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RESEARCH ARTICLE / ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ

The Celebrated Transcendence: al-Mâtūrîdî's Resolution of the Determinist-Libertarian Dichotomy regarding Human Free Will

Zor Eşiği Aşmak: İnsanın Hür İradesi Meselesinde Cebri-İhtiyarî Dikotomisine Mâtūrîdî'nin Çözümü

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Abstract

This article attempts to systematically set out al-Mâtūrîdî's theory of free will and human action. To this end, firstly, a presentation is given of his refutations of both his main rivals, determinists and libertarians, as represented by the Jabriyya and Mu'tazila, respectively. The following section then presents those arguments al-Mâtūrîdî offers in direct support of his own theory. These arguments are discussed in terms of different possible interpretations and are used as the basis for an analysis of his theory that maps out its overall framework by listing its main concepts and principles. By this means, key terms such as power and free will, as denoted chiefly by the Arabic terms *qudra* and *quwwa*, and *ikhtiyâr*, are clarified. In the third and final section of this study, questions regarding the specifics of al-Mâtūrîdî's theory of human agency in relation to divine creation are addressed, and some problems are identified as fundamental. A resolution is undertaken with aid from Aristotle's metaphysics and J.L. Mackie's analysis of causation in order to determine exactly what human power consists of and how it relates to the effects with which al-Mâtūrîdî says it is connected.

Keywords: Kalâm, Theology, Free Will, Concurrentism, Determinism, Libertarianism, al-Mâtūrîdî, Mu'tazila

Öz

Bu makale, Mâtūrîdî'nin hür irade ve insan fiili teorisini sistematik olarak ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Bu, Cebriyye ve Mu'tezile'nin temsil ettiği gibi, ana rakipleri, hem determinist hem de liberteryenleri çürütmelerinin bir sunumu ile gerçekleştirilmektedir. Sonraki kısımda, Mâtūrîdî'nin kendi teorisini doğrudan desteklemek için ortaya koyduğu argümanlar sunulmaktadır. Bu argümanlar farklı muhtemel yorumlar açısından tartışılmaktadır ve Mâtūrîdî'nin ana kavramları ve mebdeleri listelenerek teorisinin genel çerçevesini detaylarıyla gösteren bir analizin temeli olarak kullanılmaktadır. Bu şekilde, esasen kudret (ve kuvvet) ve ihtiyâr Arapça terimleriyle belirtildiği gibi güç ve hür irade terimleri açıklığa kavuşturulmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın üçüncü ve son kısmında, Mâtūrîdî'nin insanın failiyeti teorisinin ilahi yaratılış için taşıdığı manasıyla alakalı sorular ele alınmaktadır ve bazı ciddi sorunlar tanımlanmaktadır. İnsan kudretinin tam olarak ne ifade ettiğini ve Mâtūrîdî'nin bağlı olduğunu söylediği etkilerle nasıl alakalı olduğunu belirlemek için Aristoteles'in metafizik düşüncesi ve J.L. Mackie'nin illiyet analizinden yardım almak suretiyle bir çözüme varılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kelam, Teoloji, Hür İrade, Eşzamanlılık, Cebriyye (Determinizm), İhtiyariyye (Liberteryenizm), Mâtūrîdî, Mu'tezile

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Introduction

In this article, we shall examine Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's (d. 333/944) concept of human freedom through a comprehensive analysis of concepts and terminology, and a compilation of his remarks on the subject as presented in his theological treatise, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, and Quranic exegesis, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. There have been three book-length studies conducted on al-Māturīdī's theory of free will in Turkish, and one in-depth examination, the classic article by Pessagno, in English.¹ While the main details of his theory are already known and outlined in several other modern studies, a presentation that integrates its more intricate details into the framework of a consistent theory is lacking and, more importantly, different interpretations have been made within the existing literature regarding his view, both in regards to its fundamentals and its more technical minutiae.²

In his work, al-Māturīdī presents a critique of several perspectives on human freedom. The latter fall under the scope of two main rival theological groups, namely, the Jabriyya and the Qadariyya, the second of which often stand in for his more immediate rivals, the Mu'tazila.³ This makes it necessary to establish the relevant connections and identify al-Māturīdī's view in the context of a wider dispute, since, as shall be seen, his primary objective is the refutation of rival arguments and theories: much less regularly does he attempt to openly explain or substantiate his own view.

1 The Turkish studies are as follows: Saim Yeprem, *İrade Hürriyeti ve İmām Mâtürîdî* (İstanbul: İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 1984); Harun Işık, *Maturidi'de İnsan Özgürlüğü* (Ankara: Araştırma Yayınları, 2013); Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu, *Mâtürîdî ve Neseî'ye Göre İsan Hürriyeti* (Ankara: OTTO, 2017). Appearing in the same year as Yeprem's book, Jerome Meric Pessagno, "İrâda, İkhtiyâr, Qudra, Kasb the View of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī", *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104/1 (1984), 177-191. Other noteworthy articles include Ahmet Akbulut, "Allah'ın Takdiri-Kulun Tedbiri", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 33 (1992), 129-159, and Abdülhamit Sinanoğlu, "İmām Mâtürîdî'nin Düşüncesinde İnsan Hürriyeti Sorunu", *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15/30 (2016), 249-267. Short expositions covering the basic ground have been offered in Mustafa Cerić, *The Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām: A study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 208-223; Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 302-308; Nazif Muhtaroglu, "Al-Māturīdī's View of Causality", *Occasionalism Revisited: New Essays from the Islamic and Western Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Nazif Muhtaroglu (Dubai: Kalam Research & Media, 2017), 14-17.

2 For example, Muhtaroglu's idiosyncratic attempt to show how al-Māturīdī's theory can be interpreted as occasionalist ("Al-Māturīdī's View of Causality", 14-17).

3 See Abū Maṣṣūr Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, eds. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muḥammad Aruci, 2nd edn, (İstanbul: Maktabat al-Irshād, 2010), 406, fn. 9.

Three main questions shall be the focus of the following investigation:

Firstly, what are the primary criticisms al-Māturīdī makes against his rivals? In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, the focus is on refutation. The reader of this book will observe that al-Māturīdī was primarily engaged in an overtly polemical discussion on the topic of human freewill, which was already home to many different viewpoints and conceptual nuance. Here, for much of the debate, al-Māturīdī's discussion evidently follows an unnamed text of Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka'bī (d. 319/931), his main target, at whom he levels his most strident criticism. Nevertheless, his discussion is also more covertly dialectical. That is, while openly rejecting the views of the Mu'tazila, Jabriyya and others, he also occasionally and implicitly endorses some of their concepts, principles, and arguments. Furthermore, al-Māturīdī is not developing his position in an orderly way that his reader is meant to follow; it is already an established theoretical framework, and only disclosed piecemeal in an ad hoc fashion.

Secondly, what is the direct evidence for his own view? An answer must consider both his affirmative statements for certain positions, his endorsement of the views or statements of others and his outright rejection of those positions he holds to be theoretically inconsistent or otherwise disadvantageous. Here, the evidence al-Māturīdī offers to reject the Qadarī and Jabrī views (among others), which we shall present in answer to the first question, is of key use. Notably, as al-Māturīdī's own view is open to interpretation, the arguments he presents to support it also serve as the material evidence for determining what, precisely, that view is. Overall, the investigation of his debate on free will, or in the preferred terms of the Muslim theologians, human "power" (*quwwa* or *qudra*), covers some of the most obscure and convoluted passages of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Much interpretative work that takes into account historical details of Islamic theology is often needed to make sense of the subject passages.

In line with the common reading, al-Māturīdī is identified here as a concurrentist. This concurrentism, however, can only be adequately understood within the context of the kalām debate among the theologians with whom he is contesting different theories of power. Accordingly, it is bound to the terms of the discussion wherein al-Māturīdī is seen to navigate through different theoretical options. This provides the method adopted in this study: to derive his theory entirely in relation to his discussions and criticisms. Only in the last section of this article (in relation to the third question, below) do we find it necessary to borrow some modern concepts to clarify remaining, and important, ambiguities that represent outstanding problems for his concurrentism.

Some form of concurrentism likely existed within Islamic theology before al-Māturīdī. Evidence points to one person in particular: Dirār Ibn ‘Amr (d. cir. 200/815), a key and idiosyncratic thinker usually associated with the Mu‘tazilī school. He wrote in early days of Islamic theology that featured the intellectual dynamism and originality which often accompanies burgeoning fields of investigation. It appears Dirār first introduced the theory of acquisition (*kasb*),⁴ which seems to be the bud of concurrentism in kalām al-Māturīdī (probably indirectly) nurtured and developed.⁵ Another possible line of influence stems from Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), who reportedly held that human action has two aspects (*wajh*): it is constrained (*iḍṭirārī*) since it cannot occur without the cause for it, and it is free (*ikhṭiyārī*) in that it is chosen and acquired by the person who does it.⁶ As we shall see, the concept of aspect is critical for al-Māturīdī. But whatever the sources may be, the theory of *kasb* was interpreted, or processed, in contrasting ways. Thus, what became the dominant position in the Islamic world for several centuries was that of al-Māturīdī’s contemporary, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 936). This towering figure pioneered an idea of *kasb* that allowed Sunni thinkers to distinguish themselves from the libertarian Mu‘tazila while avoiding the naïve determinism of the Jabriyya. However, his theory is no concurrentism, and posits God’s action as the sole determinant of all events. On this view, what agents “acquire” is the moral significance of their deeds. Thus, it is a variety of compatibilism: the agent is believed to lack significant freedom but to remain responsible for their actions since those actions are identified as theirs.

Al-Māturīdī was likely not aware of this theoretical development to the west, in Mesopotamia, and, as we shall attempt to demonstrate, the theologian of Samarkand presents us with a very different meaning of acquisition. The success of his theory speaks for itself. In later centuries, due to growing awareness that compatibilism was simply a disguised form of determinism, the latter theory often gave way in the Ash‘arī school to one that corresponds to key features of al-Māturīdī’s.⁷

4 Abū Hasan al-Ash‘arī, *Makalāt al-islāmiyyīn*, ed. Naim Zarzur (Beirut: Maktabat al-‘Aşriyya, 2005) 2/300.

5 Cornelia Schöck, “Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/745–6) and the ‘Jahmiyya’ and Dirār b. ‘Amr (d. 200/815)”, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology* ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 75-76.

6 Al-Ash‘arī, *Makalāt*, 1/50-51. Compare with W. Montgomery Watt, *Free will and Predestination in Early Islam*, (London: Luzac and Company, 1948), 116.

7 For example, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), *Tamhīd al-awā‘il wa talkhīṣ al-dalā‘il*, ed. Imad al-dīn Ahmad Haydar (Beirut: Muassasat al-Kutub al-Thaqafiyya, 1986/1407), 323-333; Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390), *Sharh al-aqā‘id al-nasafī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyya, 1987), 57-62. Compare to the concurrentism expressed in the final work of eminent Ash‘arī theologian Imām al-Ḥaramayn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), *Al-‘Aqīda al-nizāmiyya*, ed. Muhammad Zahid al-Kawtharī (Cairo: al-Maktabat al-Azhariyya li’l-Turāth, 1992), 45-49, whose terminology, as we shall see, also closely follows al-Māturīdī’s.

Finally: What is the role played by the power attributed to the human agent in distinction to God's power, which al-Māturīdī fixedly says is causally effective in the creation of human action as it is in all temporal events? How these respective powers simultaneously hold and interrelate without one annulling another needs explanation. Yet al-Māturīdī's comments in this regard are limited and obscure once explored beyond the basic points, raising critical questions right where his writing appears most original. More specifically, by affirming both, he needs to explain how the two coalesce to produce the self-same action yet remain independently effective. This aporia in al-Māturīdī appears to have rarely been seriously addressed in the current literature, even though it evidently motivated continued theoretical development among his followers.⁸ Additionally, al-Māturīdī's attempted resolution has been largely unmapped and yet we must chart it to help understand its various interconnected parts.

While there is certainly evidence available to substantiate the assessment that al-Māturīdī endorses natural causal efficacy (a topic fundamentally related to that of

8 Those in the modern literature who point toward the aporia specifically for al-Māturīdī include, Şerafeddin Gölcük, *Kelam Açısından İnsan ve Fiilleri: Bakıllani'de İnsanın Fiilleri Anlayışı* (Istanbul: Kayıhan Yayınevi, 1979), 184-185; Akbulut, "Allah'ın Takdiri", 147; Yazıcıoğlu, *Māturīdī ve Neseфі*, 64-65. Like many who register the problem, Pessagno deems al-Māturīdī's statements as coherent, once worked out in technical detail ("İrāda, İkhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb", 186-188). Yet, as far back as 1927, D.B. Macdonald frankly notes in reference to al-Māturīdī and (somewhat unfairly) his school: "No explanation is attempted of this fundamental antinomy of predestination and freewill; they are stated side by side as equal, if contradictory, facts" ("Māturīdī", *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopaedia of Islam: 1913-1937*, eds. M.TH. Houtsma, A.J. Wensinck, E.Lévie-Provençal, H.A.R. Gibb, and W. Heffening (Leiden: Brill, Reprint 1987), 5/415). For studies covering the centuries long debate among Māturīdī scholars over the nature of human action and free will, see Asım Cüneyd Köksal, "İslām Hukuk Felsefesinde Fiillerin Ahlākiliği Meselesi: Mukaddimât-ı Erbaa'ya Giriş", *İslām Araştırmaları Dergisi* 28 (2012), 1-44; Şule Güldü, *Osmanlı Dönemi Fıkıh Usûlü Çalışmaları: Hüsun-Kubuh Zemininde Oluşan Mukaddimât-ı Erbaa Literatürü*. Ph.D. Dissertation (Samsun: Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2019); İmam Rabbani Çelik, *XV. YY. Osmanlı Düşüncesinde Telvîh Hâşiyeleri: Teklif Dair Tartışmalar*, Ph.D. Dissertation, (Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2022).

human free will),⁹ we shall attempt to show that the latter can be accurately revealed in its critical details based solely on comments al-Māturīdī directs specifically toward it. In order to resolve the ambiguous aspect of his thought in this regard, we shall make connections to Aristotelian concepts of power and use of J.L. Mackie's INUS analysis of causation. This distinguishes between the necessary and sufficient conditions of events and appears uniquely able to clarify the divine and human aspects to action, respectively, by making room for multiply different effective factors.

This article is divided, accordingly, into three main sections, addressing the preceding questions, respectively. By explicating al-Māturīdī's theory and resolving major tensions it reveals with the use of modern distinctions, it is hoped that his thought becomes more welcoming to contemporary philosophical conversation. Yet, the array of arguments he makes are indicative of the concepts framing discussions of the time as well as his thought. Thus, they also speak to the sophistication of kalām in the tenth century.

Kalām Polemics on Human Power

To begin our study, we examine al-Māturīdī's arguments against his primary opponents, the Jabriyya and Mu'tazila. Although the Jabriyya are determinists and Mu'tazila libertarians, al-Māturīdī argues against the latter for reasons other than their libertarianism. Indeed, as we will attempt to substantiate, al-Māturīdī is himself a libertarian who believes that the moral value of an act, including its legal and theological consequences, can only be applied to the agent if they had significant freedom to choose differently. Rather, the debate between the parties is primarily theological, revolving around the respective scope and roles of divine and human power.

Al-Māturīdī goes out of his way to present, even if only briefly, the main evidence of each party. That he does this indicates how important the discussion is to him.

9 Despite a general scholarly agreement, interpretations regarding al-Māturīdī's statements in this direction differ regarding key details, especially concerning the ontological identity of natures as either accidents or bodies. See Richard M. Frank, "Notes and Remarks on the Tabā'ī' in al-Māturīdī", in *Mélanges d'Islamologie: Volume dédié à la mémoire de Armand Abel parses collègues, ses élèves et ses amis*, ed. P. Salmon (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 137-149, esp. 139, n. 10; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 256-257, n. 109; Alnoor Dhanani, "Al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī on Atomism and the Tabā'ī'." in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmâm Mâtürîdî ve Mâtürîdîlik: Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmî Toplantı*, ed. İlyas Celebi (Istanbul: M. U. İlâhiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2012), 65-76; and Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 90-91.

Additionally, the reader may be surprised by the sheer number arguments he brings against his opponents in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. Indeed, these form a web of interrelated evidence that is difficult to disentangle, for often one argument will be later extended or revisited in a new way or to different ends, such that while not entirely separated from the previous iteration it is also no longer the same argument. Here, we can treat only key examples because there is simply too many to address in al-Māturīdī's writings. The arguments discussed have been chosen for at least one of three main reasons: their evident importance to al-Māturīdī's theory; their relative strength versus his opponents; and their presentation of concepts and distinctions central to the kalām debate and or al-Māturīdī's specific usage. Apart from this implicit assessment, we largely refrain from critically evaluating the arguments cited.

Refutations of the Jabriyya

The Jabriyya believe God determines and manifests all human actions, including those for which humans are rewarded and punished. More specifically, this group accept that human acts are only metaphorically owned by their human agents and are in reality actions of God. Al-Māturīdī lists the key evidence for this view as follows. Firstly, God is described in the Qur'an as the Creator of all things, hence, this must encompass human actions.¹⁰ Otherwise, to say that the act belongs in reality to the servant removes a portion of existence from under God's power. Secondly, if humans brought about (*tijād*) their own actions, then in the performance of His action God would be comparable to human beings, and this entails a form of anthropomorphism. Thirdly, granting humans the power to act independently of God would make them creators in their own right; a thought antithetical to Islamic doctrine, which declares that there is only one Creator.¹¹

Al-Māturīdī does not level at this group the same degree of vitriol that he does the Mu'tazila. This is perhaps because he counts them among the Ahl al-Sunna, but more likely since he simply deems them less serious rivals, noting that their view is not worth extended discussion.¹²

Against the Jabriyya, seven discernibly distinct arguments are noteworthy for our purposes. These types of proof, or verification (*tahqīq*), are provided by either verbal transmission (*al-sam'*) – which includes revelation – or reason (*al-'aql*),

10 Such expressions are to be found in al-An'am 6/102 and al-Furqan 25/2. On this point, al-Māturīdī also notes the Jabrī claim God can do whatever He wishes with His creations, just as anyone can do whatever they want with their own property.

11 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 305.

12 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307.

which al-Māturīdī states carry such certainty that any who refuse them stand against the truth.¹³ The verbally conveyed proofs are of two types (*wajhān*). The first regards the divine command and prohibition (*al-ʿamr wa l-nahī*), while the second falls under the divine reward and punishment (*al-waʿd fīhi wa l-waʿd lahu*). Both, al-Māturīdī says, are in the Qurʿan, which addresses human individuals as effective agents (*al-ʿammāl*) and, also, names their activities specifically with the word action (*al-fʿil*).¹⁴ This al-Māturīdī takes as evidence to genuinely attribute actions to the human beings. Indeed, later, he claims that while certain verses of the Qurʿan might seem to indicate a determinist view,¹⁵ it is wrong to interpret them in a way that contradicts the basic understanding of religion without a clear divine statement on the matter. More specifically, much of revelation would become inconsistent since God holds people as disobedient or obedient; for the purpose of revelation is guidance, and guidance becomes superfluous if all human events are compelled.¹⁶

Next, al-Māturīdī turns to articulate rational premises upon which these revelatory proofs are understood. He observes that the ascription of action to God does not mean free action cannot simultaneously belong to the servant.¹⁷ As we shall see, this is one of his most central claims: Every human act is divided into different aspects (*jihāt*, sing. *wajh*), some of which must be attributed to the human agent and some to God.

Thirdly, he deems it impossible that God would command or forbid actions that, in reality, belong to Himself. He says were it possible for the commanded actions to not truly belong to the human agent, then it would equally become possible to command an action be done yesterday or a year ago, and what is more, that the agent create something out of nothing (*ijād*). All of these, of course, are impossible for any human to fulfil and God’s command essentially becomes inapplicable.¹⁸

13 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 305-306.

14 The cited verses are Fussilat 41/40, al-Haj 22/77, al-Bakara 2/167, al-Sajda 32/17, and al-Zilzal 99/7.

15 The quoted verses are al-Anʿam 6/39, 6/125, 6/149, al-Sajda 32/13, and al-Maʿida 5/48.

16 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 377.

17 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 306. The same point is made against al-Kaʿbī specifically, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 361.

18 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 306 and 377. See also *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 327 and 352. In a closely related argument, al-Māturīdī observes that God has named various people as either obedient or disobedient. This is impossible if the act is not attributable to them in reality. Indeed, al-Māturīdī notes that were the acts to belong to God along with the properties of obedience and disobedience, then God would become both Lord and servant, which is impossible both according to revelation and reason. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 306-307.

The fourth argument is the first of the explicitly rational proofs. Al-Māturīdī states that to ascribe actions to God that signify obedience and disobedience, vulgarity and wrongness would place Him in a position of subjection to divine commands and prohibitions and, in turn, reward and punishment, which is rationally abhorrent.¹⁹ It seems al-Māturīdī assumes there will be no genuine distinction between divine and human action on the determinist view, and so the same actions God prohibits are also those He performs.²⁰ The missing premise of the above point is that since God has promised reward for those who obey Him and punishment for those who do not, He becomes subject to the same reward and punishment.

Fifth, everyone feels themselves to be free (*mukhtār*) rather than compelled in their actions, and they judge themselves to be an agent that “acquires” their actions (*fā'ilun kāсібun*). Al-Māturīdī treats this introspectional evidence as on a par with the evidence of the senses and, hence, a form of immediate, incontestable knowledge. Indeed, were this perception illusory, then we would have to similarly deem sensory knowledge to be suspect in general.²¹

Sixth, al-Māturīdī says that for an event to be defined as an action, it must be attributed to a will. But on the *jabrī* view, no human action comes with a human free will, and so cannot be an action attributed to the human that performs it.²²

Finally, given in a later segment of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, perhaps one of al-Māturīdī's most basic pieces of evidence against the *Jabriyya* is that it is ugly according to reason to consider commands and prohibitions, and rewards and punishments, as applicable to acts that are compelled.²³

As can be seen from the arguments enumerated here, while the *Jabriyya* attempt to maintain God's absolute dominion and sovereignty, al-Māturīdī stresses the moral judgements that attend all acts, and without a distinction between those of God and humanity, these judgements will take God as their referent. Further, al-Māturīdī holds that a person must have the power to choose their actions in order to be held responsible for them. This places him firmly in the libertarian camp. The attributes of disobedience and obedience, which are intrinsically connected to the divine command and prohibition, simply become invalid otherwise. Moreover,

19 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 306; 411-412.

20 For otherwise, al-Māturīdī repeatedly and adamantly stresses how God's creation of morally reprehensible actions by no means entails that immorality is ascribable to Him. For example, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319.

21 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307; 321.

22 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307.

23 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319.

al-Māturīdī believes there is definitive evidence found both in the Qur'an and introspection that proves human beings do, as a matter of fact, have this power of choice.

Refutations of the Mu'tazila

Al-Māturīdī stacks up by far the largest series of arguments against the Mu'tazila; his evaluation of their doctrine on free will spans many successive sections of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and is also dispersed in standalone passages across the treatise. Nevertheless, as before, al-Māturīdī presents the evidence for the position in question. First, this group cites the criticisms of the Jabriyya as evidence for the truth of their views.²⁴ They also claim that, apart from a literal sense, actions are sometimes analogously attributed to God in the Qur'an as the conditions from which they arise. In a similarly analogical sense, they read verses to indicate God's increasing or decreasing a person's theistic belief, although, in truth, the people in question are the causes of such shifts. Finally, some verses are taken to represent God merely calling people either truthful or false in statements that attribute actions to God in a moment of His testing human beings.²⁵ In sum, according to al-Māturīdī, this group attributes actions to humans in a genuine sense, while they reject God's will and capacity to create and determine these activities. Indeed, an immediate criticism of this group is that they make God's will concerning the servant's actions to be like mere desires or aspirations, as, for example, with people who can only have hopes regarding events beyond their control.²⁶ Later, two key principles of the Mu'tazilī view are noted: God's will (*irāda*) is nothing other than His creation, and a true will cannot be under the power of anyone else's.²⁷ Thus, whatever God creates belongs entirely to His will and so cannot be the result of the will of any other person. Accordingly, the actions of the human agent, in order to be deemed free, must be entirely attributable to the will of the human agent. In this situation, no overlap between divine and human action is possible. This is a major point of contestation for al-Māturīdī, as we shall soon see below.

The first argument by al-Māturīdī we shall consider resolves around the binary of movement and stillness. Both are classed as accidents (*'arād*) predicated of corporeal entities (*ajsām*). Al-Māturīdī notes that both these phenomena are the same to sight in that a person cannot tell them apart from their previous states. While he might be understood to mean that a very slow movement, for example, is indistinguishable to

24 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307 and 318. It is significant that these include criticisms al-Māturīdī too affirms against the Jabriyya, as seen above.

25 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 308-309.

26 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307; 381.

27 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 382.

the human eye from stillness, or perhaps that two objects moving together at the same speed and direction may appear to be at rest relative to each other, al-Māturīdī's point is more philosophical, for he states that differentiation would have been achievable if the similarity were not fundamental. Indeed, it seems he means that both types of action encompass the fundamental structure of all events in the world. Hence, to make human power responsible for any event in this sense would put humans on a par with God, who is the cause of the rest of the world's events. For one key principle al-Māturīdī follows is that agents are known by their actions, and actions in the perceivable domain that appear similar have similar agents.²⁸ Al-Māturīdī elaborates no further, but it seems that if a worldly agent were responsible for either rest or movement, then they would be much like God, and we would face a form of anthropomorphism. The main implication, however, is that there can only be one Creator; the being that realizes any event must be the one that realizes them all.²⁹

Similarly, al-Māturīdī continues that we know the createdness of perceptible items because they are inextricably linked to separation and union, movement and stillness. This statement is based on the *kalam* proof of temporality (*hudūth*) from states apriori indicative of change. Yet we cannot establish that God created these states since we cannot see the entity that created them. The same is true of the servant's acts. In this situation, then, someone other than God could be responsible for the world's events; God cannot reveal which of the two states — separation or unification — is His creation, and because the world's creation cannot be known without these states, proof of God's existence vanishes.³⁰ Thus, the argument appears to be as theological as it is metaphysical. Since each of the mentioned conditions – separation and union, on the one hand, movement and rest, on the other – can logically occur due to causes other than God, it is impossible to prove He is their sole Creator. As a result, we would have to accept that God left no foundation or sign of His unity and lordship within the perceivable world, and this is what is unacceptable to al-Māturīdī, for belief that God exists entails that He creates evidence of His existence in nature.³¹

28 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 314-315, 327, 333, 334-335. This criticism overlaps with a basic principle of al-Māturīdī's own view, as shall be seen below.

29 A closely related argument is given in relation to God's sovereignty, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 314, 328.

30 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 312-313. Since the proof from the origination of events (*'ihdāth*), a hallmark of *kalām*, is supposed to work by avoiding an infinite number of originators, al-Māturīdī appears to hold, rather, that if God exists, He must be involved in all, not just the first of the world's events.

31 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 313. This point carries important implications for *kalām* itself, in so far as al-Māturīdī sees it, and is elaborated upon further against the Mu'tazila, who regard themselves as the discipline's stewards and practitioners. See, al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 315-316, 318.

Thirdly, al-Māturīdī claims the limited power possessed by creatures is, on the Mu‘tazilī view, a power that cannot be directly exploitable by any other creature. This means that if God has no efficacy on the power bestowed on His creatures, His power will be limited just like those of His creatures. The conclusion is theologically unacceptable, for God cannot have any created predicate (*ṣifat al-makhlūq*).³² Notably, this was one of the reasons cited by the Jabriyya to deny the human has power, and shows al-Māturīdī implicitly accepts some of the arguments put forth by one group in rejecting the other.³³

Fourth, while al-Māturīdī acknowledges that each human is the genuine agent of their actions, he also states that one who makes another competent or powerful (*muqtadir*) must likewise possess the capacity conferred, just as to teach another person it is necessary to possess knowledge. Al-Māturīdī then immediately claims that God creates the actions of His servants. This leap can be read in the sense that God, capable of doing those actions that He bestows (*tumalliku*) His servant the power to perform, remains an agent of that action insofar as He is its Creator.³⁴ Admittedly, this creative aspect is *non sequitur* and depends on a separate argument. Nevertheless, the point is successful in illustrating that certain things can only be passed on if they are possessed; one does not necessarily lose this possession by granting it to another; and finally, that we can conceive of an agent (God) to maintain power over the human act He empowers His servant to perform.

Fifth, al-Māturīdī declares faith to form the most beautiful act (*aḥsan al-fi‘l*) according to reason and the most brilliant of all things (*anwar al-ashya’*). If, then, we claim, “God is not the Creator of faith” (since the human is the cause of their own faith), then we must elevate (*tafdīl*) above God anyone who obeys Him by believing in Him and doing good deeds, since God’s beautiful creations cannot match in beauty and benefit (*al-ḥusn wa l-khayr*) the obedient servant’s faith

32 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 313 and 367.

33 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 313-314. Indeed, al-Māturīdī writes that God would, on this view, be unable to control the actions of even a mosquito, let alone anything more powerful. See also, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 334-335, 345-346.

34 A related argument follows from the above point. Al-Māturīdī observes that if the power of God’s creature is beyond divine control, then it will be asked how one is to believe in the divine promise and reward, or the realisation of the resurrection and judgement day. This is because events will take a course God does not intend so that the fate of the world and its inhabitants are not under divine control. In short, trust in the promises of a being limited in power is open to severe doubt. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 314.

and worship, while He creates unclean, foul-smelling, filthy, and ugly objects.³⁵ Thus, the servant becomes superior in both action and creation (*faḍala l-‘abd ‘ala allāh fī l-fī‘l wa l-khalq*), for superiority in virtue is based on actions. Such a conclusion as this befits the Mu‘tazila, al-Māturīdī says deridingly.³⁶ The initial premise is based on an epistemological observation, which in turn is based on an epistemological principle: The rewards of obedience are beautiful to the senses, and faith is beautiful to reason; while the first type of beauty can change according to different times and states, the second cannot. Thus, rational beauty is fixed and universal,³⁷ and what is beautiful to the senses ranks below what is beautiful to reason. Now, each act will be rewarded in proportion to its worth, and God has promised to reward a good deed tenfold.³⁸ The implication against the Mu‘tazilī view is that the act which is good to reason will be multiple times more valuable than the sensorily beautiful creations and rewards that divine action produces. And this is no conclusion to be accepted.

Sixth, in one of his logically tightest arguments, al-Māturīdī first observes that God declares individuals who seek praise for accomplishments they did not achieve to be blameworthy.³⁹ In other words, this means taking credit for another’s work. At the same time, God says it is incumbent on individuals to express gratitude to Him for the gift of faith and to reciprocate with praise and thankfulness for His benevolence. It is, therefore, implausible, al-Māturīdī concludes, for God not to have originated faith and spiritual blessings, as otherwise, He would be in the position of an individual who seeks recognition for deeds they did not perform.⁴⁰

This leads to our seventh argument. According to the Mu‘tazila, God’s power is limited to only one of the two choices (*wajhayn*) between the performance of good rather than evil. For the Mu‘tazila hold all evil results exclusively from human action. Yet, al-Māturīdī notes, every “single-type” act (*fī ‘lu naw‘un [wāhid]*) is a natural action, which contrasts with the “dual-type” act (*fī ‘layn*) that is performed through a voluntary will based on power (*ikhtiyar ‘an qudra*). A dual-type act is

35 For further details on this last clause specifically, see *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 317-318, and the statements of al-Māturīdī’s follower, Abu l-Mu‘in al-Nasafī, *Tabsirat al-adilla*, ed. Claude Salamé. (Damascus, 1974), 672.

36 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 316. See also, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 110.

37 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 275, 297-298, 312, 275.

38 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 316.

39 As the editors of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* note, the reference is likely to Āli ‘Imran 3/188.

40 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 316-317, 327, 328, 331, 340-341.

one that had the possibility of being different to what it was,⁴¹ and because the Mu‘tazila assign to God only the ability to create what is good, a single-type act, al-Māturīdī says that God then possesses merely the power found in natural causation, which lacks freedom. It also seems al-Māturīdī is implying that, on the Mu‘tazilī view, God is not praiseworthy at all, since He is not free.⁴²

Eighth, al-Māturīdī declares that some unfortunate theological implications follow the belief humans create their own actions. Specifically, he compares the Mu‘tazila to the Ditheists (Thanawiyya) and Magi (Majusiyya), writing that the former outdo these dualist sects in the number of creators they introduce into existence due to their affirmation of humans as producers of their own actions.⁴³

This and the ninth argument make apparent that al-Māturīdī’s understanding of creative action is philosophically loaded. Certainly, along usual lines, the divine act is defined as introducing and bringing something into existence from nothing (*al-’ibda‘ wa al-’ikhraj min al-’adam ila al-wujud*).⁴⁴ But this extends into a comprehensive form. Specifically, movement itself is something that comes in and out of existence, and since all events are encompassed by movement, they are, therefore, dependent on creative acts.⁴⁵ Al-Māturīdī thus argues against the Mu‘tazila that commanding or prohibiting an action is not the same as commanding or prohibiting its creation.⁴⁶ The idea here is that God alone is the Creator of the act; the human cannot be charged to create their action as such (but rather held responsible for obedience or disobedience) – yet the Mu‘tazila apply, in al-Māturīdī’s view, precisely this definition of creation to the servant’s act.

41 This argument requires at least the possibility that the act is of a different type, for example, good or bad; it is not altogether clear in this context whether al-Māturīdī holds that the act could, apart from this, also have had the possibility of being a different instance or token event to what it in fact was. This interesting question we shall leave aside.

42 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 317. Significantly, what this and the above argument suggests is that al-Māturīdī regarded a type of acquisition to apply to God, even if he did not state this openly or give it a unique name, for only in this way could He be deserving of praise and thanks.

43 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 317.

44 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 317.

45 One illustrative example of this understanding is in Abū Maṣṣūr Al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-qur’ān*, vol. 8, eds. Hilal İbrahim Kaçar and Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Dār al-Mīzān, 2007) 84-85. It is worth noting, as a matter of theoretical significance, that Aristotle is the probable ancestor of this view. While his *Physics* does not support creation *ex nihilo*, it does suggest that the introduction of motion from a prior state of motionlessness would constitute absolute generation or creation (*Physics*, 252b, also see, Bk. VIII, Chap. 6). The same is apparent, for example, in Simplicius’ commentary (*Simplicius: On Aristotle Physics 8.1-5*, trans. István Bodnár, Michael Chase, Michael Share (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 87-94).

46 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 318.

In the tenth argument, al-Māturīdī observes no action in all its aspects can be considered as obedience or disobedience. Here, he notes proportions of height and width, strength and weakness, and beauty and ugliness. These are relative properties created by God that cannot be described as good or bad.⁴⁷ The implication is that the Mu‘tazilī denial of these, which inhere in the acts of human beings, to the creative power of God is based on false premises; by trying to divorce the evil of human acts from God, they eliminate His creative power over it entirely, even those aspects that have no moral significance.⁴⁸ Al-Māturīdī is drawing a fact-value distinction of a theistic sort; a fundamental source of value is obedience and disobedience to God’s commands, yet what God creates is the “fact” or physicality of the actions, not the disobedience or obedience *per se*.⁴⁹ For al-Māturīdī, the Mu‘tazilī fails to differentiate the two main aspects of actions, one of which is attributed to God and the other to the human. These are the creative and obedient (or disobedient) aspects, respectively.⁵⁰ It is crucial that these are not confused or overlapped; the different aspects must be attributed to their true agent, not to both.⁵¹ More specifically, we might say that a fact-value distinction is made, where the creative aspect is not “value-apt” in terms of obedience, though the aspect attributed to humans is.⁵² In a useful example, al-Māturīdī notes that though God creates the utterance of the words spoken by the human agent, we are not to call Him the speaker of these words.⁵³

Our aim is not to critically evaluate these arguments, as equally debatable and ingenious as they may be, but express al-Māturīdī’s reasons for rejecting the main alternatives and also illustrate the key distinctions and concepts he is using. This latter is particularly important to the concept of creation, which we found to revolve around the binary of movement and rest and to include a critical distinction between value-apt and factual aspects of actions. Evidently, the most basic argument versus the Mu‘tazila is their failure to identify and address these different aspects appropriately.

47 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319.

48 In this context, al-Māturīdī notes that the servant does not even know the metaphysical details of his deeds, and so cannot possibly be responsible in bringing them about.

49 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 325.

50 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 320, 322 and, against al-Ka‘bī, 323 and 325. The point here is directly connected to different conceptions of the relation between bringing something into existence (*takwīn*) and the thing brought into existence (*mukawwan*), a central debate in kalām.

51 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 323. See also, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 314-315 and 344.

52 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 325 and 330.

53 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 324-325.

Real Agents

In this section, we move our discussion from al-Māturīdī's refutations to his points of affirmation. Specifically, we shall present the evidence he uses to directly support his view. This is bound up with the polemics above, since a falsification of one argument in the dialectic sometimes (but not always) immediately indicates the rival view that should be adopted. Occasionally, we shall take it upon ourselves to indicate these overlaps when they occur. Yet his various *reductiones* often do not determine the alternative to be adopted. And this is where his positive statements are crucial.

There are two main aims in this section. First, to present the evidence al-Māturīdī uses to directly support his view and, second, utilise these proofs to comprehensively piece together his overall theory. To this end, we initially examine his statements that ascribe power to the servant and thereafter identify statements that demonstrate this power is both a faculty of free action and direct causal effectivity. Although al-Māturīdī's libertarian stance has already been clearly indicated in his arguments against the Jabriyya and Mu'tazila, further substantiation and clarification of his view will be provided here to set out its more complicated details and distinguish in a hopefully conclusive way his conception of *kasb* from the compatibilist version of his counterpart al-Ash'arī.

Al-Māturīdī's Affirmations

After the Jabriyya and Mu'tazila (and Qadariyya), al-Māturīdī examines the view of a third group of Muslim theologians. This view is, in fact, his own. His representing this view as belonging to a group may be a veiled reference to Dirār and others who hold the same view or simply a disguised means of referring to himself. In any case, these theologians ascribe free actions to the servant in a genuine sense and thus claim the latter is truly obedient or disobedient, while they also ascribe the creation of the act itself to God. He says that, in this way, they attribute the act in real terms both to God and the servant.⁵⁴

This encompasses acts of both misguidance and guidance, blessing and abandonment and other such binary states (*aḥwāl*). Al-Māturīdī writes "the act belongs to the servant through acquisition, while it belongs to God through creation" (*ṭhabata anna ḥaqīqa dhalika l-fi 'l huwa li-l 'ibād min ṭarīq al-kasb [wa] allah min ṭarīq al-khalq*).⁵⁵ The formula is a close replication of one given earlier following the second argument against the Jabriyya above, where al-Māturīdī states attribution of the act to God does not nullify its value-aptness vis-à-vis the human agent.

54 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 309-310.

55 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 309. Also, compare to *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 311.

Specifically, the act is God's in terms of His creation of it according to its properties (*khalāqaha 'alā mā hiya 'alayhi*) and bringing it into existence when it did not exist before (*awjadaha ba'da an lam takun*).⁵⁶ Later the phrasing is repeated with the specification of *kasb* with freedom of choice or liberty (*ikhtiyāran*).⁵⁷ The same pronouncement is also to be found in al-Māturīdī's Qur'anic commentary, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'an*: "[The act] belongs to the servant via performance (*fi lan*) and to God via realisation (*taqdīran*)."⁵⁸ To this al-Māturīdī immediately adds:

The move to (do) good or evil comes from the servant, and from God comes the creation [of the act]. This is what is rationally understood from the path of justice and fairness (*al-'adl wa l-ḥaqq*); it resides between excessiveness and deficiency.⁵⁸

The context of this passage is a rejection of the Qadariyya and the Murji'a,⁵⁹ wherein the former are criticised for denying God's government or arrangement (*tadbīr*) of human acts. Two points are worth noting. First is the moral necessity al-Māturīdī associates with his position, a feature clearly present in his arguments against the Jabriyya and again here in his statement about justice and fairness. Second is his mention of *tadbīr*. God is not here to be understood as merely a processor of human decisions acting to manifest whatever such agents decide to do. Rather, He can act as He wills and in according to His plan. Thus, divine direction is a guarantor of destiny and fate.⁶⁰

One primary reason al-Māturīdī insists that the act can only be attributed to God in terms of its creation is because all worldly events exhibit binary properties that are indicative of change and, hence, their temporal nature. This includes obedience and disobedience, goodness and badness, in addition to physical properties, such as large and small, light and heavy. Al-Māturīdī writes that the existence of such properties necessarily implies the existence of its opposite.⁶¹ God, however, cannot be ascribed any such binary property characteristic of temporality.⁶²

56 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 306.

57 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 321 and, see also, 326 and 482-483.

58 Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, eds. Ahmet Vanlıoğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu's (Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2005), 82. Compare to al-Juwaynī: the human act is attributed to God via decree and creation (*muḍāf ilā Allah tabāraka wa ta'ālā taqdīran wa khalqan*) (*al-Nizamiyya*, 46-47).

59 The latter are actually none other than the Jabriyya, though al-Māturīdī confuses (or equates) the two. See also, for example, al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 310.

60 This is also indicated in al-Māturīdī's argument versus the Mu'tazila, see fn. 34. However, the question of destiny and fate in so far as it extends beyond these general remarks to individual human lives deserves detailed study in al-Māturīdī's thought that cannot be offered here.

61 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319 and 325.

62 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 309.

What is ascribable to God is *divine* action, which al-Māturīdī suggests is ultimately His creative act (*fī l-taḥqīq khalquhu*).⁶³ This is implicitly a rejection of the Mu‘tazilī view that certain physical events are attributed to God’s action in figurative terms only. Thus, by attributing to God genuine action in the world, the Quranic statements that He has power over all things and is the Creator of everything can be affirmed and allow God to be praised as He should. By way of proof, al-Māturīdī says every human action has aspects that the agent can envision, predict and comprehend, while there are also aspects they have no knowledge of and cannot foresee. Again, al-Māturīdī’s observation is simple: they can be responsible for the first aspect meaningfully, not the second. This seems to lie on a distinction between all the innumerable physical and microphysical details of an act, on the one hand, and the basic intention, including the will to obey or disobey a divine command, and the rather superficial knowledge of the act, on the other. While humans know the latter, they lack knowledge of almost all the other.⁶⁴ The idea is that creation requires manipulation of all the physical elements, which al-Māturīdī assumes requires knowledge of them to the last detail. And, only via actions one truly accomplishes can a person be worthy of reward or punishment, praise or blame, which makes the agent deserving of moral appraisal.⁶⁵

Another proof is that while human actions are ascribed the status of being good and bad, they cannot be reduced to either of these in absolute terms. Yet, were it up to the agents, their actions would always be good and beautiful. Hence, al-Māturīdī infers the acts do not go as intended because the agents lack knowledge of these qualities, and this is because God’s action is not subject to human knowledge, while He creates these qualities according to His will. In short, the action is not entirely the servant’s own.⁶⁶ Similarly, we perceive that the acts of servants bring them harm, weariness, and pain. Al-Māturīdī states there cannot be harm without a cause, and so similarly for the other states. Yet, the agents seek pleasure and benefit rather than any of the things noted, so he concludes that they cannot be the source of these qualities.⁶⁷

At first glance, these two arguments appear relatively weak, since one can surely cause something one does not fully understand. Yet the basis of this line of

63 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 310. Al-Māturīdī uses what appears an eclectic range of terms to denote God’s creative act, including *ījād*, often rendered as “bringing-into-existence” and *inshā’*, “establish” or “compose”.

64 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 310-311, 341. The same point is often raised against the Mu‘tazila. See, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 325, 339, 351.

65 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 316-317.

66 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 311.

67 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 312. See also, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 322, 380.

reasoning can be identified in Greek philosophy. According to Aristotle, the creation of an entity is ultimately the manifestation of specialised knowledge. He uses the example of an artisan engaged in creating a bronze sculpture and identifies the most distinguishing feature of the efficient cause as the *knowledge* implemented by the artisan, not their labour.⁶⁸ For the production of a statue via the artisan's work represents the fulfilment of a model, or form, that is the ultimate explanation of the construction. If we were to interpret al-Māturīdī's statements accordingly, the efficient cause, in the form of divine knowledge, combines with the formal cause of the human act, which is all the details the event is divinely envisioned to possess.⁶⁹

The next proof al-Māturīdī presents starts from the basic doctrine that there is no creator other than God; if the origination of temporal events were accomplished by one other than God, we would be accepting an additional creator.⁷⁰ As we observed before, al-Māturīdī holds actions as creations *ex nihilo*, and we must recall the definition of actions as types of movements deemed to come in and out of existence. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this *absolute* divine power, al-Māturīdī notes also that power is given to the human agent. Indeed, only God can empower other beings.⁷¹ If God needed to relinquish power or sovereignty in order to empower the human being then we would have to accept that another has dominion over Him. And this al-Māturīdī declares impossible.⁷² Conversely, we are also reminded that movement and stillness cannot be separated. Hence, the creator of one, must be the creator of both. Were humans, therefore, attributed either, they would be ascribed a power belonging to God.⁷³

One particularly revealing passage regarding this relationship between divine and human action reads: "God's act is in reality not the act of the servant; the servant's act is the *effect* brought about by God, not His act."⁷⁴ Al-Māturīdī deems cases exemplifying such a distinction to be easily found in the physical world, and he offers the example of two people carrying an object from one location to

68 Aristotle, *Physics*, 195a6-8, 195b21-25, *On Generation and Corruption*, 324a24-b13. Compare with his *Metaphysics*, 1013b 6-9.

69 It is worth also noting the central place the concept of purpose has for al-Māturīdī. God never acts without purpose and will often have different intentions for an act than its human agent. Ultimately, each divine action must, alongside perfect knowledge, be connected to a purpose, even if that purpose is unknown to us. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 167.

70 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 312. See also, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 321.

71 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 320.

72 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 365-366.

73 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 312.

74 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319. Emphasis added.

another. Though each person's act is physically distinct, the effect (the changing location of the carried object) is caused by both.⁷⁵ This illustration certainly helps to show how human and divine action can be coherently distinguished: Both humans and God are concurrently agents, but at the first level, God's act is responsible for the physical act of the human; the human act is the effect of God's, and the effect brought about by the human act is again an effect caused by God. Thus, an asymmetric hierarchy between human and divine agency is established, wherein all that is ascribed to the human is created, though at the final level, human and divine agent together cause a single effect. But it must be immediately recalled that each agent causes this effect in distinct ways, with God as Creator and the human as acquirer (*muktasib*). We shall endeavour to add detail to this schema below by explaining the nature of the power granted to the human being.

Power Belongs to the Servant

Much of the discussion so far already points to the libertarian stance al-Māturīdī takes. This is clearest in his criticisms of the Jabriyya, but is also clear in his criticisms of the Mu'tazila in so far as *no* criticism targets their attribution of power to the servant; al-Māturīdī's arguments against them focus largely on the negation of divine power in the production of human action. This, alongside his identification of concurrent agency, makes him a "libertarian concurrentist." By contrast, in the compatibilist position of al-Asharī, the agent is responsible for any action they perform that they could (only) logically avoid doing. A compatibilist who accepted a form of human causal agency might agree with a significant portion of what al-Māturīdī claims, even while maintaining their stance that humans do not possess genuine freedom, since the compatibilist maintains moral responsibility in the absence of significant freedom; and a person can have a power to perform acts they do not ultimately choose. However, within classical kalām, compatibilists of the Ash'arī school typically make divine power absolute, so the human cannot act or determine their actions through *any* power of their own. By contrast, attributing genuine power to the human signified the ascription of free will.

More specifically, the power that belongs to the human agent is distinguished in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* as pertaining to more than one possible choice of action. We saw already how this concept was cited against the Mu'tazilī conception of God. Free action is that which is a dual-type; there is the real (not only logical) possibility for more than one type of action.⁷⁶ It is in this context that al-Māturīdī's use of the

75 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319-320.

76 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 317, 349-350 and, see also, 214-215.

term “power”, therefore, specifically indicates significant freedom and he considers himself in this regard as following Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767).⁷⁷ Further, he mentions human possession of power in comparable senses to God’s, even though the power is not of the same nature.⁷⁸ Indeed, our limited capacity to influence other objects demonstrates our lack of control over the world and compares strikingly with the absolute power over all things that God has.⁷⁹ Hence, “everyone owns only a partial amount of the power [that exists] in the world of objects, while Allah is the owner of it all entirely.”⁸⁰ Similarly, al-Māturīdī observes that the power owned by human beings is, of necessity, transitory as well as limited, and he repeats the abovementioned point that it is God, and He alone, who can empower others.⁸¹ Thus, human power is completely derivative and incomparably limited, but of the kind to ensure significant freedom.

A major discussion in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* revolves around the issues of whether power precedes the act and endures after it. Al-Māturīdī holds that the power exists simultaneously for the duration of the act, no more, no less.⁸² Distinguishing himself from the Mu’tazila and Jabriyya, he writes “affirmation that an act takes place at a certain moment without power is closer to the meaning of compulsion than the affirmation that it takes place with power, for someone who understands what compulsion (*al-jabr*) and free choice (*al-ikhtiyār*) mean.”⁸³ For, al-Māturīdī continues, the Mu’tazila are held to claim that the power belongs before the act, not during – but if there is no power, then there can be no freedom. Indeed, this power is stated specifically as the cause (*sabab*) of the act in reality (*fi’l-ḥaqīqa*).⁸⁴ Elsewhere, al-Māturīdī states that whenever the power exists then action is certainly

77 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 349.

78 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 313 and, see also, 123.

79 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 297.

80 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 300.

81 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 314, 320.

82 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 342-348, 349-69. Notwithstanding the importance of this for al-Māturīdī’s theory of concurrentism, a detailed exploration of his discussion is not essential for the purposes of our study, which pertains to the attribution of power simply in so far as it denotes free will.

83 Significantly, in Arabic philosophy, the term *ikhtiyār* was chosen to translate the Greek *prohairesis*, that is, the intellect’s distinctive ability to rationally decide between alternative courses of action. See Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr Al-Fārābī’s Mabādī’ Ārā Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 88-89, 290-291, esp. 204-205, and see also 356.

84 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 412.

with it (*ma'ahu*).⁸⁵ In the final section of this study, we will have recourse to mention al-Māturīdī's position on this again when theorising about the temporal connection this power has with action.

A parallel emphasis is that the human being remains within a divinely composed and driven dominion. God is in control (*qādir*) through His creation and direction of human deeds, which are designated by movement. If this control did not remain, God would not empower them to undertake these activities (*mā aqdarahum 'alayhā*) and, conversely, if God were to make the servant capable of performing their deed entirely autonomously, it would entail His loss of dominion and, hence, make Him the owner of a diminishable power (*qādiran bi qudra tazūl*). Such power is ascribable only to a servant, not a Lord.⁸⁶ This demonstrates the degree to which humanity is held to be dependent on divine power; not only the scope of our causal capacities, but their very continuation is intrinsically dependent on God from moment to moment.⁸⁷

This conception of empowerment comes in addition to the most immediate form of evidence cited for freedom of the will: Everyone senses themselves to be free rather than compelled in their deliberate actions.⁸⁸ This point is crucial, for although we have seen al-Māturīdī infer in formal terms that a power is bestowed to the human, there is rather less detail regarding its actual content or meaning. In one passage, however, he offers critical information about its nature and signs. For example, included within that aspect of the act that belongs entirely to the servant is endeavour, hardship, and struggle (*mu'ālajāt wa'anā' wa jahd*).⁸⁹ These states specify agency attributed to the human and are conceptually distinct from their createdness. That is, they are based on the agent's freedom and result from it, rather than being simply a part of what God unilaterally brings into being. The

85 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 342. The study by Muhtaroglu ("Al-Māturīdī's View of Causality") that reads al-Māturīdī's theory of causation and human free will respectively as occasionalist and compatibilist simply ignores al-Māturīdī's moral aim and the wealth of evidence he offers to support it — the fundamentals of which we have already provided. Even disregarding the ethical and metaethical aspects of his thought, however, al-Māturīdī's allocation of power to the human agent indicates his distance from occasionalist thought, while any denial refuting that he conceived this power as causally effective faces what seems the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, seen above. Also see the definitions of *qudra* and *quwwa* by al-Māturīdī, below; and Pessagno, "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb", 184-188.

86 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 312, and also, 365.

87 Indeed, al-Māturīdī considers continuity (*baqā'*) as but another accident of corporeal bodies whose existence God actively maintains. *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 346-347.

88 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 307.

89 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 320.

description suggests that the agent is interactively affected by their internal and external physical conditions, such that exertion is experienced.

Some explanation for such states can be found in al-Māturīdī's claims that humans have two sides consisting of nature and reason. Each of these contributes to the human tendency to perceive some things as beautiful or good and others as ugly or evil. However, the judgements of rationality and natural inclination do not always coincide.⁹⁰ This indicates part of the struggle humans experience in their lives to obey God and achieve their goals.⁹¹ Through the application of reason, humans achieve superiority, as it enables them to have faith in God via its reach beyond immediate phenomena to conclude about things that have not yet occurred or never been seen, and also overcome their natural desires when needed to achieve virtue and goodness.⁹² That human beings feature this internal struggle reveals the causative power they have to resist natural temptations and desires.⁹³

Mapping the Framework of Causal Power

We can now summarise the intersecting theoretical material from the evidence we have revealed in al-Māturīdī's writings, listing the fundamental concepts and principles. We shall follow this with a similar section identifying the main arguments and their interconnectedness.⁹⁴

Principles and Concepts

A range of concepts and principles form the full picture of al-Māturīdī's theory of human action and help present his concurrentism systematically.

90 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 74, 253, 301, 303.

91 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 67, 248, 256.

92 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 68, 249-250, 254, 302-304. With some justification, Dorrol deems pages 301-305 of *Kitāb al-tawhīd* "an overview of al-Māturīdī's entire theological vision". See, Phillip Dorrol, "Knowledge and Free Will: Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*", *Maturidi Theology: A Bilingual Reader*, eds. Leija Demiri, Phillip Dorrol, and Dale J. Correa (Tübingen: Mohr Sebeck, 2022), 189-202, which presents a translation of the passage.

93 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 67-68.

94 Each listed principle, concept and argument has been chosen primarily based on its relevance to al-Māturīdī's perspective rather than his attempt to refute opponents. The exclusion and inclusion of theoretical elements here is no doubt interpretive and the list is not to be assumed as being definitive, but sufficient for our purposes.

Principles

Several principles form the backbone of the arguments discussed above (and listed later below). The principles here are bases on which al-Māturīdī begins his reasoning rather than points he attempts to prove.

Divine Creation (*khalq*) – Creation is often discussed in terms of bringing into existence (*ījad*) and originating (*ihdath*). Although these sometimes appear synonymous with creating for al-Māturīdī, there exists a certain distinction in emphasis: *ījad* emphasises creation *ex nihilo*, while *ihdath* signifies the temporal nature of that created as at a specific time and for a finite period.

Human Power and Choice – Al-Māturīdī predicates free action to a power that must pertain to two alternatives.

Knowledge and Action – The possibility of an action is fundamentally tied to knowledge that will explain all aspects of its manifestation. It is partly because of this Aristotelian theory that al-Māturīdī holds the human being to be limited in freedom, that is, because they are limited in knowledge, as well as power.

Movement as Creation – The movement of every object is an act of creation *ex nihilo*. This is the main reason al-Māturīdī does not assign creation to the power of the human being.

Power and Duration – The power given for an act only persists for the duration of the act.

Conceptual distinctions

Physical-Metaphysical – The distinction made between aspects of an action. The metaphysical aspect is completely connected to God as His creation, while the physical is associated with both the human agent and God. Corporeal bodies and their accidents are all under the dominion of divine action, yet as physical beings, the human agent is the inherent possessor of the act.

Fact-Value – The factual aspect of the act is subject to the above analysis between physical and metaphysical and their respective associations to God and human. As for value, this al-Māturīdī explicitly attributes to the human agent. However, as an agent subject to praise and gratitude, it also appears that God acquires an aspect of value for all actions that are not the possession of other free agents, and also some aspect of those that are, since creative divine action is what allows rational and free agents to live and acquire value, which is one stated reason for God's praiseworthiness and gratitude toward Him.

Acquisition-Acquirer (*kasb-muktasib*) – Both the act's physicality and its moral meaning are acquired by their human agents, since both are produced by divine creation, and all that is created is acquired.⁹⁵ To this we can connect al-Māturīdī's assertion that goodness and badness are accidents of physical entities – in contemporary parlance, it is arguable that these properties supervene on physical events. Both accidents must be considered the result of divine action, and as binaries, the existence of one necessarily entails the existence of the other.

Power-Powerful (*qudra-qādir*) – Al-Māturīdī deems the human agent as empowered by He who is *qādir* and thus become to a limited degree *qādir* themselves.⁹⁶ While the respective roles of God and His servant are clearly and significantly different, the term power here maintains a basic, univocal, shared meaning in the context of his writings. The power God possesses is exclusive to Him and absolute, while the power of the human agent is finite, limited in scope, and transitory. But both pertain to significant freedom to choose between two or more alternatives.

Arrangement-Realisation (*tadbīr-taqdīr*) – The human agent has the power to arrange their actions, while God alone realises them. The realisation may not be, and regularly is not, as the human intends or hopes. Thus, God maintains an overriding and supreme management of all the world's events.

Natural-Voluntary Causation (*tab'ī-ikhtiyārī*) – Natural causes only go in one direction; there is always only one type of outcome. Any action that has more than one possible type of is a product of voluntary action. This is constituted by both knowledge and (free) will.

Arguments

To track al-Māturīdī's various arguments, dispersed and repeated in writings, we can list them with individual names. The reader will notice an overlap in some cases between these and his rejections of rival theories. The arguments are divided into those based on revelation and reason and are presented in a way that aims to proceed logically.

95 The intrinsic moral value of an act is not inherent to the act itself, contrary to what one may have assumed based on the rational framework presented by al-Māturīdī about morality and, also, given that the beauty and goodness that reason recognises possess a universal and stable significance. See, al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 311-312.

96 It is perhaps significant that al-Māturīdī shows a preference to describe human agents as empowered by God and capable (*yaqdiru*) rather than *qādir*, though the latter term is also applied to them.

Revelatory

1. Creator in Revelation – The Qur’ān calls God the Creator of everything. Every movement denotes creation. Therefore, every act is created by God.

Rational

2. Creation demands Complete Knowledge – Human knowledge is limited; without complete knowledge an act cannot be created. Hence, humans are not the creators of their actions. The parallel positive argument is that none but God has complete knowledge, and since creation demands complete knowledge, God alone is Creator. This amounts to a philosophically based argument by al-Māturīdī to accompany the revelatory one above.
3. Creation requires Complete Power – If our actions were entirely within our power, they would go completely according to our plans. They do not go according to our plans. Hence, they are not entirely within our power. As before, this argument is connected to the revelatory one. The rational equivalent is: None but God has complete power. Creation demands complete power. Hence, only God is the Creator of events.
4. The Createdness of all Events – Action is constituted by accidents of movement and rest. All accidents are created; therefore, action is created.
5. Obligation from Divine Commands – Commands are binding on those who have the power to fulfil them. God issues commands to human beings, and His creative action does not include any aspect subject to His own command.

The Concurrency of Divine and Human Power with the Act

Based on the above assessments, we are now equipped to address some unsolved concerns. The notion that humans enjoy a substantial degree of freedom is supported by the concept that we are endowed with a capacity for agency at the precise moment of engaging in action. Now, there are three subsequent questions.

Firstly, does the power of the human agent solely encompass the ability to make decisions, or does it possess effectiveness beyond this? We noted above al-Māturīdī’s example of the collaborative effort between two individuals in carrying an object. If this example is intended to illustrate the theory closely, it strongly implies that the human agent, in conjunction with God, possesses a causal power to change the external world. However, the example is taken from the observable realm (*al-shāhid*), suggesting that al-Māturīdī might have employed it only as an analogy to elucidate the metaphysical reality underlying the generation of an action.⁹⁷

97 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 319-320.

Secondly, there is a temporal aspect to the issue here and an analytic one. Regarding the first, the creation of the act follows the creation of the power for the agent to decide and will, then to move and act, assuming that a decision comes before deliberate action. Also, the capacity to act, as we have seen, exists only during the moment of action. Yet, free actions must be the implementation of a decision made by the individual beforehand, and the decision, as an event that possesses temporal accidents, must be created. Hence, the action is dependent on another action that is also created. But if the decision is free, then it must also have a temporal precedent arising from the agent, that is, another decision and this preceding decision will in turn require another and so on ad infinitum. Hence, we face an infinite regress in search of free agency.⁹⁸

Seemingly aware of this problem, Rudolph observes that though al-Māturīdī does not explicitly designate it, he acknowledges a pre-existing power. This aligns with the states and causes (*al-aḥwāl wa l-asbāb*) that al-Māturīdī recognises as factors preceding action.⁹⁹ It is unclear whether this will resolve the issue above, however. The term power is deliberately distinguished here as designating necessary conditions rather than efficient causes. Certainly, it seems al-Māturīdī must acknowledge the existence of a prior power to the occurrence of an action for theoretical coherence, but this means explaining how an action can be free without a preceding determinant that belongs to the human agent, and is not about their circumstances, that is, necessary physical conditions.

Also, if the *power* to act is created, similar problems follow. Let us say that the power is created, then how can it be created for one of two different actions? Such a duality suggests that the power is separate from the action, in which case it is not an activity but rather a potentiality. The problem is that the power does not exist before the act, but only for the duration of its performance, which is the point at which it is created, and hence it is never in a potential state but always active once in existence. Here too, then, there appears to be a discrepancy, since the human agent cannot be free unless what is created corresponds to their will, but what they will is dependent on a power to will that must be created, and that exists only at the moment the act is already being undertaken, and hence already determined.

One may object that al-Māturīdī insists the power to act exists with the act, not before, and therefore it is wrong to require the existence of a prior act for free action;

98 Compare to the concerns raised against the Mu'tazila by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), *al-Muḥaṣṣal afkārī al-mutaqaddimīn wa l-muta'akhirīn min al-ḥukamā'i wa l-mutakallimīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay (Cairo: Maktabat al-Dar al-Turath, 1991), 454-457.

99 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 306. Based on al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 342. See also, for example, al-Māturīdī's comments on the contrasting capacities of different species "due to a power in them" (*Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 341).

rather liberty is internal to the power itself. However, given that in physical terms actions evidently follow decisions, this requirement is not unjustified. One response is that the temporal order of events cannot describe the cause-effect relation. For example, God could be ordering events based on His perfect knowledge of what one will do, and hence creates the power for the particular decision and action. This is so, even though logically one could have done something other than what one did do with that power, God realizes the event that He knows you will choose. Thus, the power does not need to precede the act.

Two issues exist with any such explanation.¹⁰⁰ Firstly, al-Māturīdī makes explicit no such theory.¹⁰¹ Rather, his comments support the idea that a thing comes into existence based specifically on something else that exists *before* it.¹⁰² Secondly, it will not solve the problem once expressed analytically. As for the analytic expression, it is as follows: God bestows the agent a power to perform an action, but what this “performance” can possibly consist in is not clear given that the effect of the power, that is the action, must be created by a different power, that is, God’s. In other words, while power is bestowed to perform the act, the question is what the power is doing if the act must be created despite this. Indeed, if the act is created, then it does not seem that this power needs to be bestowed at all. Thus, the two terms, power and creation, do not coalesce but rather obstruct each other analytically.

Thirdly, is the power to act or decide one’s actions created or uncreated? Given the above problems, postulating the uncreated human will is one way of attempting to resolve them. Also, al-Māturīdī defines both *quwwa* and *qudra* in terms of effectivity. Thus, *quwwa* is a cause (*‘illa*), and *qudra* is a cause (*sabab*), not an effect *per se*.¹⁰³ It is tempting, then, to say that the power to decide one’s actions comes before the act, or allowing for the possibility of two alternatives by some other means, and one way towards this is by judging agential power to be uncreated. Indeed, later members of the Maturidiyya did say it is uncreated.¹⁰⁴

100 This is putting aside as moot the debate about God’s pre-eternal knowledge making free action impossible.

101 Here we omit discussion of al-Māturīdī’s theory of *takwīn* – which he indeed considers a pre-eternal attribute of God – since it is not raised in his explanations of human freedom, and does not explain specifically the freedom of the servant.

102 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 79-80.

103 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 79 and 342, respectively.

104 See Gölcük, *İnsan ve Fiilleri*, 171; Emrullah Yuksel, *Sistematik Kelam* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2005), 82-83; Abdürrahim b. Ali Amasî Şeyhzade, *İzahü’l-akaid: nazmü’l-feraid tercümesi*, trans. Hacı Ali Efendizade Mehmed Emin (Dersaâdet: Müşterekü’l-Menfaa Osmanlı Matbaası, 1338[1919]), 81-83. A refutation of the view is in Mustafa Sabri (d. 1373/1954), *Mawqif al-bashar tahta sultan al-qadar* (Cairo: Matbaat al-Salafiyye, 1352 [1933]), 142-144.

They perceived the problem al-Māturīdī most likely did not. For al-Māturīdī, it appears that the possession of genuine power was sufficient to call the agent a possessor of significant freedom. For later members of the school, however, voluntary action (though not the manifestation of the act) is explained by the partially free will (*al-irādat al-juz'īyya*) of the human agent, as distinct from the universal will (*al-irādat al-kullīyya*) of God. And it is significant that al-Māturīdī does *not* declare the human power to act as created – except very rarely. In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, there is one place where he states it is. But the passage is emphatic: To name the act of God as “creation” does not entail compulsion (*al-iḍṭirār*), since the power belonging to the act is a creation (*makhlūq*), and this is the reason it is not compelled but free (*ikhtiyār*).¹⁰⁵ Thus, as far as al-Māturīdī is concerned, it is not despite but because the power is created that the action is free; freedom lies in a power *created* for that freedom to exist.

So how shall we assess al-Maturidi's attempted resolution of the question regarding human freedom and divine omnipotence, in light of the above issues? It is worth noting immediately that in our mapping his theory no theoretical element stands out clearly to solve the above aporia. In his assessment of al-Māturīdī's contribution to the theory of human action, Rudolph observes the theologian sought only that which is justified from each rival theory, and calls this a mark of genuine synthesis.¹⁰⁶ However, reading between the lines, even as sympathetic a commentator as Rudolph seems to doubt the synthesis is complete, for he neither explains nor announces it as theoretically successful.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, it appears al-Māturīdī adopts a criterion for justifying theories based on theological advantages, though these advantages — provided by competing theories — risk entailing contradictory elements. And in our assessment, it appears serious inconsistencies are present, making the resolution deficient.

Let us, then, attempt a an interpretative restoration of his view. To answer the three issues above, we should analyse the philosophical framework behind

105 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 321.

106 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 306. For some reason generally not in keeping with the discussion found in *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, Rudolph situates al-Māturīdī's resolution between the Karāmiyya and the Hanafīyya, as his main rivals.

107 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 306-308. Here, the varied ways his successors reacted to his theory are noted.

al-Māturīdī's theory in more detail.¹⁰⁸ It appears the term *qudra* is used chiefly in a narrow sense as the power that a thing has to produce a change (described fundamentally as movement or process).¹⁰⁹ But there is a second sense of *qudra*, best termed “potentiality”, that al-Māturīdī appears to assume, though distinguishes with no distinct term. Potentiality denotes the capacity to be in a different state, and it seems this is the power al-Māturīdī regards as indefinable. Rather, it is grasped from examples.¹¹⁰ Here we can cite, for instance, al-Māturīdī's comments that flight and swimming (under the sea) are capacities of only some species and not a *quwwa* that humans have. Similarly, the human agent, until they act, is only a potential agent, and until they decide between two alternatives, for example, to write or to speak, is not a writer or speaker.¹¹¹ God actualises this action in the agent but is never either the writer or the speaker.¹¹²

Without further explanation, however, this would render the human agent completely passive. It is better, then, to rather think of their power being emergent with the power given them, as something actualised by God, so that God gives them the power to realise one of two different alternatives. Since this power is intrinsically indeterminate, and hence, in a sense, only a potentiality, it is actualised to take a specific form. Here we may recall that al-Māturīdī distinguishes the created power that coincides precisely with the duration of voluntary action from the power that exists before and represents unfree action. So al-Māturīdī clearly endorses a concept of significant freedom yet it is obstructed by his insistence that

108 The reader may recognize that the following explanation of al-Māturīdī's theory of causation has an Aristotelian framework. That is because, as indicated above and noted in the following discussion, Aristotle's thought appears a defining source for our theologian. However, it is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this study to elaborate further on this influence of Aristotle's philosophy – an influence that has gone almost completely unrecognized in the literature. In any case, it appears only fitting that this connection play a role in the development of any resolution attributable to al-Māturīdī or his thought.

109 Compare with Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1046a9-12.

110 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd* 342-343. Note that al-Māturīdī's analysis of *qudra* follows closely in substance Aristotle's explanation of *dunamis* (potentiality) and *energia* (actuality) in the *Metaphysics* (1048a). Aristotle judges both *dunamis* and *energeia* as indefinable and best understood through analogies, as echoed by al-Māturīdī. Thus, both thinkers must use examples for clarification. For Aristotle, potentiality stands to actuality as a building to what is capable of building, what is awake to what is asleep, seeing to what has sight, shaped to shapeless matter, and what is complete to what is incomplete (1048b1-3). Compare with Pessagno, “Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb”, 187.

111 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd* 34. Aristotle also explains that for rational beings, power has two possibilities, and it requires a deciding motivation to prefer one over the other (1048a8-20), in contrast to non-rational capacities. In either case, once all the capacities are in place the effect necessarily occurs.

112 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 324-325.

every movement is created. It is as if he intends an idea akin to the Aristotelian unmoved mover, though the movements are created. For Aristotle, only a few unmoved movers were gods, and each human or animal soul was an unmoved mover.¹¹³ Thus, al-Māturīdī notes that God empowers others in a way that does not take away from His own power, just as the unmoved mover moves others without diminishing this power to move others or annulling the self-movement of others.¹¹⁴

Now, it appears that two possible answers are available to repair al-Māturīdī's theory. The first is to conceive of this power in the human agent as incomplete, so God creates the act. Admittedly, this partial power, if effective, too might itself denote a movement of some kind. If so, then it can be described as metaphysical movement, which becomes an act once actualised by God, while the metaphysical aspect of the act that contributed towards it is uncreated. Indeed, this recalls the position taken by later Māturīdīyya. It is in principle coherent, but somewhat overturns al-Māturīdī's claim that *all* events are created.

The second is to conceive of the power God grants to the human agent as a resource they can use freely. This freedom lies in the power given being indeterminative, as noted, with the action, by contrast, being defined at the moment one's free will is exercised. Thus, the human agent is not passive, but active via the power bestowed them. This is ensured since God's actualisation of the decision does not happen before the act but is perfectly synchronic with it. In this way, the capacity of free choice is actualised in the moment that it is made, so that the power and act coalesce in a temporal unity without predetermination – as would seem possible at the interface between temporal and the divine, atemporal realms. For the actualisation of the power does not come before the act, and so does not predetermine what it will be. Rather, in the causal connection between an atemporal and temporal realm, there is no before or after for the cause vis-a-vis the effect, since we have no temporal coordinate for this metaphysical cause except its correlation with the effect in time, suggesting its only way of being successfully designated is as precisely concurrent with the latter.

Additionally, the human power involved can be conceived of in line with quantum physics, where subatomic particles feature indeterminate behaviour that has been

113 Stephen Menn, "Aristotle's Theology", *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 342-348.

114 Aristotle, *Physics*, 259a.

interpreted as intrinsic to the particles themselves.¹¹⁵ This reading of microphysical events illustrates how human agency may be undetermined without the need to postulate a metaphysical dimension, *pace* later Māturīdīyya. Also, this would be more in keeping with al-Māturīdī's theology, wherein only God is metaphysical. Similarly, the agent's decision does not rely (at least not entirely) on causal determination. Thus, the act of choosing is created, but undetermined with its creation.

Moreover, on this reading, since the human power can be read as a physical one, it can be deemed physically effective also. Yet it must always be only a fraction of what is needed for any act to be realised, for God alone creates it and the effect to which it pertains. Accordingly, in direct relation to our first question in this section we may note that the power al-Māturīdī attributes to the human being need not be limited to intellectual capacity to choose between two alternatives, but can also include physical effect. As such, al-Māturīdī's example of two agents physically carrying a single object is not purely figurative.

Our account can be further clarified by use of Mackie's INUS theory of causation. Here, each factor is "an insufficient but non-redundant [necessary] part of an unnecessary but sufficient condition."¹¹⁶ His classic example is the start of a fire. The insufficient condition is an electric wire near flammable material. This by itself is insufficient to generate a fire. The necessary condition is, again, the electric wire and the flammable material because there would be no potential for ignition unless they are present. The unnecessary but sufficient condition is the set of conditions that, when combined, are enough to cause the event. In Mackie's example, the presence of an electrical discharge from the wire is enough to cause a fire, even though the presence of an electric wire alone is insufficient. Finally, unnecessary condition refers to the fact that other factors or conditions could lead to the same outcome but are not necessary, for example, other sources of ignition, such as a lit match or gas leak.¹¹⁷

Applying this to Māturīdī's theory, the physical and intellectual disposition of the human agent are insufficient but necessary conditions for free action, while when

115 Faye, Jan, "Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/qm-copenhagen/>>.

116 Mackie, John, L. *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 62.

117 Mackie, *Cement of the Universe*, 34-38. It should be noted that Mackie's theory is a conceptual analysis and does not attend deliberately to the ontological issue of causation, or the "question about how the world goes on", as Mackie puts it (*Cement of the Universe*, 1), which is what al-Māturīdī is interested in. Nevertheless, Mackie's assessment of causes and their interrelationships easily translates into a useful explanation of al-Māturīdī's theory.

God actualises the power needed for action, we see the creative act of God and the actualised power of the human agent together become the sufficient condition for the event. Al-Māturīdī's discussion in counterfactual language regarding the concurrence of divine and human will seems to support this analysis. Without God's actualisation of the potentiality granted to the agent in the form of an effective power at the precise moment of action, and His creation of the act, the human's act cannot be.¹¹⁸ There are two further points. Firstly, God's status as the cause of all movement makes His action always necessary for any event in every circumstance. Only other factors can be called unnecessary, since a different *set* of conditions (necessarily including divine action) could also cause the event. Secondly, God's will is a necessary but insufficient condition for free action specifically, since the agent must will it too.¹¹⁹ If it is free, God shall not will something that the servant will not, and in general God's will to cause the event can occur on the arrival of the servant's, but need not always, for the servant may will something that God does not actualise.

Conclusion

We have seen that al-Māturīdī tries to avoid the philosophical and theological disadvantages found in the respective theories of the two main rival groups in Islamic theology. He managed to do this by combining aspects of both alternatives, while also rejecting much of what they contain. In addition, he develops a range of concepts and distinctions to connect the theoretical elements and principles he has adopted from the theological discussion in which he is a participant.

We have tried to prove this by identifying and presenting his definitive statements, which rule out a compatibilist theory. In addition, we have listed the main principles that appear central to the structure of al-Māturīdī's theory and attempted to articulate logically the main arguments that constitute the evidence to support the rather unique and celebrated resolution of the problem of free will in Islamic theology. Al-Māturīdī's theory of human freedom appears to be a form of concurrentism that seeks to avoid the ethical, theological, and metaphysical problems perceived in alternative views that are defended in his day and today. In this light, his theory offers a *via media* that can be set against compatibilism. In doing this, it appears clear that al-Māturīdī is a subtle defender of significant freedom and offers a highly unique theory of concurrentism.

In the last section of the article, we have tried to resolve some questions regarding the precise nature of human power and freedom vis-a-vis divine creation. This

118 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 380.

119 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, 381.

sees us discussing topics where al-Māturīdī's statements are less plentiful and more ambiguous. It seems true that in this regard, he was content to conduct his discussion primarily in refutation of his rivals rather than put together his theory in its main principles and corollaries. Two plausible resolutions to the relation between divine and human power, and, especially, divine creation and human free will, have been offered. The first represents that adopted by later members of his school and features the addition of an uncreated human will to ensure the freedom of human actions. The second we propose mainly in keeping with al-Māturīdī's own thought, complemented by extra material from Aristotle's metaphysics, which is taken as an original background source for the theologian. Here, we claim that al-Māturīdī assumes a type of power denoting potentiality but does not explicitly distinguish it in his work. Two additional theses are key. First, the act of the human will does not need to precede its creation to be free, because God's creative act is atemporal. Hence, its relationship to the physical reality is best described as precisely concurrent. Second, human power does not have to be restricted to intellectual activity; it can also be seen as drawn from a faculty of physical power that is causally efficacious, but never sufficient by itself; the production of effects necessarily requires God's power. In this regard, further clarity is gained through Mackie's INUS analysis of causation. In sum, al-Māturīdī presents human free will as a potentiality that exists before the act and is actualised by God precisely at the moment of action. This actualisation does not predetermine results, being intrinsically open to more than one type of effect, allowing choice through the power granted to the agent.

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