that it is possible He created a metaphysical realm within which the moral laws of morality exist as a part of God's creation. This realm will be quite different from the rest of creation, and signify a place of intangible laws. This is a possibility, but one must note that, for al-Māturīdī at least, reason might not have access to it, for the assumption is that the intellect has access to a realm of a radically different nature outside of time and space, and this al-Māturīdī rejects. The thought does gain some sympathy, however, given the fact that for al-Māturīdī the judgements of what is

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<sup>445</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 116.

<sup>446</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 118.

<sup>447</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 313.

right and wrong given by reason are unchanging; in contrast to the judgements made by the senses and the things of the sensible world themselves. This unchanging nature of morality confirms its objective status, whether it suggests a peculiar existence of the good within the conditions of existence is another matter.

The worldly nature of morality's existence is particularly important in understanding ethics in the framework of his theory of opposites. Al-Māturīdī's position offers a complicated interrelation of metaphysical, physical and moral components, which must be properly distinguished. Consequently, all morality, that is to say, every aspect of *ḥusn* and *qubh*, whether it is the good, the right or moral worth, is of temporal description and we are unable to gain epistemological access to metaphysical morality except by analogy. Thus, the things in heaven are described in terms of worldly and sensual pleasures; as in line with a basic share of *ḥusn*, in so far as temporal events and states constitute its existence. But, despite the worldly composition of morality, behind this is an ethical relation to God that is based on virtue; specifically, the virtues of God as encompassed in the divine names, and those of the believer, as noted above. Only some special aspects of moral existence are not classifiable in such worldly terms, and these are the divine attributes, chief among them being divine wisdom. As for the intrinsic goodness of human belief, this must be classed as an objective good, because of the justice it denotes. As noted in the previous chapter, we do not know the essence of any of the divine attributes precisely because of the transcendent realm to which the relevant knowledge must pertain. But our basic understanding of wisdom and justice give us an insight into their meaning.

#### **4.4 Divine Wisdom and the Moral World**

The above discussion about the different concepts at play in al-Māturīdī's ethics and the worldly nature of morality provides background by which we may understand the key role and status al-Māturīdī gives to divine wisdom. Of the concepts we noted above, wisdom displays at least two, namely justice and purpose, as noted in Chapter Three. This would make its classification rather difficult in the framework above. But the difficulty with treating wisdom as any other concept of the good in the context of al-Māturīdī's thought exists for more profound reasons than that. Specifically, wisdom is an attribute of God, and it therefore has a metaethical as well as ethical status pertaining

to creation as a whole and which it, however, also ultimately transcends, both metaphysically and epistemologically. Now, this is the case with all of God's attributes, which admittedly must fit into the third conception of morality, namely, moral worth, discussed above, for the attributes of God are all virtues. Nevertheless, wisdom, as we shall see, is an overarching concept for al-Māturīdī's thought due to its peculiar explanative power and its essentiality to understanding the structure of the moral universe he depicts.

We noted in Chapter Three that humans achieve wisdom through the faculty of reason and are thereby able to appreciate and recognize the intelligence displayed by the natural order God created. We also noted that wisdom contains both teleological and consequentialist aspects. Here wisdom is to be distinguished from knowledge, for al-Māturīdī says that the design and governance of creation is a sign of God's knowledge and power (not simply His wisdom); and we have seen him use these observations in his proofs for the existence and oneness of God. In short, since the cosmos is made up of opposed elements that could not possibly hold together were it not for the existence of a being to direct and keep the cosmos in harmony, a Being with knowledge of how everything works and functions, and the power to direct everything too is evident.<sup>448</sup> In contrast, the purposes things serve and the final end to which they are directed makes them ethically appraisable, and it is in this way more specifically that wisdom enters the scene. Al-Māturīdī writes that whosoever performs an action with no specific goal lacks the attribute of wisdom.<sup>449</sup> Now, God is free of all need, which makes it impossible that He should create something in order to benefit from it. At the same time, al-Māturīdī states it is inconceivable for the cosmos to have been established by God without wisdom or purpose, and that for the cosmos to exist solely to be annihilated would be unwise. Rather it has been established for its existence to persist.<sup>450</sup> Accordingly, al-Māturīdī holds that the cosmos is fundamentally bound to reason and, hence, wisdom and thus has been created for certain specific reasons in accordance with which God gave humanity commands and prohibitions as well as the means to survive.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>448</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>449</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 167.

<sup>450</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 84, p. 167; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 72.

<sup>451</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 67, p. 248.

But wisdom does not only pertain to goals and consequences; al-Māturīdī states that it also involves treating people justly. Hence, one requirement of wisdom is to punish a sin according to its greatness, in regards to which al-Māturīdī cites the Qur’ānic verse: Whoever has done a bad deed will be repaid only with its equivalent — they will not be wronged.<sup>452</sup> Accordingly, he states it would be wrong for a lesser sin to be punished in the same way as a sin of the greatest magnitude.<sup>453</sup> As he explains, punishment is not something to be meted out arbitrarily, especially by a Being Who suffers no harm from opposition and carries the attributes of forgiveness and mercy (*al-’afw wa al-rahmah*).<sup>454</sup> Thus, justice is included as an aspect of wisdom.

But it is only one aspect and wisdom is not limited to justice. The other major aspect al-Māturīdī mentions is grace. This we have discussed before in Rudolph’s examination of al-Māturīdī’s concept of wisdom. The term refers to God’s freely choosing to favour someone specifically with reward and blessing. In fact, al-Māturīdī appears to identify this additional aspect of wisdom as another instance of divine justice.<sup>455</sup> Yet its meaning applies also to a more general generosity of God that is referred to, incidentally, in the first part of the verse al-Māturīdī cites above: Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times to his credit. If one were to have limited divine wisdom purely to human conceptions of justice, the explanation of such disproportionate reward would become difficult, for there should be little difference in the moral implication between undue punishment and undue reward. But al-Māturīdī’s conceptual framework provides a means of locating this divine virtue coherently in God’s actions. The fact that grace too is regarded as a form of justice is understandable once we consider that all God’s actions are wise, and everything is therefore placed in its proper place.

Another virtue al-Māturīdī identifies as associated with divine wisdom is God’s mercy. In response to those who in the name of justice claim that a major sin cannot or will not be forgiven by God without proper repentance, al-Māturīdī asserts that those who limit

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<sup>452</sup> The Qur’ān, 6:160, the full verse reads: Whoever has done a good deed will have it ten times to his credit, but whoever has done a bad deed will be repaid only with its equivalent — they will not be wronged. (p. 93).

<sup>453</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 433.

<sup>454</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 457.

<sup>455</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 193; Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” pp. 52-53.

God's forgiveness in this way assume they know His wisdom.<sup>456</sup> Indeed, he states that oppression (*thulum*) is characterised by unforgiveness, whereas God is the most forgiving and, indeed, often reciprocates evil with good, revealing a divinely established meritocratic asymmetry that exists profoundly in favour of humankind.<sup>457</sup>

But this situation points also to the basic *kalām* opinion that humans cannot comprehend the essence of God's wisdom. While this means also that some things will remain mysterious to us to some degree, as al-Māturīdī is pointing out, it also means that we cannot assume to know or set limits on it with our limited knowledge.

The sword, however, will cut both ways. Just as we cannot assume to limit the favour God will show humanity nor can we assume to restrict or deny in an unqualified way what He is willing to inflict. Certainly, it is with some astonishment that al-Māturīdī meets al-Ka'bi's claim that nothing evil exists in creation. Among those things that we must accept as part of the worldly condition al-Māturīdī cites abjection (*dhillah*), deception (*khudu'*), need (*hājah*), faults (*'uyūb*), Satan (*shaytān*), evil, (*shar'*), discord (*fitnah*), tribulation (*balā*), corruption (*fasād*), decay (*natn*), malignancy (*khubth*) and filth (*qadhr*).<sup>458</sup> Clearly, al-Māturīdī was ready to confront the dark aspects of the world we observe; this is not the best of all possible worlds. Al-Ka'bi's rejection of these observed stains on the brilliance of the natural order stems from the Mu'tazili belief that the creation of something is [to be] that thing itself (*khalq al-shay huwa dhālika al-shay*).<sup>459</sup> In order to protect God from being directly and incorrigibly associated with evil this compels the Mu'tazili to say that nothing of negative moral value has been created.<sup>460</sup> The other alternative is to say evil things do exist but that God did not create them; a view al-Māturīdī ascribes to the Zoroastrians, who have a god of light and a god of darkness to account respectively for the good and evil perceived in the world. In response to these two groups al-Māturīdī says, in the first instance, that God is indeed, the creator of everything; if anything existed outside His creation, then His sovereignty, lordship, and other names of praise would not be applicable to them, and this would in

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<sup>456</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 420.

<sup>457</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 421.

<sup>458</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 334.

<sup>459</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 334.

<sup>460</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 238-239.

turn undermine those aspects of His divinity.<sup>461</sup> In the second instance, al-Māturīdī additionally claims that evil cannot be attributed to God or His actions, because, contra the Mu'tazili doctrine, the substantive content of the action is to be disassociated from its Creator.<sup>462</sup> As noted before, al-Māturīdī draws upon a distinction between forming (takwīn) and formation (mukawwan).<sup>463</sup> The idea here is like the one that a courier cannot be held responsible for the content of a letter; the created thing has a character that is distinct from the character of the creator.

The point is also related to the divine will and divine decree (*al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar*), central articles of Islamic faith. For our purposes, they together concern the actual creation of good and bad. Al-Māturīdī states that the difference between them lies in the divine decrees moral specificity. While the divine will concerns God's creation of every individual event, the divine decree concerns the design of this event with attributes of goodness (*ḥusn*) and badness (*qubh*).<sup>464</sup> Thus, the relation between morality and God to each individual is highly intimate and so with the realisation that follows theoretical reflection one also realises that every blessing is a direct act of God.

From this brief analysis we can also see that al-Māturīdī stands in direct opposition to the Mu'tazili doctrine of *al-Aṣlah* (the optimum). By holding wisdom as a key divine attribute in understanding the world, al-Māturīdī is able to avoid many of the problems that plague the general Mu'tazili position and their doctrine of *al-aṣlah* in particular. By holding that God was bound to do what is just, the Mu'tazila raised an independent moral standard next to God that threatened His sovereignty and conflated justice with moral goodness. In contrast, al-Māturīdī points to wisdom, which does not have any certain substantive moral baggage attached. Indeed, divine wisdom is beyond our comprehension, defined as to put a thing in its correct place. But what this means substantively al-Māturīdī does not explain, though he does cite certain examples of wisdom, such as the provision of revelation. Indeed, what is important is the knowledge that all God's actions are wise. *A fortiori*, the world and all its contents are examples of divine wisdom. On this basis, as we have seen before, wisdom never becomes an

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<sup>461</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 328.

<sup>462</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 110.

<sup>463</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 110-13, p.239 fn. 12.

<sup>464</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 395.

entity separate of or co-eternal with God. Thus, al-Māturīdī can state that there is no way God has to do the optimum good for humanity, and no way that He could therefore be criticised. Rather, He is the wisest and His actions do not leave the boundaries of wisdom.<sup>465</sup>

Al-Māturīdī also rejects the doctrine of the optimum on another basis, which we discussed previously to different ends. While refuting the Mu'tazili position, al-Māturīdī states that what is advantageous implies something that is useful always for someone rather than another, and as a result, creates disadvantage, or more precisely, unfairness, even on the terms of Mu'tazili thought. Similarly, he states that if optimum advantage is made in one place, the greatest misfortune (*fasad*) arises as a possible condition and will result in its existence.<sup>466</sup> The point here is a corollary of the temporality of goodness. Good and bad are contingent conditions and one necessarily implies the other. It is unclear whether al-Māturīdī is making the stronger claim that the creation of one necessarily depends on the creation of the other. That is, however, what the argument seems to require, though such necessity is an epistemological and not a physical one. It is possible al-Māturīdī has conflated the two here. But the message of the argument is one we have seen before: nothing is from all perspectives absolutely good or evil, and the status of a thing will change according to context. This problematizes the ability to call anything good or evil in absolute terms, and because of that undermines both the Mu'tazili and dualist positions which both heavily depend on the ability to identify moral values precisely.

But al-Māturīdī's claim goes further than asserting the divinely ordained existence of evil. More specifically, he asserts the existence of evil serves unique ends that pertain to human comprehension of morality, revelation and the hereafter. In fact, al-Māturīdī stands in a strong position to deal with the traditional problem of evil. Firstly, in order that reflection is performed accurately and diligently, as should be, al-Māturīdī states it was necessary according to wisdom that both harmful and beneficial aspects were created in the world.<sup>467</sup> And through those aspects, humans are tested in various

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<sup>465</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 192-193.

<sup>466</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 164.

<sup>467</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 237.

ways.<sup>468</sup> And different people are tested differently. It is by means of being tested that humans become thankful for the goods that they are blessed with.<sup>469</sup>

This point acquires a theological aspect, as the trial inherent to life in the world helps humanity understanding the meaning of revelation. Given that benefit and harm translate into terms of reward and punishment, the condition of trial is central to understanding the nature of the universe and the place of humanity within it. Specifically, humans grasp what is meant by the punishment and reward God speaks of respectively by simple comparison with the privations and misfortunes they experience in this life alongside its luxuries and joys.<sup>470</sup> Of course, God has also created things that are unable to distinguish good from evil and it becomes clear that these creatures have been created for some purpose external to themselves. In contrast, humans seek to perform actions that will benefit them and the creation of beneficial and harmful entities, those that give pleasure and pain, are essential from the view of wisdom, because it is by these things that the meaning of the matters with which each human individual held responsible are represented them. Indeed, al-Māturīdī states that humans only gain an awareness of benefit and harm with the creation both of things harmful and beneficial, and that were it not for this the creation of humankind itself would have had no meaning.<sup>471</sup> Indeed, reason specifies the wisdom behind the divine commands and prohibitions at this most basic level.<sup>472</sup> For behind these parts of revelation is the divine promise of heaven and warning of hell, which gives existence a degree of its meaning, and reveals the wisdom behind it.<sup>473</sup>

And surely, if wisdom is in the reality all around us, then we can characterize it in some way. To this end, Rudolph cites also harmony specifically, and governance, as implied by coexistence of opposites and divergence, as reflective of the God's wisdom in the world.<sup>474</sup> In addition, he cites the ability of reason to identify good, bad and 'all

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<sup>468</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 175; pp. 247-250.

<sup>469</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 245-246.

<sup>470</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 245.

<sup>471</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 249.

<sup>472</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>473</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 393-394.

<sup>474</sup> Rudolph, "God's Wisdom," p.50 in ref. to (Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammad Aruçi, *al-Tawhīd*, (Ankara: İSAM Yayınları, 2003), p. 35 (*Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp.83-84), cf. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.72.



fundamental values' as demonstrative of the rationality of the world.<sup>475</sup> Nevertheless, it is the varied aspects of the universe, the opposite and divergent elements, the harmony and irregularity of nature's course and most especially the existence of both good and bad, pleasure and pain that lead al-Māturīdī to a more radical conclusion: that the purpose of the universe, in so far as we can comprehend it, is to test humanity in their obedience to and worship of God.

One result of this thesis is that al-Māturīdī does not mention happiness as a major part of his ethical theory. For it is clear that any eudemonistic conception of morality would clash with what is perhaps the primary and overriding purpose of the world's existence as a place of fateful vicissitudes and inherently problematic conditions. But that is not to say that happiness is set aside. In fact, al-Māturīdī makes it clear that entry into heaven and the happiness that results is one of the ultimate goals for humanity to have. Nevertheless, happiness per se is not the goal in this world, for while happiness may be good-in-itself, it may be bad-for-another. This is made clear in those circumstances where the pursuit of happiness will interfere with the achievement of moral endeavours and, more especially, prevent the acquirement of God's favour, by which one may gain eternal happiness in the next life. In short, al-Māturīdī's ethics can be eudemonistic only in a partial and extended sense, in view of reward and happiness in the next life, and in contrast to the perpetual trials we face in this one.

The opposites constitutive of this trial are of course necessary for there is no trial of any kind without some negative consequence or condition and the attainment of something positive. In essence, opposition and contrast are the condition for the possibility of humankind's being made responsible for service to God and being subject to judgment. What is more, oppositions and contraries are also essential to comprehension, for all that is comprehended is only done so through the act of reason, which, by definition, separates and unifies what should be separated and unified. Without contraries or individuated things, this would not be possible. God, however, created such things out of nothing, in an act itself the condition of rational operation. The human

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<sup>475</sup> Rudolph, "God's Wisdom", p.50 in ref. to Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammad Aruçi, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, (Ankara: İSAM Yayınları, 2003) , p. 17 (*Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp.73-74).

comprehension is but the separation and unification of the things that have already been created by God in a state of individuation.

Thus pleasure and pain were created out of nothing, as natural counterparts to reward and punishment. The objects of pleasure and pain, of course, exist subjectively, that is, their classification depends on the physiological constitution of human beings in general. Without a desiring subject, nothing can be a desired object. But it is trial itself, in addition to these, that is essential understanding morality. Crucially, al-Māturīdī says that this gave meaning to the cosmos, which otherwise would have had none at all. For trial grants creation purpose and the concrete material out of which this trial is constituted are objects of desire and fear, pleasure and pain — the objects with which humanity is tested. Here, al-Māturīdī also observes a psychological element, as encouragement via eternal reward and warning via punishment in the hereafter (*wa‘d wa waīd*), which inspire people to take God’s revelation seriously rather than lightly.<sup>476</sup>

Accordingly, divine wisdom does not include the necessity to create only humans that do what God wants. God can give to whom He pleases and take from whom He pleases and it does not contradict His wisdom.<sup>477</sup> And unlike the Mu‘tazili theory, where it is obligatory for God to effect the optimum for each person’s success, in al-Māturīdī’s thought wisdom allows the creation of what disadvantages a person in order to test them. In fact, failing to put something in its proper place is not just an instance of folly but also evil.<sup>478</sup> In this way, al-Māturīdī turns the Mu‘tazili thesis on its head, for were God not to have created objects of harm, fear and ultimately, of evil, the omission itself would have been evil. Indeed, those with intellect were created precisely to be tested and to thank God.<sup>479</sup>

As already noted, al-Māturīdī links wisdom to knowledge, for the latter is an essential condition of the former, while oppression and folly, the opposites of justice and wisdom respectively come from need and ignorance, things from which God is absolute free. So everything He does is wise.<sup>480</sup> Thus, while al-Māturīdī states that the essence of divine

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<sup>476</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp.166-167, pp.175-177, p. 245.

<sup>477</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 158.

<sup>478</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 181.

<sup>479</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 158, pp. 245-246.

<sup>480</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 297.

wisdom is beyond our comprehension, the trial of humanity and the meaning that this bestows creation is identified clearly as a result of divine wisdom. But the trial with which humanity is tested is not only de facto identified as wise. Al-Māturīdī reserves the ability to recognise the traces and effects of wisdom, evidently by the use of some teleological and common sense principles of judgement, as discussed earlier regarding the proofs for the existence of God. And it is in this context that the trial of humanity is regarded as a part of divine wisdom precisely because of the meaning this trial grants creation.

In fact, al-Māturīdī invokes the existence of both good and evil as evidence for God's existence. While, as we have noted before, good and evil are central opposites next to wisdom and folly. Regarding nature al-Māturīdī states the fact that everything is tied to different times and furnished with various states and predicates proves nature did not come to existence by itself, because if it had, then everything would have possessed its most beautiful qualities.<sup>481</sup> Hence, the existence of evil is an unnatural anomaly that realises moral oppositions. As the microcosm, each human individual is an incarnation of this morally charged universe and in their own selves they must address and direct the different forces, needs, desires, temptations and ambitions that they have in what is a perpetual struggle to be a person that displays virtuous qualities. And just as the world gains a trace of wisdom by the existence of divergence, each human is laden with significance as a result of the oppositions that exist within them and the struggles that they have. As while one condition of morality the existence of an ultimate aims or ends, another is the existence of alternatives for the achievement of that end. The meaning that results from this condition proves that the alternatives in question were deliberately designed for a purpose and according to a wise Creator.

Thus there must be something even more fundamental than the existence of trial that plays a central role in the relation of wisdom to morality, and which relates to much of what we have said. The understanding of divine wisdom here is something that can justify the existence of good and evil and our knowledge regarding what it contains is limited. Therefore, divine wisdom pertains to a level of morality beyond good and evil, at least in so far as humans can understand it. In short, the problem of evil is defeated

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<sup>481</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 83.

simply because God is above our categories of good and evil. What is evil here from our point of view cannot be attributed to God as evil; for there is in truth wisdom to it ordained by God.<sup>482</sup> In contrast, wisdom can be attributed to God, because of its metaethical status, its transcendence of good and evil as humanly understood.<sup>483</sup> The binary system of morality, even with its contextual relativity, which al-Māturīdī recognizes and promotes, is a part of creation as much as it is a reason behind it.<sup>484</sup>

Now it may be argued that al-Māturīdī has found an explanation of evil that is simply too general. For all the various evils that we see in the world, is it reasonable to point out that these are merely elements of humankind's examination? For, if so, the concept of trial solves everything in this regard. This may seem like theoretical heavy-handedness because it leaves the smallest evil to the greatest catastrophes, regardless of the particular victims and their plight, open to one single and ubiquitous explanation. Indeed, the problem recalls that which we saw with the tale of the three brothers; the fate of each one defied a single pattern and al-Ash'arī's abandonment of a principle for its explanation. Nevertheless, some may view its explanative power as a virtue of al-Māturīdī's perspective, and what is more, the explanation follows necessarily from it, since good and evil as categories are simply not applicable to God as such. Rather He is beyond our moral categories; those categories He created. Hence what we see as evil serves some purpose in a scheme that simply is not morally appraisable.

But just because wisdom is above good and bad does not mean that God does not endorse morality as we know it. Indeed, He created morality objectively and the descriptions of heaven, to which al-Māturīdī says humankind comprehends via analogy to the pleasures of the world, stand as a confirmation that much of what we seek is of such legitimate value that God presents it to His favoured servants as reward in the hereafter.

One may wonder what the status of God's other attributes is given the centrality al-Māturīdī accords divine wisdom specifically. God has ninety-nine names, according to eminent tradition; even more if one counts all those that occur in the Qur'ān. What is

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<sup>482</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 325-326; cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 329.

<sup>483</sup> Op cit. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 114.

<sup>484</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 235-236.

more, these are the all best names (*asmā al-ḥusnā*). And yet none of them has as prominent a place as the attribute of wisdom does in al-Māturīdī's metaethical thought. This is because, whatever the extent and form of their manifestation, they do not have the ethical explanative power that the concept of wisdom offers. The attribute of power, for example, fails to explain the particular moral order of the universe; that of mercy fails to explain the existence of hell, the attribute of love fails to explain the all particular aspects of the universe. And while divine wisdom plays a role comparable to that of divine justice in the Mu'tazili system, the latter suffers from a distinct inability to account for the disproportionate favours humankind is believed to receive from God, including the mercy sinners will receive in the hereafter. Thus, al-Māturīdī seems to use the concept of wisdom to encompass certain other aspects of God in so far as He is known, and our scholar is able to do this because of the wide application and substantive ambiguity the concept possesses.

The vacuity is correspondingly reflected again in al-Māturīdī's various definitions of folly, the opposite of wisdom. But it is a resourceful concept in so far as it is able to locate in general terms the basis of morality, of rather the framework within which it exists. For example, al-Māturīdī defines folly as the performance of an action without the permission of one who has the right to its performance, and as breaking the law of one in authority to command and prohibit.<sup>485</sup> Thus we see the al-Māturīdī defines folly as a matter of right and authority, in addition to the previously seen description of acting without a goal.

The famous naturalist philosopher Willard Van Orman Quine said that the question of 'why' in regards to the world and its contents is misled and that the only meaningful question we may ask is 'how', stating: It is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described.<sup>486</sup> The merits and drawbacks of this stance are not to be discussed here, but if one thing is clear, it is that the meaning we would be able to ascribe the world, if indeed any meaning can be ascribed to it at all on such a basis, would be limited significantly. For al-Māturīdī, this is unacceptable; not

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<sup>485</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298.

<sup>486</sup> W. v. O. Quine, *Theories and Things*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1981), p. 21.

simply because of the basic theological problems this would apply, but because of the dearth of meaning that would result.

Al-Māturīdī lists the responses of the *'ulamā* to the question of why God created the universe. There are several responses and it is interesting that al-Māturīdī does not specify which he regards as most correct. The first states that the question is improper and is based on ignorance of the wisdom behind the world's creation. The second is a Mu'tazili view that also holds the question as absurd because God's attributes and essence are for them synonymous and because God must do what is most advantageous, the question is reduced to asking why God is just, which is as nonsensical as asking something like why God is all-knowing and all-powerful. The third, view is that the creation of the world results from God's graciousness. The fourth states any answer will have no meaning since because such a question can be asked of all the possible worlds in existence. The fifth is that the world was created to test certain beings of God's creation and to make manifest the distinction between wisdom and folly in concrete terms through them. Finally, the sixth view is that of Husayn b. Muhammad al-Najjar (d. 220/835) and states that there are many reasons for the world's creation, among them to indicate God's existence, to be a source of guidance and to manifest God's mercy and blessing through the various means of contentment it provides. Yet the world also contains sources of danger, so cannot have been created just for the advantage of God's creatures.<sup>487</sup>

Though he does not state which of these views he finds to be correct, al-Māturīdī does here take time again to criticise the Mu'tazili view. He states that such a view makes God's actions determined and so undermines divine freedom. It also implies that God is in need of doing what is advantageous to others and only by this means can become worthy of worship, whereas God is beyond any need and is not worthy of worship due to following any such obligation.<sup>488</sup>

We can only speculate as to which view al-Māturīdī himself holds (the last one seems most likely), however, it is clear that the central place he grants divine wisdom is reckoned to solve the problems of the doctrine of *al-aṣlah*, while maintaining a similar

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<sup>487</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 163-166.

<sup>488</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 166.

level of theoretical advantage. To act wisely, as far as humans are concerned, is to act in a way that will achieve some desired and beneficial end. Often the benefit is for the agent in question. For God, however, such an appraisal is not possible; He is far above any worldly need. Thus, while God may have created humankind to worship Him, we will still need an explanation for why God created humankind. That the world is principally a place of trial for humanity does not explain the ultimate purpose of the trial, so though this is a central teaching of al-Māturīdī's thought, it remains clear that the concept of divine wisdom carries the weight of the theological burden in explaining reality, as all the of reality carries a divine purpose.

#### **4.5 Chapter Conclusion**

At the beginning of the chapter we identified three main concepts utilised in Western ethics: the right, the good and moral worth. These are fundamentally different concepts; deontology focuses on the intrinsic significance of actions, utilitarianism on the results of actions, and virtue ethics on the character of the agent and the good life. The first two conceptions share a concern with universal rules of action, whereas the latter concerns agents themselves.

Among the concepts of the good, we saw al-Māturīdī first discuss human survival. His distinction between *hasan lidhātihī* and *hasan ligayrihi* shows that consideration of the consequences of actions is one way of identifying their morality. In contrast, however, al-Māturīdī identifies *Tawhīd* as being of intrinsic moral value according to the intellect and that the findings of the intellect are higher than those of the senses. *Tawhīd* is highlighted not as a good, or not simply as a good, but a duty. We have highlighted also the teleological aspect to al-Māturīdī's thought, which provides the grounds to believe that the concept of moral worth is present in his thought. Being made of divergent features, it is up to each individual to control their actions and bring balance to their behaviour. More importantly, the human being was created with a purpose, furnished by their ability to know good and bad, and are ordered to obey their Lord. The connection to God, however, is not one simply of robotic obedience, but denotes a connection from the heart and thankfulness for the favours they have received. In sum, al-Māturīdī depicts a type of character, whose intentions and feelings are shaped in accord with their recognition of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things, including themselves.

The way we have classed the different conceptions of the good is line with also different ethical schools of thought, but each of the two rule-based theories as well as virtue ethics has the capacity to theoretically absorb the concepts that are made central to the others and explain it in a perhaps less central or basic role. Thus, for example with virtues ethics, there is the main concepts of *arête* (excellence or virtue) *phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (happiness or flourishing), which by some deft philosophical theory can cover the central features of the three main schools. The upshot is that rather than depicting al-Māturīdī as holding an assortment of independent concepts, he could possibly be read as a virtue ethicist. It is not my aim to either refute or confirm such a reading; our concern has been with metaethics rather than ethics, and the epistemological aspect to the acquisition of moral knowledge that shall be treated in the next chapter. Nevertheless, as stated previously, al-Māturīdī does not appear to have been concerned with laying out a systematic ethical theory as such, and has chosen religious concepts, such as Tawhīd, as much as ethical ones for highlighting.

Al-Māturīdī is also flexible in his ascription of harm and benefit to actions and entities, which he regards as largely dependent on particular context. This, however, does not mean that he eschews objective morality, and cites justice and wisdom as objectively good. Indeed, he refutes those sceptics that tell us moral deny the possibility of attaining moral knowledge due to the constant changing nature of the world. Unfortunately, al-Māturīdī does not offer much to explain what will be just and wise in any given circumstance. Indeed, he admits that often research will necessary to determine the morality of a given matter, when there exist two or more possibilities regarding its truth. Nevertheless, crucial to objective judgments is the faculty of reason, which al-Māturīdī regards as the only means of achieving moral knowledge. Things that are beautiful to the senses are not always beautiful to the intellect, and in fact al-Māturīdī associates the beauty of morality and ugliness of immorality to the judgment of the intellect. The objective nature of morality remains, also, as we have argued, even if reason, firstly, does not pertain to a transcendental world and, secondly, is only possible to articulate goodness in contextual terms.

We have identified that the main elements contained in divine wisdom are teleological, that everything is designed with a purpose, and deontological, that all is created with



justice. But in addition we see that al-Māturīdī includes within the concept of wisdom grace, goodness, and mercy. Indeed, given that all of God's actions are wise, every aspect to them will also be wise, and so in theory a plethora of further divine virtues may be included. It appears impossible to understand which element is the most basic to wisdom, though certainly justice and grace stand out. This ambiguity, however, adheres to al-Māturīdī's claim that the essence of divine wisdom will remain beyond human comprehension.

On this basis also we see that al-Māturīdī rejects the Mu'tazilī doctrine *al-Aṣlah*, while also refuting the claim that evil in any form can be attributed to God yet maintaining that it exists and that God created it. This is explained by the function or wider purpose that evil serves, and allows him therefore to confront the existence of evil directly. Here we see also that the condition of trial is basic to humanity, with the responsibility bestowed them by their ability to distinguish good from bad, right from wrong, and give both the world and the divine commands and prohibitions meaning. This puts eudemonistic considerations into the background of al-Māturīdī's ethical thought, because the purpose in this world is not happiness but success in obedience to God and the development of character, though reward in the afterlife will include happiness and bliss.

In relation to this, because al-Māturīdī identifies good and evil as created entities, God is beyond human designations of good and evil, while wisdom, which is related to reason, is applicable to Him. This again also shows the priority of the concept of the right and that of virtue (as shown by the graciousness that is included under the concept of wisdom) over that of the good, and though the essence of wisdom itself remains beyond us, it is responsible for providing the world meaning and rationality.

## Chapter 5: The Status of Moral Knowledge in al-Māturīdī's Ethics

### 5.1 Moral Knowledge as the Prelude to Moral Obligation

This chapter is made up of two divisions, dealing with, respectively, with the source of moral knowledge and its status. The study of moral epistemology aligns somewhat with the different types of *ḥusn* and *qubh* discussed in the previous chapter and forms a preliminary to the discussion of moral obligation that will take place in the next chapter. For example, revelation, constitutes a condition of a distinct moral category, and was accordingly discussed in the previous chapter, but the contents of revelation constitute material for moral knowledge and are therefore addressed here.

In fact, the concern with epistemology here continues from the second division of Chapter Three, but is more specifically ethical; drawing from al-Māturīdī's comments on the source of morality and discussion of moral categories. In this division we also address the question of how al-Māturīdī saw the different sources of knowledge related to each other and whether any single source was sufficient as a source of moral knowledge on its own. The division ends with a section on the epistemological status morality held for al-Māturīdī.

As noted at the beginning of Chapter Three, there is the attempt to put al-Māturīdī's metaethical comments into order of logical priority. Hence, the nature of morality was dealt with first, before the means of human knowledge of it. The final section of this division offers an important theological clarification, dealing with the modal status of morality and reason. This acts to contrast morality to divine wisdom and constitutes a key position in al-Māturīdī's metaethics.

The statuses of morality, whether objective or subjective, and its different elements, whether material or spiritual, will determine the kind of moral knowledge we have and also how any form of moral obligation may exist. Of particular focus is al-Māturīdī's position on the degree of objectivity morality has and this is tackled in the third division of the chapter. The issue is of particular interest due to the frequency with which al-Māturīdī addresses it in addition to its fundamental importance. Thus this section is a prelude to al-Māturīdī's comments on moral obligation (and in accordance with the

multifaceted account of moral good and evil to be discussed here, there is a multi-layered account of moral obligation), which will be addressed in the next chapter.

## 5.2 Moral Epistemology

### 5.2.1 The Sources of Knowledge

Al-Māturīdī expresses knowledge as ‘bringing to recognition the nature and form of objects’.<sup>489</sup> This may be useful as a lexical term, and distinguishes nature from form, but little by way of a formal definition of knowledge is found in al-Māturīdī’s extant writings. Al-Nasafī, perhaps his most famous student, reports he stated during one of his lectures the similarly superficial expression that ‘knowledge is an attribute that brings into a state of clarity everything that can be said and thought for its possessor’.<sup>490</sup> This certainly lacks the type of analysis Plato, for example, provided, of true justified belief. What is clear, however, is that knowledge is supposed to be explanative of objects and allows the articulation of information, which assumes truth, justification, and possession (that is, belief).

Al-Māturīdī claims there are three ways to achieving knowledge of the truth of objects and events (*haqāiq al-ashyā*). These are perception (*‘iyān*), report (*khabar*, pl. *akhbār*) and theoretical reflection (*nathr*).<sup>491</sup> Perception is the most basic means to knowledge and takes place via the senses. Even animals display this type of knowledge with the ability to distinguish both what will help them survive from what will bring them ruin and what causes pleasure from what causes pain.<sup>492</sup> As for reports, they are essential in those circumstances where one has not perceived for themselves something that can only be learnt via experience. In such cases, those that have not had the relevant experience can learn via the report of those who have.<sup>493</sup> Of course, report or testimony is a subcategory of perception, as the former is also received only via the senses. Nevertheless, testimony involves its own unique set of epistemological considerations and so is distinguished enough to be treated separately. Here, al-Māturīdī gives the

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<sup>489</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, IV, p. 20.

<sup>490</sup> Al-Nasafī, *Tabsirat al-Adilla*, fol. 4a in Hanefi Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 45.

<sup>491</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 69.

<sup>492</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 70.

<sup>493</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 47.

classical division between *al-khabar al-mutawātir* (continuously recurrent report) and *al-khabar al-wāhid* (solitary report). Specifically, the former are narrated by a large enough number of witnesses to guarantee against falsehood, even though each individual narrator (*rāwi*, pl. *rāwiyūn*) is not independently assured of telling the truth. By contrast, *al-khabar al-wāhid* can only be confirmed by further investigation into the reliability of the relevant narrators and the specific contents of the report, because the number of independent narrations is limited.<sup>494</sup> As with most of the *'ulamā*, al-Māturīdī accepts the undeniable strength of the *mutawātir* report.<sup>495</sup>

Notwithstanding the fundamental nature of perceptions and reports in the acquisition of knowledge, theoretical reflection is still necessary in both cases. Al-Māturīdī explains that the use of reflection is indispensable in many instances of perception, such as those of distant objects or ones with very small dimensions. Distant objects appear small and those in water misshapen; only deduction allows us to correct for those impressions. He notes that reflection is also essential in case of miracles, specifically, to distinguish their extraordinary status from the normal course of events. In the same way, in order to understand whether a report is accurate or not it is necessary to use reason.<sup>496</sup>

Al-Māturīdī is more typically concerned with stating what he views as the truth and refuting opposing views than explaining the processes that his stance involves, such as what these epistemological operations specifically involve. He does not, for example, go into the details of the means by which the reliability of a report is possible to doubt or confirm and, more generally, it is not entirely clear if al-Māturīdī believes that reflection is always necessary and its use only more explicit in cases of doubt or whether it is in continuous and active operation. On the one hand, it appears that reflection is needed for a specific task of confirmation only in those instances where there is an initial cause for doubt as to the accuracy of either a particular perception or report. Certainly, for al-Māturīdī, sense perceptions do lead to epistemologically certain knowledge, and he criticises those extreme sceptics who wish to deny the knowledge attained by the senses, for example. On the other hand, logically speaking, reason must

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<sup>494</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>495</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>496</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 49; p. 254.

implicitly appraise all information, since doubt is raised only after some rational assessment of some kind, but it is also used more specifically and questioningly after reliability is called into question. As Özcan notes, of all the sources of knowledge, in al-Māturīdī's account the greatest weight is given to reason, because to know the reality (*haqīqah*) of a thing, one must contemplate on reflect upon it carefully.<sup>497</sup> Thus, reason has a role of providing the final instrument of validation in regards to the other means of acquiring knowledge and in this sense has an elevated position in al-Māturīdī's categorisation.

### 5.2.2 The Operations of Reason

For anyone reading al-Māturīdī's writings, it will appear that he simply assumes a theory of the intellect, or reason, and does not explain it, for you will not find in his writings any detail exposition of the intellect and its processes. However, al-Māturīdī's definition of reason, though rather modest, is also so basic that it stands in affinity with the three traditional laws of thought, namely, that of identity ( $A: A = A$ ), non-contradiction ( $\neg (A \wedge \neg A)$ ), and excluded middle ( $\forall A | A \vee \neg A$ ), at least in so far as 'joining' corresponds to identification, and 'separation' to contradiction and exclusion. It is doubtful that al-Māturīdī worked out the details in such a fashion, but he manages to articulate in an extremely concise fashion the basis of reason in way sound enough to develop his thought on a sure footing. The definition, being so basic, can be usefully applied in varied ways. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī directly relates the capacity of analysis and synthesis with rumination (*tafakkur*) and inference (*istidlāl*). He states, specifically, that the latter pair are requisite (*haqqa*) for analysis and synthesis.<sup>498</sup> This implies that rumination and inference, or deduction, are more basic than analysis and synthesis rather than the other way around. How exactly this is so he does not explain, but it seems that his idea of reason must have been something more advanced than the basic laws of thought. Demirli reads al-Māturīdī's definition of reason as a basic description of the process of definition itself. For to define an object, one must remove all those qualities or features that do not apply to it and gather all those that do in such a way as to list them in order to sufficiently distinguish the objects that are to fall under

<sup>497</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 64.

<sup>498</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 353.

the definition from all things of other kinds.<sup>499</sup> Indeed, to define something involves processes of induction and deduction, joining and differentiating.

The importance al-Māturīdī gives to the faculty of reason cannot be exaggerated. By rational thought, al-Māturīdī supposed human beings to be able to infer the existence of a wise Creator of the world. The leading capacity in this regard being deduction, which is pertinent to theoretical reflection (*nathar*) — the thought process on which al-Māturīdī places so much emphasis. He writes that the uniqueness of humankind, despite various weaknesses and limitations, rests in their ability to understand subjects and causes. By this means, they learn of the existence of a being that we resemble and yet which does not possess any of the characteristics of creation that the human being is unable to transcend as a creature of the world; One that is therefore also dependent on no other for anything.<sup>500</sup>

In this regard, he attacks a claim common to people from different faiths. Although their religious beliefs are different, there is a consensus amongst them regarding how true belief is acquired, specifically, that the truth is revealed solely by inspiration or conviction alone. Given that people of varying faiths both present inspiration and conviction as sufficient evidence for their beliefs, they are in fact mutually refuted, since their beliefs contradict those of their counterparts.<sup>501</sup> This argument by al-Māturīdī would entangle him in a debate on the reliability of religious experience. Yet he does not concern himself the issue. His statement simply displays a main cause for doubt about this source and he quickly builds on this observation, which highlights the importance of understanding where knowledge comes from. Al-Māturīdī identifies report and deduction as the means to correct religious belief with the suggestion that reason leads to only one conclusion and thus allows people to reach true faith.<sup>502</sup> In contrast, those that deny the existence of God are described as those who do not see and hear because they have neglected the performance of rational thought.<sup>503</sup> Correspondingly, when discussing the three sources of thought al-Māturīdī uses the

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<sup>499</sup> Ekrem Demirli, *İslam Metafiziğinde Tanrı ve İnsan: İbnü Arabî ve Vahdet-i Vücut Geleneği*, (Istanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2009), p.237. See also, Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>500</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 169, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 167.

<sup>501</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 65, cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 68-71.

<sup>502</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 66-68.

<sup>503</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, p. 208.

term to perceive (*nathar*) rather than reason (*'aql*) because the former is explicitly an active process.<sup>504</sup>

He states immediately that knowledge pertains to the differentiation of beneficial, truth and beauty from their respective opposites. Accordingly, al-Māturīdī observes that the intellect was not merely created for the attainment of sustenance since even non-rational creatures are able to fulfil their physical needs without rationality. What is more, the angels have no need of eating and drinking and in their hearts contemplate the sublime stations. This, al-Māturīdī concludes, means the intellect was made for the purpose of rumination and drawing lessons (*'ibrah*).<sup>505</sup> He also notes that the philosophers (*hukamā*) claim a main pillar of reason is the investigation of causes and principles, and the height of knowledge is to be able relate ones ideas with irresistible evidence.<sup>506</sup> What is more, reason is the ultimate and exclusive discerner of things good and bad, even after perception takes place and reports are received.<sup>507</sup>

Al-Māturīdī uses the term *fuād* (heart, mind), which Alper observes to have been used by al-Māturīdī as a synonym for reason,<sup>508</sup> to name the faculty by which humans are able to distinguish the harmful from the beneficial, clean from dirty and easy from difficult.<sup>509</sup> Indeed, al-Māturīdī asserts that theoretical reflection distinguishes the human being above all other worldly creatures with a capacity to manage the rest of creation as well as choose the beneficial and avoid the harmful. In this regard, al-Māturīdī draws the highly rationalistic conclusion that those beings that do not distinguish between good and evil have not been created for their own selves but for others.<sup>510</sup>

Throughout his writings, al-Māturīdī comments on the uses of reason, which we will do well to consider here in order to furnish our understanding of his position. He writes humans were created as people of discrimination (*ahl al-tamyīz*); via reason they are

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<sup>504</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 59.

<sup>505</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 237.

<sup>506</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 254.

<sup>507</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 74.

<sup>508</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 57.

<sup>509</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 52. Al-Māturīdī also identifies the heart as the only abode for the essence of faith (*haqiqatuhu*), p. 476.

<sup>510</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 235.

shown that bad actions are foul and praise worthy actions good. In this sense, reason is a source of discovery, in so far as it allows humankind to understand good and evil.<sup>511</sup> Al-Māturīdī refers to reason as the light of the heart (*nūr al-qalb*) and sight of the heart (*basar al-qalb*) in the form of Qur'ānic expression.<sup>512</sup> As Alper writes, he associates an expansive meaning to the heart with the ability to rationalise.<sup>513</sup> Yet human reason too has limits, comparable to those of the senses.<sup>514</sup> Just as one sense may struggle to acquire clear information within the scope of its ability, another sense is implemented to help clarify the truth of the matter. Reason is another such faculty, and yet it too has its limitations, that is to say, areas of knowledge which it cannot grasp. Unfortunately, al-Māturīdī does not go into much detail as to what this involves specifically.<sup>515</sup> This does not deny that its findings are objective, but it warns that this knowledge may elude us and in some areas knowledge will be out of reach completely.

In fact, al-Māturīdī identifies such circumstances as another form of test for humanity, citing no less than such critical points of faith as the existence heaven and hell as part of the the divine promise and threat (*wa'd wa wa'id*) as well as the *hurūf al-muqatta'a* (the unique letter combinations at the beginning of certain chapters of the Qur'ān) as examples of scriptural points beyond our ability to comprehend and or investigate in any sure way. Here he says humans must simply practice the suspension of judgement (*al-wuqūf*) rather than make any claim.<sup>516</sup>

In his book on al-Māturīdī's epistemological thought, Özcan discusses the degree of certainty al-Māturīdī associates the different sources of knowledge. We have just noted that al-Māturīdī deems some areas beyond the realm of accessible knowledge and reason specifically. But according to Özcan, al-Māturīdī holds that direct comprehension (*idrāk*) and grasping (*ihāta*) is something beyond the capability of reason, and therefore makes doubt extend to all the knowledge derived from rational investigation. Indeed, sure knowledge, which is knowledge of this type and beyond all doubt, apparently only comes from the senses, as for example the knowledge that one

<sup>511</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 301.

<sup>512</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, p. 54-55.

<sup>513</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, pp. 56-57.

<sup>514</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 183, pp. 253-54

<sup>515</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 183.

<sup>516</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 138.



feels hungry.<sup>517</sup> Accordingly, Özcan writes that when it comes to the unseen world, which includes God, angels, the afterlife, life in the grave, both the use of both reports and reason is required. The information that reason provides in this regard, however, is merely deductive, which means it is not beyond doubt. As a result, the unseen world remains merely a matter of faith.<sup>518</sup> In short, everything that comes through the senses is indubitable, and everything that comes through the operations of reason is speculative.

There are a number of problems with this account, however. Despite the fundamental place al-Māturīdī gives to sense perception, that every piece of knowledge gained by this faculty was considered by him to be beyond doubt remains questionable. He does consider the senses a reliable source of information and could rightly be called a naïve realist, trusting in the everyday impressions that we have to be accurate windows into the world.<sup>519</sup> Al-Māturīdī also describes the senses as forming the most distinguished (*akḥass*)<sup>520</sup> and highest path to knowledge (*arfa'u turuq al-'ilm*).<sup>521</sup> Such statements have been taken to mean 'most certain'.<sup>522</sup> Indeed, al-Māturīdī also regards knowledge from the senses to be 'knowledges of truths' (*'ulūm al-haqāiq*),<sup>523</sup> and talks of the knowledge as being necessary (*ḍarūrī*).<sup>524</sup> All this supports the reading that al-Māturīdī deemed the senses to be indubitable.

However, these terms are not altogether unambiguous. For example, Özcan states that the reason why the senses are called the highest path to knowledge is because by establishing our connection with this world, they allow us to reach knowledge of the 'supernatural'.<sup>525</sup> Despite that this conclusion seems erroneous due to the fact that the senses would be providing only a basis for an act achieved by another faculty, namely reason, it still shows that the term can be explained in a different way. Similarly, 'Knowledges of truths', for example, could simply be a statement against the sceptics who deny the possibility of knowledge completely; and whom al-Māturīdī makes a

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<sup>517</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 127.

<sup>518</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>519</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 70, cf. Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>520</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 352.

<sup>521</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 72.

<sup>522</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 80.

<sup>523</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 179.

<sup>524</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.70, cf. p. 76.

<sup>525</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 71.

point of refuting at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. What is more, the term *ḍarūrī* is also used to distinguish the immediate nature of sensory information to the procedural arrival of knowledge through reason and does not necessarily refer to a degree of epistemological certainty.<sup>526</sup> Furthermore, we must note al-Māturīdī's tendency to present arguments drawn directly from the Qur'ān, and mention of the (eye-) witnessed truth (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) found therein.<sup>527</sup> This level of veracity is just one below that of 'the very truth' or 'the truth of certitude' (*haqq al-yaqīn*).<sup>528</sup> The phrase draws attention to the effect of witnessing or experiencing an event oneself in the formation and certainty of belief. It also draws attention to the human tendency (no matter how misconceived) to claim plausible deniability unless one sees something first-hand. The point here is that this signals as much a psychological event as it does a level of certitude, and that al-Māturīdī may have adopted the idea in these terms specifically.

Finally, given al-Māturīdī's use of reason as essential to the validation of sensory information, he was perhaps talking about the senses as used in combination with reason. In this way, the senses would provide the best knowledge having been first combined with the use of reason. Özcan rightly concludes from the passage in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* that for al-Māturīdī, the use of the senses is the first stage in the comprehension of objects, with rational evaluation of information acquired by the senses in a second.<sup>529</sup> But we should make clear that while rational deduction from sensory information is possible, sensory knowledge without the use of reason is not. Indeed, even if al-Māturīdī did use the cited terms to mean the senses achieve certainty, the structure of his thought does not allow such a simplistic reading. He recognizes that our knowledge of the external world is not automatically guaranteed of certainty. This is in cases where our sensory organs are damaged, insufficient, or deceived along with that added problem of dreams and hallucinations.<sup>530</sup> Admittedly, al-Māturīdī treats these as exceptional circumstances, but the comparison is to a basis (*asl*) that is known by the sense organs again. In other words, the senses are meant to provide the evidence by

<sup>526</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp.67-69. The term, being one of philosophical debate, has been used in different ways by various Muslim thinkers. See Ali Durusoy, 'ZARURİ' DİA, Vol. 44. pp. 144-146, cf. *Kâmûsu'l-Muhîr Tercümesi*, tr. Mütercim Asım Efendi, 'ed-daruret', Vol. 3, p. 2128.

<sup>527</sup> Op. Cit. Özcan, *Matüridi'de Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>528</sup> See *The Qur'ān*, 69: 51, 102: 5 and 7.

<sup>529</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp.130-131; cf., Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 183.

<sup>530</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 72, p. 75.

which we become aware of the condition by comparison with what is normal.<sup>531</sup> But apart from being immediately circular, this omits the fact that what is normal and healthy and what is irregular and faulty is known only via the deductions of reason. It is possible al-Māturīdī held that the intervention of reason to be needed only in such extraordinary situations and in judging the reliability of reports. (Indeed, he is clearer about this when it comes to reports, as he states that reason distinguishes the unreliable from for the reliable ones.<sup>532</sup>) But of course, judging what is extraordinary necessarily entails judgements of every case of sensory perception to confirm those that are not. In short, this observation itself is a result of rational evaluation, and reason is what will judge if there is some error in any particular instance of perception. So even within the framework of al-Māturīdī's own thought, regardless of the fundamental position perception has, reason is always necessary to confirm its accuracy and thus any certainty derived by the senses is always only in correspondence with rational appraisal.

Moreover, there are three types of perceptions: internal, external and those that are a combination thereof. For example, that I am having the impression of a tree is certain; that a tree is the cause of the impression is not. It should follow, therefore, that the internal one that for al-Māturīdī is certain independently of reason, and those external ones that are dependent on reason for confirmation. It is doubtful that al-Māturīdī conceived things in this way, but the structure of his epistemological thought demands it. He does in fact observe that the senses acquire knowledge of the visible or manifest (*thāhir*) and that reason acquires that of the hidden (*khaḥf*).<sup>533</sup> It is perhaps uncertain how much the distinction between the internal and external corresponds to that epistemological distinction between the manifest and hidden, but the similarity is certainly suggestive. What we learn also is that reason is essential to both the external and hidden. The upshot of this distinction problematizes the understanding that all knowledge from sense perception is more certain than that from both reports and the operations of reason.

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<sup>531</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 75.

<sup>532</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 72.

<sup>533</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 509.

As for the unreliability of reason, we have just established that reason is essential to confirm the information of the senses and reports. But how could the confirmation be anything more than doubtful if it is provided by reason unless reason is capable of certain knowledge? Thus, it would be highly problematic to say al-Māturīdī regarded all knowledge derived from the operations of reason to be speculative and doubtful; and, in short, to rule out the acquisition of certain knowledge and comprehension via reason for al-Māturīdī based on some semantic or terminological technicality appears mislead.

The error with this reading also, in fact, appears because of, rather than despite, terminological evidence. Although Özcan notes the terms *idrāk* and *ihāta* are forms of knowledge provided only by the senses, al-Māturīdī uses the term *idrāk* in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* to describe both the ability of the senses and reason to arrive at the reality (*haqīqah*) of things.<sup>534</sup> We have established above that the operation of reason is in fact constant rather than occasional, but nevertheless al-Māturīdī can coherently refer to knowledge from the senses as fundamental (*aslī*).<sup>535</sup> Furthermore, there evidence suggests al-Māturīdī did not believe in the existence of a priori knowledge, making him fundamentally an empiricist, despite the conspicuous position he gives to reason.<sup>536</sup> But what he mean exactly here is not clear, for in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* he states that the part is smaller than the whole is certain. Indeed, he observes that there are two paths to knowledge, both with the senses at their basis. In the first path, the senses alone are enough to bring knowledge, in the second the application of reason is also required. Yet the key here is to understand that the need for this extra requirement is not merely for speculative purposes and does not merely result in speculative knowledge. In both paths, what is known is thereby comprehended by the use of reason.

From the argument just above, there remains the possibility that *idrāk* is only confirmed by reason, rather than manifested by it. That is to say, that objects are comprehended by the senses and that reason confirms the reliability or the comprehension by some means other than, though equally certain to, comprehension. However, al-Māturīdī also uses the verb form of the term in question in *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* while emphasising the

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<sup>534</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.480, Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 130.

<sup>535</sup> Op cit., Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 179.

<sup>536</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 509; Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 132.

essentiality of reason to the comprehension of reality.<sup>537</sup> And a passage in *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna* mentions reason as being the means of comprehending the reality of things.<sup>538</sup> This is evidence al-Māturīdī did not regard *idrāk* as exclusive to the senses. What is more, if the veracity of the senses is dependent on reason, then, by implication, reason is the ultimate means to all certain knowledge. Therefore, it possesses the ability to bring about indubitable knowledge.

The means by which this knowledge is achieved by reason, however, is not limited to *idrāk*, or at least is not of the same kind, as the confirmation of the veracity of the senses by reason suggests. The term al-Māturīdī regularly uses for the work of reason is *istidlal*, which has at least three meanings: deduction, induction and analogical reasoning. Even though he may not give them these different names and instead discusses them under the same heading, al-Māturīdī can be read as citing each in association with different areas of research and knowledge and these all result in different degrees of certainty. Indeed, the division of the operations of reason is essential to understanding al-Māturīdī's epistemological position, for sometimes he talks of reason being used in relation with the senses only in cases where there is problem with them and at other times it appears reason is essential to processing the information gained by the senses in all situations. And sometimes reason is used in a jump from the information known by the senses to that which is not.

Thus, for example, deduction is clearly in use with regard to the proofs of God's existence.<sup>539</sup> It is also cited in relation to the ability to have some form of metaphysical knowledge of the divine act of creation. More specifically, in reference to the scope of reason and the limitations of perception, al-Māturīdī opposes those who claim nothing can arise out of nothing. He argues that such a stance presupposes existence contains only all that we can perceive. On the contrary, just as knowledge exists pertaining to things beyond the realm of sensible objects (even if only articulated in the language related to those objects), so too does knowledge about the possibility and impossibility of things.<sup>540</sup> The implication is that rational principles will judge what is possible

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<sup>537</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, I, p. 234.

<sup>538</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 579.

<sup>539</sup> Op cit. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 68-69, p. 81.

<sup>540</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 81.

regarding the divine act of creation rather than empirical knowledge. As Alper notes, though it is not the ‘highest’ path to knowledge, reason does deal with the highest things.<sup>541</sup> Thus, al-Māturīdī limits the scope of empirical knowledge from infringing upon the realm of metaphysics.

Indeed, al-Māturīdī attributes a great source of evil to the thought that prevents the use of logical deduction.<sup>542</sup> Why would al-Māturīdī say belief in God is necessary for people who study and reflect upon the world if reason brings only doubtful evidence? Belief, of course, is not in itself knowledge, and one could say simply that the evidence is not sufficiently strong. But if doubt, whether reasonable or unreasonable, were possible then there would be valid grounds to disbelieve and al-Māturīdī does not countenance such a thing. Recall also that al-Māturīdī accepts as undeniable the validity of *mutawātir* hadith, even though, logically speaking, it is possible to still doubt them. The conduct of research into objects is but evidence of the performance of theoretical reflection, as is the fact that doubts increase when unexpected events occur — so people seek refuge in reflection and contemplation (*taammul*).<sup>543</sup>

In an epistemological point against those who deny the centrality of reason, al-Māturīdī notes that even the decision about the necessity of reflection in regards to knowledge does not itself come before the use of reflection. This therefore is proof of the latter’s necessity. What is more, that thought and research are accomplished by the use of reason.<sup>544</sup> It is unlikely that points such as these would be advanced if reason was deemed unable to provide anything other than doubtful evidence.

In regard to whether our sensory faculties are deceiving us or not, a combination of deduction and induction is indispensable. We infer what the normal conditions of sensory perception are over the course of experience. Various instances of deduction will then determine that the normal conditions are reliable and hallucinatory states unreliable. And though al-Māturīdī does not explicitly say so, because the reasoning here is deductive, it will yield necessarily true knowledge unless one or more of the

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<sup>541</sup> Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 80.

<sup>542</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 208.

<sup>543</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 73.

<sup>544</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 204.

premises are false. Induction is also referred to in association to knowing objects, which al-Māturīdī says is essential to daily life and social relations.<sup>545</sup> This is a continuation of knowledge of causation but in a physical rather than metaphysical context, as he writes that reason is the means by which we learn the origin and consequences of things, which he describes as their hidden aspects; and it is by this means that al-Māturīdī holds we can arrive at the conclusion of their being created.<sup>546</sup>

Al-Māturīdī as much as admits the limits of analogical reasoning when he says that those things that exist outside this world are known by means of the things in the visible world; are compared with them and every doctrine of belief that goes beyond sense perception is known via analogy.<sup>547</sup> In this sense, al-Māturīdī regards the world as evidence (*adillah*) and admonition (*'ibrah*) from God about Himself, the afterlife and all the unseen.<sup>548</sup> Elsewhere, he concludes that the features of the visible world necessarily make it possible to understand the unseen world, and that such Qur'ānic verses inform humankind they can grasp the truth and find the right path via rumination (*al-tafakkur*) and deliberation (*al-tadabbur*).<sup>549</sup> In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī writes that God cannot be known via the senses and that hence analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) from what we know of the world is the means by which are meant to know of His existence.<sup>550</sup> This might seem strange given that analogy only leads to uncertain knowledge. However, the reference here must be to *deduction* by analogy, with the idea of causation in the world being used to reach the idea of a first cause, as noted above.

Induction and analogical reasoning do not result in certain knowledge, but deductive reasoning does. Believing al-Māturīdī to judge the faculty of reason as incapable of providing certain knowledge thus goes against the role and significance he assigns it. The point of our discussion is to show that al-Māturīdī, despite naïve realist assumptions, did not hold that all knowledge acquired by the senses is certain nor that all knowledge acquired by reason dubious. Rather, al-Māturīdī is more accurately read

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<sup>545</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 76.

<sup>546</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 208; *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, VIII, p. 174.

<sup>547</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 240.

<sup>548</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 245.

<sup>549</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 73.

<sup>550</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 315-316.

to hold that speculation is a unique ability of reason as opposed to holding that all knowledge derived from reason is speculative.

### 5.2.3 Acquirement of Moral Knowledge

The question for our study ultimately regards the status of moral knowledge specifically. Al-Māturīdī recognises each of the sources of knowledge to have different ranges and scope.<sup>551</sup> Accordingly, for al-Māturīdī combinatory use of the senses and reason is necessary for us to know what is good and what is bad.<sup>552</sup> No one sense is, therefore, capable of providing such knowledge on its own. This makes al-Māturīdī neither a rationalist nor empiricist in the context of ethics. The senses provide information about the material of morality, such as pleasure and pain, benefit and harm, while reports tell us about the injunctions and counsels of revelation. Finally, through reason these things are evaluated for their validity.

Thus, for example, the certainty of a *mutawātir* report cannot be doubted. As Özcan observes, there is nothing else in al-Māturīdī's system that can replace reports and provide us with religious knowledge. What is more, they are not in themselves guaranteed of truth, once a report is examined rationally, it can be trusted with the same trust that is accorded reason.<sup>553</sup> But reports are a source of moral knowledge, either from revelation or from experience and allow people to learn from those with such knowledge. In this sense, reason distinguishes humanity from animals, for while animals know from instinct what will benefit and harm them, but the case is different with humans. For them, reports and education are essential to survival, and the moral basis and knowledge of the hereafter for which prophets are sent to teach humankind. With revelation also, people learn also that life is trial for which commands and prohibitions have been made. Özcan concludes that it is via the fact that they must learn through education than humans know they are moral beings, for which they must be thankful and devoted to God.<sup>554</sup>

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<sup>551</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.98, p. 183, p. 224; op. cit. Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 60-63.

<sup>552</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 64.

<sup>553</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>554</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 106-109.



But though we have claimed that al-Māturīdī is neither a simply an empiricist nor rationalist and in fact makes use of the various sources in the achievement of moral knowledge, the senses are not included as a source for moral knowledge in his scheme, but rather as we have claimed above, as source for the material of morality. Experience adds evidence to the judgements of reason, but what the senses take to be good or bad will change and is subjective while what reason perceives to be good or bad does not vary.<sup>555</sup> That is not to say that the senses have no role in the achievement of moral knowledge, indeed, for the category of moral goodness they are essential, but by themselves cannot be adequately relied upon even in this way. This applies even though, as Özcan notes, al-Māturīdī is careful to use the term ‘iyan rather than hawas when it comes to the naming the means by which we achieve sensory knowledge for the likely reason that the first term is more general and includes inner senses which together constitute our wijdan, which can be translated variously as emotional life, sentiment; also extending to empathy and sympathy.<sup>556</sup> For al-Māturīdī several times says that the beauty and ugliness, good and bad, (right and wrong), of an action is known by reason, as well as our superiority to the rest of life.<sup>557</sup> Similarly we should recall that al-Māturīdī uses two terms for the reason, with *fuād* in addition to ‘*aql*, suggesting that the faculty is not simply a machine for the operation of dry logical deductions,<sup>558</sup> and perhaps most importantly of all that he identifies the faculty of reason as the only abode for the essence of faith (*haqīqatuhū*) via the act of the hearts (*amal al-qulūb*).<sup>559</sup> Indeed, his statement that those things of beauty that God has created are beautiful to the intellect, and those things of ugliness God has created are ugly to the intellect, highlights the objective nature of this intellectual knowledge, for what the intellect grasps is the reality of the things.<sup>560</sup> As Evkuran notes, this signifies a basic harmony between the principles of the intellect and the structure of the cosmos.<sup>561</sup> Indeed, al-

<sup>555</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>556</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, pp. 76-78.

<sup>557</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 204, p. 298, p. 316; Evkuran, “Māturīdī’nin Düşüncesinde Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi,” p. 129.

<sup>558</sup> *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, X, p. 52.

<sup>559</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 476

<sup>560</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, II, p. 254, p. 255

<sup>561</sup> Mehmet Evkuran, “Māturīdī’nin Düşüncesinde Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi,” in *İslam Düşüncesinde Ahlaki Önergelerin Kaynağı*, eds. Eşref Altaş and Mervener Yılmaz (Ankara: Nobel Akademik Yayıncılık, 2016), p.116.

Māturīdī mentions that the value of every labour and form of organisation rests upon the basis of reason, which is unvarying in its judgements. Like the senses of perception, it overcomes obscurity; it is the authority of all matters of vagueness and ambiguity. Similarly, it is even the basis of every type of knowledge of the natural disposition.<sup>562</sup> Accordingly, al-Māturīdī writes that reason is essential to survival.<sup>563</sup> Most crucially of all it is also the basis for the most basic of all moral actions, as al-Māturīdī writes that belief in God and His prophets is a matter for the intellect.<sup>564</sup> Indeed, al-Māturīdī says that we were created responsible (*mukallaḥ*) for our actions because of our ability to discern good from bad, and God made the good beautiful to the intellect and the bad ugly.<sup>565</sup> This is highly significant, for the wording makes clear that a basic moral accountability is placed on the human being on the basis of reason alone.

The senses do, however, bring various experiences that add strength to the findings of reason in moral matters, according to al-Māturīdī.<sup>566</sup> This is important as another instance of the holistic epistemological stance he takes in regards to morality and ethics. (Where al-Māturīdī does oppose reason and the senses, or more precisely, desires, regards the moral role of reason in holding us back from temptation, as we shall discuss below.) How the different types of information delivered by the faculty of perception and reason respectively work together is not described by al-Māturīdī in any great detail. But we should recall that reason pertains to the same material world as the senses, whether hidden or sensible, as well as the supernatural.

Significantly, al-Māturīdī does not say that reason is able to identify the moral value of actions in an intuitive way; rational reflection (*nathar*) and contemplation (*taammul*) are the operations with which something is determined to be good or bad, right or wrong.<sup>567</sup> Alper explains this by saying that the evaluations of reason are able to go beyond the immediate consequences of actions.<sup>568</sup> But we should not jump to the conclusion that al-Māturīdī would deny the existence of a priori knowledge per se, such as the part being

<sup>562</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 304.

<sup>563</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 204.

<sup>564</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 377.

<sup>565</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 167, p. 301.

<sup>566</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 303-304.

<sup>567</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.17; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 609

<sup>568</sup> Alper, *Akul-Vahiy*, p. 93.

smaller than the whole. Of course, this does not constitute moral knowledge, but we should recall that he considers rumination and contemplation to be basic to analysis and synthesis. And while it is unclear in what sense this is meant to be the case, al-Māturīdī provides insufficient information to construct a detailed picture of his understanding of the operations of reason, if he indeed had one. Furthermore, his statements that while both human and animals alike gain knowledge of what is beneficial and what is harmful with the senses, with reason humanity alone comes to know what the meaning and reality of things are,<sup>569</sup> that reason understands objectively the moral quality of Tawhīd, thankfulness and lying suggests that he did not ascribe solely to a consequentialist morality, as made clear in Chapter Four. Yet there is an empiricist tone to his work, and raises the question of what kind of empiricist he was, whether he held either or both concept- and belief-empiricism, or indeed, whether he was to some extent an intuitionist, where the moral quality of an act is known by an exercise of intuition rather than independent evidence. This especially seems to be the case with his statement regarding the morality of thankfulness to the one that provides blessings, which appears to assume an idea of indebtedness.<sup>570</sup>

Then there comes the concept of wisdom specifically, which displays possession of at least two moral basic concepts, and all of the basic moral concepts to the Western tradition we outlined in Chapter Four. This makes the source of wisdom worthy of further investigation, though al-Māturīdī relates it specifically to reason. Thus, when al-Māturīdī considers the question of whether it is possible for an all-wise God to do something that is unwise, he answers that it is not possible because such a being will have all knowledge.<sup>571</sup> This establishes a firm link between knowledge and wisdom, and wisdom is thus aligned with truth. And for al-Māturīdī, the source of both correct religious and moral belief is the same. Reason is the judge of what is beneficial and harmful, good and bad. In addition to this, however, the connection between reason and wisdom is a close one. We have noted that reason acts as an analyser and synthesiser of the objects around us, whereas wisdom is, as Pessagno observes, used mainly in the

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<sup>569</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 579; Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 107.

<sup>570</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>571</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tahwid*, p. 102.

sense of purpose. Therefore, reason evaluates what is already given, while wisdom sets the goal that is to be achieved.

Nevertheless, it is through reflection on the world and the purposefulness it displays that humans can reach correct religious faith. This is achieved via the faculty of reason, which thus has the capacity to recognise this purposefulness. The moral dimension to wisdom implied here is central for al-Māturīdī. He notes that a person who acts with no purpose behaves in a way that is worthy of blame,<sup>572</sup> that reason discriminates between the beneficial and harmful so that we can seek the former and avoid the latter.

Thus, for al-Māturīdī, in this act of discernment reason carries out a basic epistemological role. Wisdom, however, is of different significance and pertains to morality in a more basic sense, since purpose, whether human or divine, is concomitant with value. Indeed, the two are inextricable. Without purpose, there is no morality and so, as its condition, wisdom is more fundamental to morality than reason. Yet, on the other hand, in and of itself, a goal is not enough for morality; the goal must be good. For while purpose implies value and vice versa, a means of accessing the morality of this value is essential. Now, for the human being, this is possible, according to al-Māturīdī, in objective terms, as per the benefits and harms presented by the material conditions of this world. For humanity, reason dictates what is good and what is bad, in accord with the needs and desires of the human being, including the need for communal peace and harmony. Thus, we find that the concrete conditions of humanity's existence determine what is of value. These values are constituted by the goals of humankind vis-à-vis the material conditions of existence: hence the need for the satisfaction of basic needs, desires as well as the attainment of peace and harmony more generally.

In light of the above discussion we can draw a table of the kinds of knowledge the different sources of knowledge are able to grasp and the status that that knowledge has. Those placed in brackets are categories that the al-Māturīdī does not announce himself but which we have found necessary to ascribe to him in accord with the structure of this thought.

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<sup>572</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 381, cf. p. 67, p. 167, p. 395; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, X, p. 72.

**Table of Moral Statues**

Source	Moral Type	Quality	Status
Senses (internal)	Sensory pleasures and pains	Certain ( <i>darūrī</i> )	Subjective
Senses (external)	Source of sensory pleasure and pain	Certain ( <i>darūrī</i> ) (after assessment by the intellect)	Subjective
Reason Deduction istidlal	Theological; principle-based; wisdom	(Certain ( <i>darūrī</i> )); speculative	Objective
Haber Mutawattir	Theological; Religious; communal	Certain	Objective
Haber Ahad	Theological; Religious; communal	Dubious	Objective

In view of the above, the status of moral knowledge must be considered according to its sources and if a combination of sources is necessary, then which of the sources is most central to its acquisition and constitution shall determine its status. There is the important question about the degree of importance al-Māturīdī places respectively on reason, monotheistic belief and revelation in the human attainment of morality. Then there is the question which of these, if any, is alone sufficient as a moral guide.

To begin with the first question, al-Māturīdī often connects correct religious belief with moral conduct. For example, he says that belief in God's oneness makes one feel their indebtedness to God, from which moral actions follow.<sup>573</sup> Şekeroğlu proposes the link is so close that you cannot have one without the other and that al-Māturīdī holds disbelief will guarantee one's actions are based merely on inclination and desires.<sup>574</sup> In the first place, he says that the denial of God's existence is bad for consequentialist reasons, because it cuts away the possibility for moral guidance. He also unconvincingly attempts to argue that because before any good deed there must be the idea of the action in the mind first, a moral mind is therefore a precondition of morality. This mind he

<sup>573</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 401.

<sup>574</sup> Şekeroğlu, *Matūrīdī'de Ahlak*, pp. 116-118.

attaches to religious faith, and makes *necessary* for moral acts.<sup>575</sup> In essence, on this reading, al-Māturīdī holds Tawhīd is necessary for moral action.

But while some passages offered by al-Māturīdī, especially in Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān, do present a strongly polarised and simplistic view of the relation between an agents religious persuasion and their possibility of being moral, other comments of his demand us to acknowledge a rather more complicated picture. In the first place, al-Māturīdī states several times that *īmān* does not guarantee good action. In Kitāb al-Tawhīd, he sets out to reject the claim that the term *īmān* can be used to encompass every good deed and he draws a distinction between *īmān* and *islām*, with the former being a necessary but insufficient condition for the latter.<sup>576</sup> As Şekeroğlu too notes, his comments about the need for education and instruction (*tarbiya*) demonstrate clearly acknowledgment of the fact that religious belief requires additional and external support to ensure actions of positive moral value.<sup>577</sup>

More precisely, al-Māturīdī states that *īmān* is something that belongs to the heart in particular and therefore does not encompass all parts of the religion. For not every action is merely an action of the heart.<sup>578</sup> More specifically, knowledge of God's existence is not enough to be called *īmān*, for disavowal is still possible. Indeed, this is what the term disbelief signifies in the Islamic teaching, stubborn denial of the truth after it is known; and the word *kufr* is used for someone who 'covers' the truth having found it, like someone who has been defeated in a debate but simply refuses to acknowledge they are wrong. The point here is that an act of affirmation (*taşdīq*) is necessary for faith, or rather, *īmān* in God.<sup>579</sup> These references show that *īmān* and morality are not identical though they may overlap, in that faith is itself something that is good and a prerequisite of Islam. What is more, *īmān* does not necessarily guarantee good deeds or prevent evil. Though *īmān* might be a particular instance of justice, the

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<sup>575</sup> Şekeroğlu, *Matüridi'de Ahlak*, p. 84.

<sup>576</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 471, p. 480.

<sup>577</sup> Şekeroğlu, *Matüridi'de Ahlak*, p. 123.

<sup>578</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 477.

<sup>579</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 478-479.

latter has a wider application than the former and al-Māturīdī observes that there are both just and unjust believers.<sup>580</sup> Admittedly, this seems a fairly trivial conclusion.

The next thing is to ask whether disbelief will completely cancel what we would otherwise count as good action from having a positive moral value, so that nothing the disbeliever does may count as moral. This is the doctrine of the al-Ash'ari school, since what is good is what is commanded by God and because the disbeliever cannot have the intention to obey God, their actions have no moral value. In this matter, the immediate response for a student of al-Māturīdī is to point out that since reason determines what is good and what is bad the possibility of moral knowledge and action is also available to disbelievers. But finding clear expression of this consequence to al-Māturīdī's position in his own words is fairly difficult. Indeed, it is not for nothing that Şekeroğlu adopts the reading that he does.

Nevertheless, in line with his claim that *īmān* and Islām are to be distinguished, al-Māturīdī observes that the performance of bad actions does not nullify the faith of a believer.<sup>581</sup> This is meant to counter the position of those who said that sin completely removes faith from the believer and takes them out of Islām unless they repent as well as those who said that sin puts the Muslim in a place between belief and disbelief. Now, given that an act is to be evaluated independently of the faith of the person behind it, *ceteris paribus* it should also follow that disbelief will not render all ones actions evil, and that rather these, spiritual and practical ethics, denote different realms, in spite of being interconnected.

But this is not actually the conclusion al-Māturīdī promotes. In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, he states that one who denies God's existence cannot have the name of goodness or benevolence (*ismu al-hasanah wa al-khayr*). The same goes for those who associate partners with God, since while accepting God's existence they deny His commands and prohibitions (regarding Tawhīd). Both groups therefore can have no hope in God's

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<sup>580</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 352.

<sup>581</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 418.

mercy, their punishment will be eternal and, al-Māturīdī states, this is not contrary to God's grace or nobility (*al-karm wa al-juud*).<sup>582</sup>

Now, it is indeed standard Islamic belief to hold that disbelievers in God, as explained in the terms outlined above, will not find salvation in the next life. However, the subject here should shift if a distinction can be validly made between faith and morality. The nature of the connection is somewhat complicated by the fact that, for al-Māturīdī, correct religious faith is itself an instance of what is morally good and judged to be so by reason. He writes, 'īmān is beautiful, good, and a decoration and guide to its possessor.'<sup>583</sup> Indeed, belief is related to God in distinct ways, that is, as an act of divine kindness (*al-in'am*), a favour in the form of a grateful obligation (*al-imtinan*) and an ornamentation of the heart and love (*al-tazyīn fī al-qulūb wa al-tahbīb*).<sup>584</sup> The complication referred to just above is brought about by the need to conclude that faith and morality are not independent categories. In fact, in al-Māturīdī's scheme, they reveal mutual dependence: while faith is an instance of morality, morality depends on faith for its existence.

Another passage sums up in a crucial, though rather complicated, way various aspects of al-Māturīdī's ethical stance on this topic, particularly in relation to his theological concerns. This passage is worth quoting in full:

We agree with the Mu'tazilah that nothing is to be attributed to God from creation or any actions except from that which does not evoke evil (*al-qubh*) with God's names, and of what does evoke evil, that must be negated from God. Out of this requirement certain matters arise. One of these regards attribution, where what is attributed to God from the good (*khayrat*) [is done so in the sense] that it comes from Him. The Mu'tazilah say: Attribution occurs in terms of the good that God commands and invites and strengthens humanity to practice. We say: Even if this attribution is good, the aim of [this] attribution to God is [achieved] without mention of actions. However, when actions are mentioned, the intention is thankfulness to God and praise of Him. And though what the Mu'tazila say may be permitted, what we say is more appropriate, since the believer and the disbeliever share [a common position] in regards to the divine

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<sup>582</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 457-458.

<sup>583</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 486.

<sup>584</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 487-488.



command, invitation and encouragement, but in view of thankfulness and praise things differ. What can explain this is the unqualified saying (*al-qawl al-mutlaq*): *Īmān* is a blessing and favour from God (*min ni'amillāhī wa minanihi*), and God blesses and favours the believer, and were it not for the grace (*fadl*) of God upon him he would not be cleansed and a great punishment would meet him. From this viewpoint, nothing is to be attributed to God in [the case of] the disbeliever, whereas when there is no mention of actions, the matter falls on divine commands.<sup>585</sup>

Certain points are clear from this passage. While both al-Māturīdī and the Mu'tazila hold that only good things are to be attributed to God, the Mu'tazili form of attribution omits actions. In this circumstance, the believer and disbeliever are equal, but when actions are included, praise and thankfulness distinguishes them. We can see also that al-Māturīdī regards the omission in the Mu'tazili stance as a flaw, and that his view, which includes actions, is better. Extracting further details from this situation is necessary if we are to understand why al-Māturīdī regards his position as better and exactly how praise is a distinguishing factor. To this end, we may further note that the Mu'tazili position remains at the level of what the addressees of revelation might and have the potential to do, whereas al-Māturīdī's position refers to completed actions. What is more, the Mu'tazili position fails to give due weight to the immense difference that belief in God is supposed to make and this difference warrants praise and thankfulness. Finally, the saying he cites refers to *īmān* specifically, so from the last two sentences we may infer that only with faith does the opportunity for purification and salvation exist. Hence, in contrast to the believer, no action of the disbeliever can be attributed to God because it cannot be used for the purpose of thanks or praise.<sup>586</sup> Al-Māturīdī's concerns here are focused on the specifics of spiritual success and in relation to this the disbeliever's deeds are futile. Beyond salvation, however, God has given both the believer and the disbeliever the ability to be moral; the believer and disbeliever stand together as addressees of God's commands, encouraged and empowered by Him to practice good deeds.

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<sup>585</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 401-402.

<sup>586</sup> Cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, where al-Māturīdī describes faith as a means to what is good (p. 571), and his take on Qur'ānic verses that claim heaven is for Muslims alone (p. 597).

Despite the position the believer and disbeliever share as recipients of God's commands, the categorical difference they have in terms of moral value according to al-Māturīdī's position seems to unduly narrow the scope of things for which God can be praised, especially since al-Māturīdī has already noted that nothing exists outside God's creation and all that is in creation falls under terms of praise, such as divine sovereignty and lordship. Of course, al-Māturīdī might be referring to names other than these (which stem, among other things, from His being Creator of this world) that do not apply to the disbelievers, but the point simply goes against the evidence available to al-Māturīdī's writings. The more likely answer would be that divine sovereignty and lordship are not subverted by being associated with the good or evil realised by disbelievers and polytheists.

His stance is perhaps a result of a position similar to the ancient Greek view that morality is a state of completion; unless one has all the virtues then one cannot be called a properly virtuous person.<sup>587</sup> The various readings of this doctrine bear comparison with al-Māturīdī's view. Recall that both morality and faith (assuming a distinction between the two here for a moment) have the same source, that is, rational reflection. So how could it be possible for someone to successfully acquire one without also acquiring the other? That they cannot, is at least one thought that seems to be implied by al-Māturīdī's position, and is reflected in Aristotle's arguments for the unity of virtues given in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 6, Chapter 13), which refer to prudence and 'correct reason' as central to morality. But apart from virtually no textual evidence that al-Māturīdī held such a doctrine, he also states, as we have noted already, that a believer can be unjust,<sup>588</sup> which makes it even more difficult to see the theory of a unity of virtues being found in his writings. Now, al-Māturīdī may have held that even a believer is not properly moral until he acquires all the moral virtues, but then this would undermine his claim that the actions of the even the sinful and flawed believer are possible objects of praise. What is more, given that the source of morality and faith are the same and that therefore if you have one then you must also have the other, it would

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<sup>587</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1 (Ch.10) 1101a9-20, Book 6 (ch.13) 1144b-1145a12; Terry Penner, 'The Unity of Virtue,' in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 82 (January, 1973), pp. 35-68.

<sup>588</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 352.

not possible for a believer to be unjust; whereas it is clear that this is not the case. It appears, then, that a unity thesis cannot be the basis of al-Māturīdī's position here.

Ultimately, it appears that the position seems to have been derived from the fact that disbelievers and polytheists will be sent to hell for eternity; since they do not enter heaven, perhaps al-Māturīdī concluded that they cannot be named good in any terms.

Certainly, al-Māturīdī gives a rational basis to both faith and morality. We have already seen, in al-Māturīdī's comments on prophecy and the person of the prophet, that reason plays an essential part of recognising the authenticity of the prophet and prophecy. This person must come with evidence (*dalīl*) and proof (*burhān*) by virtue of which the people will honour him with leadership (*al-imāmah*), as they recognize that their prosperity lies with him. In fact, al-Māturīdī cites the moral conduct of the Prophet as constituting a proof of his authenticity. How could a non-believer, then, be convinced of his message on the basis of moral evidence if ethical knowledge and morality is only possessed by those who already believe? Thus, although they have the same source does not mean that both are achieved together or simultaneously.

For it is equally clear, even from the passage above, that al-Māturīdī deems God's commands, invitation and encouragement as worthy of attribution because of the good that they point to (and therefore join) and not as good simply by virtue of having been commanded by God. This is another way in which al-Māturīdī reveals himself to belong to the ratiocentric camp. Admittedly, all these might merely be deemed good because of the salvation and purification that following them will bring. But if that were all they were good for, then reason would struggle to recognise their goodness, because reason recognises the moral value of an event in separation from thoughts of an afterlife.

The main issue is that, on the one hand, al-Māturīdī says that reason comprehends the permitted (*ḥalāl*) and the forbidden (*ḥarām*), while on the other says that these are known and declared also by revelation. The use of the terms *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām* in relation to reason might seem odd given that divine commandments appear essential for a thing to be considered forbidden, but, as Alper notes, al-Māturīdī uses the terms in correspondence with what accords with reason, so that we have the concept of forbidden-according-to-reason (*ḥarāmūn fī al-aql*) in various places of his writings. Now, since reason is able to distinguish good from bad, unless we regard disbelievers as

completely irrational, they too must, according to al-Māturīdī's system be accorded the ability to recognise and do good deeds. The fact of their ethical goodness and the virtues of humanity in general, should in any case be evident enough, without making such a dogmatic inference.

Here, the conclusion to be made is that al-Māturīdī views correct religious belief as the necessary condition for praise because it is basic to all others. Surely, one who is fortunate enough to know the truth and meaning of reality, and yet fails to act accordingly, is still in a better position than one who knowingly rejects that the truth. In this regard, religious belief is no doubt principally an event of the heart and mind, and it is possible for one to act contrary to their beliefs on the basis of lowly desires, which, indeed, al-Māturīdī cites as the typical cause of evil deeds.<sup>589</sup> Thus one can recognise the truth and yet, temporarily at least, neglect to act accordingly. But does this not also characterise disbelief: recognition of the existence and oneness of God with refusal to confirm it with the heart and tongue; to instead stubbornly deny it? Indeed, al-Māturīdī talks of the heart (*fuād*) synonymously with the intellect, indicating religious belief is it not simply a case of knowing. There is in fact an 'act of the heart', a phrase used by al-Māturīdī to highlight the necessity of overcoming base desires to confirm the truth of God's existence, even if at great personal cost.<sup>590</sup> If this parallel between belief and moral action is accurate, then the former does not appear to gain any special privilege in this respect, it is also already only an act.

Nevertheless, religious belief, like any belief, is certainly basic in a practical sense. For it precedes intentions and actions. And since faith allows one to follow God's commandments, invitation and encouragement, no moral action of this kind will follow without it. But even this admission is limited to faithful obedience of revelation specifically, while al-Māturīdī states that right and wrong are known by the intellect independently of revelation. This means, firstly, that the intention to act morally is not limited to religious devotion, and so neither revelation nor religious belief is essential in this respect. Secondly, it means that the basis for action that religious faith provides is only of the type to obey God or act in a way that shows thanks to Him. From these two

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<sup>589</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 233.

<sup>590</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 476.

observations we may observe that correct religious belief pertains to moral acts only in so far as those acts are deemed to be pleasing to God and are carried out for that very reason. Moral acts themselves, however, are available to disbelievers not merely in the form of an invitation, and therefore as something that is possible after they stop being disbelievers.

One may ask in regard to the passage above that given the Mu'tazila and al-Māturīdī claim that the command to do good is addressed to both believer and disbeliever and the premise that the disbeliever must first believe in order to do the good, then how can they be commanded to do good? In response, we may observe that the first command is to believe correctly and affirmatively in God, only after which do the other parts of revelation become applicable. And this seems plausible given the hierarchical scheme of morality that al-Māturīdī is advancing.

Here the purpose has been to identify the degree of independence al-Māturīdī attributed morality from religion and religious belief in particular. It appears we must read al-Māturīdī as viewing correct religious belief as the necessary condition for praise, because it is simply the necessary condition for salvation. Indeed, this makes sense in a theological view of success — for how can God be praised for a human tragedy? — but it is nevertheless a failure of faith and destiny rather than ethics. His position on this point therefore appears to be heavily influenced by an epistemological assessment of Islamic doctrine and weighted on the fate of disbelievers in the hereafter, which has no bearing on the qualitative status of their moral actions as events determined by reason.

Yet, that is not to say that human reason is a completely sufficient guide in the acquirement of moral knowledge or the performance of moral action. For example, Al-Māturīdī qualifies human knowledge by noting that it is not possible for humans to comprehend with certainty the reason for each particular aspect of creation, citing questions about the existence of a harmful insect, as an example.

That reason can know what is good may suggest there is a standard next to God, as per the problem of sovereignty. Nevertheless, knowing God to be wise prohibits something contrary to this to be attributed to Him, as an omission to provide guidance would seem. Al-Māturīdī regards wisdom as a kind of perfection; to do anything other than what is wise would be flawed. God is by essence (*dhāt*), all-wise (*al-Hakīm*), self-sufficient (*al-*

*Ghanī*) and all-knowing (*al-‘Alīm*). It follows, says al-Māturīdī, that God’s acts cannot be unwise. Another way we may understand this is by looking at the various descriptions of folly. These include, disregard the knowledge one has,<sup>591</sup> failing to put something in its proper place, which is also evil,<sup>592</sup> acting without the right to perform the action, and breaking the law of the one with authority over the law.<sup>593</sup> The first two denote ethical flaws and the latter two denote a lack of sovereignty. God is all-knowing and as self-sufficient has no need to disregard His knowledge. One may say that the proper exercise of knowledge depends only on further knowledge, but that would be misled; the good application of knowledge is a virtue gained by following reason rather than vain desires, and God has no such desires. For the same reason, though one may argue that there is no reason that He follow His knowledge either, given that there is no law above Him, His self-sufficiency makes such actions pointless.

Though, al-Māturīdī does say that the wisdom behind the creation of the world lies in the trial of humankind,<sup>594</sup> and God created a being with the ability of being educated, discern the beneficial from the harmful and attain knowledge that pertains to realities beyond the sensible world, and obey His command, also notes that humans might not comprehend the necessity of understanding all of God’s actions with the framework of divine wisdom because of their limited knowledge.<sup>595</sup> One implication that can be drawn here is that absolute moral knowledge is necessarily beyond humanity. We do not know the essence of wisdom or reason as made clear by the fact that the wisdom behind some aspects of creation appears beyond us.

What is more, the intellect can also become confused. Many things that appear to be instances of goodness (*ḥusn*) and are in reality evil (*qubh*), and many that appear instances of the upright (*salah*) in fact are elements of what is corrupt (*fasad*). Since the intellect is vulnerable to such confusions, al-Māturīdī concludes that certain things obstruct the intellect from understanding the essence of wisdom and folly (*jahl*).<sup>596</sup> The moral evaluations of reason can go astray under various influences. This is usually due

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<sup>591</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298.

<sup>592</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 181.

<sup>593</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 298.

<sup>594</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 245.

<sup>595</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 297-298.

<sup>596</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.183.

to natural inclination, drives, desires and even needs that swerve rational thought away from achieving its goal with the prioritisation of others less worthy or unworthy altogether.<sup>597</sup> Here, satan plays a significant role in moving people to act on temptation rather than the considered evaluations of rational reflection and contemplation.<sup>598</sup> But as Alper notes, regardless of the devils work, in this respect the ego becomes the rival of reason.<sup>599</sup> Then there are also emotional factors that obstruct successful performance of rational thought. These include grief and sadness alongside jealousy and hatred, as prime examples.<sup>600</sup> Al-Māturīdī also gives an intellectual example of what might retard the faculty of reason in this way, specifically, a basic denial of its ability to discriminate at all. He explains that to oppose the view that reason is the means by which good and bad are determined leads one to find it impossible or, at least, difficult to discriminate between the verdicts that nature shows the intellect. The perspicuous (*muhkam*) becomes confused with the intricate (*mutashābih*) and vice versa, and the information of each thing is abandoned for another.<sup>601</sup>

The human is also reliant on revelation in particular for religious knowledge. Often, al-Māturīdī refers to the human being using the legal term of *mukallaf*, someone who legally qualifies as being responsible for their actions. It is incumbent upon the rational individual, meaning humanity in general, to be grateful to their Lord. And the means by which this gratitude may be expressed is not simply left to humanity to work out for themselves unaided. By the revelation of divine commandments and prohibitions, God has allowed specific forms in which their gratitude may be demonstrated.<sup>602</sup> Of some certain basics, al-Māturīdī says that reason recognises what is good along with the judgement of its obligatory status. The central examples in this regard are the morality of Tawhīd and the immorality of polytheism.<sup>603</sup> As for religious practices specifically, such as prayer and fast, the source of obligation comes from God.<sup>604</sup> Indeed, there is simply no way for reason to gain such religious knowledge. Rather, revelation is the

<sup>597</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, III, p. 173.

<sup>598</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 284.

<sup>599</sup> Alper, *Akūl-Vahiy*, p. 94.

<sup>600</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 262.

<sup>601</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 304.

<sup>602</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 166-167.

<sup>603</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 410.

<sup>604</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 293.

sole source for this knowledge and the authority behind it.<sup>605</sup> But in certain areas, revelation acts as a confirmatory source for the findings of reason. Among these is the foundation of Islam, which is Tawhīd.<sup>606</sup>

But the need for prophecy is based on both worldly and religious issues. We established above that al-Māturīdī believes desires will lead people to compete and destroy each other and that this constitutes the need for a basis (*asl*) with which people can achieve mutual harmony. What is more, Al-Māturīdī states that given the existence of the means for fulfilling humanity's various physical, the divine Creator will send a guide to teach them how to live rather than leave them to their own fate. In fact this is deemed a necessity by al-Māturīdī in the view of divine wisdom.<sup>607</sup> Hence, God sends a prophet within this educational and instructive capacity. We would need not, therefore, take al-Māturīdī to mean that humanity is incapable of establishing some degree of stability themselves on the basis of reason, however lacking or successful that may be, but that it is still necessary according to the wisdom of God for revelation to exist to guide and direct them in this regard. Hence, the need for a prophet.<sup>608</sup> This is simply because reasons will not solve all of moral or ethical problems, and revelation is provided to answers those problems God deems it necessary to answer. What is more, humans tend to forget or lack the will to do what is right, for which again revelation is a key as inviter and encourager of the performance of good deeds.

In sum, there are two aspects to human morality; one 'world orientated' and the other theological. On the one hand, nature is a guide toward God's existence and wisdom, on the other, also the condition of human morality, with the creation of needs and desires, pleasure and pain and ultimately trial. What is more, these values, though related to humans specifically, are still objective also in a theological context, as holding independently of revelation. That is to say, that there moral goodness and badness is recognisable by humans through the faculty of reason alone. On the other hand, next to these rather worldly aims, there are the aims revealed by God, which state more

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<sup>605</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 112; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, VI, p. 410.

<sup>606</sup> Al-, *Tawīliat al-Quran*, II, p. 266.

<sup>607</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 249.

<sup>608</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 68.



specifically the forms of worship that humankind is to observe and is held accountable for. This adds a second level to human morality.

### 5.3 Human Epistemological Freedom and the Moral Role of Reason

Al-Māturīdī observes in human nature (*tabi'ah*) the inclination towards pleasure, joy, ease and disinclination towards harm and suffering. This disposition is created by God.<sup>609</sup> As noted above, through reason humans work out the beneficial aspects of the world (*al-manāfi' fi'd-dunya*) and the consequences (*awāqib*) of actions.<sup>610</sup> The intellect also recognises these as objective. More specifically, though some moral values are subjective in so far as they are determined in relation to the specific material conditions of human life and the physical constitution of the human being, they are objective in that reason recognises their value based on the benefits they confer to human beings, and others are objective completely because that are recognised as good in themselves. For if all that reason was capable of doing was, in Hume's words, act as the slave of the passions its role would be relatively trivial. Rather, the faculty of reason is capable of recognising the value of things in separation from the material circumstances and more importantly, in separation from the human inclinations (*tab'*, lit. nature). That is to say, there are a number of things that are deemed as being of value in themselves. The most prominent example of this is the value of Tawhīd. This is gives us two different perspectives of beauty: what is beautiful according to human nature, and what is beautiful according to human reason.<sup>611</sup>

On this basis, another function of the intellect is to bring regulation and moderation to the satisfaction of human needs. Epistemologically, reason is contrasted with the senses, but superimposed on this distinction, ethically; it is contrasted with the *nafs*. We noted above that the moral evaluations of reason can go astray due to natural inclination, drives, desires and even needs and that the devil helps move people to act on temptation instead of rational reflection.<sup>612</sup> But at bottom the ego is the rival of reason for and even otherwise noble emotions such as grief and sadness may obstruct successful

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<sup>609</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 255.

<sup>610</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 20; Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, V, p. 203.

<sup>611</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 254.

<sup>612</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 284.

performance of rational thought, alongside jealousy and hatred, as prime examples.<sup>613</sup> The role of reason is to recognise what is truly good and bad, whether it is pleasurable or not, while in contrast, the role of shaytan is the to make a thing of immorality attractive through encouragements and invitations in the individual's heart.<sup>614</sup> The distinction between the rational faculty and the nafs with different and competing inclinations implies also that comprehension of the principle or truth of an event is itself a motivating force in the human being, for otherwise reason would indeed, be simply a slave to the passions. Thus we may attribute to al-Māturīdī's theory of reason that involves a basic will to truth in the human being, and what is more, virtues of truth, as traits that allow us to act for the sake of the findings of rational endeavour simply because they are true and therefore valuable.

In this sense, the intellect is the condition of the possibility of morality, for it allows us to act according to moral principles and ideas of goodness. In this role the intellect is a guide in each individual to judge the value of natural desires and to struggle to do what is right and good, not to mention consider the context of humanity's greater purpose.<sup>615</sup> Thus, the ability to discern that what may to inclination appear beautiful is in reality ugly, and what may appear good is in reality bad, belongs exclusively to reason.<sup>616</sup> The implication here is that not all motivations stem from physiological factors alone. Rather al-Māturīdī's position assumes a theory of reason as a self-sufficient motivating force, so that we act on the basis of moral principles for not ulterior cause. For al-Māturīdī does not count the motivation from lust the same as free will (*irāda*).<sup>617</sup>

These different motivating forces may under certain circumstances coincide, under others they may not. One of the distinguishing things of rational thought in this context is the ability to look beyond the immediate consequences of actions and to evaluate and regard with importance those that will occur later in time. Al-Māturīdī cites such examples as the use of cupping and medicine to make his point.<sup>618</sup> Initially the operations these involve may be repulsive, but reason will judge them according to the

<sup>613</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 262.

<sup>614</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 255, p. 256.

<sup>615</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>616</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p.183.

<sup>617</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 380, p. 388.

<sup>618</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, 195. Also cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 255.

moral legitimacy of their methods and benefits. To give a contrasting example, the act of intercourse under the legality and wisdom of marriage will under normal circumstances bring pleasure to the individuals' nature and also be beautiful in its moral validity to the intellect. In contrast, adultery may be naturally pleasurable but reprehensible to reason. Indeed, al-Māturīdī writes that disobedience to God involves putting the ego above one's duty to thank Him.<sup>619</sup> Without the ability to judge and overcome these desires we would be utterly determined by our biological and physiological drives. Whereas, al-Māturīdī notes that we have the ability to act or not act according to our desires.

In this regard, reason comes hand in hand with education, and what was an object of natural inclination or disinclination can be reversed as a result.<sup>620</sup> The key to education, as is the case with the closely related practice of habituation, for example, that what is taught is right and good rather than the opposite.

Of course, the type of freedom here goes beyond what our physical abilities allow us to do. That is to say, some actions we are unable to do merely because of mental and physical limitations and in this sense, we are only free in so far as these abilities can extend. This is one standard definition of freedom mentioned in the Islamic tradition.<sup>621</sup> But there is also our freedom to choose from among those actions that we are able to do. This is crucial to morality for it means that we can act either morally or immorally by our specific choice.

This gives the human responsibility for their actions. And brings us back to the original topic of faith of whether faith is given by God or achieved by the individual. Here, should recall the fact that al-Māturīdī holds that the realisation of an act is the result of God according to the intention in question. Applying same principle here however we just end up asking if the intention was the gift. In short, one might understandably perceived the situation here to be highly circular, as correct religious faith is a gift from God, and God grants hope and reward to those that have correct religious faith.

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<sup>619</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 233.

<sup>620</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, pp. 354-355.

<sup>621</sup> See, Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, (London, 1948), pp. 40 ff.

In this regard the key concept of abandonment or forsakenness (*khidhlān*). The human being has both rational and non-rational dimensions. One set of good and bad are constituted by these worldly objects. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī identifies something of much greater importance, progress in which nothing from the sensible world can contribute. This is the path of truth, and essential to progress is to keep away from base desires and illicit pleasures. *Khidhlān* is applied to those that do not make this effort; because they did not try God did not reward them with faith. A case by case investigation of this may not reveal complete correspondence; great sinners may believe, while virtuous people (though al-Māturīdī would not call them this) might not, but for al-Māturīdī belief is a fundamental act of goodness and justice which no good person can do without and should indeed achieve if they apply their reason without bias. What is more, even with the opportunity to recognise God's existence via the use of reason and to accurately identify moral values by the same means, revelation was provided because fighting against natural desires and intellectual biases is difficult given human nature and so there was a need for the counsel and support of prophets to help humanity. By this means, entrance is made to the world beyond perception of the senses and virtuous action allows humanity to establish harmony and ease with their own nature.<sup>622</sup> Indeed, a great disaster for each person is to be left by God with the burden of desires to follow ones ego as they please. This is *khidlan*. And this occurs in the first instance with regard to faith and reason and in the second in regards to revelation and the desires. For even with faith, moral conduct requires control over the ego, where God's help and guidance is crucial.<sup>623</sup>

#### 5.4 Chapter Conclusion

Due to the lack of detail into which it goes, we have speculatively tried to construct an account in this and the previous chapter of the types of moral values al-Māturīdī conceived to exist and the epistemological ways to each of them. Despite al-Māturīdī's basic definition of knowledge he goes into some detail regarding the means to knowledge. There we find that there is an elevated position of reason among the three sources of knowledge, with the senses and reports, due to its role of critical evaluation

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<sup>622</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 256.

<sup>623</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 192, p. 233, p. 335, p. 468.

and validation. Reason is essential to realising the existence of God and in this regard it is used like the other senses to reach the truth. Al-Māturīdī is confident that the use of reason should result in a single valid conclusion.

Also, are discussion of the relation between the sense and reason lead us to the following conclusion: the senses necessarily rely on the evaluative operations of reason for validation; alone they are unreliable, for what determines them and the information they acquire in general and in particular to be certain is reason, even if al-Māturīdī does not explicitly so himself. Conversely the material which reason works upon is that information provided by the senses and from which is the existence of God is grasped through rumination and inference. Thus the senses provide the basis for the faculty of reason reach knowledge of things that they do not grasp.

We have also argued that reason is able to achieve sure knowledge even when it jumps from the data provided by the senses to reach knowledge of what is beyond them. This makes belief in certain aspects of the hidden world, most basic of all the existence of God, not a mere matter of faith or speculation. With regard to the status of moral knowledge specifically, we learn from reports and revelation to gain moral knowledge from the prophets. These are achieved by the senses with the additional operations of reason. More specifically, reason is the evaluator of the knowledge we acquire from the sense, in terms of determining the truth and morality quality of acts.

Wisdom is also a moral concept, which we have here judged a virtue and therefore appraised under the concept of moral worth rather than the good or the right. But it has significant complexity, with various aspects. Chief among these aspects is justice, purpose, and mercy, while the concept also has close connection to the reason and knowledge. This wisdom is displayed in the world from which people draw lessons and gain knowledge of God's existence. Religious belief, however, is not sufficient for moral knowledge or moral conduct, though for al-Māturīdī it is a necessary condition for these, with the likelihood that this belief arise from the divine judgement of eternal punishment form the disbelievers and polytheist.

Moral knowledge is not a guaranteed result from possessing reason and good intentions. The wisdom to some aspects of creation remains unclear, though creation in general was

designed for trial, for which revelation was also provided to show people true religion and morality.

The practice of religion is and indeed belief in God is also reliant on reason, which works independently from the inclinations, and provides a degree of freedom that makes humans responsible for their actions. Even so, reason is not enough; God's help is needed to be successfully moral and have correct faith.



## **Chapter 6: The Origin of the Moral Imperative and its Theoethical Dimensions**

### **6.1 Ethical Parallels of the Epistemological Divide Evident in Euthyphro and the Is-Ought Gap**

The derivation of moral obligation pertains closely to the is-ought gap we mentioned in previous chapters. This gap some of the theological-ethical theories conspicuously fail to bridge. Of course, the link between the derivation of an obligation and the gap is not direct; the latter concerns the derivation of a normative claim from some non-normative source — this is not the only way that a normative might be found. The task may instead be to find an unconditional *sui generis* form of morality within a secular and mundane world. Another option is instead the saturation of every aspect of creation with some moral significance. Either way, morality and its source or foundation are simultaneously identified.

In our analysis of the Euthyphro Dilemma and the various stances that surround it, we found that theocentrism and ratiocentrism are divided by radically different epistemologies that have led to incommensurable conceptions of morality. Now, this is paralleled in the Islamic tradition, with the stances taken by the Mu'tazilah and Ash'ariyyah schools of *kalām*, and to a lesser extent, among the various schools of fiqh. Theocentric theories are necessarily empirical since, scripture is read and prophets are heard and ratiocentric conceptions of morality have rationalistic bases. The same thread is found in ethics proper: consequentialist theories are based on empiricist epistemologies and deontology is typically based on rationalist ones. The main difference recalls a problem that German Enlightenment and Rationalist philosopher Immanuel Kant perceived in Hume's ethics: the difficulty to provide a foundation for morality as an essentially binding imperative on the rational agent. This means binding morality to a categorical basis, that is to say, one that is not contingent on any circumstance of the world, as these are deemed to be fundamentally arbitrary to morality's requirements and validity. This theoretical jump protects morality's status as universal, objective and binding at the cost of raising the strictness by which it may be conceived.

Now, Kant struggled greatly to provide that foundation in the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, but one thing that becomes clear upon close examination of this work is that despite the highly formal appearance of his ethics in general and its general divorce from concrete circumstances, the system presupposes a value claim, if not a fully-fledged value theory, without which it would be substantively deficient. It is true that the law of non-contradiction will help whittle away all subjective moral maxims, but there is also an end for which and upon which the moral law works. For Kant this is the rational being, which is able to formulate and observe moral laws autonomously.<sup>624</sup> Overall, the degree of his success remains debated. One main difficulty, which he attempted to solve in the later *Critique of Pure Judgement* but unfortunately appears to have been fundamentally unsuccessful, is the abrupt division between physical existence and the rational or metaphysical realm, wherein morality is located and its status preserved.<sup>625</sup>

This is clearly not a problem that the consequentialist will face in a serious fashion, if at all. Their whole system is based on the identification of worldly ends as being of moral importance. In the case of the utilitarian, this is pleasure, or more generally, happiness. The problem that they do face, however, is proving that this end is actually a moral end. For example, in *Utilitarianism*, British Philosopher J.S. Mill states ‘The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as a means to an end’. But this demands proof and Mills own efforts are woefully controversial In *Utilitarianism*, he asserts:

The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people do actually desire it.<sup>626</sup>

Taking the analogy at face value, fallacious reasoning is clearly apparent. The word ‘desirable’ denotes something good, it does not mean ‘able to be desired’ like ‘visible’

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<sup>624</sup> Op cit. Dieter Schönecker and Allen W. Wood, *Immanuel Kant's Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals: A Commentary* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp.141-49

<sup>625</sup> Op cit. Paul Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom: Selected Essays*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), ch. 8, Ch. 11, Ch. 12.

<sup>626</sup> Mill, J. Stuart, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*, (Everyman: London, 1996), p. 36.



means 'able to be seen'. Here two uses of the word desire are being confused with one another, and the analogy therefore collapses. Here, fellow British philosopher and founding figure of analytic philosophy, George Edward Moore, accuses Mill of committing the naturalistic fallacy. For Moore the naturalistic fallacy is a term of art; means to define the good as something some other notion, when the concept of goodness itself is for Moore 'unique and undefinable'.<sup>627</sup> But it is important here to keep in mind the nature of the proof Mill offers. It is not a deductive or direct proof, but rather an inductive one, and thus the definition of terms is not at stake here. Hence, Moore's charge is unfair. The relation between what is desired and what is desirable is (according to Mill) only evidential, not conceptual. This will apply to all empirical ethical theories, of which utilitarianism is just one. The problem lies in locating a normative value in something worldly. What is more, the identification is subjective. Humans see happiness as morally significant because of their particular psychological make up. This makes morality not exactly something that is good in itself, but rather good *for* someone or something, despite the fact that happiness itself is often regarded, as it was by Aristotle, for example, as an end-in-itself. That is to say, happiness remains a subjective end, though it is sought for nothing other than itself.

Kant of course rejected the very possibility of morality being properly conceived in this way, that is to say, as essentially based on human inclinations. Nevertheless, he recognised the fundamental importance happiness held to humanity and its associated link to morality as a form of reward for good action; and so made some effort to grant it a place in his ethics. His main concern was not, of course, the pursuit of happiness, but rather the worthiness to be happy. In this way, Kant believes that the ultimate end of practical reason goes further than establishing the rational agent as the moral end of action; he believes that it actually points to something that is even greater. In the "Dialectic" of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant makes an important distinction between what he calls the supreme good and the perfect good. The supreme good is that end we noted above, the rational agent as the unconditionally good, of value in-itself, and hence always an end never a means.<sup>628</sup> The perfect good, however, includes this but

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<sup>627</sup> Moore, *Principia*, pp. 58-59

<sup>628</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Mary Gregor, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 89 ff.

something else in addition: human happiness. In fact, Kant recognises the unfortunate fact that with the vicissitudes of the causal realm, though the moral agent *should* be rewarded with happiness, in this world, this is no guaranteed to come about.<sup>629</sup> What is more, the highest good involves the attainment of happiness in direct proportion to the virtue of an individual, and this cannot be made possible without first knowing the true moral worth of a person's actions by looking into their heart and intentions, which of course is impossible to do for humans.<sup>630</sup> The result, however, is problematic: on the one hand, Kant has us consider it necessary for the moral agent to consider the highest good as the ultimate object of rational action, on the other hand, he states this object can never be something which we can attain by ourselves. Now, Kant deems it irrational to pursue an end one cannot achieve, so therefore, quite independently of any theoretical evidence, the rational agent is compelled to consider their moral end, the highest good, is possible of attainment, and must hold any other additional belief this requires them to have.<sup>631</sup> Essentially, facing the prospect of an empty ideal, Kant defers the achievement of the highest good to an afterlife. The fact that the highest good cannot actually be achieved within the world we live, according to Kant, provides us with a practical ground for believing in an everlasting life after the present one where the task of morality continues to be performed.<sup>632</sup> This point makes faith imperative in the moral life and is the starting point of Kant's moral theology. Beiser notes that Augustine had already used this dilemma against the ancient pagans, and now Kant presented it to his modern contemporaries.<sup>633</sup>

Indeed, there is a radical separation between the ends of morality and the end of happiness. In epistemological terms, for Kant, theoretical ('objective') evidence for holding a proposition is limited to the sphere of empirical conditions, but practical ('subjective') considerations are thought of as constituting evidence that is transcendent. This division is essential to maintaining the purity of morality. In Section III of Chapter II of the "Dialectic" of the second *Critique*, 'On the Primacy of Practical Reason,' Kant

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<sup>629</sup> See Kant's argument in Sect. 3 of "Theory and Practice," 8: 308–312.

<sup>630</sup> Kant "Theory and Practice," 6:21, 99.

<sup>631</sup> Kant, *Practical Reason* 5:110-13.

<sup>632</sup> Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5:121-124.

<sup>633</sup> F. Beiser, 'Moral Faith and the Highest Good' in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*, Paul Guyer ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 597.

makes it clear that practical reason has the right to command only those beliefs necessary for action according to moral principles, but not ones necessary for attaining happiness. It is in this sense that we are to understand the famous phrase, ‘I had to do away with knowledge in order to make room for faith.’<sup>634</sup> That is to say, there is a realm of information that can only be accessed in the form of rational faith rather than as an object of knowledge. Without this restriction, he argues, theoretical reason could be compelled to hold all kinds of beliefs that Kant deems monstrous, such as the Islamic heaven or the mystic’s fusion with the deity.<sup>635</sup>

The problem with Kant’s thesis, however, is that while happiness is placed outside of morality because it is a worldly circumstance, it still supposedly finds a place in rational thought. But it is precisely because Kant does not take into account the causal processes of the world that the whole basis of his arguments for believing in another world seems so weak. Whereas in his moral philosophy we see Kant attempting to rid morality and value of human desire and inclination, in his concept of the highest good he makes no apologies for taking such things to be of crucial importance. Thus, he takes into account human nature, when he did not before. Considered in relation to his moral philosophy, this addition of happiness to form his conception of the highest good appears arbitrary.

I have chosen J.S. Mill and Kant as representative of consequentialist and deontologist thinkers in general and point to a radical disconnection between two central moral concepts on the basis of epistemological foundations. Thus we see that the dilemma runs clearly in ethics in some form, which hosts two incommensurable ideas of how morality is to be identified and conceived; two things that are in fact intimately related. The problem is also shown to be but a reincarnation of the is-ought problem; both Mill and Kant try to bridge the gap, but from different directions, with Mill attempting to make an empirical fact something of moral significance, and Kant attempting to relate the ratio-moral world he determines to exist with that of the concrete.

Each position has its strengths and weaknesses, but the respective aspects of each theory point to issues of fundamental philosophical importance. This we have already discussed in Chapter Two in light of the work of Jacques Derrida to make this clear.

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<sup>634</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B xxx.

<sup>635</sup> Kant, *Practical Reason*, 5: 120–121.

The advantage of the empirical approach to morality lies primarily in its generally better basic agreement with an indispensable feature of human comprehension and the production of meaning. Here we may relate this now more directly with our discussion of deontology and utilitarianism. In Chapter Two noted the empirical-rationalist tension that his thought reveals and also that this was revealed from with a rationalist methodology. Yet Derrida identifies himself as a ‘radical empiricist’.<sup>636</sup> The relation here to empiricism specifically lies in the latter’s dismissal to conceive of truth in metaphysical terms divorced from the innumerable features of the world. Rather than presence, deconstruction highlights absence and the interdependence of the two in the production of meaning. As Stocker observes, Derrida is actually working in a vein similar to Kant. Without pure ideas, no proper facts will be possible, and, in addition, whatever there is of facts will form only a chaotic succession of elements. This is because there will be no ideal to structure our comprehension of items and drive the derivation of meaning. Thus, without the transcendental we will not be able to attain knowledge. And yet, the transcendental forever remains divorced from the experience of the finite and concrete, which is the material out of which knowledge is also made. Only by the simultaneous presence of an original and primordial difference along with the transcendent can a connection be made with the manifold of empirical phenomena. Derrida is claiming that the primordial difference through which objects are comprehended is *both* a priori and concrete. It is a priori, because it refers to an essential aspect of the possibility of knowledge, and yet concrete because it is necessarily of the world. Thus we have something that is at once both pure and concrete. This is a contradiction, but a necessary one for the constitution of knowledge.<sup>637</sup>

In this sense, the rationalist perspective reflects a basic adherence to the will to truth that we noted above. The will to truth denotes a search for epistemic purity for its own sake. That is not to say that empirical thought is not the result of this will to truth, but it fails to identify or recognise the latter’s true concerns, motivations, and, indeed, rejects the possibility of those pure events that the will to truth seeks to grasp. In the moral context, this concerns a basic separation of subjective or worldly incentives from the search for

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<sup>636</sup> Barry Stocker, *Derrida on Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 32.

<sup>637</sup> Stocker, *Deconstruction*, pp. 171-172.

truth and the constitution of the truth. The will to truth denotes an effort to attain that which is true in itself, a perfect objective ideal.

From the above analysis, we can see that acknowledgement of the transcendental, as an origin and absolute divorced from the spatially and temporally individuate items of the world, grants rationalism the ability to better account for the contradictory nature of the structure of signification. More important is the rationalist's access to the conceptual resources needed to see that without that structure there will be no knowledge at all; and hence also the ability to see the relation of reason to knowledge and the status of knowledge itself. In short, the rationalist will be able to comprehend that knowledge is attained on the basis of an essentially contradictory structure, making use of a pure ideal, on the one hand, as well as a matrix of empirical items, on the other, that is to say, various differences that are realised in temporal and spatial terms.

We may observe also that the Euthyphro dilemma replicates the basic division of incommensurable qualities within ethics and epistemology. The task is to see if this contradiction can in some way be resolved, if not completely, then at least on some level. We have already seen that Derrida deems the contradictory nature to the structure of knowledge and meaning to be essential. But the question is to what extent and in what manner precisely this intrinsic disjunction exists. Perhaps at some level and in some form a resolution is possible to offer a means of consolidation between the different schools of ethical and theological-ethical thought. To that end, we shall turn to look again at the thought of al-Māturīdī.

## **6.2 The Source of Moral Obligation in al-Māturīdī**

Though we may know what is good and bad, harmful and beneficial, is there any imperative demanding that we seek the former in each case and avoid the latter? For al-Māturīdī notes that humans can recognise what is moral and what is immoral in various ways but the question of source of the moral imperative is something else. Unless there is an obligation to be moral, it appears that there is a choice in matter that exists outside of morality, though it appears at the same time the most crucial part. This is precisely the problem that Kant saw in the naturalistic account of morality given by David Hume, which we shall discuss below. The additional category needed here are those of right and wrong — each of these includes the idea of a moral imperative, unlike good and

bad, harmful and beneficial. In different terms, the question is whether reason simply provides prudence or deontological recognition of things that are good. This is precisely a metaethical question.

Does al-Māturīdī possess such a conception of reason? In answer to this issue he provides some comments, for there is certainly a hierarchy in his conception of the values that make up morality. Of course, there are the material goods of this life, which give rise to pleasure, joy and other positive traits. As we have seen, al-Māturīdī does not casually disparage or dismiss the sensory pleasures that are available to humankind, fully embracing them as a part of what is good for human survival. Their appraisal in these moral terms is divorced from their physical attributes, and rather when assessed by the intellect within a specific context. Nevertheless, as argued in the previous chapter, these material goods are learnt of by the senses and recognised as good by reason because of the various effects they have on the physical condition of the human. Finally the material goods of the world are perhaps the clearest objects by which we may imagine the bliss of heaven through analogy. This gives them a unique status. For in essence, the same type of good exists in the hereafter, though unimaginably greater in quality and duration. But nevertheless, just as seeking goods in this life is not constitutive of right or wrong neither is that of those goods in the hereafter. That would rather be a prudential decision, and there is more to morality than self-interest. In short, this type of goodness alone is not and cannot be the source of moral obligation. The problem is that even to know what is beneficial and what is harmful, as what is good and what is bad, does not tell us what is right. And it is from the concept of right and wrong that moral obligation arises.

The concept of right is expressed in various forms by al-Māturīdī. Two things are evident. Firstly, al-Māturīdī does in fact recognise that for the constitution of certain normatively appraisable actions there must be a divine command, specifically.<sup>638</sup> This of course is perhaps the most obvious source for a moral imperative. God is worshipped due to His essence, so one cannot say ‘what has He done for me that I should obey Him?’ Because revelation also contains the specific forms of worship that God demands and invites humanity to perform, it is also constitutive of the means to achieving a close

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<sup>638</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah*, VI, p. 410.

relation to God and deeper form of love towards Him. These specific acts are cannot be known by humanity independently of revelation; this is exclusively the domain of revelation.<sup>639</sup> We know, for example, that al-Māturīdī does not consider the findings of reason as constitutive of the trial or examination in this world that pertains to the hereafter. What is known as *ḥalāl* or *ḥarām* in view of God’s punishment and reward, therefore, is classed in this way solely on the authority of God.<sup>640</sup> Their existence, of course, is an act of divine wisdom, and thus classifiable as an act of justice and reason, but human reason is unable to achieve knowledge of them independently except within the terms laid out revelation. This is the case given that heaven is God’s creation and it is His decision in what terms He shall reward or punish someone, be it in this life or the next. Thus, the scope of the divine command uniquely concerns what brings divine reward and punishment, and these consequences are bestowed directly within the framework of divine action.

Whatever heaven and hell contain, they do so due to God’s will and people will meet them depending on obedience or disobedience to His commands and prohibitions. In this sense, al-Māturīdī’s ideas of good and bad appear utilitarian in the sense that they emphasis the seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain. But he says that the things of this world are a sign of the rewards and punishments in the next. For contra the rationalist ethics of Kant, al-Māturīdī does not include knowledge of an afterlife within the type of information that reason is supposed to be capable of reaching independently of revelation.<sup>641</sup> Revelation is responsible for informing humankind of what is at stake in morally appraisable behaviour. The authority of punishment and reward in the hereafter is based upon an aspect of wisdom that is not independently available to human beings. Only via divine commands and revelation therefore is such authority brought about. That is to say, heaven and hell are known via revelation and therefore, in the most direct way, people are judged in regard to their response to the divine message. Thus revelation is also a source of moral knowledge that pertains not just to the morality available to reason but more specifically that which pertains to the next life. It is

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<sup>639</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, IV, p. 112; Alper, *Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p.196-98; Evkuran “Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi,” p.122.

<sup>640</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, IV, p. 293.

<sup>641</sup> Op. cit., Evkuran, “Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi,” p. 117.

included as one of the three sources of knowledge in Kitāb al-Tawhīd, and there is nothing in this sense that can replace it.

Accordingly, the question arises whether or not al-Māturīdī regarded a similar command or imperative to actually exist outside the context of revelation, that is to say, whether a normative source of obligation exists outside the theologically based aspects of morality. Just because revelation contains moral imperatives, does not mean that obligation is constituted by revelation alone nor does not necessarily mean that reason has no such authority; reasons recognition of what is permitted and forbidden suggests otherwise. In the first place, al-Māturīdī explicitly identifies the intellect as the epistemological means to recognising what is good and bad, harmful and beneficial, right and wrong. In the second place, and as noted before, al-Māturīdī says, on the one hand, reason comprehends the permitted (*ḥalāl*) and the forbidden (*ḥarām*).<sup>642</sup> While, on the other hand, he states that these are known and declared also by revelation.<sup>643</sup> Thus, permissibility and prohibition exist on the basis of reason alone, for otherwise reason would not be able to comprehend them.<sup>644</sup> But none of this provides us with a means to shift from the recognition of morality, to an obligation to be moral. Are we then to hold that these are all recognised without a normative value regarding their performance? To the contrary, Evkuran states that for al-Māturīdī our ability to recognise moral values gives people a basic form of moral responsibility.<sup>645</sup> This essentially means that there is a source of obligation outside a theological context. And, it is this that makes them moral beings.

Thus, we may point out that divine command cannot be the first form of authority, even if God is the ultimate authority, since for al-Māturīdī it is necessary to believe in God and do good works for Him *before* revelation arrives, that is to say, before divine commands are heard. As Evkuran notes, there are three frequently cited examples al-Māturīdī uses in this regard: thankfulness to God, the beauty of justice and the ugliness of oppression.<sup>646</sup> Even more basic, however, is belief in Tawhīd, which, indeed, al-

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<sup>642</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, V, p. 203.

<sup>643</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt ahl al-Sunna*, IV, p. 292.

<sup>644</sup> Alper, *Akul-Vahiy İlişkisi*, p. 84.

<sup>645</sup> Evkuran, "Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi," p. 122, pp. 128-129.

<sup>646</sup> Evkuran, "Ahlâkın Temellendirilmesi," p. 129.



Māturīdī holds as the necessary condition for morality as a whole. The picture is rather complicated, however, because this is only to put matters within firmly the human perspective. Metaphysically, things change; with God there was wisdom and no rational duty or standard next to Him. The basis for ethics then is at its most basic God's wisdom, and thus a specific virtue, which laws and structures merely articulate or regularise in some way.

We might recall here that al-Māturīdī stands between two radically different positions. The Mu'tazilah claim revelation is the sanction of morality, which is determined by reason, while the Ash'ariyah view revealed religion as morality itself. Al-Māturīdī holds the view that revelation completes morality; it adds components unavailable to reason. At one level, he is eminently closer to the Mu'tazilah and at another to the Ash'ariyah. The Mu'tazilah hold the judgements of reason independently valid and al-Māturīdī accepts this in so far as he accepts that reason identifies what is right and wrong, good and bad and virtuous, but he rejects it, in agreement with the Ash'ari view, in the sense that reason itself is part of creation and its laws are determined by God. Now, for al-Māturīdī, reason allows us to understand the world; it is our way of accessing reality and inferring its meaning. This gives it a unique ability, but with this ability also comes humankind's first responsibility, and this is to know their Lord and Creator. Thus, the first of moral obligation of human kind is epistemological, and is carried out by rational operations, such as reflection and deduction.

What is more, according to al-Māturīdī, Tawhīd is good in itself. We do not look for its consequences to judge its moral value. There are other examples of things that al-Māturīdī recognises as good-in-themselves, but Tawhīd is unique as the basic condition to being a moral person. Crucial here to it being good-in-itself is the fact that we are not meant to believe in and worship God simply to gain entrance into heaven and avoid hell. This places utilitarian considerations to one side. Rather Tawhīd is invoked as an instance of justice, and thus we find that al-Māturīdī's ethical framework provides the concept of moral obligation outside the context of revelation, notwithstanding the theological nature of the subject in question.

With Tawhīd, we have a doctrine that holds objective truth in so far as al-Māturīdī and monotheism more generally is concerned. The nature of the imperative is, for sure,

dependent on the truth of the doctrine, and also as a right and just response to divine existence. It is therefore also dependent on the more general and epistemological obligation to accept the truth as something valuable in itself. (The only reason why belief in the truth could possibly become bad is due to some extrinsic reason, and therefore does not affect its own intrinsic moral status.) Thus, we see that moral obligation extends not just to practice in al-Māturīdī's ethical scheme but also to belief.

Now, it may be objected that this obligation is only an epistemological norm rather than a moral one. For it is one thing to say that we are obligated to believe the truth and another to say there is a moral truth that we are obligated to follow. But that is not really the issue here. Al-Māturīdī can happily accept this distinction, while simply extending the boundaries of what is moral into the epistemological realm, with continued recognition of the existence of various objective moral truths that humanity can know and act in accordance with. On this distinction, the existence of God is a truth the recognition of which is moral. In this light we may read the doctrine that to believe is an *act* of the heart. This arguably places religious faith among the same list of actions we normally regard as moral ones. In fact, al-Māturīdī describes faith as specific part of worship (*al-khas min al-'ibādāt*),<sup>647</sup> which belongs only to those who have an intellect.<sup>648</sup> In this way, the distinction between epistemological and moral conduct is blurred somewhat within al-Māturīdī's conceptual framework.

In this way, an epistemological act is the first and most basic moral act. As Özcan notes, humanity alone comes to know what the meaning and reality of things are.<sup>649</sup> Now, for al-Māturīdī to call this a duty of the heart begs the question: duty to whom or what? The simple answer would be to God, and yet the duty is incumbent on us before we know that He exists. Thus, it seems, this is initially a duty towards ourselves as rational beings, based on the obligation to know and recognise the basic truth behind existence. In this light, the essential purpose of the human is fundamentally philosophical, as expressed in Socrates oft-quoted and uncompromising dictum: The unexamined life is not worth living. For serious consequences are dependent on the outcome of this task,

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<sup>647</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 477.

<sup>648</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 476.

<sup>649</sup> Özcan, *Bilgi Problemi*, p. 107.

by which means alone humankind is able to respond appropriately to God and pursue goodness.<sup>650</sup> Without knowing that life has a purpose, and what the purpose of humankind is specifically, the world takes on a very different meaning. But more importantly, for al-Māturīdī, it is a meaning based on denial or simple neglect of the faculty of reason and the truths it makes available.

By the same token, every value that reason manages to grasp is also incumbent upon us to practice and believe. Most will be incumbent in terms of another end, as per the definition of things that are good-for-another.

Revelation includes much of what reason tells us and the obligation to perform the actions in question, therefore, is doubly reinforced. This is important especially since reason can err, and that is when the role of revelation becomes more prominent. We may discuss the wisdom behind various rulings derived from revelation, but there may be many, and the ruling might be based on one or several. We may not be able to discover what precisely the truth of the matter is. And yet, what is revealed is valid not arbitrarily, for we can discern the positive value of the moral practices and beliefs that are contained in revelation. And in those matters that we cannot, we still know the source is God, the most wise.

This is necessary, for though divine wisdom is the basic concept in al-Māturīdī's ethical framework, it remains shrouded in mystery. We have access to its traces and effects, but cannot predict exactly what these effects will be. For example, note al-Māturīdī's equivocal stance on the creation of the universe. The world has purpose; that it has purpose indicates the existence of a wise Creator, nevertheless creation may have been given a different form completely. So though reason grants us the means to comprehend the world, precisely because the world is structured by rational principles, the fact remains that much of the world remains entirely arbitrary and filled inherently with anomalous and irregular events that add to its awe-inspiring nature and beauty. Al-Māturīdī's concept of wisdom makes space for this fact by its inclusion of a teleological aspect which can be applied to nature. This will cover those things that our faculty of reason cannot comprehend or be applied to. The ambiguousness of divine wisdom is a

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<sup>650</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 38a5-6.

crucial point, for it indicates al-Māturīdī's stance that God is completely morally sovereign. Nevertheless, reason sees the traces of wisdom in the world. The upshot is that what knowledge we do have of the divine virtues is, at least in part, accessed by reason, and conversely, reason is, at the very least, our most prominent means of understanding morality and the most trusted source for the resolution of moral questions.

Another important observation that must be made is that following religious belief, or even before it, there appears to be another source of obligation for al-Māturīdī. As noted in Chapter Five, he says that we were created responsible (*mukallaf*) for our actions because of our ability to discern good from bad, and God made the good beautiful to the intellect and the bad ugly.<sup>651</sup> Now the question is whether this ability is a sufficient or necessary condition for morality. Given that we must believe in God and given that there is implicit in this the obligation to consider the design and constitution of creation, the goodness or correctness of these two acts is also implicit, at least for al-Māturīdī. We have also discussed whether monotheistic belief is a necessary condition for moral behaviour, and found that al-Māturīdī considers this to be so. Nevertheless, if we have found also that the mere ability to discern good and bad places an obligation on us, then morality follows also from this fact alone; except that (for al-Māturīdī) it does not result in behaviours that are appraisable as being moral due to the deficiency in religious belief. In any case, it is clear that a basic moral accountability is placed on the human being on the basis of reason's moral perception alone.

We have here tied obligation to epistemological considerations, but of course whether we can generalise from this example is questionable. More specifically, simply knowing what is good and bad, and being obliged to practice good and bad are separate things. Thus the move from one to the other must be justified. In terms of more general moral applicability is al-Māturīdī's statements that God made the good beautiful and the bad ugly, and also, the former praiseworthy and the latter reprehensible.<sup>652</sup> Strictly speaking, we do not get obligation out of what is beautiful, but what is beauty encourages practice and ugliness encourages aversion. On this subjective basis, therefore, we find, if not

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<sup>651</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 167, p. 301.

<sup>652</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 167, p. 301.

obligation, then the motivation to be moral. Thus, with the objective moral judgments of reason, and the motivations to act according to those judgements, we are held accountable for being moral in this sense too.

So far we have mentioned the obligation bestowed upon us by revelation and rational norms. We may summarise what we have said so far like this: Reason recognises what is good and along with this discerns certain obligations. The central examples in this regard are the morality of Tawhīd and the immorality of polytheism.<sup>653</sup> Our obligation to worship God is constituted by this and the revelation of commandments and prohibitions tells humankind how to thank God for His blessings.<sup>654</sup> Here, al-Māturīdī points to the lordship of God (rubūbiyya), His creation and direction of everything that exists, as placing the obligation on humanity to know Him, His rights over us, His commands, practice the requirements of worship, obedience and respect and prepare to answer for every action one performs.<sup>655</sup> In addition to being required by reason (*lāzim fī al-'aql*), this obligation is also pre-eternal (*al-azal*).<sup>656</sup> This is part of al-Māturīdī's comments on the names of God. For example, in reference to Qur'ānic verses that mention the name Creator and attribute Mercy, al-Māturīdī states that were we only to attribute these titles to God on the basis of created states and events, then our worship of God would have been contingent. However, God was from pre-eternity the possessor of these titles, and that our obligation to worship Him was pre-existent and necessary.<sup>657</sup> As for religious practices specifically, such as prayer and fasting, the source of obligation comes from God.<sup>658</sup> Indeed, there is simply no way for reason to gain such religious knowledge. Rather, revelation is the sole source for this knowledge and the authority behind it.<sup>659</sup> But in certain areas, revelation acts as a confirmatory source for the findings of reason. Among these again is the foundation of Islam, namely, Tawhīd.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, V, p. 410.

<sup>654</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 166.

<sup>655</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 203.

<sup>656</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 118.

<sup>657</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 116.

<sup>658</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 293.

<sup>659</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, IV, p. 112.

<sup>660</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, p. 266.

To this two-fold scheme we nonetheless, add a third element, which is fairly prominent, and key to gaining a comprehensive picture of al-Māturīdī's metaethical framework. Justice and truth are the words that may usefully class correct religious belief. And yet the accomplishment of belief in Tawhīd cannot be properly described as a mere intellectual event. Certainly, al-Māturīdī describes it in theological terms as a great blessing, and this is indeed an important aspect to it. But more than that, just as the obligation to believe in Tawhīd exists before revelation, so too is the obligation to worship God having grasped it, since belief in Tawhīd makes the performance of good deeds necessary.<sup>661</sup> More precisely, the existence of God is a basic constituent of the need for moral behaviour. His very existence and that of human beings establishes a relation, between, in the first place, a Creator and created, a Bestower and bestowee, and with the addition of revelation, a Guider and guided. The missing link appears because this obligation would not be met without a specific type of motivational force or guide before the revelation of divine commands. Specifically, al-Māturīdī invokes and the concept of gratitude to explain the response that is appropriate for humanity to have towards God.<sup>662</sup> He does not go into the details of the aspects of this third dimension, but al-Māturīdī writes that moral obligation comes automatically from the realisation that there is a wise Creator who shares in infinitely greater degrees the rational aspect of human nature and nothing of their worldly weaknesses. From this realisation the individual at once comprehends that along with the rational constitution of the universe there is a rational moral order in which humanity is implicated, as the creation of opposites in nature along with human needs and desires, produces areas of competition and trial set up by God. Success amounts to managing these needs and desires for the continued existence of humanity. And along with this comes the requirement to be grateful in having been created and allowed the means to continue ones existence and derive happiness from the things God has created to sustain life.<sup>663</sup>

It appears that al-Māturīdī did not conceive of the possibility of one reaching a deist conclusion, where the events of the universe would take place independently of God's action. But even if such a conclusion were reached, it is arguable that gratitude for the

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<sup>661</sup> Şekeroğlu, *Maturidi'de Ahlak*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>662</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 342.

<sup>663</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 249.

act of original creating the world with the result provisions and blessings would still result. Elsewhere al-Māturīdī cites a direct relation between virtuous action and the acknowledgement of God's wisdom and grace towards humanity.<sup>664</sup> It is also evident, as in line with Islamic teaching generally, that no matter what hardships and pains one faces in this world of trial, al-Māturīdī held that gratefulness is the correct response to God the Creator of every event. Important in this regard is perhaps the fact that for al-Māturīdī, this obligation is not constituted by a mere emotional response. He puts it simply when he says that thanking God for the blessings He has given humankind is a requirement of reason (haqq al-qawl fī al-'uqūl).<sup>665</sup> Given al-Māturīdī's stress on the essentiality of gratitude, this emotional response appears to be the psychological manifestation of a rational event.

The identification of gratitude in particular has important significance within the scheme of Islamic religious ethics. It shows a difference between motivations that may emerge after revelation compared to those that may emerge before. The highest relationship with God is based on love, whereby one acts primarily out of their devotion to God without much regard for heavenly recompense. This type of fervour in worship gained an established place within Islamic theological thought and tradition, not least because of the example set by early Muslims, most prominently Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya al-Qaysiyya (d. 801).<sup>666</sup> The emotions are possible once the believer sees that everything that happens in the world, and all the blessings and hardships, arise by God's will, since there will be fear of pain and sadness, hope for pleasure and happiness, and finally, appreciation for what God has given and awe of His majesty. In this light, gratitude with its particular causes as described by al-Māturīdī comes closest to the highest form of devotion one can have towards God, as at least a foundation for more fervent devotion. What is more, al-Māturīdī identifies it as the natural and primordial type of response amongst all others.

Thus, while knowledge of the existence of morality is known through knowledge of God's existence, the concept of gratitude adds another layer to this. Belief in the

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<sup>664</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 468.

<sup>665</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 166, p. 342.

<sup>666</sup> Op cit., M. Smith, *Rabi'a The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

existence of a deity is often associated with a certain amount of practical obligations, and al-Māturīdī makes this clear by reference to our connection to the rest of creation and our being a part of something that displays purpose, wisdom and beauty. In effect, this emotion is a locus of motivational force in each human to worship God as He demands, because of His various positive superlative qualities and transcendence of any fault, and more specifically because of our indebtedness for the provision of life, freedom of the will, the blessings of reason, faith and religious and moral guidance to name just a prominent few.

One may argue in reply that this is not a proper or categorical obligation, since if one simply does not feel gratefulness, then the obligation to respond to God in the moral way will not apply. The first immediate answer to this is merely that to regard it as a hypothetical or contingent obligation runs contrary to the psychology that al-Māturīdī's frequent references to the natural disposition of human beings set out. Only those whose natural state is in some way inhibited will not develop the correct emotional response upon reflection of the world; and the divine Being Whose wisdom it reflects.

But even this is to miss the point somewhat. A second and more accurate answer is that God is objectively worthy of worship regardless of how we feel subjectively. But the emotion and the logic behind the emotion cannot be easily separated; the emotion simply would not exist without the relevant set of structural elements, including among other things basic ideas of equity and justice in the context of a relationship between two separate and moral beings. For the origin of the obligation reflects an I and Thou encounter, to use Martin Babers words. Moreover, that the particular dynamic this produces should result in this specific emotion is itself dependent on another set of factors, which, though contingent, is the only emotion that will result *mutatis mutandis* in all close possible worlds. That is to say, something must be seriously askew in human psychology if the same set of elements resulted simply in the emotion of jealousy, pride, euphoria, or sadness, for example. Thus the obligation remains profoundly rational and subjectively binding.

### **6.3 A Solution to the Euthyphro Dilemma and the Is-Ought Gap**

As noted above, the Euthyphro dilemma parallels the epistemological divide in ethics, and in al-Māturīdī's conception of divine wisdom, there are two sets of problems to



solve. First, there are the problems associated with the two horns of the Euthyphro Dilemma, theological problems of independence and metaphysical curtailment, on the one hand, and the ethical problems on the other, such as those of arbitrariness and emptiness. Second there is the opposition between consequentialist and deontological views on the foundation of morality, and these opposed concepts we found together subsumed by al-Māturīdī under the single concept of divine wisdom.

The first horn of the dilemma is relatively easy to solve. Al-Māturīdī does this by the removal of the pre-eternal transcendental realm of reason-based morality, as explained neatly by Rudolph, and its replacement with reason as a feature of God's creation. This makes all validity reason has based on God's creation, which directly refutes the metaphysical curtailment problem by rejecting reason any privileged status. At the same time, it also safely protects His divine sovereignty and authority by making the judgments of reason dependent on God's creation.

Al-Māturīdī's framework also manages to parry the other thorn of the dilemma, composed of arbitrariness, emptiness, modal vulnerability, and inaccessibility. Each of these problems are solved because though only a creation of God, reason is also the medium of God's commands, furnishing them within a system of meaning. This overcomes the emptiness problem, since the reference of morality is the judgements of reason itself, and though it is true that 'God is whatever He says is moral', whatever He says conforms to a certain standard, that is to say, the standards perceived by reason. As may be seen, this solves easily the problems of modal vulnerability and inaccessibility. In regards to the problem of inaccessibility, the sceptical aspect of theocentrism, which disregards our most basic moral intuitions, is replaced with a framework that is rationally informed and offers a means of confirmation and explanation of those intuitions. In regard to modal vulnerability, we may first recall that the commands of God are of two types. The first are those that confirm and complement the findings of reason; the second are those that refer to the specifics of religion. By confirming the ethical values established on a rational basis, neither morality nor the first set of divine commands will suffer from modal vulnerability. The second, of course, does not face the problem, for reason has little means of determining what the specifics of religious

worship should be, except perhaps in a negative sense by determining that those specifics do not fundamentally clash with morality.

Finally, the arbitrariness problem is also relatively easily solved. We noted above that both God's commands and any foundational rational principle are both equally open to the charge of arbitrariness, as noted by Alston. So the mere reference to a rational system does not overcome the problem, but what a rational system does do, however, is provide a framework to explain the reasons behind any moral claim as to its particular contents, and this the divine command theory does not do. Nevertheless, the position of the foundation principle or principles remains in a position similar to any divine command in that its contents cannot be explained by reference to anything before it. It is foundational precisely because it depends on nothing else. But as we noted before, at this level, the charge of arbitrariness becomes rather weak, for it points not to a particular contextual deficiency but the mere requirement for a prior basis in general. Indeed, this supposed requirement is itself based on a supposition and so the arbitrariness problem itself subject to the arbitrariness it aims to attack. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the charge does hold. We noted before in Chapter Two what we named the deconstructive critique, which refers to the explanation of morality shifting to metaphysical or natural explanations in the absence of a rational principle within the system to explain the system. This regards the existence of morality, and God is the creator of the moral system, so if one asks for the ultimate foundation or centre of morality, with the framework of al-Māturīdī's thought, one will have to point to God as the Creator and the Most-Wise.

The second set of problems is a little more difficult: the opposition between consequentialist and deontological views on the foundation of morality. We have seen in Chapter Four how al-Māturīdī combines both teleological and deontological aspects in his concept of divine wisdom. Specifically, wisdom is defined in two ways by al-Māturīdī. The first is 'hitting the point' (*isāba*), which means doing the right things in order to reach an intended target. The second is: 'setting each thing in its proper place' (*wad'u kulli shayin maudi'anhu*), which means doing what is right and just.<sup>667</sup> Rudolph

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<sup>667</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 102. This is the standard meaning given to "to do right" according to the Ash'ariyyah also, see, Frank, "Moral Obligation," p. 207.

cites the latter as ‘the focus of the whole concept’.<sup>668</sup> However, it is the combination that interests us the most here. We also noted above that the combination seems unexplained and superficial, with both notions simply placed side by side under the name of wisdom, and in so far as can be found in al-Māturīdī’s writings, the meaning of wisdom is itself the combination of these two concepts. Thus, the marriage of the two concepts must be made without any addition.

In Chapter Three we tentatively sought an answer through asking what rights the objects are due and what these rights are based on, but at that stage had not yet set out al-Māturīdī’s theological conception of reasons creation to ground our answer. Now, we know that reason is created by God, and so too, therefore, are the rights that pertain to objects. This is the deontological aspect of wisdom. But what in God’s creation explains these rights? Here we may recall al-Māturīdī’s statement that part of wisdom is the creation of every individual thing in a way and station appropriate to its essence.<sup>669</sup> This refers us now to the teleological-consequentialist aspect of al-Māturīdī’s definition of wisdom. The character of the objects determines that they are given a specific situation in reality because of the character or arrangement of reality also. As we have discussed previously in the first section of this chapter, without a thing of moral value, rationality will lack the ability to form a moral system. Yet, if we say there is a goal to God’s commands, this does not save them from being arbitrary in ethical or rational terms, as the goal must be moral or rational in order for this to happen. And how can we call the goal or purpose good without first knowing what is of value? The problem also goes deeper, since reason cannot provide a value by itself; we must rely on teleology itself to provide it, which means that the very thing in need of moral content now must also be its source. Yet this is where the sovereignty and wisdom of God is important in our explanation. God is the creator of reason and all the laws that follow; He is also the Creator of the specific character of cosmos, and no one but He can decide how this will be, for He is the eternal and thus the ultimate cause of all things.

The fact that there is no other explanation than the decision of God for the specific character and contents of the universe is reflected by the addition of God’s grace

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<sup>668</sup> Rudolph, “God’s Wisdom,” pp. 52-53.

<sup>669</sup> Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 395.

alongside the concept of justice in the conception of divine wisdom offered by al-Māturīdī. While justice, indeed, as explicable within the framework of rational laws and principles denotes a type of necessary relation between events and deserts, graciousness is purely arbitrary and only explainable by direct relation to a virtue of God rather than rationality. It is bestowed without necessity, and to whomsoever God pleases.<sup>670</sup> The same is the case with the particular contents and design of the cosmos; these are simply not explainable on any rational principle. And yet it is by the use of reason that the purposefulness the world displays is recognised. Indeed, on this basis humans reach correct religious faith. This means that some relation between wisdom and reason exists despite the former's inclusion of rationally unascertainable aspects. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that rational principles underlie the fundamentals of the world's structure, if not its more particular contents, for if this were not the case, then the world would be profoundly and comprehensively mysterious. Thus wisdom provides the substantive and teleological aspects of the world for which reason is but a structure or grammar. In this sense then, since reason recognises purposefulness and also the beauty of justice or righteousness, it closely parallels wisdom, but it does so only at the level of comprehension and lacks the ability to produce it.

Indeed, morality always only makes sense in terms of some end; it cannot be a mere formal structure, but must envelope aspects of the natural world and concrete circumstance along with a certain value theory. This is the only way morality can make sense, that is to say, there must be a value around which morality is based. Here, al-Māturīdī cites three types of end, one is intellectual and consists in attainment of the truth, another is material and is constituted by achievement of pleasure and avoidance of pain and the other is aretaic and concerns the virtues. How does this categorisation help us reconcile the teleological and deontological aspects of wisdom? We noted before that derivation of a moral obligation pertains closely to the is-ought gap we mentioned in previous chapters. We also noted that there were three ways the gap could be bridged: the derivation of a normative claim from some non-normative source; an unconditional *sui generis* form of morality within a secular and mundane world; the saturation of every aspect of creation with moral significance.

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<sup>670</sup> Al-Maturidi, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, p. 193.

This is the most basic problem of all. We saw how both Kant and Mill appear to fail to run up against the gap. The gap is strictly speaking a case of logical incoherence. Just like one cannot deduce conclusions of value from statements about facts (or vice versa), one cannot deduce conclusions about milk from statements that are not about milk. The impossibility, therefore, to solve the gap is simply a logical impossibility. And this then rules out the first of the resolutions listed above. And yet it is important to note that the existence of meaning itself depends upon an arbitrary privileging of one term over another, to make it the centre or basis of analysis. This then is a subjective, though necessary event. It is ultimately a normative act that cannot be justified by any fact. The epistemological disjunction at the heart of meaning and signification that we saw highlighted in detail by Derrida shows that meaning does not arise or rather is not comprehended simply from the signified object or event itself, yet at the same time, the assumption of an essential meaning is required in order to create the differences and deferral necessary for meaning to arise.

In this regard, the rationalist believes that goodness is expressed directly by the thing itself while the empiricist leaves the moral significance of events to their consequences or larger context. Al-Māturīdī makes use of both types. The logocentric act of reason allows us to produce meaning while the production of all meaning depends on the differences and deferrals provided by the empirical conditions of time and space. Though the act of reason is necessary, it is also subjective, as Derrida has shown that all the hierarchies can be overturned on the basis of the very grounds they are founded.

Now, both rationalist and empiricist can claim that a state that has goodness in itself exists. For example, the rationalist may say justice and the empiricist may say happiness, respectively basing these on reason and experience. Hence we have four categories of meaning, with good-in-itself and conditional good separately for both rationalist and empiricist. The basic of the two is the former, as what specifically is conditionally good will depend on what is good-in-itself. Derrida's main concern is on the things that are considered intrinsically good. As we saw in Chapter Two, such hierarchical relations are undermined by the revelation that the logocentric ideas used to ground them cannot be sustained. The fundamental alternation between intrinsic and extrinsic, self and other, exists in all categories of objects, meaning that nothing is only

intrinsically or extrinsically good or bad in so far as the structure of human thought provides comprehension at the most basic level.

Al-Māturīdī's combination or rather conjunction of both intrinsic and extrinsic categories together is indicative of his acquiescent epistemology. Nevertheless, we see a privileged place for the findings of reason because of the objective status they have. On the one hand, therefore, al-Māturīdī's use of both empirical and rational goods clears him at a certain level of showing the bias that Derrida points to, while on the other hand, his identification of intrinsic goods specifically, and elevation of reason seems to make him subject to the deconstructive critique. However, Derrida himself must use reason to reveal his findings; his conclusions arise from a rationalist method of inquiry that reveals the importance of the empirical conditions of reality to the production of meaning. Secondly, he admits that the production of meaning is essentially dependent on the logocentric operations of reason. Thus, it does not seem that al-Māturīdī can ultimately be made subject to the deconstructive critique in a way that Derrida himself cannot.

This corresponds to the basic will to truth and status of truth as good-in-itself that even Derrida's work presupposes. Correspondingly, the first and foremost duty al-Māturīdī identifies as incumbent on humanity is to find the truth. Indeed, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* begins with an epistemological discussion that is introduced by observations asserting an obligation to know religion on the basis of evidence — this obligation arrives before revelation. Thus the truth is one end. And, importantly, it pertains closely to the deontological aspect of wisdom in its character, because what is right and what is proper is belief in Tawhīd, which al-Māturīdī holds as the necessary condition for morality as a whole.

Thus, the first moral obligation of human kind is epistemological; seeking knowledge is the duty of humanity even before they know of God's existence. Now we must ask, in reference to the ought-is gap where does this obligation come from? The obligation comes from the saturation of all creation with moral significance – the third of the three solutions of dealing with the ought-is gap. Because the cosmos as a whole and in various particulars is indicative of God's existence and signs of His wisdom, knowledge

becomes incumbent upon humankind as it leads them to religious faith and also moral knowledge.

Now our obligation to know these is based on the fact that we are rational beings and made for a particular purpose. So ultimately the obligation derives from God's plan and design, but immediately before that, from the human perspective, it arises from our rational capacity and inclinations, that come already geared for the comprehension and discovery of truth. We should note, then, that this duty to know combines the deontological and teleological-consequentialist aspects of wisdom and thus also signals a reconciliation of ideal and concrete and the empirical and rational division between incommensurables present in ethics and epistemology. For the obligation to know and examine is based on our teleological nature, the purpose for which humans were created — which is to worship God — and assumes first a basic duty to know of His existence. In al-Māturīdī's thought, this of course is incumbent on the human even before revelation, and assumes then also the more general duty to seek the truth, or rather, the objective morality of truth itself as something good-in-itself.

On the other hand, al-Māturīdī's statement that the material world allows humanity to conceive of right and wrong, good and bad, and reach knowledge of a Creator appears to marry empirical conditions with rational inference. The question therefore, is whether al-Māturīdī has managed to identify the moral entities accurately, and in this regard deconstruction has no positive contribution to make, on the contrary it deconstructs such identifications. Since the appearance of any moral system will involve some logocentric designation, then unless we abandon morality we will have to look at some other source than these rationalist considerations.

What, then, are these considerations? For al-Māturīdī, reason allows us to understand the world; it is our way of accessing reality and inferring its meaning. This presupposes that we should do what our nature seems to demand. But what is this presupposition based on? There will always be a presupposition in morality until we reach that final principle or divine command that can only face the weak charge of super-arbitrariness, which need not concern us, while God is the one who creates this purpose in us, making Him the ultimate source of all morality via a principle to know manifested in our nature. Only in secondary terms do the other ends that al-Māturīdī cites come into the picture,

and these are not subject to the problem of arbitrariness. These are the attainment of pleasure and avoidance of pain and aretaic principles along with practice and conduct in accord with divine commands.

#### **6.4 Chapter Conclusion**

Epistemological divide we see in theological-ethics both Western and Islamic parallels one in ethics between Kant and Hume in particular, and deontology and utilitarianism more generally.

A main motivation behind Kant's ethics is the preservation of the objective status of morality, but in order to do this, he draws an unbridgeable division between the physical and metaphysical realms. While the problem for Kant was bringing morality to the world, the problem for the utilitarian is to make the contents of the world morally appraisable. This was where Mill's proof appears to fail so abysmally. Whereas in Kant's theory we saw a deep division between the ends or morality and the pursuit of happiness, which Kant rather clumsily tries to overcome in the attempt to find a place for both in his ethical thought.

Derrida's work shows that in fact, the opposition is basic to thought itself and impossible to bridge. So is a resolution to be achieved? The 'rational' part to this dual-aspect construction concerns the basic will to truth, which finds that comprehension and meaning relies on what is not immediate or identical to be achieved. No ultimate synthesis appears possible between the empirical and rationalist schools, be they theocentric or ratiocentric, utilitarian or deontological.

In al-Māturīdī's system 'utilitarian' considerations take a back seat to the evaluations that are achieved purely on the basis of reason. In this context also we see reason to be behind the comprehension of moral obligation specifically. While revelation brings with it obligations directly from God concern duties and rights in worship, the obligations brought about by reason stem largely from a basic will to truth, meaning that for al-Māturīdī knowing and acknowledging the truth constitutes a general moral duty to humanity. Further to this is also the thankfulness required to the one that bestows blessings, which it appears al-Māturīdī conceived as a basic duty humans are aware of, again independently of revelation, and seems to be based on a combination of rational



and affective considerations. Namely, the things considered good based on the desires of humans, and the proper response based on reason.

On the one hand there is no standard next to God, and divine wisdom is the ultimate source of morality, and the other hand a duty to know and accept God's existence is the first and most basic moral obligation — thus al-Māturīdī reflects aspects in between the Mu'tazilah and Ash'arī schools on theological-ethics.

The obligation for us to know God we have found lies in a general obligation to accept the truth, and this ties the moral and epistemological together. So while we gain knowledge of God from revelation with the specifics of how to worship Him, reason tells us beforehand of his existence and grants us an obligation to accept it. What is more, because the good is beautiful and the bad is ugly, we are motivated also to act according to what reason finds to be good and bad. This last point relates to a third. In addition to reason and revelation, is the third one of gratitude, where there is an inherently acquired principle of thanking the Bestower. With this third element we see another implicit concern with the development of character, so that one forms a proper relationship with God, with the inclusion of what appears the proper emotional-rational response.

We saw also how al-Māturīdī is able to relatively easily avoid becoming snagged on both the horns of the Euthyphro dilemma. His basic theocentric position allows him to deal with the theological problems that would normally arise for a ratiocentric theological-ethics. On the other hand, his endorsement of reason as being objective, in so far as it pertains and can extend to the contents of this world, allows him also to avoid the problems of ethics associated with theocentric theories. Essentially, in this regard, though the findings of reason are objective, they are also contingent upon the creation of the world, and do not extend to some metaphysical realm. This leaves us with a world that is the product of God's sovereign decision, and so ultimately arbitrary, but not random or capricious. By this means we can see that the oppositions constitutive of morality are dependent on the design of the world; good and bad are created things and do not explain the wisdom that created them.

There is, however, still a more basic problem of the is-ought gap. This gap is impassable in so far as it exists as a logical problem and therefore can only be avoided.

Al-Māturīdī does this via the above explanation of the world, that is to say, by conceiving of its design as intrinsically wise and rational, and thus morally significant, though the essence of divine wisdom is beyond us.

This theory receives external support in the epistemological work carried out by Derrida. The construction of meaning is primarily a rational act that sets up a centre upon which oppositions are established. As humans, we rely on pre-given forms of time and space to provide the context, or material, upon which to carry out this act. Thus, we see that the rational side of the construction of meaning is normative, or rather the basis of norms while the fundamentals of empirical existence provides the necessary condition. Similarly, then the fact-value distinction we see in the is-ought gap is ‘transcended’ by a primary act of reason, which is at once the basis of meaning and value. This structure to thought, as shown by Derrida, directly parallels what al-Māturīdī writes about the establishment of meaning with the cosmos itself. The divine creation of the universe is a sovereign act of divine wisdom and reason, and hence inherently meaning-giving; and becomes the basis of all morality, while no pre-existing empirical conditions are necessary for God’s decision; time and space are His creations.

This leaves the question of how we are to derive moral conclusions from the design of the world; how its general possession of significance translates into particulars of moral action. This is a problem that all natural law theories in ethics have to deal with. How does reason understand what is good and bad based on the teleology of the world? Note that for al-Māturīdī this problem is particularly acute, since as a place of trial the world contains evil, and therefore is not a criterion of what is right and good alone. Rather it is a complicated mixture of the both moral and immoral elements. Certain human desires may reveal a weakness of humanity rather than a virtue or perfection; a source of trial rather than prosperity.

Here we may recall that al-Māturīdī cites various epistemological sources for morality that correspond to various moral concepts, which we classed as the good, the right, and moral worth. Hence, human moral understanding is not simply a product of the design of the world as such, though its design is the basic condition for that understanding. Some of al-Māturīdī’s explanations of what is moral are admittedly teleological, such as the one that states the creation of a thing merely for destruction is folly, and the one

made against homosexuality, which reveals that teleology does indeed have moral value in his view. Nevertheless, reason also determines things as morally right and positive in themselves, such as belief in Tawhīd, as an example of justice. This also seems to be implicitly based on an epistemological norm of seeking and acknowledging the truth in general, and of existence in particular. In addition is the sensory information provided by the senses, which single out certain aspects of creation as pleasurable. What this means is that the human understanding of morality is in a basic yet conditional sense independent of the design of the universe and dependent instead on the subjective desires of the human for survival and flourishing, responses to pleasure and pain, and, ultimately, on judgements of reason, which appraises the morality of those subjective desires according to principles of justice and revelation.

## **Thesis Conclusion**

At the beginning of this study, in Chapter One, we examined the Euthyphro dilemma and concluded that while Socrates sought a rationalist explanation to the basis of morality Euthyphro sought a theocentric one. This basic division we found again in both the Western and Islamic traditions of thought on the subject, respectively. Often, due to each party assuming different premises on the one hand and the debate never being lead to a direct examination of these premises on the other, this suggested the need for a more basic subject of debate. This had two aspects. First, that the criticisms made against each theory would not be enough to conclude the debate, often because they simply begged the question against the opposing view. Second, that positive support from outside would be necessary to determine which side of the debate was valid.

In correspondence to this two-sided problem, the proper subject for debate was identified in Chapter Two to be epistemological, and pertained to the need to determine whether rationalist or empiricist epistemology was more philosophically sound. In this regard, the work of Derrida was used to reveal, firstly, that the original claim of an epistemological root to the Euthyphro dilemma was correct and, secondly, that a synthesis of the opposing sides was impossible. However, both rationalist and empiricist elements were shown to be necessary in the explanation of the production of meaning, and hence, also morality, with the additional clarification that the basis of morality was an act of reason that sought to transcend the empirical conditions upon which the act depended. Derrida's identification of the act as logocentric — with privileged given unity, identity, immediacy, and presence over distance, difference, dissimulation, and deferment — corresponded to this act's subjective nature in the most fundamental sense of being inexplicable according to some prior criterion.

Also in Chapter Two, we explained how the problems arose and whether they had to be embraced or resolved, that is to say, whether they were legitimate problems or not. The means of determining this was based on the epistemological possibilities of their resolution. In this regard, we singled out the problems of arbitrariness, as highlighted by Alston and the tale of the three brothers, and model vulnerability, as especially indicative of the fundamental matter of epistemology that lies behind the dilemma. The tale of the three brothers, in particular, showed already that ultimate justice may not be

realisable, and that morality's coherence with God can only be established on a metaethical level.

In Chapter Three, we began our study of al-Māturīdī's metaethical thought by looking at his cosmology and the epistemological dimensions he attached to it. In this regard, al-Māturīdī's argument from opposites was meant to prove the temporal and contingent nature of the objects of the world, which with opposite and divergent constituent elements acted as a guide to the presence of a knowing higher power necessary for their continued existence. We concluded, however, that the opposites al-Māturīdī refers to are of no single description and instead pertain to radically different subjects, such as ethics, physics, and psychology. The argument from providence builds on this, with observations about the opposites that exist in human beings, and the physical, moral and psychological needs that they have. These needs have been provided for and therefore point to the existence of a being that desired the continued existence of humankind. The argument from design is similar in character, but refers more to the wisdom that is seen in creation to conclude that a being of knowledge must have created the world. The overriding message to each of these proofs is that the world displays rationality, wisdom, and design in its structure, and the work of an indescribably powerful being in the continuation of its existence.

This led us not so much into an investigation of God's power or existence, but rather His wisdom; the most emphasised unit of al-Māturīdī's theological-ethics. In this concept is made up of two aspects, one deontological and the other teleological. Because the teleological aspect has to do with reach a particular end, we also named it consequentialist. This dual aspect to wisdom is reveal by al-Māturīdī in various ways. Such as principles that state one should act with an end, and similarly the existence of each object was established for a purpose, and that to ignore ones knowledge is folly. These principles, which the human knows inherently, allow us to see the traces and effects of divine wisdom, though its essence remains a mystery to us, and it has an internal logic that is autonomous from any external standard. The deontology aspect of divine wisdom emerges from the proper placement of each and everything in creation. The particulars of this aspect are also a mystery to humankind. Yet al-Māturīdī, in a

way that is reminiscent of the Mu'tazilah, makes justice a divine principle of creation and intrinsic to morality.

The morality that al-Māturīdī states humankind does have epistemological access to is outlined in Chapter Four. There we outlined three concepts of western ethics and noted that each of these represented the centre of a particular tradition of ethics. The purpose of this was to show how fundamentally different these concepts were, so that we could recognise the varied and complex contents of al-Māturīdī's ethical thought. Hence, our task was not to specify which ethical theory the al-Māturīdī adopts or seems more inclined toward, though such an investigation appears valuable. Rather what we highlighted was the assortment of moral concepts used. The concept of the good was mentioned in relation to humanity's survival and social prosperity, while the right was recognised as a part of faith and ultimately epistemological responsibility to reflect upon the world and acknowledge the truth. Finally, the concept of moral worth was used to highlight certain comments al-Māturīdī made about the design of the human being and obedience and thankfulness to God. Among these, however, we noted that one category stood higher than the others, and that was the category of justice. Because the values of reason are objective, and do not alter with time, unlike the inclinations derived from the senses.

Significant to understanding al-Māturīdī's metaethics, however, was the recognition that good and bad as moral categories belonged entirely to the world, due to the describing objects of creation. Now, this is just one category of morality, and the one that is most obviously tied to the world. The right and moral worth, however, also have a similar status. These two aspects of morality exist in a hierarchy also, since reason denotes again the final referee of what constitutes a virtue, for it is combined with and guides the affective states to produce appropriate reactions and behaviour, and evaluates our motivations to produce ones arise as a result of genuine concern and affection for the ones they are directed toward. But though the faculty of reason provides the objective apprehension of morality, ultimately, in terms of the structure to the power of comprehension (though not its object), it too only reflects the world. Derrida's work reveals this by highlighting the empirical conditions that are necessary for the production of meaning. It cannot extend to a timeless and or spaceless realm of

existence. This supports al-Māturīdī, who himself says that reason is part of the universe, which we took to mean constitutive of its structure. This is essential for the human being, which as a rational being is able to form an intimate intellectual relationship with the world. For if the world displays commensurate qualities with the mind, then there is unmediated comprehension of its contents and design. But the createdness of reason means that it remains a mere a tool utilised by God to construct reality. So while it works as the basis for the objective comprehension of reality, this comprehension and the objects it comprehends are all contingent, as parts of creation.

We should note also, that a crucial part of al-Māturīdī's thought is that evil exists due to do divine wisdom. Thus, while the world is moral in its purpose, it is not necessarily good in its design or contents. Trial is the basic condition of humanity, as this is shown by the existence of evil. Indeed, al-Māturīdī cites the existence of evil as evidence of God's existence. Hence the existence of divine reason as wisdom does result in any necessity for the creation a world that is purely and simply good. Via trial become come to learn of both reward and punishment, happiness and sadness, justice and injustice, which all help to explain the existence of an afterlife with heaven and evil.

From an epistemological point of view, the question arises of how one can know what is moral judging merely from the teleology of the world when it contains of both good and evil. For only if the world was the best of all possible worlds could such conclusions possibly be made. These considerations occur in Chapter Five. The explanation in this regard, includes two observations, for we have an assortment of ideas — divine wisdom, the good and the bad, the right and the wrong, and the teleological notions behind flourishing and virtue — that stand together within a highly intricate metaethical scheme.

Firstly, with al-Māturīdī, there is the idea that our knowledge of good and bad is not derived solely from the natural world or revelation, but that the human can discern what is right given their faculty of reason. It would be most anachronistic to assume that al-Māturīdī's simultaneous use of varied moral concepts that are distinguished standardly today in philosophy was somehow deliberate. Accordingly, it is not clear, however, whether al-Māturīdī meant that those things that are intrinsically good are not grasped by the senses, as those that are extrinsically good no doubt are. What we do see,

however, is an epistemological emphasis on reason as the final judge of what is good and bad. The positive material of human condition is appraised by reason for truth, justice and obedience to God. That does not mean that they derive their value solely on rationalist considerations, however; they have a conditional value intrinsic to them. The inclusion of heaven, a garden of sensory bliss as well as moral perfection makes this clear enough. But nevertheless, we see a strong stress on the danger of desires. This makes the concept of right most basic to al-Māturīdī's thought, for it is via this rational appraisal of material goods, emotions and principles can be finally judged as moral, and so whatever moral values al-Māturīdī was referencing, they were all deemed to be rationally appraisable.

Secondly, there is also a degree of scepticism about how much we are able to know of the wisdom in the world. Divine wisdom has no standard above it, and follows its own logic, of which we humans are privy only to some aspects, as indicated by al-Māturīdī's comments. This means that though reason is the final moral arbiter, its judgements are not to be deemed as intrinsically concomitant to the wider purpose and rationality that exists behind the universe. Its judgements are to a degree independent of that divine and underlying rationale. There remains the problem of how any particular ethics can be derived from observations about the constitution of the universe, but in this regard we have seen also that al-Māturīdī's ethics is extremely flexible, combining utilitarian, deontological and aretaic concepts of morality. In addition, while our understanding of wisdom and justice overlap with that of the divine, but it is are not complete, and the material conditions that give rise to moral goodness are simply inapplicable to divine significance while moral virtue exists for us in a manner based on affective states and motivations, which reason determines to be moral or immoral, on the one hand, and which exist according only to material conditions, on the other. Therefore, one cannot say that the moral opposites that we distinguish in the world can decide whether the universal purpose is good or not, or that the purpose decides which of the opposites is good and which is not. Rather, while humans may comprehend justice and goodness, divine wisdom remains mysterious, indicating that it is without standard, and obeys instead its own internal logic, granting it superiority over the opposites we see in nature.



Al-Māturīdī does not seem to consider the problem of arbitrariness that will result, but the world is a work of wisdom and when we look at the world our immediate reaction of wonder and awe tells us that we possess an ability to know according to our intellectual equipment and recognise of justice as good and beautiful, contra the common distinction between what is good and what is right.

In Chapter Six, we saw that, at a more basic level, the wisdom behind the creation of the universe is the ultimate source all morality. The purpose that the universe displays gives it general significance on the one hand, and issues moral significance to all its contents, on the other. Al-Māturīdī's metaethical scheme, as laid out here, can avoid falling to the fallacy of division, because instead of inferring that the morality of the whole universe must also be true of all or some of its parts, we highlight instead only find a basis for moral appraisal, not the substantive aspect of the appraisals themselves.

This has to do with the is-ought gap, which every moral theory has to address. And here we found that the basic applicability of moral significance that applies to the entire world is derived from its epistemological structure. Here we recalled Derrida's observations that meaning is produced by an initial and primordial rational act, which decides a self-present centre for the derivation of meaning, paradoxically within the pre-given matrix of individuated time and space. The external support that al-Māturīdī receives from the field of epistemology and the work of Derrida in particular lies in the multiple ways that al-Māturīdī depicts the contents of the according to terms that one would find essential to the analysis of the production of meaning and comprehension. Firstly there is al-Māturīdī's privileging of epistemology over metaphysics. Contrary the rationalist thesis that metaphysical knowledge can be arrived at directly by the faculty of reason, al-Māturīdī makes the material world and empirical observation the basis for any such knowledge to be achieved. Secondly, there is al-Māturīdī's general elevation of the faculty of reason as the distinguishing feature of humanity and ultimate provision of moral knowledge. This parallels Derrida's basic premise that logocentric ideals are basic to the production of meaning (even if also the deconstruction of meaning). Thirdly, Derrida observes the production of meaning to be concomitant with various hierarchical oppositions. Similarly, al-Māturīdī depicts the world in terms of divergent and opposite elements. Now, his observation includes a physical or metaphysical

description of reality, but is not limited to it. We have argued that al-Māturīdī includes within this picture a whole range of sciences, including the moral. While Derrida says the oppositions are based on logocentrism, al-Māturīdī will say that these are based on the plan of God's creation and that they are a guide to knowledge in the belief in God, and that the coexistence of such opposites itself is evidence of the Being Who keeps them together. Thus, for al-Māturīdī the oppositions have various ends, including explanation of the meaning of reward and punishment, which gives the world meaning in a way that oppositions are meant to be constitutive of meaning for Derrida.

Support is also attained by related parallels to the production of meaning. As Derrida notes, reason provides the initial centring act, while empirical and conceptual differences are the necessary conditions of this act that gives meaning and comprehension. Thus, he revealed also that though a synthesis is not possible, a combination is necessary. Similarly, divine wisdom divides into teleological and deontological aspects. The teleological aspect corresponds to the initial, sovereign and purposive act of reason to create meaning, while the deontological aspect corresponds to individuation, putting each thing in its proper place. Thus, al-Māturīdī does not find a way of joining reason and fact, but merely juxtaposes them to different ways of conceiving of the world in a hierarchical relation. In regard to the second, deontological aspect, al-Māturīdī writes that the universe has been tied to different times and furnished with various states and predicates; each thing put in its proper place. This individuation, coupled with our moral faculties allows us to see all the opposite and divergent elements in the world, which are just so many different reflections of the original meaning-giving act of divine wisdom.

In this regard, there is the parallel that deconstruction also reveals the evidence that the production of meaning is ultimately subjective, while al-Māturīdī shows that the wisdom of God decides the meaning of the world by His sovereign plan. Though there is an assumption of a commensurate quality between the original divine act of creation with the finite capacity of human reason to recognise and infer the meaning displayed by the world, and more specifically, the categories of justice and wisdom, this is merely via apprehension of its 'traces and effects. This makes al-Māturīdī theocentric at the

most basic level. His position ultimately means God is the source of all morality, as His attribute of wisdom is the origin of moral significance.

But in addition to teleological and deontological aspects the concept of divine wisdom also contains virtues of grace and mercy. This also reflects God's sovereignty, for we see that these aspects cannot be explained by justice, and we are only able to understand their import by the manifestation of such virtues as they appear in this world. That is to say, we also see that certain aspects of morality are constituted by justice and appear right from the view of reason while others remain outside justice, being based on God's grace and that justice itself is considered as bestowed by the grace of God. What is more, wisdom is considered a divine attribute, as constitutive of what it means to be divine and thus gains significance from the concept of divinity itself. The two concepts thus gain moral value autonomously in relation to each other.

A final piece of evidence derived from epistemology is the basic finding that all meaning exists on the basis of the conditions provided by time and space. Now, this makes one immediately think of a realm where differences in time and space do not apply; where the ideal of reason, complete self-presence, is real. In other words, logocentrism suggests that there is something beyond, just like this world is a clue to the existence of the supernatural, for in al-Māturīdī's proof's for the existence of God, he notes that the temporality of existence is evidence for a being upon whom all objects depend, and hence a metaphysical realm.

Finally, we may turn to the Euthyphro dilemma, the point from which we started. In Chapter Six we surveyed how al-Māturīdī successfully manages to avoid entanglement on each of the horns. There is little need to repeat those points again here. But we may observe that Alston's thesis can be used to help explain al-Māturīdī's position, for the similarities are striking.

First, we may note the particularist epistemology that Alston employs, and which is essential to the theocentric stance if it is to explain its evasion of the ethical horns of the dilemma. Our apprehension of goodness, or rather positive moral values, as is our recognition of God, relies ultimately on autonomous categories. Al-Māturīdī does not explain this, of course, but his theory requires it. There are two ways and only two ways of understanding the circumstance of morality. Derrida shows that a combination is

essential; and al-Māturīdī details how morality combines these two stances. The moral truth does not exist as a Platonic form, and so there is no issue of metaphysical curtailment and no standard next to God. That is to say, a rational system revealed by God does not logically imply that God is subject to reason. Though moral coherency is due to God and God's revelation is apprehended by reason, the existence of moral coherency does not completely or ultimately explain God's moral status, which is above any standard, but still understood for its positive moral value by the associations that we make with the structure of justice, His divine virtues and the greatness of design and beauty we witness in the world.

Second, Alston notes that God is loving by His nature, and that this is no restriction on Him that is significant. Correspondingly, we spoke of how due to God's divinity, it is impossible for Him to create a stone so heavy He cannot lift, this is proof of His power rather than evidence of any weakness. Thus, al-Māturīdī makes wisdom an essential part of divinity, rather than a restriction it is a perfection, contravention of which is only possible for created beings.

Third, we noted that Alston accepts that the arbitrariness problem will remain, and yet labelled it as a default problem for both theocentrist and ratiocentrist. Specifically, we identified two types of arbitrariness, super-arbitrariness and limited arbitrariness, only the former one applies to God, and it is weak. We tackle the possibility of limited arbitrariness with the acceptance of reason's capability to recognise wisdom and justice independently of revelation — God gave us a faculty to recognise and measure the divinely created moral forms.

In general terms, the purpose of the analyses in Chapter One and Chapter Two has been to provide the grounds to talk about morality in general, beyond the confines of the Islamic context and even that of Abrahamic theological-ethics. This allows us to make conclusions of wider import. We have seen how al-Māturīdī's metaethics combines theocentric and ratiocentric and where his ultimate inclination lies in epistemological terms to prove that the matter is really one about epistemology. That is to say, an epistemological solution is necessary to show what direction is correct for the formulation of a theologically valid metaethics, in a way that enjoins real discussion by drawing on positive support. In this regard, we have seen that the two strains are

radically different, such that only juxtaposition appears ultimately possible. This is what al-Māturīdī has done. The combination is accomplished on an epistemological level, with God autonomously creating the laws by which we judge what is right and wrong, though these laws apply objectively within the matrix of the world.



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