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**MĀTURĪDĪ THEOLOGY IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE:
DEBATING HUMAN CHOICE AND DIVINE POWER**

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It is frequently alleged that the science of *kalām* (Islamic dogmatic theology) experienced no meaningful growth or development during the Ottoman period. Secondly, developments in the important Sunnī school of theology, the Māturīdian tradition of *kalām*, beyond the contributions of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944) himself and his Samarqandī intellectual successors have been almost entirely neglected in Western scholarly literature.¹ This paper aims to contribute to filling these lacunae in understanding by describing one key element of Ottoman-era Māturīdī *kalām* literature: the delineation of a distinctly Māturīdī theory of the relationship between human freedom and divine omnipotence.²

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¹ Important exceptions to these two tendencies may be seen in Badeen, Edward, *Sunnitische Theologie in osmanischer Zeit* (Würzburg: Orient-Institut Istanbul, 2008), and El-Rouayheb, Khaled, "Opening the Gate of Verification: The Forgotten Arab-Islamic Florescence of the 17th Century," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 38/2 (2006), 263-281.

² For English summaries of al-Māturīdī's theological views on this issue, see Cerić, Mustafa, *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

This paper will argue that one of the key theological questions discussed by al-Māturīdī was given a more precise formulation in the works of Ottoman-era theologians. This question was how a specific human action can be in any way attributable to the human individual. This question needed to be answered because if, according to al-Māturīdī, a human's act could not be in any way attributable to her, then she could not be held morally liable for it in the afterlife. However, if all things in the universe are created by God (which must manifestly be true in monotheistic belief), then in what sense, if any, is a human being's act attributable to the human committing it? In short, how can we solve the problem of the relationship between the moral necessity of human freedom and the ontological necessity of divine omnipotence? Al-Māturīdī responds by attempting to define an internal process of deliberation, intention, and assent that takes place inside each human individual before an act takes place, and then further argues that this internal process occasions God's creation of the act itself, following a human being's intention to commit it. This paper will analyze al-Māturīdī's discussion of this internal process and then go on to show how this part of al-

and Civilization [ISTAC], 1995); Pessagno, J. Meric, "On al Māturīdī's Notion of Human Acts," *Islāmic Thought and Culture: Papers Presented to the Islāmic Studies Group of American Academy of Religion* (ed. Ismā'īl R. al Fārūqī; [Washington, D.C.]: International Institute of Islāmic Thought, 1982), 61-64; id., "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb: The View of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104/1 (1984), 177-191; id., "The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984), 59-82; and Rudolph, Ulrich, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand* (trans. Rodrigo Adem; Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2015).

Mâturîdî's theology received special attention in the Ottoman period, where it was reformulated to better express and explain this theological insight.

This moment in Mâturîdian theological history also represents an intellectual phenomenon typical of the Ottoman period. As El-Rouayheb has argued, intellectual life in the Ottoman period placed great emphasis on a methodology referred to as *taḥqīq* ("verification"), or a process of more clearly explicating the evidence for a specific scholarly proposition.³ This Ottoman-era development of al-Mâturîdî's original discussion represented an example of *taḥqīq*, where later followers of his school attempted to more clearly formulate and explicate his attempt to affirm both human freedom and divine omnipotence. In other words, the theological question of the relationship between human freedom and divine omnipotence experienced a uniquely Ottoman Islamic methodological reformulation, a development important not only for the history of the Mâturîdî school and Ottoman-era Islamic theology, but also for the history of this important theological question in general.

Al-Mâturîdî on the Question of Human Freedom and Divine Omnipotence

Al-Mâturîdî's discussion of this thorny theological dilemma begins with the question of how it is that any action at all can be attributed to the human being committing it, and in what sense specifically it may

³ El-Rouayheb, "Opening the Gate of Verification," 265.

be said to be attributed to her. This is the key question he is trying to answer since it is necessary for God's judgment of human acts to make moral sense. Al-Māturīdī presents three types of arguments for the assertion that a human being's actions are, in some sense, attributable to her: these are arguments from revelation, reason, and *a priori* knowledge.⁴ Al-Māturīdī cites a number of verses from the Qur'ān in this context, including for instance:

Sūrat al-Naḥl 90: "*Truly God commands justice, virtue, and giving to kinsfolk, and He forbids indecency, wrong, and rebelliousness.*"

Sūrat al-Sajda 17: "*No soul knows what comfort is kept hidden for it as a recompense for that which they used to do.*"

Sūrat al-Zalzala 7: "*So whosoever does a mote's weight of good shall see it.*"⁵

Al-Māturīdī therefore deduces from the Qur'ān itself that God not only commands human beings to do good and avoid evil, but that God will also reward or punish human beings in this context: for this to be true, he asserts, human acts must in some way be attributable to those committing them.

⁴ Use of these types of proofs are typical of al-Māturīdī's theological methodology more generally; see for instance al-Māturīdī, Abū Maṣ'ūd Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (eds. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi; Beirut: Dār Şādīr & Istanbul: Maktabat al-Irshād, 2007), 66 and 302.

⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, 306; All Qur'ānic translations taken from *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, et al.; New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015).

Al-Mâturîdî then goes on to assert that pure reason also demonstrates that human acts must in some way be attributable to their human committers. He attempts to prove this by arguing that there are at least some senses in which an act cannot be attributed to God (and thus, must in at least this sense be attributable to the human being). These include the status of the act as a form of obedience or disobedience (to divine command) or the status of some acts as kinds of moral evil.⁶ Since reward and punishment, or moral rightness or wrongness, are features of at least some human acts, these senses of the act must be attributable to either God or the human being committing them: since it is manifestly nonsensical to attribute to hold God subject to any form of moral approval or opprobrium, or any form of obedience or disobedience, these are examples of senses in which an act may be attributed to the human being.

Finally al-Mâturîdî argues that human beings simply know *a priori* that they are freely choosing their actions and therefore their actions may be said to be attributed to them, at least in this (very important) sense of free commission and thus subjection to moral judgment by God. This is the argument that al-Mâturîdî presents the most forcefully, as his theological methodology places great emphasis on the crucial role that human sensory and self-knowledge plays in human knowledge more generally. To use his phraseology: "Everyone knows *a priori* (*min nafsihî*) that he is a chooser (*mukhtâr*) in what he does, and that he is

⁶ Al-Mâturîdî, *Kitâb al-tawhîd*, 306.

[also] a doer (*fā'il*) and acquirer (*kāsib*) [of his action from God].⁷ To deny this reality, according to al-Māturīdī, involves a denial of simply human sensory knowledge of one's self, and at the same time approaches the heresy of fatalism (*jabr*).⁸

These theological terminologies (*mukhtār*, *fā'il*, and *kāsib*) would go on to form the basic structure of later Māturīdian discussions of this same theological problem, and later Māturīdian theologians would also resoundingly affirm that the human being is the chooser, doer, and acquirer of the act that she commits. Every human being freely chooses the action that they commit, and are therefore rightly called the doer of that act (as opposed to the act being strictly attributed solely to God). Once a human being makes a decision to commit an act, God provides that person with the ability or power (*qudra*) to commit the act itself; in this way, human beings are said to acquire the act from God.⁹ Thus, because God is the creator of all things in the universe, God is directly responsible for the *existence* of the act itself, since human beings cannot bring things into being from nothing. However, humans are *responsible* for the moral consequences of the act since they freely choose which acts they wish to commit. Thus, the existence of an act is not attributable to human beings, but its status as a free choice with moral

⁷ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

consequences is attributable to them.¹⁰ This is the essence of al-Mâturîdî's doctrine of human choice (*ikhtiyâr*), a term that he uses to refer to this entire complex of theological ideas.

However, as is clear from the above analysis, al-Mâturîdî's discussion of this problem leaves significant questions unanswered: if human beings are able to freely choose their actions before God brings them into being, what exactly is the nature of this choice (*ikhtiyâr*)? Is it, too, a creation of God? If so, how can it be said to be a moment of actual moral freedom attributable to the human being? In other words, how does al-Mâturîdî's formulation get past the fundamental dilemma in the first place? Al-Mâturîdî attempts to begin to answer this question by positing a process of internal deliberation that human beings undertake prior to God's creation of an act. He argues that the power to commit the act (the *qudra*) is created by God subsequent to the "desire of the human being and his choice and inclination (*mayl*)" to the commission of the act.¹¹ In other words, al-Mâturîdî attempts to better define human choice (the centerpiece of his discussion) by locating it in the innermost heart of the individual being, where a purely internal process of deliberation and "inclination" occurs prior to God's intervention. Sensing the importance of this move in al-Mâturîdî's original discussion, Ottoman-era Mâturîdian theologians would attempt to better explicate this process of internal deliberation in order to safeguard the theological necessity of human

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 310 and 323.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 352.

freedom and choice vis-à-vis God's omnipotence.

It is important to point out here that Ottoman-era theologians who identified with al-Māturīdī's theology almost certainly were not exposed to al-Māturīdī's ideas directly from al-Māturīdī's own text, but were familiar with other works of Māturīdian theology from the later school tradition. The most influential of these texts was Abū l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī's (d. 1115) *Tabṣīrat al-adilla*, a systematic explication of al-Māturīdī's ideas, numerous copies of which are extant in Ottoman-era madrasa collections in Istanbul and elsewhere. On this particular theological question, al-Nasafī adheres closely to al-Māturīdī's discussion, where he also calls human beings choosers, doers, and acquirers of their actions.¹² Like al-Māturīdī, he also uses the term "choice" (*ikhtiyār*) to describe human actions and he also follows al-Māturīdī's views of God's empowerment of human beings to commit an act that they have already "intended" to commit.¹³ In other words, like al-Māturīdī, he identifies the locus of human freedom and moral responsibility in a process of internal deliberation that occurs before the person is empowered by God to commit an act; al-Nasafī refers to this process as "intention" on the part of the human being. However, like al-Māturīdī, al-Nasafī does not elaborate in much detail on this process.

¹² Al-Nasafī, Abū l-Muʿīn Maymūn ibn Muḥammad, *Tabṣīrat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn* (eds. Hüseyin Atay and Şaban Ali Düzgün; Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2004), II, 227-228.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 167.

Another Ḥanafī theologian and jurist whose work would have a major impact on the Ottoman-era discussion of this question was the late Mamluk-era Egyptian scholar Ibn al-Humām (d. 1457). Though not explicitly part of the Māturīdian tradition, Ibn al-Humām's *kalām* text *Kitāb al-musāyara fī 'ilm al-kalām* would in fact play a major role in the Ottoman-era discussion of this theological problem. Like al-Māturīdī and the Māturīdian tradition, Ibn al-Humām affirmed the doctrine of *ikhtiyār* and consequently argued that human choice provided the occasion for God's creation of their actions.¹⁴ Unlike al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī, however, Ibn al-Humām took the important step of attempting to better elucidate the inner process that constitutes the free choice of the human being when committing an act, a process that al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī merely alluded to or posited without any elaboration (as we have seen above).

Ibn al-Humām terms the moment that a person chooses to commit an action the "sincere resolve" (*'azm muṣammam*), and it is only after this moment of intention is formulated that God creates the act for the human being to commit: "If the human being brings about that resolve, then God creates the action for him, and thus the action is attributed to God with respect to its being [simply physical] movement, and it is [attributed] to the human being with respect to its being adultery

¹⁴ Ibn al-Humām, Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Kitāb al-musāyara fī 'ilm al-kalām wa-l-'aqā'id al-tawḥīdiyya al-munjiya fī l-ākḥira* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Maḥmūdiyya al-Tijāriyya, 1929).

and the like [i.e., an action in the sense that it can earn moral approval or censure].”¹⁵ Thus, Ibn al-Humām provides a pithy terminology to refer to the moment of deliberation and intention that truly makes a human action a produce of free choice: this is the “sincere resolve,” a moment of free choice that occurs only within the human being’s heart. This is also the feature of human action that ensures that each act potentially involves moral responsibility, since it means that each human act is rooted in a moment of unburdened human free will. The question still remains, however, as to the ontological status of this moment of free will: since everything in the universe is created by God (including the act itself), is not this moment also created by God? This is the question that the Ottoman-era theologians would attempt to tackle, in an effort to preserve and better elucidate this central emphasis on human freedom in Māturīdian theology.

Reformulating al-Māturīdī: Discussing Human Freedom and Divine Omnipotence in Ottoman-Era Kalām

The question as to how to best classify and characterize Ottoman-era Sunnī *kalām* is a very difficult one. As numerous scholars have pointed out, the Ottoman intellectual tradition tended toward synthesis in the Islamic religious sciences, and often ignored the boundaries between schools erected by earlier scholars (such as the divide between Māturīdism and Ash‘arism). Indeed, following trends already evident in

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

the Mamluk period, Ottoman-era theologians often ignored, downplayed, or even attempted to erase differences between these two *kalâm* schools, most often opting instead for “pan-Sunnî” theological projects rooted in the “philosophical” *kalâm* metaphysics of Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî (d. 1210).¹⁶ Exclusive affiliation with either the Ash‘ariyya or Mâturîdiyya during the Ottoman period was relatively rare. There were, however, examples of a stated preference for one school over the other in specific theological questions, as exemplified in a series of 18th-century treatises devoted to discussing a concept called the “partial choice” or “the partial will” (*al-ikhtiyâr al-juz’î* or *al-irâda al-juz’iyya*). This concept referred to the specific aspect of human acts that renders them free, and thus morally consequential. Many of these treatises were notable for taking an explicitly Mâturîdî approach to the question of human acts, and in doing so rendered a specific critique of Ash‘arî theology.

Judging by extant manuscript copies in the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul, Muḥammad ibn Muṣṭafâ Ḥamîd al-Kafawî Âqkirmânî’s (d. 1760) Ottoman-language treatise *Af‘âl al-‘ibād wa-l-irâda al-juz’iyya*

¹⁶ The strongest example of this “synthetic” impulse in theology is the prevalence of theological ikhtilâf treatises devoted to minimizing the differences within Sunnî kalâm school traditions. See, for instance, *Risâlat al-ikhtilâf bayna l-Ash‘â‘ira wa-l-Mâturîdiyya* by Ibn Kamâl Pasha (d. 1534), one of the most prolific theologians of the Ottoman period (ed. Badeen 2008), and the numerous articles on this topic by Mehmet Kalaycı of the Ankara University Divinity Faculty.

was by far the most common example of this genre.¹⁷ Numerous copies of Arabic-language treatises on this topic were also produced in the mid-18th century Ottoman Empire, most notably Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Gumuljinawī's (ca. mid-18th century) *Risāla fī baḥth al-irāda al-juz'iyya*¹⁸ and the famous scholar Dāwūd al-Qārṣī's (d. 1756) *Risāla fī bayān mās'alat al-ikbtiyārāt al-juz'iyya wa-l-idrākāt al-qalbiyya*.¹⁹ The analysis here will focus on these two texts, since they currently do not exist in edited versions and are, despite their popularity in the Ottoman period, largely unknown in current scholarship. Moreover, the arguments made in these particular treatises are very representative of other examples of this genre.

Both of these treatises make two new arguments that attempt to bolster the Māturīdī doctrine of free human choice. These are: 1) that human beings possess a "starting point" or "access point" (*madkhal*) in each of their acts that is the result of interior deliberations and inclinations; and that 2) these internal processes are best described as a "state" (*ḥāl*) of the person rather than as an element of creation (*khalq*) because these internal processes occur in the innermost reaches of the human

¹⁷ An edition and detailed analysis of this treatise can be found in Şamil Öçal's "Osmanlı Kelamcıları Eş'arî miydi?: Muhammed Akkirmânî'nin İnsan Hürriyeti Anlayışı," *Dini Araştırmalar* 2/5 (1999), 225-254.

¹⁸ MS Istanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Esad Efendi, 1180 is used here.

¹⁹ MS Istanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Serez, 1422 is used here. An edition of a slightly earlier example of this genre is also provided in Badeen's collection, Qāḍī-zāda Muḥammad al-Isbirī al-Arḍurūmī's (d. 1717), *Mumayyizāt madhhab al-Māturīdīyya 'an al-madbāb al-ghayriyya*.

being, and thus do not have actual existence in the external world (*fî l-kbâri*). The term *madkhal* is meant to refer to the fact that human beings possess a specific role in, or “point of entry” or “admittance” into, the existence of the act by virtue of their own choice and intention that occasions the actual creation of the act (as a thing in the world) by God.

Though difficult to render into English, the use of the term “*madkhal*” (which very literally means: “a place into which one is entered in” or “a place where a thing is caused to be brought about”) very precisely captures the sense of human freedom that these theologians are trying to express: that is, that human beings play a role in the occasioning of an act based on their desire to commit it, but that the existence of the act itself is due to the creation of God. This single term, therefore, very well encapsulates the Mâturîdian doctrine that 1) human beings are free because their choice to commit an act is essentially unfettered, but that 2) God remains the omnipotent creator of all things in the world because it is God that actually brings the act into being in the real world (outside the inner deliberations of the person).

According to al-Qārşî, “the human being possesses a *madkhal* in his acts.”²⁰ Al-Qārşî identifies this term with the concept of *kash*, or (as seen above) the notion that human beings “acquire” acts created for them by God. This Ottoman-era Mâturîdian discussion, therefore, can also be understood as an explication (or more accurately, a *taḥqīq*) of the much older theological notion of “acquisition.” Furthermore, al-Qārşî

²⁰ Al-Qārşî, *Risāla fî bayān mas'alat al-ikhtiyārāt al-juz'iyya*, 6a.

cites Q 2:286 as evidence for this position: “*God tasks no soul beyond its capacity. It shall have what it has earned and be subject to what it has perpetrated.*” According to al-Qārṣī, the elaboration of a specific *madkhal* that human beings possess with respect to an act is a distinctly Māturīdīan theological position: he argues that the Ash‘ariyya’s discussion of human acts contains an element of “compulsion” (*idṭirār*) precisely because it does not include a notion of *madkhal*. This critique of Ash‘arism, though conducted very respectfully and without any accusation of outright heresy, is interesting for two reasons: it demonstrates that al-Qārṣī acknowledges a distinctly Māturīdīan tradition of theology with which he identifies on this particular question,²¹ and it highlights his concern to remove any element of “compulsion” from a proper understanding of human actions. This argument is, therefore, a strong theological case for human freedom, albeit it within the context of divine omnipotence.

Secondly, al-Qārṣī argues that the inner deliberations and intentions that form the *madkhal* of the human act are not properly described in terms of creation (*khalq*): “the notion of creation does not pertain to them” because they are “actualized ... in the interior (*ḍimn*) of individuals such that they are not created [in the outside world].”²² This means that these deliberations and intentions exist in “an intermediate [state]

²¹ Al-Qārṣī elsewhere refers to a wide variety of theologians as authorities, suggesting that he may not have recognized a substantial difference between Ash‘aris and Māturīdīs on most theological questions.

²² Al-Qārṣī, *Risāla fī bayān mas‘alat al-ikhtiyārāt al-juz‘iyya*, 11a.

between existence and non-existence,” which al-Qārṣī defines as a *ḥāl*.²³ To sum up, according to al-Qārṣī: “human beings possess *dakbl* [“entrance,” or “access”] in their free actions, such that fatalism (*jabr*) is refuted ... and they are not creators of their free actions, such that *qadr* is refuted [i.e., the doctrine that human beings directly cause their acts to come into being].”²⁴ In other words, al-Qārṣī views the Māturīdian position as the ideal middle ground of orthodoxy that avoids both 1) an affirmation of fatalism and 2) a denial of the absolute omnipotence of God.²⁵

Al-Gumuljinawī's arguments are similar to al-Qārṣī's, and also borrow heavily from Ibn al-Humām's text. Like al-Qārṣī, al-Gumuljinawī also identifies himself as part of the Māturīdian tradition, at least on this particular theological question.²⁶ According to al-Gumuljinawī, “Human beings possess actions of partial choice (*ikhtiyārāt juz'iyya*) and wishes of the heart (*irādāt qalbiyya*) on account of which they are rewarded or punished.”²⁷ In other words, like al-Qārṣī, al-Gumuljinawī argues that it is the inner deliberations and intentions of a human being that guarantee moral responsibility, because these processes are what occasion the existence of the act itself and are not subject to any form of compulsion. He also, like al-Qārṣī, accuses the Ash'ariyya of introducing an element

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Al-Qārṣī, *Risāla fī bayān mas'alat al-ikhtiyārāt al-juz'iyya*, 11b.

²⁶ Al-Gumuljinawī, *Risāla fī baḥṭh al-irāda al-juz'iyya*, 2b.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3a-3b.

of compulsion into their doctrine of human action. Using al-Qārṣī's same terminology, al-Gumuljinawī argues that this is the case because the Ash'ariyya do not elaborate any kind of "access" (*dakhl*) for the human being in the processes that bring their acts into existence.²⁸ By contrast, according to al-Gumuljinawī, al-Māturīdī's doctrine holds that: "the power (*qudra*) and will (*irāda*) of the human being possess a *madkhal* in the action, which is not the effecting of their actual existence."²⁹ Again, like al-Qārṣī, al-Gumuljinawī also identifies this *madkhal* with the concept of *kasb* and the "partial will" (*al-irāda al-juz'iyya*).³⁰ Al-Gumuljinawī also identifies the internal processes of deliberation and intention within the human being that occasion the creation of an act as a kind of *ḥāl*, since they are neither exist in the external world, nor are they lacking in existence entirely.³¹ Al-Gumuljinawī's arguments, therefore, are essentially identical to al-Qārṣī's on these important points. Al-Gumuljinawī also copies passages from Ibn al-Humām on the notion of the "sincere resolve," suggesting that Ibn al-Humām had at least some influence on this discussion of human acts during the 18th century. Al-Qārṣī also cites Ibn al-Humām as a theological authority on this topic.³²

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 3b-4b.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4b.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4a.

³² Al-Qārṣī, *Risāla fī bayān mas'alat al-ikhtiyārāt al-juz'iyya*, 8a.

The Significance of the Ottoman-Era Mâturîdian Explication of Human Free Will

Despite their brevity, and aside from their theological sophistication, these treatises provide some important insights into the nature of Sunnî *kalâm* discussions in the Ottoman period. They confirm the assessment that Ottoman-era theologians did not see themselves as exclusively Ash‘arî or Mâturîdî in school affiliation, but instead recognized a wide variety of historical figures and precedents as authorities worthy of emulation. At the same time, however, al-Qārşî and al-Gumuljinawî show that not all Ottoman-era theologians simply minimized or refused to recognize major differences between Ash‘arî and Mâturîdî (an attitude common in the *ikhtilâf* literature). Instead, al-Qārşî and al-Gumuljinawî, while recognizing both al-Ash‘arî’s and al-Mâturîdî’s authority, were very comfortable declaring their preference for one thinker over the other in some important theological issues, even going so far as to suggest that al-Ash‘arî’s thought leaned toward determinism.

While these two theologians may have been broadly syncretistic and pan-Sunnî in their intellectual outlook, they were not uncritically so. Ottoman theologians’ understanding of Sunnî *kalâm* debates therefore evinces a level of extraordinary sophistication and development, to the point of being able to draw fine distinctions among a variety of divergent theological traditions, within a single theological problem. Though their approach was encyclopedic, it was not simply a cataloging exercise: instead, these theologians were, to use a phrase, “connoisseurs” of the

myriad theological traditions that had preceded them, and they were able to critically evaluate and explicate the most intractable of theological problems based on this knowledge. In other words, it is hoped that this discussion may help to dispel the widespread contention that Ottoman scholars were merely uncritical encyclopedists who did not produce works of original value. Based on this admittedly small example, it would seem that they were much more original and sophisticated than is often asserted.

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