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MÂTÜRÎDÎ'NİN İLÂHÎ HİKMET ANLAYIŞI

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ÖZET

Bütün Müslüman ilâhiyatçılara göre Tanrı'nın hikmet sahibi olduğu âşikârdır. Fakat "Tanrı hikmet sahibidir" cümlesinden ne anlaşıldığı o kadar âşikâr değildir. Bu sebeple kelâmcılar Tanrı'nın hikmeti ile ilgili, Mu'tezile'nin aslah prensibinden tutun da Selefiyye'nin Tanrı yaptığı her şeyde hikmet sahibidir anlayışına uzanan, bir dizi açıklamalar geliştirmişlerdir.

Tebliğimde Mâtürîdî'nin hikmet anlayışını biraz aydınlatmak istiyorum. Göreceğimiz üzere bu oldukça karmaşık ve bir dizi kelâmî tartışmayı bünyesinde barındırmaya mahkûmdur. Zirâ Mâtürîdî bu terimi, Tanrı'nın sınırsız gücü fikrini yaratılmış dünyanın aklen anlaşılabilirliği fikri ile uzlaştarmaya çalışmak için kullanmaktadır.

AL-MÂTÜRÎDÎ'S CONCEPT OF GOD'S WISDOM

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SUMMARY

That God is wise was self-evident for all Islamic theologians. But it was less evident for them to explain what we mean when we utter this sentence. Therefore, the Mutakallimun developed various interpretations of God's wisdom, ranging from the Mu'tazilite idea that God has always to do the optimum (al-aslah) to the traditionalist standpoint that He is wise whatever He does.

In my paper, I want to shed some light on Mâtürîdî's concept of God's wisdom. As we will see, it was complex and destined to combine several aspects of the theological discussion. For Mâtürîdî used this concept in order to reconcile the idea of God's omnipotence with the idea of the rationality of the created world.

I

At first sight, the concept of God's wisdom does not figure among the prominent ideas of Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī.² Neither in his *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*³ nor in the *Tāwīlāt al-Qu'ān*⁴ is it extensively discussed, apart from two more-or-less short chapters to be found in the *Kitāb at-Tawhīd*: one of which is entitled in the edition (but not in the manuscript) *al-Hikma fī ḥalq al-ḡawāhir aḍ-ḍārra*, i.e. "The wisdom concerning the creation of harmful beings"⁵; and another one entitled in Kholeif's edition *Af āl Allāh*, "The acts of God", and in the edition of Prof. Topaloğlu and Dr. Aruçi *Fī l-ḥikma wa-s-safah*, "On wisdom and stupidity"⁶.

Despite this scant evidence, however, it seems to me that God's wisdom played a central role in Māturīdī's thinking. Even though he did not elaborate on it expressly, he often took it into account when discussing other issues. I would even argue that this concept was one of the basic ideas of his teaching which deeply influenced the structure of his theology. Therefore it may be useful to gather together his statements about it and to consider what he may have wanted to tell us in this way.⁷

In doing so, I first need to emphasize that there is nothing unusual about the fact that Māturīdī was reflecting upon God's wisdom. Every Muslim theologian did so, and every *kalām* school was convinced that God is wise and always performs wise acts. The only question was what the *mutakallimūn* really meant when they uttered such sentences. For there was a variety of interpretations of God's wisdom differing not only in detail, but on substantial and crucial points.

2 I dedicate this article to the memory of Richard M. Frank who died on May 5th, 2009, only a few weeks before the opening of the symposium on Māturīdī and Māturīdism. He extended our knowledge about Islamic theology, including the Māturīdite school, with numerous perspicacious articles, and was also the first scholar who recognized that the concept of God's wisdom and the related topic of the intelligibility of the creation were of central importance to Māturīdī's thinking (cf. Frank's remarks in „Reason and Revealed Law: a sample of parallels and divergences in kalām and falsafa“, in: *Recherches d'Islamologie. Recueil d'articles offert à Georges Anawati et Louis Gardet par leurs collègues et amis*, Louvain 1977, p. 123-138, especially p. 125 n. 2).

3 References are given to the edition of Fathalla Kholeif, Beirut 1970 (=Kh), as well as to the new edition prepared by Bekir Topaloğlu and Mohammed Aruçi, Ankara 2003 (=TA).

4 References are given to the edition of Fā'ima Yūsuf al-Ēaymī, 5 volumes, Beirut 2004, as well as to the much better, but still unfinished, edition printed in Istanbul since 2005 under the aegis of Bekir Topaloğlu. of which 13 volumes have appeared thus far.

5 *Tawhīd* 108-110 Kh / 168-170 TA.

6 *Tawhīd* 215-221 Kh / 343-351 TA.

7 A first draft of my reflections on this topic was included in my book *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Leiden/New York/Köln: E.J.Brill 1997, pp. 330-334.

One of these interpretations was the view of the Mu` tazila⁸. As is well-known, they were convinced that wisdom is, in a certain way, an objective standard. This standard indicates in an intelligible manner what is wise and what is wrong or, in terms of moral judgement, what is good and what is bad. This means, if considered from the viewpoint of man, that man is capable of recognizing good and bad using his intellect. Consequently, he is bound by moral duty from the moment he can make use of his intellect in an autonomous manner. On the other hand, the concept also has consequences for God. For He, too, has to acknowledge the same objective and intelligible standard. He can only do what is perfect and has to follow criteria which do not depend on His decisions and are neither open to change nor subordinate to His will. Therefore, many Mu` tazilīs, amongst them Māturīdī's immediate opponent Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka`bī, drew the conclusion that God must always do what is "the best" or, more exactly "the most advantageous" for His creatures, a conclusion which has become famous as the *aṣlah*-theory.

Another interpretation which differed completely from the concept of the Mu` tazila was the view of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Aṣ`arī⁹. He refused any idea of objective standards which might be self-evident and intelligible and therefore accessible to human minds. According to him, God alone decides what is wise and what is appropriate to His wisdom. His decision needs neither reason nor justification, but is completely free. The Creator can do whatever He wants and can order whatever He wishes. The simple fact that He is acting implies that his acts are perfect and wise. God could just as well do the opposite. There is no intelligible structure in His commands and His prohibitions. Therefore, man is not able to identify his duties by intellectual means, but is dependent on revelation if he wants to know what is good and what is bad and, consequently, what he should do and what he should avoid.

Each view depicts a completely different idea of God, for each of them stresses another aspect or, to use *kalām* terms, another attribute of God's essence. Aṣ`arī emphasizes the power and the freedom of God. He wants to avoid the idea that the Creator could be related to or bound by anything. Thereby Aṣ`arī accepted that when considering his theory, one might have the impression that God's acts are perceived as arbitrary and lacking intelligible coherence. The Mu` tazila, on the other hand, emphasize God's justice. According to them, God has to respect

8 Robert Brunschvig, "Mu` tazilisme et optimum, in: *Studia Islamica* 39 (1974) 5-23; Frank, "Reason and Revealed Law" (cf. n. 1), pp. 124-129; Daniel Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ash`arī*, Paris: Les éditions du Cerf 1990, pp. 433-435.

9 Frank, "Reason and Revealed Law", pp. 135-138; Gimaret, *La doctrine*, pp. 435-451.

the same objective standards as man, for what is good and wise in the sensible world, is also good and wise in the world of transcendence. In adopting that view, the Mu'tazilīs took the risk of defining God's actions and thereby limiting the scope of His activities which could be interpreted as a restriction of His power and His absolute freedom.

II

Let us now turn to Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. As we will see, his own concept of God's wisdom is a kind of middle course between the two concepts which I have just outlined, for in a certain way he tries to combine both aspects: God's power and sovereignty which was emphasized by Aṣ'arī as well as God's intelligibility and justice emphasized by the Mu'tazila. This does not mean that Māturīdī himself had direct knowledge of both concepts. Of course, he was well aware of the teaching of the Mu'tazilīs and, in particular, of Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī¹⁰. But I do not think that he had ever heard anything about the teaching of Aṣ'arī; probably, he was not even aware of his name. Nevertheless, he was familiar with ideas which were quite similar to those of Aṣ'arī. I am speaking of the ideas of Islamic traditionalists, the muḥaddiṭūn, who paved the way for Aṣ'arī's teaching and who were themselves widespread in the Islamic world. They also taught that God is beyond our comprehension and that we are in need of His revelation if we want to know what is good or bad and what is wise or wrong. Therefore, it may well be that Māturīdī became familiar with such ideas when he was reading their books or discoursing with them.¹¹

As I said, Māturīdī's own conceptualization tries to take into account both aspects. On the one hand, he is convinced that God's wisdom is not limited by any objective or given standard. God is completely wise and free. This is a conviction which Māturīdī shares with the Traditionalists. When God created this world and started acting in His creation, He had no need to respect any self-evident moral

10 Māturīdī criticizes Ka'bī numerous times in his writings. As for his critique of the *aṣṭah*-theory cf. for instance *Tawḥīd* 52,7 Kh / 81,8 TA; 92,15-20 Kh / 145,11-146,5 TA; 97,8-21 Kh / 152,5-16 TA; 124,9-14 Kh / 191,7-12 TA.

11 This is confirmed by the fact that even Abū l-Mu'in an-Nasafī who wrote nearly 200 years later than Māturīdī mentions „the theologians of the ahl al-ḥadīṭ“ as one of the main opponents of the Māturīdīte school (besides the Mu'tazila) with regard to this question; cf. his *Tabṣīrat al-adilla fī uṣūl ad-dīn `alā Ōarīqat al-Imām Abī Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī*, ed. Claude Salamé, 2 volumes, Damascus 1990-1993, p. 661,13.

assumptions, but decreed Himself what was good and what was bad. On the other hand, Māturīdī's God does not change. He will never revise what He has decreed in the beginning. His system of commands and prohibitions is something stable. In fact, it is more than that because it is the intelligible representation of God's wisdom which will itself never change. Therefore, man is able to understand the wise order of the creation and to distinguish the good from the bad and these are aspects in Māturīdī's teaching which remind us of the ideas of the Mu'tazila.

At this point, I have to confess that, as far as I know, Māturīdī never explained this concept in a definitive manner. As I mentioned in the beginning, neither in the *Kitāb at-Tawhīd* nor in the *Tawīlāt al-Qur'ān* is there a chapter which contains all the information we would like to have about this topic in a comprehensive and systematic way. The only possibility to determine his ideas is thus to read his writings carefully in order to look for statements which can be relevant for our question. This is a fruitful method, as we will see now, because it enables us to find all the theoretical elements which are necessary for shaping the concept I have just described.

III

The first of these elements is Māturīdī's conviction that God's wisdom is absolute. It does not depend on external presuppositions and so-called objective factors, but has its reality and its logic exclusively in itself.¹² This was an argument of central importance for Māturīdī which he often repeated when criticizing the *aṣlah*-theory of the Mu'tazilites. For their assumption that God must always accomplish "the best,, or "the most advantageous,, for his creatures was in his eyes unacceptable and simply an insult to God. According to Māturīdī, man is not allowed to call God to account.¹³ We must not demand from Him an explanation about His acts and His creation. Consequently, we should not claim that we are able to describe exactly God's actions and to define what the quiddity (*māhīya*) or the essence (*kunh*) of His wisdom is.¹⁴

Despite this fact, God's wisdom is not completely unknown to us. This is the second important element in Māturīdī's concept which modifies and qualifies the first one, at least to a certain degree. This second element is based on the

12 *Tawhīd* 216,16-20 Kh / 345,3-6 TA; 217,17-20 Kh / 346,8-11 TA; 220,5-7 Kh / 349,13-15 TA.

13 *Tawhīd* 220,12-221,5 Kh / 350,5-351,4 TA, where Māturīdī quotes Qur'ān 21:23.

14 *Tawhīd* 108,16-17 Kh / 168,2-4 TA; 217,8-9 Kh / 346,1-2 TA.

assumption that although we cannot grasp God's wisdom itself - we are able to find its traces and effects all over the world. For there are many examples which show us that God's perfect knowledge and wisdom is mirrored in the effects which He produces in this world. One of them is the harmony and the wonderful governance (*tadbîr*) which permeate the whole of creation.¹⁵ Another effect may be called the rationality of the established order; it manifests itself in the fact that the good and the bad and all fundamental values are intelligible and can be discerned by human reason.¹⁶ But even in things which, at first sight, contradict this harmony, one can find traces of God's wisdom. This is especially true for harmful animals and beings (*al-ḥaiyāt wa-l-ğawāhir aḍ-ḍārra*) as Mâturîdî explains in his chapter about. The wisdom concerning the creation of harmful things (*al-Ḥikma fî ḥalq al-ğawāhir aḍ-ḍārra*) which I have already mentioned above.¹⁷

This chapter is quite short, as I said, but it includes interesting reflections. Obviously, Abū l-Muʿîn an-Nasafî had the same impression because his *Kitāb Tabşirat al-adilla* contains a chapter called "Section about the creation of bad things" (*Faşl fî iğād al-qabîḥ*) which closely follows the model which he had found in the *Kitāb at-Tawḥîd*.¹⁸ Mâturîdî's reflections on harmful things are thus worth presenting. They consist of a series of short and more or less independent arguments. Therefore, I will report them in the same way by enumerating them point by point. The list of Mâturîdî's arguments reads as follows:

First: God has created useful and harmful things in this world in order to give us the opportunity to experience different things. When we are in contact with beautiful and useful things, we feel pleasure. When we are in contact with harmful things, we feel pain. This enables us to understand what God has told us about reward and punishment in the next world, because as a result of these experiences, we can better imagine the pleasures of Paradise and the pains of Hell.¹⁹

Second: By experiencing harmful things we learn to bear hardships and troubles. This enables us to accept the hardships of intellectual life. Intellectual life, for its part, is necessary because we must make use of our intellects and must make the effort of reasoning in order to better understand each other and to live peacefully together.²⁰

15 *Tawḥîd* 18,13-16 Kh / 35,8-11 TA.

16 *Tawḥîd* 10,17-11,4 Kh / 17,10-16 TA.

17 *Tawḥîd* 108,14-110,7 Kh / 168,1-170,6 TA.

18 *Tabşira* 661-673.

19 *Tawḥîd* 108,15-21 Kh / 168,2-7 TA.

20 *Tawḥîd* 108,22-109,2 Kh / 168,8-11 TA.

Third: Besides that, experiencing harmful things forms and strengthens our character. By experiencing the bad and the hostile, we accustom ourselves to avoid it and to do the right things. This is the kind of habit which young people have to acquire because it puts them into the position to accomplish the kind of acts which God wants them to do.²¹

Fourth: The fact that this world contains useful and harmful things side by side and is nevertheless well-organised and in perfect order, is an impressive demonstration of God's existence, His oneness and His wisdom.²²

Fifth: Harmful things affect all men, even rulers and kings. By this means, all men including rulers and kings - learn that human power is weak and helpless in comparison with the almighty God.²³

Sixth: The fact that God can create useful as well as harmful things is revealing in another sense, too. It demonstrates that God's power is unlimited and that He is free to do whatever He wants. There is no necessity (*hāḡa*) for Him to accomplish only one kind of act, as the Mu'tazilites want us to believe.²⁴

Seventh and final argument: Every harmful thing is at the same time useful for we always have to examine closer what seems to be clear and ambiguous at first sight. Fire often destroys things by burning, but also helps us when we are cooking. Water can have destructive effects, but is indispensable for life, and even a substance which is a well-known poison, can be, under particular circumstances, the only remedy for dangerous illnesses.²⁵

All these arguments demonstrate that, according to Māturīdī, the existence of harmful things is not a problem, but a sign for God's wisdom. For everything which may be harmful in itself can produce positive effects on other creatures. Thereby it is part of the overall harmony and the intelligible order of the world. As I said, Māturīdī does not express this idea in a comprehensive and systematic way. In fact, the only general notion he uses in this context is the term „test“ or „examination“ (*miḥna*). As he explains, harmful things help us to prove ourselves in this life; as such, they are part of the *miḥna* which we have to pass in this world.²⁶ Abū l-Mu'in an-Nasafi, for his part, is more explicit. In his chapter about the creation

21 *Tawḥīd* 109,3-7 Kh / 168,11-169,2 TA.

22 *Tawḥīd* 109,8-12 Kh / 169,3-6 TA.

23 *Tawḥīd* 109,13-15 Kh / 169,7-9 TA.

24 *Tawḥīd* 109,16-18 Kh / 169,10-12 TA.

25 *Tawḥīd* 109,18-110,2 Kh / 169,13-170,2 TA.

26 *Tawḥīd* 108,18 and 108,22 Kh / 168,5 and 168,8 TA.

of harmful things, he presents quite similar ideas but puts them in a different way. According to him, even harmful things demonstrate God's wisdom, because they finally produce useful effects and „wisdom is what leads to a praiseworthy end“ (*wa-l-ḥikmatu mā ta`allaqat bihī `aḡibatun ḥamīda*).²⁷

IV

This is revealing for, as I said, it considerably modifies our perspective. At first, we have been told that man is not able to define the quiddity and the essence of God's wisdom. By now, we learn that we can nevertheless understand its purpose and its function. If this is the case we must after all ask for the operating principle of God's wisdom. For if His wisdom is reflected everywhere in his creation there must be in all created beings something which is itself wise or, at least, intelligible and which can be related to God. As a matter of fact, Māturīdī tries to discern and to characterize this principle. His reflections on this question constitute the third element of his teaching about wisdom, and they are perhaps the most interesting of them all.

As he explains in this context, God's wisdom manifests itself in two ways (*fī l-ḥikmati Ōarīqāni*): One is the way of kindness or generosity (*faḍl*), the other the way of justice (*`adl*).²⁸ Both of them are closely related, but have to be described in different ways. God's kindness is simply immeasurable. It has no limit and no end (*nihāya*). Therefore, we are not allowed to say that any act of God would represent the maximum of kindness and generosity (*al-aḡḍal*) which He is able to exert.²⁹ As for the justice, however, we have a criterion. But again, this criterion is not defined as a maximum or as a maximum point. On the contrary: God's wisdom and justice do not consist in always doing "the best" or "the most advantageous" (*al-aḡlah*) for His creatures, but in always doing what is right and appropriate for them.

This is an idea which was very important for Māturīdī and which he expressed in two ways:

First, he said: Wisdom in the sense of justice means „to hit the point“ (*al-iṣāba*). This definition not only occurs several times in the *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*³⁰, but also in the *Tawīlāt*. There we can read: *al-ḥikmatu hiya l-iṣābatu wa-minhu*

27 *Tabṣira* 664,7-8 and 666,6; cf. 385,7.

28 *Tawḥīd* 125,10 Kh / 192,17 TA.

29 *Tawḥīd* 125,10-12 Kh / 192,17-19 TA.

30 *Tawḥīd* 97,16 Kh / 152,11-12 TA; 306,4 Kh / 487,1-2 TA.

summiya l-ḥakīmu ḥakīman li-annahū muṣṭib („Wisdom means to hit the point; therefore the wise man is called wise because he is one who hits the point“).³¹ By this statement, Māturīdī obviously wanted to explain that wisdom consists of doing what is right (*aṣ-ṣawāb*) and what is appropriate (*aṣ-ṣāʾib*) in a particular situation or for a specific objective.³²

The second definition is just as interesting. It is quite often repeated in the *Kitāb at-Tauḥīd* and reads as follows: Wisdom (in the sense of justice) is „to set everything in its place“ (*waḍʿu kulli ṣayʾin maḍḍi`ahū*).³³

At first sight, this seems to be a very general statement, but at closer examination, it is the focus of the whole concept. For it includes in four words the two aspects which are of central importance for Māturīdī. To repeat them: One aspect is that God has to be regarded as the absolute sovereign. He is the principle of all beings. He is the One who has created and has set (*waḍa`a*) everything which exists in this world. At the same time, the creatures are not the objects of His arbitrariness. Rather, they have their own characteristics and their own rights. Therefore, they are not set at any place in the creation, but exactly at the place which is the right one and which is appropriate to them (*maḍḍi`ahū*).

This is, in my opinion, the essential point in Māturīdī's concept of God's wisdom. It enabled him to reconcile the idea of God's unlimited power with the idea of the intelligibility of the created world. This result is, by the way, confirmed by Abū l-Mu`īn an-Nasafī. For he shared Māturīdī's reflections on this point, as would be expected, and once again he did it by expressing the same idea in a more systematic way. As Nasafī put it and this is at the same time my own conclusion “Wisdom consists of knowing things as they really are and setting them in their places (*al-ḥikmatu ma`rifatu l-aṣyāʾi bi-ḥaqāiqihā wa-waḍʿuhā mawāḍi`ihā*). It includes, therefore, knowledge as well as action (*fa-kānat šāmilatan `alā l-`ilmi wa-l-fi`li ḡamī`an*). ... As an act, (our) language defines it as a movement which hits the (right) thing (*wa-huwa fī ḥaqīqati l-luĒati taḥarrukun wa-ḍŌirābun yuṣṭibu ṣ-ṣai*)”.³⁴

31 *Tawīlāt* I 106,9-10 Ēaymī / I 273,2-3 Vanlioğlu-Topaloğlu as part of the commentary to *Qurʾān* 2:151; cf. I 96,13 Ēaymī / I 246,9 Vanlioğlu-Topaloğlu and I 96,29 Ēaymī / I 248,2 Vanlioğlu-Topaloğlu (to *Qurʾān* 2:129).

32 Cf. *Tawḥīd* 307,5-6 Kh / 488,6-7 TA, where Māturīdī explains: *wa-huwa tawīlu l-ḥikmati an yaġ`ala kulla ṣayʾin `alā mā huwa `alayhi wa-yuṣṭiba fī kulli ṣayʾin al-awlā bihī*.

33 *Tawḥīd* 97,16-17 Kh / 152,12 TA; 110,16 Kh / 170,16 TA; 117,9 Kh / 181,1-2 TA; 125,14 Kh / 192,20 TA; 306,4 Kh / 487,1-2 TA.

34 *Tabṣira* 384,11-13.