ONTOLOGICAL AND MORAL FUNDAMENTALS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND THE INDIVIDUAL IN ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Introduction
Humans are two dimensional beings. On the one hand, they have an active consciousness, will and creativity. On the other hand, they are passively bound to these conditions. For this reason, sometimes man sees himself as quite strong and sometimes, in the face of being, quite weak.¹ The product of this dual nature of humanity is a multitude of philosophies and religious beliefs which take either the physical body or the mind and spirit as the main foundations.²

This work will examine the different understandings of these in Islamic thought. The central concept is therefore “humanity”. We will examine the God-human relationship in Islamic thought within this concept.

From “Islamic Thought” our goal is theology (Kalam), philosophy and sufism (Tasavvuf). Consequently, in our research we will not consider the unsophisticated perspectives found in Islam, as a religion since an examination of interpretations of the God-human relationship in religious texts is outside the scope of this article.

² Takiyeddin Mengüşoğlu, Felsefeye Giriş, p. 256
Islamic thought means far more than just religious texts. In Islamic thought, the God-Human relationship may be expressed more or less than in the Quran and the Prophet’s hadiths. For example, in the Quran, God is represented in a ‘pure’ way while in Theology discusses God more in terms of a person or an attribute. Consequently, these views have emerged in theology:

1- God as a individual
2- God as both an individual and as an attribute
3- The attributes of his being
4- The attributes outside his being
5- The attributes from both inside and outside his being

The view of God/Allah in text has been lost in this debate. As a result, the concept of God/Allah in theology has become something other than the God/Allah in holy texts. On the other hand, the God-human relationship of creator and created, as seen in the Quran, has become something similar to that of Aristotle’s cosmic presence, the “first mover” (al-muharrik al-awwal) or the “One” found in Plato’s system. In Sufism, however, the Quran’s ontological take on God/Allah, as separate from man, considering the lover-beloved (‘aşiq-ma’şuq) relationship.3

Therefore, God, in the schools of Islamic thought, has become a logos rather than a praksis as it appears in the Quran. The Quran presents God as a verb, a behaviour or a means of positioning, while schools of Islamic thought see God as something that can be understood, as the definition, proof and object of theoretical thought.4

To put forward the systems for individual descriptions of Islamic thought, one must look at how the relationship between God and the individual are formed. Islamic texts describe the relationship between God and the individual is an ontological relationship between the creator and the created, the epistemological relationship between the revealer and that who received the revelation and a moral relation between the Lord and slave.5 In this work, how these types of relationships are understood in Islamic thought from an ontological and moral perspective will be examined. First of all, the place of the individual in Islamic thought’s cosmological ideas and the

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philosophical context must be defined. On the other hand, the relationship between divine and human actions in the light of debates over human free-will must be taken into consideration.

1. Basis of Individual Recognition in Islamic Thought

Islamic theology’s school of thought focuses primarily on God’s person and attributes. The result of these debates is that a theo-centric and monist understanding of God emerged. Whether through outside influence such as Christian thought\(^6\) or whether through internal influence, the first theologists preferred the verses of the Quran which express transcendence (tanzih) more than anthropomorphism (tashbih). Most Mu’tazilah theologians used the analogy’s (qiyas) jurist (faqih) of understanding which is based on metaphysics resembling the physical world. However, they preferred to use tanzih when looking at elements resembling the physical world.\(^7\) This approach has led them to ignore the attributes of God. At the same time, the Mu’tazilah theologians rely on Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic notions in an attempt to defend their positions.\(^8\)

Mu’tazilah scholars predicted a conception of an essentially theo-centric world. In their thought “God is one, without equal, who hears and sees. As God has no body, imagination, flesh, blood, being, substance or property, there is no question of colour, taste, scent, touch, heat, cold, wet, dry, height, width or depth. Unity and division, movement or stillness and decomposition are not possible. God has no parts and pieces, organs and limbs. He has no left and right, no front and back or top and bottom. He can not be contained by space, time has not effect on him. The words of the living can in no way describe him. He is not limited in time or space. He was not born nor can give birth. He has no measurements. The senses can not detect him. He can not be compared to a human and resembles the created in no way. Minds can not comprehend him. There is no God but God.”\(^9\) With these views, the Mu’tazilah reject all notions of being able to understand or conceive God.

The Mu’tazilah understanding of God is that of the transcendence. One of the reasons for this is that they divide the world into the ancient (qadim) and the originated (hâdith). Ancient is God’s most distinctive quality. God does not fit into any category of originated.\(^10\) Next to him, everything is originated, so much that their existence and non-existence are equal. Their main concern is

\(^7\)  İlîya Çelebi, “Mu'tezile'nin Klasik İslâm Düşünçesindeki Yeri Ve Modern Döneme Etkile-ri”, Kelam Araştırmaları 2:2, 2004, p. 7
\(^8\) Macit Fahri, İslam Felsefesi Tarihi, translated by Kasım Turhan, İklim publication, İstanbul, 1992, p. 55
\(^10\) Zuhdi Jarallah, Al-Mutazila, Beirut, 1974, p. 61
hold God separate from a world containing evil, want and corruption. A second concern is to distance themselves from the anthropomorphism deriving from Christian theologians’ theories of trinity and incarnation. But from these two concerns have emerged a system in which God and humanity are separated by an insurmountable distance. In this system, God and the individual are two different beings. But God is the dominant element at the centre. Indeed, he is so dominant that it is not possible to come across anything that suggests that the individual has any autonomy.

It can not be said that Sunni Islamic theology is different from Mu’tazilah theology. It is accepted that the most Ash’ari theologians in particular were under the influence of the Mu’tazilah theologians. Sunni theologians on principal accept the ancient and originated categories of being. They attribute this separation to the substance-property theory. According to this, the physical world derives from substance and property and necessarily requires a creator. Physical beings do not possess a definite nature and as a cause what is seen is a composition of individual habits. Within God’s cause-effect relationship, claiming that he brought about events means that his power is being restricted. The Sunni theologians have, with their calls to an understanding of an anthropomorphic God an approach which negates the God-Human resemblance.

Ultimately, to the Sunni theologians, the individual is something which is ‘weak’ and ‘lacking’ without control over his own actions next to God. Additionally, the Sunni theologians announced that the universe’s creation and oversight was an absolute victory of a construction process which ‘nullified’ the individual done with an indeterminist approach.

Islamic philosophers developed their thought around the emanationism (sudûr theory). Farabi and Ibn Sina divided existence into the necessary and the possible and described the creation of existence as a kind of ‘necessary’ state. Farabi’s philosophy of a obligatory existence is at its essence the reason for the other existences. While not being its opposite but also not its partner, impossibility’s description and not thinking of non-existence is difference from a perception of being a unique order of existence and outside matter and form and an eternal existence. Possible existences, however, are lacking from the perspective of existence and are equal existences to existing...
and not existing. Beings are in debt to the necessary existence. For this reason, beings are not capable of defending existence on their own.\textsuperscript{16}

In Ibn Sīnā’s ontology put forward an exaggerated division of existence into necessity and possibility. According to him, necessary existence is the reason and possible existence is the result. Necessary existence is single while possible beings are many.\textsuperscript{17} Necessary existence is stable while possible beings change and between them there are insurmountable barriers. According to him, necessary existence is absolutely perfect, absolute goodness and absolute intelligence. It is at once being intelligent, giving intelligence and becoming intelligent.\textsuperscript{18}

For example, Islamic philosophers speak of these exaggerated thoughts with respect to God’s oneness in terms of God’s transcendence. According to them, God is a truth which can not be compared to any being. He is a unique being. His existence has a nature unlike any other. He is One such that he can not share his existence with any other being or individual. This is a necessary part of his nature. Whatever the meaning of an individual’s necessary nature is, being one is the same thing. As in the case of physical object, existence and destruction do not have plenty and contrast. In this way, there is no equal, resemblance, partner or opposit in this union. No other necessary being which shares the same necessity or which can create an opposite can be imagined.\textsuperscript{19}

Islamic philosophers explain the existence of the theory of applied emanationism, expressed as the pyramidal hierarchical reality. Those which are excessive and innate are regarded as two distinctly separate categories of beings. On top of the pyramid is the First Reason, God. Below him are the less perfect Second Reasons (intellect and heavenly bodies). The third most perfect being is the efficient intellect (\textit{al-aql al-Fā’al}). Efficient intellect is the intermediary between the innate universe and the excessive universe and takes names like \textit{al-Ruh al-Amin}, \textit{al-Ruh al-Quds} and \textit{Gabriel}.\textsuperscript{20} Below the imminent universe is found the first matter (\textit{heyûla}). After it and upwards come the four elements (air, water, earth and fire), plants, animals and human. These orders take the names matter, copy and soul.\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibn Sīnā}, \textit{Kitab al-shifa’ al-ilahiyyat}, edited by Ibrahim Madkour, n.d., vol. 1, p. 37


\textsuperscript{19} Ibn Sīnā, \textit{Kitab al-najat}, vol. 2, p. 84

\textsuperscript{20} Abu Nasr al-Fārābī, \textit{Al-Siyasa al-madaniyya}, p. 32

\textsuperscript{21} Abu Nasr al-Fārābī, \textit{Kitab ara’ ahl al-madiniy al-fadilah}, p. 66
When analysed from the point of the individual, it is possible to speak of two drawbacks to the he exaggerated point of a separation between the necessary and possible and the sudur theory’s hierarchical pyramid form.

1- This theory, as it makes a virtual distinction of existence, brings forth an imagination of broken existence and phenomenons. The separation between metaphysical and physical, such as the division between broken objects such as the two worlds – one of God, one of man – and thus two different beings and two different unions (definitional one, real plurality). When considering he sudur theory’s Aristotelian dualism between matter-shape, reason-reasoned, substance-property (jawhar-'araz), stable-changing and its manicheistic and gnostic notions such as spirit-matter, soul-body and fall-rise, it is easier to understand the broken form’s violence and dimensions.

2- As can be seen in our descriptions, this theory imagines a vertical universe which gets smaller and more lacking as we move from top to bottom and rests on a vision which is basically transcendence as in the theological school. The theory which regards the possible as nearly non-existant has notions such as first, absolute, principle, empyreal, supernatural and non-human and it gives birth to an understanding of an intert God which, to the opposite of the abstract principle which leaves the individual in an empty space, opens the door to a deistic belief. Thanks to this transcendence approach – in particular that of Ibn Sina – on one hand the possible existence is discounted while on the other hand it takes the basic possible existence is the total existence from man and gives it to God. God is both the giver and receiver of intellect and it leaves nothing for humanity when there is intelligence.

The greatest response to the dualistic approach of Islamic philosophers came from the Sufi school. The Islamic Sufi movement rejected these rigid categorical distinctions of the theologians and philosophers. According to them, the distinction between the ancient and the originated, the obligation and the possible are fundamentally wrong. There is one being and that is God’s being. The plenty seen in the word are the various visions of the relative and

25 Şahin Filiz, ibid, p. 236
relative truth. This idea is called the wahdat al-wujud, particularly systematized by Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi.

The wahdat al-wujud is an “absolute unity” notion. According to it, “unity” or “the unity of ones” is valid for each being and existence can be found in this unity. In the philosophy of wahdat al-wujud, “existence” is not a logical predicate, and is not an abstract idea. On the contrary, it is the clearest and greatest truth and can not be grasped by any intellect. Beings, however, can embrace intuition, discovery (al-kashf) and taste (al-zawq).

According to Ibn Arabî, the apparent expressions of God in the Quran can not construct a metaphysic from these expressions which speak of people. Resting on these expressions, beliefs about transcendence and anthropomorphism are shown to be wrong because transcendence and anthropomorphism would make God a restricted and definite being. What is necessary is to take a middle ground between transcendence and anthropomorphism. Or in other words, Ibn Arabi espoused a unity which sides with real plurality and a principled unity.

Sufis embrace a belief which recognises God as a dynamic and living truth in contrast to the belief in God of the theologians and philosophers. According to them, a belief in God in most Muslim individuals’ souls is more advanced than the God found in heaven. Sufis have connected the topic to love rather than to the individual’s God of authority and leadership to which beings submit and are helpless.

In Sufism, humans are separate amongst all other beings because in Sufi philosophy man is the greatest found in the three books, the Quran and nature. While man is personally the aim, the other two books are a tool for this aim because the last two books are not aware of themselves.

However, this is the reason for the only beings with self-conscious which discover divine secrets and the creation of the world. God situates man, as the manifestation of his love, in the center of the world. Everything is for him and inside him. For this reason, the saying “he who knows himself, knows his God” is a cliché in Sufi philosophy. In Sufi philosophy, man is the best suited to collect the divine names, adjectives and verbs (al-insan al-

28 Muhyiddin Ibn al-Arabi, Fusús al-hikam, p. 70
30 William Chittick, Tasavvuf, translated by Turan Koç, İz publication, Istanbul, 2006, p. 183–4
Man is not imagined as a being far from God in of form or intellect. Additionally, in Ibn Arabi’s words, man, as God’s manifestation of a being, cannot personally be deserving of the name God. Amongst all creatures, only man knows God as the God (haq) and the cosmos (khalq) because man is both the haq and the khalq. In Ibn Arabi’s philosophy, the most competent of the basic principles of existence and truth cannot escape creating a “God-human being”.

2. Individual Definitions of Moral Fundamentals in Islamic Thought

According to the Quran, God is ontologically the owner and creator of man and, in a moral sense, is man’s teacher and instructor, guarding him, giving him blessing and his lord. The relationship between man and God is one in which from God to man there is divinity, justice and mercy; from man to God there is, at its base, belief and worship. The God-man relationship in Islam is not built on the model of the master and the slave because the relationship between man and God in the Quran is not founded only upon power. God restricts his power by his moral principles and rests his relationships on the principles of justice and mercy. In the Quran, however, man’s relationship with God is based on moral principles such as free love, gratitude and adoration. For this reason, to say that the moral relationship that man has established with God is based on the master-slave basis is fundamentally wrong.

In the Islamic religion, man is the bridge between God and matter. Man is a means to divine will in the spheres of time and space. For this reason, man is first of all a moral creature and the entire universe is his to act upon. Of all the creatures, only man’s actions are moral because with free conscious and thought only he acts. For this reason, man is known as the “ashraf al-makhluqat” in the Quran.

However, in Islamic texts the notion of God shaped by praxis does not occur in the same way in Islamic thought. In Islamic thought, the ontological dualist nature of beings is divided into two: man as a metaphysical being and man as a physical being. For this reason, in our traditional history, the individual as independent creature does not appear in our consciousness. Man is stuck between God-Sultan (the metaphysical) and nature (the physical).

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33 İhhami Güler, “Allah-İnsan İlişkisinin Ahlâkî Boyutu (Allah’ın Kulları muyuz?)”, p. 195–9
34 Ismail R. Faruki, Tevhid, translated by Dilaver Yardım&Lâtif Boyacı, İnsan publication, Istanbul, 1995, p. 78
In Islamic philosophical history, we can say that the individual as a moral creature is seen in the shadow of a dual nature in this ontological thought. Man from an ontological perspective is, a piece of system which becomes less valuable from the top to bottom with categories such as transcendent-menial, absolute-limited and substance-property; but according to Islamic thinkers’ moral philosophy, they are in dual constructs like soul-body, virtue-disgrace and (normally upside down) hierarchic constructs in which one serves another. In Islamic thought, the soul, as the place where virtues reside, is viewed as a source of wisdom, courage and chastity more than an active intellect.35

According to Farabi, amongst the powers of man’s soul we can see an hierarchical explanation in which one rules the others like pieces of a mechanical tool. The philosopher/prophet is the ruler of all layers of society just as God rules the universe. Similarly, the powers of the human soul are in the same way the powers which rule the powers of thinking, imagination and demand.36 This is a complete description of the universe in its entirety, with the society in which the individual’s integrity and unity will be described. His moral philosophy is in the forefront of the human soul’s intellectual activity. Thus, it is not praxis but rather logos that we are faced with. This takes all the people together and man’s relationship with God as being a moral relationship because man, not merely with intellect, but with all adjectives and characteristics is a creature which has founded a moral relationship with God and the universe.

With Ibn Sina, however, the main worry is directed towards the elimination of ontological problems created by taking man as the centre. For this reason, by decomposing man into soul and body and recognizing him as a being, it proves that he is an originated being. According to Ibn Sina, man’s soul and body are ontologically two separate substance and these were created later. The soul is a spiritual substance which flows from the active mind while the body is a physical substance formed from the elements. For this reason, there can not be said to be a necessary relationship between the spirit and body. In considering man, Ibn Sina’s ontological conclusion is of two separate parts. The soul’s goodness arrives especially as it leaves the body.37 There is no superiority of either soul or body but at the same time in the soul there appears a kind of hierarchy between thought, anger and lust that suppressed one over the other in moral actions. The power of thought demanded of man is stronger than the other powers. In this way, as with Farabi, Ibn Sina counts

35 Hasan Hanefi, “Geleneksel İslam Düncesindeki Otoriteryenliğin Epistemolojik, Ontolojik, Ahlaki, Siyasi ve Tarihi Kökenleri Üzerine”, p. 242
36 Abu Nasr al-Fârâbî, Kitab ara’ ahl al-madinah al-fadilah, p. 89
man’s designed rational activities as a divided being more important than his practical actions.

The theological schools which take man not as with an absolute theoretical structure but from the point of his actions approach the topic as tied to God’s attributes. The theological schools have approached the subject of attributes from the point of transcendence and have tried to “protect God”, so to speak. Generally, God’s attributes of power (knowledge, will and power) are put forward while his moral features are overlooked. In the Quran, God’s cosmological will is expressed as “destiny” and under the Umayyads these ideas were rejected so as to legalise their authority and downplay individual freedoms. Later, these developed into the Jabriyya sect’s claim that man had no power over his actions. Even if not as extreme as the Jabriyya school, the Ash’ari school preferred to see man’s actions as created by God so as to prove God’s wisdom and power. The Maturidiyya, however, were more cautious and interpreted power as God’s knowing the fate of human acts. It was the Al-Mu’tazila school, however, which came out in favour of man on this topic. According to them, man’s actions were the product of man not God. Man was viewed as a being with responsibility with free will to create his own actions. This was because it is out of the question for the higher power which granted the power to act to then hold him responsible. As can be seen, the Al-Mu’tazila school’s main concern was to prove that God was just. This approach resembles the transcendence approach of other theological schools. As Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri expressed it, the Mutezile’s views exaggerated man’s actions as a free because this view goes beyond God’s servants performing bad and evil acts themselves.

In sufism, however, it is not possible to come across traces of man’s freedom. The Sufis’ efforts to reduce the minimum ontological separation between God and man can not perpetuate the moral relationship between God and man. What remains is that the view of a union between God and the individual is ultimately a view of a union resulting from a deep mystical-psycological experience of an individual’s a subjective rather than practical mind. Consequently, in Sufism, an individual’s freedom is destroyed and God’s overarching power is defended.

To sum up, in all the schools of Islamic thought a God-centric understanding prevails. God, as the universe’s absolute ruler, props up both the cosmos in its turning and the rules which guid man’s actions. Man, in a top to bottom system, is without value and meaning and is in a position distant form God,

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38 İlhami Güler, “Allah-İnsan İlişkisinin Ahlâkî Boyutu (Allah’ın Kullarını mı?)”, p. 201
40 Hasan Hanefi, “Teoloji mi Antropoloji mı?”, p. 516
lonely and lowly. As the distance between man and God increases, man’s menial increases to the same degree. It is not possible to see man in a horizontal moral relationship which gives meaning to the physical in the schools of Islamic thought.

Conclusion

In conclusion, man, as represented in the pure texts of Islam, is the counterpart of revelation and the object of religion. Religion an anthropological truth which clarifies God’s way of speaking with man. In the schools of Islamic thought, however, man is not the counterpart; God is separate from man and incorporates man into a system in which has no theoretical value like speaking with himself.

The ontological relationship of a creator and created is explained in human terms such as master and slave, ruler and subject relationships and in this way it has become something of human action of the authority of a supreme sovereign and subjection. The problems of the ontological outlook have spread to the moral as well, and human actions has been constricted to a dualism like good-evil, allowed-forbidden through the help of theories of “religious morals”.

In truth, according to the Islamic schools of thought, man is not a being which represents the fake in the face of the true, the worthless in the fact of the valuable or the innate in contrast to the exaggerated power. To most of them, God and nature are an element – even the dominant element – of the meaningful world. Man is not God but God is not separate from Man.

As expressed by Fadl al-Rahman, man is not completely free like God nor helpless like any other creature. He is not exaggerated nor innate. His knowledge does not encompass everything, but he is not stupid, ignorant and blind. In this framework, he can achieve the highest levels of moral development. God, nature and man each have their own reasons which are not separate from one another. The divine causality is realised from nature and even more from man. Man’s causality, in the narrowest sense, can not be addressed until reduced to the two categories mentioned above.41

It is possible today to see the effects of historical inaccuracies about Islamic thought. A Muslim individual is no longer an investigating subject but has rather come a submissive object. For years, the Islamic world’s tired authoritarian administrations have been unable to independently address Islamic thought’s ontological and moral opinions.

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