

## On Some Theological Views Of Abu Mansûr Al-Maturîdî

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### Abstract

al-Maturidi proves the Creator of the world by starting from the temporal origination of the world out of nothing(huduth).According to him, the temporal origination of the world can be explained in three ways of acquiring knowledge:1-Report(khabar) 2-Senses 3-Reasoning(nazar).Thus he proves the existence of God by these three ways.On the other hand,according to al-Maturidi, proving the attributes is closely related to attaining knowledge about God.Since we cannot acquire knowledge of God by senses and reports(khabars),knowledge of God can be acquired through indications in the world for Him; that is, the indication of the known(shahada) for the unknown(ghayb).The visible (or the known) indicates the unseen in terms of its attributes not the esence.Thus al-Maturidi proves the attributes to God by this way.

**Keywords:** al-Maturidi, the existence of God, the attributes of God,semantics.

### Ebu Mansur El-Maturidi'nin Bazı Kelami Görüşleri Üzerine

#### Özet

Maturidi, alemin yaratıcısını alemin hudusundan hareketle ispatlar.O'na göre alemin hudusu da bilgi elde etme yollarıyla ortaya konur.Bilgi elde etme yolları üçtür: 1- Haber 2-Duyular 3- Nazar.Dolayısıyla Maturidi Allah'ın varlığını bu üç yolla ispatlamış olmaktadır.

Diğer taraftan Maturidi'ye göre Allah'ın sıfatlarını ispat etmek, Allah hakkında bilgi elde etmekle yakından ilgilidir.O'na göre Allah hakkında duyular ve haber vasıtaları ile bilgi elde edilemeyeceğinden , Allah hakkında bilgi alemin O'na delaletiyle yani şahidin gaibe delaletiyle bilinir.Şahid alem gaib aleme zat itibariyle değil sıfatlar itibariyle delalet eder.Dolayısıyla Maturidi, sıfatları bu yolla ispat eder.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Maturidi, Allah'ın varlığı, Allah'ın sıfatları,semantik metod.

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In this article we will consider Maturîdî's views on proving God's existence and His attributes, and criticize his views and make a new suggestion.

**1-Proof for God's existence:** al-Maturîdî sets out to prove the Creator of the world by starting from the temporal origination of the world out of nothing (*huduth*). According to him, the temporal origination of the world can be explained in three ways of acquiring knowledge: 1- Report (*khavar*) 2- Senses 3- Reasoning (*nazar*).

Al-Maturîdî uses Qur'anic verses to show the creation of the world through reports, one of the ways to acquire knowledge. For example, the verse 6:102: "Such is Allah, your Lord. There is no God save Him, the Creator of all things,so worship Him. And He taketh care of all things".<sup>1</sup> However, when considered within its context, it becomes clear that the verse describes, and gives information about God. The verse reads: "Such is Allah, your Lord" and declares that that there is no god except Him. Expressing that God is the Creator of everything, the verse urges people to worship Him and states that He is the One who takes care of everything (*wakîl*). Consequently, He is the creator of everything is not mentioned in the verse to imply His creating everything out of nothing, but rather to emphasize that His being the creator of everything should be understood as a result, or as an entailment, of the preceding statement that there is no god but Him. Likewise, the statement that He is the creator of everything should be taken to be the reason for the subsequent statement that urges worshipping Him. In this case, al-Maturîdî's understanding of the statement that God is the creator of everything to suggest creation ex nihilo is a mere conjecture.

Al-Maturîdî also tries to prove the temporal origination of the world depending on sense perception, which is another way of acquiring knowledge. Existents perceived by way of senses are the existents in which distinct and opposite natures and characters are conjoined. Distinct and opposite characters should by nature be separate and distant from each other. Therefore, someone else must be putting together these different and opposite natures and characters. If someone else is involved in this process, then it is necessary that these existents be contingent.<sup>2</sup>

Al-Maturîdî, finally, attempts to prove the createdness of the world through reasoning , which is yet another way to acquire knowledge. A body (*jism*) is not free (*hali*) from motion (*harakah*) or rest (*sukun*), two characters that cannot be conjoined. When you consider the body's lifespan, half of the motion and half of the rest will be eliminated. Anything that possesses something in a partial way (e.g. one half) must have an end. Here the body's having an end amounts to the fact that it is contingent. Furthermore, since motion and rest cannot co-exist in eternity (*qidam*), one

<sup>1</sup> Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, *Kitab al-Tawhid*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu-Muhammed Aruçi (Ankara, 2003), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 26.

of them must be contingent. That one of them being created in eternity is absurd will hold also true of the other. Thus, that which cannot be separated from the thing created will also be created, and this is body (*jism*).<sup>3</sup> Al-Maturîdî thus appears to establish for himself the created nature of the body through its accidents of motion and rest.

Al-Maturîdî tries to show that the world was created after it had been non-existent by explaining its contingency based on the abovementioned three ways of acquiring knowledge. However, the idea that the world was created after its non-existence is criticized on the ground that such a notion is inconceivable to man. Al-Maturîdî's response to this criticism is that those who object to this idea are the ones who regard the existing things through their senses. But knowledge is outside senses.<sup>4</sup> However, such a response is not satisfactory. For there is a difference between the knowledge acquired by senses and the knowledge of that which is created out of nothing. For example, although knowledge that a thing cannot be in two different places at the same time is different from the knowledge acquired by senses, this rational knowledge is in turn different from the knowledge that the world was brought about after its non-existence. Al-Maturîdî also responds to the above-mentioned objection by saying that there are things like mind and soul in human beings and human beings do not know what they are made of.<sup>5</sup> However, this response does not appear to be satisfactory either. For a thing that it is not known what it is made of is not necessarily a thing created out of nothing.

Al-Maturîdî, after indicate the createdness of the world and responding to the objection to the creation out of nothing, proceeds to prove the existence of the creator of the world. According to him, the evidence of the existence of the Creator of the world is the createdness of the world. Moreover, that things in the world do not come together or separate from each other by themselves indicates that the conjunction and separation of things are performed by something else. And this proves the world to be created and hence that it needs a creator.<sup>6</sup> But such a proof is not satisfying. For here it is assumed that the argument from the createdness of a thing in the world and proving its Creator based on this must also be valid in the case of the world and its Creator. However, the case of a thing in the world cannot be expected to be true of the world as a whole or of a thing outside the world. For these two situations are different. For in the case of the thing existing in the world and inferring from this the existence of its Creator, it is possible that some existent beings other than the said thing may exist; but when it comes the createdness of the world (as a whole) and inferring from this the existence of the creator of the world, it is not the case that anything other than the world should exist. That is, in the

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* p.27.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p.31.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p.31.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p.34.

latter case, one can speak of an absolute nothingness. Therefore, inference from the first case to prove the second is not valid.

**2-Proof for the attributes of God:** according to al-Maturîdî, proving the attributes is closely related to attaining knowledge about God. According to him, since we cannot acquire knowledge of God by senses and reports (*khâbar*), knowledge of God can be acquired through indications in the world for Him; that is, the indication of the known (*shahada*) for the unknown (*ghayb*). The visible (or the known) indicates the unseen in terms of its attributes not the essence. For example, the facts that the visible world has different states and that the opposites are combined in a being are evidence for God's omnipotence. That is to say, existence is an indication in terms of the attributes, e.g. divine power, not the essence. There is nothing in the visible world (*al-alam al-shahada*) that points to the essence. It will not be possible to prove the essence if we negate the attribute from it.<sup>7</sup> In this view, al-Maturîdî shows that there is a close relationship between the essence and the attribute (*dhat and sifah*) rather than a separation between them.

Consequently, al-Maturîdî has in mind the indication of the visible for the invisible through comparison of this indication with the opposite of what is in the visible, rather than with something similar or identical with what is in the visible. Then, in cases other than these, the visible can only be an indication for the opposite of a thing in the visible. For instance, for a person who witnesses a thing in the world, that thing can only be an indication in terms of its either eternity or contingency of that thing. And the eternity or contingency of a thing is something other than the thing itself.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, one can only speak of an indication for the opposite in terms of attributes, not an indication for a similar or identical entity in terms of essence.

Since when the visible is an indication for the invisible (unknown), it indicates not the counterpart of something in the invisible but the opposite of it and since this means that this indication can only be in terms of the attributes rather than the essence, all this amounts to the fact that the world has different aspects and hence the indication of the world to something invisible (unknown) must be in different respects. For example, the world's lack of knowledge of its beginning and its being unable to correct a defect in itself show that the world did not come into existence by itself. Again, the conjunction of the existents and the order in which they exist indicate that the Creator and the governor (*mudabbir*) of the world is one.<sup>9</sup> Thus al-Maturîdî points out the facts that the indication of the visible (*shahîd*) can only be to the opposite of a thing in the unsees (*ghaîb*) and that the *shahîd* can only indicate the *ghaîb* in terms of attributes, and from these, paves a way for proving the attributes of God.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid pp.47-48.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.48.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.50.

Al-Maturîdî thinks it necessary, by both report and reason, to describe God as Knower (*Alim*), Almighty (*Qadir*) and so on, and name Him with these words.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, according to him, describing God and naming Him denote to the same thing. Like the reported (traditional) proof (*al-dalîl al-naqlî*), reason also requires description of God and attribution of a number of names to Him. As a matter of fact, the fact that God has created beings that are distinct from each other in terms of essence and accidents is evidence for the fact that God's creative act is a voluntary one rather than natural. If God's act is voluntary, then it is necessary that He have will and power over creatures. For that which is brought about by something which possesses no power will be corruptible (*fâsîd*) and that something will not possess anything or its opposite. A thing or an act that is brought about by that actor must be brought about through power and volition. Thus God created the world in such a way to indicate that it was created, that it had a creator, and that its creator is one. If God had not known the creatures, it would not have been possible for creatures to indicate the things mentioned above.<sup>11</sup> Likewise the succession of God's acts concerning beings in the world in a manner of precision and orderliness shows that His acts are based on knowledge.<sup>12</sup> It is in this way that al-Maturîdî wants to prove that God is to be predicated of power, volition, and knowledge.

Maturîdî thinks that there is an intimate relationship between the attributes and the names. The names are derived from the attributes.<sup>13</sup> If the attributes are not proved then the names will be just appellations (*al-asma' al-alqab*). Since one cannot speak of appellations for God in eternity, calling Him with some names will be meaningless. Thus al-Maturîdî holds that it is the attributes that are meant by names. But there is a problem here. For it is difficult for the same word to mean both the name and the attribute, because they are two different things. For instance, from al-Maturîdî's point of view, while an attribute can possibly be said to be of a kind of existence, the same thing does not hold for name.

As a matter of fact, the argument which al-Maturîdî advances against those who negate the attributes (the Mu'tazilah) indicates that he considers attributes to have a kind of existence. He says, against the negators of God's attributes, that if in fact an attribute were the quality of that which describes, it would be absurd to use such properties as conjunction, detachment, and rest, from which things themselves are not free, in proving the existents of the outside world. For the existents of the outside world are free from the quality of that which describes them in this way.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, attributes are not only the word of that which describes, but also necessary for things of the outside world. Thus al-Maturîdî, by expressing against the Mu'tazilah that the attributes are not the quality of

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, p.70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.72.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.101.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p.78.

that which describes, admits that the attributes have a kind of existence. For attributes being the quality of that which describes means that they are not in existence. And this is tantamount to the denial of the attributes.

According to al-Maturîdî, in order to distinguish God from other existents, we must say God to be creator through His essence.<sup>15</sup> In other words, since God's being a Creator through an attribute outside His essence would be likening Him to other existing beings, that God is creator through His essence must be emphasized. Nevertheless, it is not because he embraces the Mu'tazilah view that he says that God is creator through His essence. The Mu'tazilah negates divine attributes when they state that God knows through His essence, but al-Maturîdî distinguishes God from other existents by the same statement; Because, after all, he affirms divine attributes.

Al-Maturîdî is in a slightly different position than the other Sunni theologians on the issue of the essence-attribute (*dhât-sıfah*) relationship. He thinks, the essence and the attributes are more intimately related to each other than the other sunni theologians think they are. As we have seen, when al-Maturîdî claims that the indication the world has for the unseen can only be in terms of attributes rather than the essence and when he asserts that the essence cannot be spoken of as denuded from attributes, he refers to the fact that the essence and the attributes cannot be separated from each other, as is the case with the other Sunni scholars. In fact, Abu al-Mu'in al-Nasafî says that the followers of al-Maturîdî shun using the Asharite statement that "God is a knower with a knowledge", lest it should be understood to be a means and prefer saying "God is a knower and He has a knowledge,"<sup>16</sup> thereby restating al-Maturîdî's view that the essence and the attributes are not separable from each other or that they are closely connected to each other.

On the other hand, according to al-Nasafî, there is no difference between al-Jubbaî's statement that "God is a knower for Himself" and al-Ka'bi's statement that "God is a knower through Himself," because both of the statements, in the final analysis, mean that God is not a knower merely because of a quality that is knowledge.<sup>17</sup> In this view, al-Nasafî comes to admit that God is a knower due to a quality, viz., due to a knowledge, and hence differs from al-Maturîdî. For al-Maturîdî holds the view that God has a knowledge or that God is predicated of knowledge, rather than the view that God is a knower due to a knowledge. In other words, al-Maturîdî finds it may appropriate to say that "God has the attribute of knowledge" than to say that "God is a knower with the attribute of knowledge." As a result, he views a closer relationship between the essence and the attributes than do the other Sunni theologians. Thus al-Maturîdî neither denies God's attribute

<sup>15</sup> İbid, p.90.

<sup>16</sup> İbid, p.90.

<sup>17</sup> al-Nasafî, *Tabsirah al-Adillah*, ed. Claude Salamé, v:1 ,( Dimashq, 1990) , p.258.

of knowledge as the Mutazilah does, nor says that God is a knower because of His attribute of knowledge, as in the case of the other Sunni theologians.

This attribute can be affirmed either by saying that the attribute makes the essence a knower or by stating that God is a knower and He has knowledge. Considering that there is no other way to affirm the attribute and that al-Maturîdî does not use the statement that "God is a knower in His essence" in order not to liken God to creatures, we can say that the Mutazilah's statement that "God is a knower through His essence" inevitably amounts to the denial of the attribute. Thus it will not be wrong to conclude that whereas al-Maturîdî and the other Sunni theologians affirm the attributes even if in different ways, the Mutazilah negates them.

As we have seen, there are some difficulties in al-Maturîdî's argument for God's existence and the attributes. However, these kinds of difficulties will not arise if knowledge of God is acquired from the context of the Qur'anic text from semantics point of view. For, in contrast to proving God's existence and His attributes in a kind of rational way, since knowledge about God is attained by way of linguistic expressions from semantics point of view, those difficulties will not emerge with regard to semantics. For in semantics used as a method, linguistic expression will be used instead of a certain rational method, and the meanings of these linguistic expressions will be determined according to semantic criteria. Thus, knowledge of God will be obtained through semantics.

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