

SALIENT FEATURES OF AL-MĀTURĪDĪ'S THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

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Read! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created,
Created man, out of a mere clot of congealed blood,
Read! And thy Lord is Most Bountiful,
He Who taught (the use of) the Pen,
Taught man that which he knew not.
(*Sūrat al-'Alaq*)¹

If dialectical argument is the characteristic of Plato's philosophy,² then demonstrative proof or *burhān* is the characteristic of al-Māturīdī's. According to al-Māturīdī, this is the method that could assist the rational being in obtaining the truth of *al-dīn* and the reality of existence. We can see this at the beginning of his book where he says that only through *burhān* can the truth be disclosed, and not through blind following.³ Apart from addressing the issues of the scope and limit of knowledge as well as the certainty which one can obtain about the reality of existence, al-Māturīdī also addressed those whom he considered skeptics like the Dayṣānites, the Manicheans, the Marcionites, the Magi, the Mu'tazilites, the Christians and the Jews.⁴

Prior to the synthesis of dialectical argument and

1 Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Brentwood: Amana Corporation, 1992), 96:1-5, 1761-1762.

2 Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems*, 4th edition, (Singapore: Mc Graw Hill Book Co.; 1989), 48. Henceforth cited as *Philosophy*.

3 *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 3, line 12.

4 *Al-Māturīdī*, 162-169. Since it is not the scope of this essay to address his arguments, it suffices to mention that he did present arguments against the

demonstrative proof in the 18th century by Kant, we will see that al-Māturīdī had integrated both methodologies in the 9th century about nine hundred years before the Enlightenment changed the phase of Western thought with the rise of the scientific revolution in the 18th century. Although al-Māturīdī recognizes sense experience as the starting point of knowledge, he did not however fall into the empiricist trap. He said that in order to understand what is being perceived by the senses, reason must play the role of an interpreter. We shall see this when al-Māturīdī's theory of knowledge is further expounded. It is in this regard that the sensible world is the world of the rational being, that is, that the realm wherein the faculties of the rational being are the domain of the sensible, to be intellected so that the purpose of creation of the cosmos may be discerned.

Al-Sam' and al-'Aql as the Sources of al-Dīn

Al-Māturīdī began his book, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, by first demonstrating how important it is to transcend *taqlīd*. Apart from the fact that *al-dīn* contains the requirements of compliance to the authority of *al-Ḥaqq*, it also appeals to the rational being to utilise the faculties that were given to him for the purpose of understanding all things that can be seen and experienced. It becomes at once clear at this juncture how al-Māturīdī's epistemology is crucially connected with his theology as a correct understanding of religion, that is, *al-dīn*. However, if unquestioning compliance, that is, *taqlīd* is the aim of *al-dīn*, then, there is no need for reason to be one of the faculties of the rational being, for its creation will have no purpose. Thus, it is only logical to assume that it is not passive compliance that is required in *al-dīn*, but the contrary. It demands a compliance with understanding, and this can only be achieved if human beings exercise

skeptics, so as to see that his thought qualifies as a theory of knowledge. For more information, see also G. Vajda's article, "Le Temoignage d'al-Māturīdī sur la Doctrine des Manichéens, des Dayṣānites et des Marcionites," *Arabica*, 13 (1966).