

RESEARCH ARTICLE

From *Kasb* to *Ikhtiyār*: Understanding Asharite and Maturidite Theories on Human Actions

Naseeh Moyikkal

ABSTRACT

Islamic theology, a realm of intellectual richness and contemplation, serves as a testament to the diverse tapestry of critical thoughts that has indeed shaped the Muslim intellectual tradition throughout history. It was characterized by fervent debates on potential theological issues like divine attributes, prophecy, and the createdness of the Qur'ān. Among these, the debate over the coexistence of predestination (*qadr*) and free will by upholding the sovereignty of God and accountability of humans simultaneously has been a subject of contemplation among Muslims, dating back to the early stages of Islam. In the Qur'ān, we can see verses unequivocally establishing the omnipotence and supreme sovereignty of God on the one hand, and there exist verses that assert the human autonomy and accountability for their actions on the other. Classical *kalām* debates grapple with this

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apparent paradox, and this theological conundrum has played a significant role in the genesis of various theological schisms and schools within the broader Muslim intellectual tradition, especially during the formative periods of Islam. Nevertheless, as Mustafa Shah (2006) outlines, the divergence of opinions regarding the issue of predestination hinges upon the question of the true creator of human actions. This article does not aim at a comprehensive treatment of the problem or reconciling it; rather, it examines the nuanced exploration of the perspectives on the issue by Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians, unravelling the intricacies that distinguished their theological thoughts.

Keywords: *Kasb*, *ikhtiyār*, human actions, Asharites, Maturidites

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic theology, a realm of intellectual richness and contemplation, serves as a testament to the diverse tapestry of critical thoughts that has indeed shaped the Muslim intellectual tradition throughout history. It was characterized by fervent debates on various potential issues like divine attributes, prophecy, and the createdness of the Qur'ān. Among these, the debate surrounding the coexistence of predestination (*qadr*) and free will by upholding the sovereignty of God and accountability of humans simultaneously was a topic of contemplation among Muslims, dating back to the early stages of Islam. In the Qur'ān, we can see verses unequivocally establishing the omnipotence and supreme sovereignty of God such as, “Truly We have created everything according to measure” (54:49). It further states, “Surely it is all written in a record. That is certainly easy for Allah” (22:70). Conversely, there exist verses that assert the autonomy of human actions and accountability, as seen in “Each soul is responsible for its own actions” (6:164). Classical *kalām* debates grapple with this apparent paradox, and this theological conundrum has played a significant role in the genesis of various theological schisms and schools within the broader Muslim intellectual tradition, especially during the formative periods of Islam (Shah, 2006). Those opposed to the doctrine of predestination were referred to as *Qadarīyya*, namely proponents of free will, whereas those who adhered to a strict interpretation of predestination were referred to as *Jabrīyya*, who argued that God alone is the True Creator of all the acts of man (Shah, 2006). Jabrites believe that everything is determined solely by God and that humans have no real agency in their actions, whereas Qadarites deny the role of God in humans' actions and attribute all actions, including will, cause, and execution, solely to humans. This was considered as elevating human status to a divine level, which was unacceptable (Rudolph, 2015).

The Mu'tazilites gained recognition for employing a rational approach to Islamic tenets, and they staunchly rejected the idea of predestination because placing God as the author of man's actions would undermine God's divine justice (Shah, 2006). The Mu'tazilites' rationale behind adopting this stance was apparent, where they strived to uphold divine justice by dissociating God from human actions. To uphold the absolute justice of God, the Mu'tazilites introduced the concept of *al-aṣḥāḥ* (most beneficial), the belief that God always acts in the best interest of every human being (Cerić, 1995). In

other words, God is just, and hence, there cannot be injustice or evil emanating from the Divine. They contended that it would be unjust for God to predetermine human actions and then subsequently punish or reward them based on those predetermined actions. Thus, the Mu'tazilites went on to assert that God has no control over human acts, encroaching upon the orthodox doctrine of the omnipotence of an all-encompassing God (Shah, 2006). Nevertheless, as Shah (2006) outlines, the divergence of opinions regarding the issue of predestination hinged upon the question of the true creator of human actions (p. 639). The disagreements raised on the question whether God bestowed individuals with an inherent capacity and volition to their own to act or not, deserving subsequent rewards or punishments accordingly (Shah, 2006). This article does not aim at a comprehensive treatment of the problem or reconciling it; rather, it examines the nuanced exploration of the perspectives on the issue by Ash'arī and Māturīdī theologians, unravelling the intricacies that distinguished their theological thoughts. The article outlines the positions starting with al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935), al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). It then examines the positions of al-Māturīdī (d. 333/934) and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), followed by analyzing Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 792/1390) commentary on *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*.

2. ASHARITES

2.1 Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī

Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī was initially known for his affiliation with the Mu'tazilites, and he was a disciple of one of their leading luminaries, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915; Shah, 2007). Yet at some juncture of his life, al-Ash'arī denounced Mu'tazilism and dedicated significant intellectual efforts to refute their theological doctrines. He asserted that God's absolute power knows no bounds and encompasses every creation and event in the world. Contrary to Mu'tazilites, the weighing of divine omnipotence led him to the argument that there is no creator (*khāliq*) and no agent (*fā'il*) other than God (Thiele, 2016). Rather, human actions are directly brought into being by God followed by a habitual order (*'āda*), which is maintained by God himself (Shihadeh, 2006). To advocate absolute determinism while upholding religious obligation, al-Ash'arī developed the doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*), thereby bridging the gap that appeared between man and his acts (Shihadeh, 2006). The doctrine of *kasb* implies that God grants existence to an act or motion, but the transition of that act into an actual performance takes place once it is "acquired" by the human agent (Adamson & Benevich, 2023). However, al-Ash'arī was not the first one to develop the notion of *kasb* in describing the theological context of analyzing human acts. The term had been in circulation long before al-Ash'arī himself to imply an act for which human beings were entirely responsible (Frank, 2016). The technical vocabulary of *kasb* was built on the ideas of earlier thinkers, mainly by Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. 200/815) and later utilized by al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Najjār (d. 220/835) and Ibn Kullāb (d. 240/854; Thiele, 2016).

Ḍirār formulated that all human actions are brought into the realm by God himself, and humans' role is limited to "acquiring" them. In other words, every human act has two

agents, namely God who produces the act and man who “acquires” it (Thiele, 2016). This concept of double agency served as an imperative tool in addressing several issues in causality, granting natural events to be analyzed as real events while upholding God’s position as the ultimate agent (Bennett, 2020). Al-Ash‘arī, in his *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* commenting on Dirār’s formulations, states:

The ground of separation of Dirār b. ‘Amr from Mu‘tazila was his view that the acts of men created, and that one act comes from two agents (*fā‘ilān*), one of who creates it, namely God, while the other acquires it (*iktasaba*) namely man; and that God is the agent of the acts of men in reality and that men are the agents of them in reality. (Watt, 1948, pp. 104–105)

The point of contention for al-Ash‘arī with Dirār was his claim that the man is the agent of himself in reality. Rather, for al-Ash‘arī, God creates the acquisition of man, and man acquires his action by virtue of possessing the power (*qudra*) that relates to it. For al-Ash‘arī, “the true meaning of acquisition is that the things proceed from its acquirer in virtue of a created power” (McCarthy, 1953, p. 60). Al-Ash‘arī further maintained that the capacity to act exists simultaneously with the act by stating that:

He (man) cannot acquire the act if there be no capacity; it is certain that the acquisition exists only because the capacity exists. And this is equivalently an affirmation that the capacity exists with the act and for the acts. (McCarthy, 1953, p. 79)

According to al-Ash‘arī, when a human agent disbelieves or lies, it does not entail that the agent has brought into existence the very nature and reality of unbelief and lying; rather, its essential nature is determined by God (Frank, 2016). Al-Ash‘arī further differentiates between acquired acts and necessary acts, such as shivering from fever and trembling. The necessary act is defined as “which the thing is constrained, compelled and forced and from which it can find no way to get free or to escape” (Thiele, 2016, p. 255). Al-Ash‘arī posited that human beings are responsible for the “acquired acts” and not the “necessary” acts. Nonetheless, if God is the ultimate creator of an action, how can humans be held accountable for such actions when they are not the originator of those acts? Thiele (2016) points out that al-Ash‘arī does not provide a direct answer to this question (p. 255). Subsequently, we could see a clear departure from this position by the later Ash‘arī theologians, who delved deeper into analyzing human actions. For instance, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) considered the doctrine of *kasb* as “a mere word, without reference to any meaning” and argued that human act is produced by the agent’s power alone, provided to him by God (Shihadeh, 2006, pp. 39–40).

2.2 Al-Bāqillānī

Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī was one of the significant scholars in his era who made a substantial contribution to the consolidation of the school’s theological teachings. He addresses the issue mainly in his earlier works, such as *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and, later, his magnum opus in

theology, *Hidāyat al-Mustarshidīn*. Al-Bāqillānī defines the notion of acquisition (*kasb*) as the act performed by an agent who holds power (*qudra*) in acquiring that act (Thiele, 2016, p. 258). For al-Bāqillānī, the concept of power stipulates that an agent should possess the appropriate capacity for that specific act to come into existence. This state (*hāl*) of being powerful (*kawnihi qādir*) is interconnected when an act is brought into existence. Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), in his *Nihāyat al-Aqdām*, explains al-Bāqillānī's concept of act as states (*ahwāl*), emphasizing that this state serves as the link between a human agent and the acquisition of the act. Moreover, when a command (*amr*) is in place and the human agent acts in accordance with that command, it is known as service and obedience (Adamson & Benevich, 2023). In contrast, if an act comes into existence contrary to that command, it is deemed sin and disobedience. It is within this framework that the concept of obligation (*mukallaf*), as well as the principles of punishment and reward, are established.

Furthermore, al-Bāqillānī asserted that the concept of *kasb* is rooted in human will (*'irāda*) itself. In other words, to counter the objection that the acquisition of an act of will requires another act of will, leading to an infinite regress, al-Bāqillānī argued that the will itself is an acquired act. Humans' failure to exercise their will at a given moment is nothing more than a lack of power (Thiele, 2016). Much like al-Ash'arī, al-Bāqillānī also held the view that an agent possesses the power (*qudra*) to act at the very moment of that particular act.

The Mu'tazilites asserted that humans are fully held accountable for their own actions since these acts originate from themselves. Eventually, they raised the objection: How can humans be blamed or praised for acts if they are not the creators of those actions? Al-Bāqillānī's response to this dilemma posits that human acts possess an attribute based on man's created power (*qudra*), and it is to this attribute that God's commands, prohibitions, punishments, and rewards apply (Thiele, 2016). For al-Bāqillānī, he asserts that a moral responsibility and assessment are intrinsic to human actions, yet the very existence of acts created by God does not imply that humans are morally responsible for their existence. In essence, while God is the ultimate creator of all acts, humans act intentionally by virtue of their "power" of acquiring (*kasb*), which is determined by their own volition, even though they do not create the acts themselves. Consequently, humans are neither to be blamed or praised for the existence of actions but are held accountable for their acquisition (*kasb*) of actions on account of their own power (*qudra*; Thiele, 2016).

2.3 Al-Rāzī

Al-Rāzī was a traditional Ash'arī, as his first teacher in both *kalām* and *fiqh* was Diyā' al-Dīn (d. 559/1164), a prominent Shāfi'ī and Ash'arī scholar known as the "preacher of Rayy" due to his widely attended sermons (Shihadeh, 2006). His early works adhered to classical Ash'arī style but later embraced a shift by integrating the Aristotelian philosophy into speculative theology (*kalām*) while still maintaining alignment with traditional Ash'arism (Griffel, 2020). Al-Rāzī was never reluctant to engage with philosophical works and quoted them extensively where relevant in his works. Simultaneously, he incorporated the *kalām* technique of exhaustive investigation and systematic disjunction

into his philosophical discourse. Shihadeh (2006) observes that al-Rāzī's discussions on human actions can be found in several of his works, including *Al-Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, *Maʿālim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, and *Al-Matālib al-ʿĀliya min al-ʿIlm al-Ilāhī* (p. 17). In his early works, al-Rāzī adhered to the classical Ashʿarī doctrine of acquisition, aimed at establishing a connection (*taʿalluq*) between the power (*qudra*) of the human agent and his act (*fiʿl*) to affirm moral responsibility and obligation. Al-Rāzī identifies four main positions in the theories of action, as outlined below (Shihadeh, 2006, pp. 15–16):

- Action is brought into being by divine power only. He mentions al-Ashʿarī, al-Bāqillānī, and Ibn Fūrak (d. 404/1015) as the proponents of this view.
- Action is produced by a combination of divine power and human power. He quotes Abū Ishāq al-Isfrāʾīnī (d. 418/1027), who asserts that human power may be affected with assistance (*muʿīn*) in the action, which then combines with the divine action.
- Action is produced when human power (*qudra*) and motivation (*daʿī*) are combined in the agent. He mentions philosophers as the proponents of this view.
- Humans act with autonomy (*istiqlāl*) and choice (*ikhtiyār*) that is deduced through reflection (*naẓar*) or inference (*istidlāl*). He mentions most Muʿtazilites as the proponents of this view.

Of the above classification, al-Rāzī accepts the third position—that an action is produced when human power (*qudra*) and motivation (*daʿī*) are combined. This combination results in the emergence of a “complete cause” (*muʿaththir tāmm*) that produces the effect at the same instant. As for human power (*qudra*), al-Rāzī adhered to the Ashʿarī path in his early stages. This was self-evident in his *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, where he maintains that human power or capability (*istitāʿa*) is an accident that exists within the human body. However, in his later works, such as *Maʿālim*, al-Rāzī rejects this Ashʿarī notion and implies that human power is the fitness of the physical organs and the balance of the humors, both of which directly influence the ability to perform or refrain from an action (Shihadeh, 2006).

Al-Rāzī maintains the view that power is linked to producing one single act, with both capability and action occurring simultaneously. As for the motivation (*daʿī*), al-Rāzī defines it as the presence of three types of cognitive states in the human agent. This includes knowledge (*ʿilm*), belief (*iʿtiqād*), or presumption (*ẓann*) that human agents perceive a preponderant advantage (*maṣlaḥa rājiḥa*) in carrying out a particular act (Shihadeh, 2006). This accommodates in the agent's heart a decisive inclination (*mayl al-jāzim*) toward performing that act. Conversely, if a particular act presents a preponderant disadvantage (*mafsada*), it leads the agent to a decisive aversion (*nafra*) against executing that act. According to al-Rāzī, the agent's mind calculates the advantages and disadvantages of an act before performing it. If the agent finds an act to be advantageous, he will be compellingly motivated (*muljaʿ*)¹ to perform it and perform it by necessity.

1 Ayman Shihadeh notes that the term *muljaʿ* employed by al-Rāzī originates from the usage by Muʿtazilites, where al-Jubbāʾī used it to indicate an intentional act which agent perceives himself to force to choose. See Shihadeh (2006, p. 24).

In explaining the cognitive state of knowledge, al-Rāzī asserts that knowledge is a stronger motive than belief itself, as the latter is susceptible to doubt. Al-Rāzī in his *Matālib* states:

The act of being beneficial and good is never a cause for the agent's performance thereof. Rather what effects agency (*fā'iliyya*) is the agent's knowledge that the act in question involves such goodness and benefit. (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 22)

The motives stemming from an agent's cognitive states are determined by both internal and external factors which include (a) variations in the essences of human souls and temperance, (b) physiognomic variation, (c) habituation, (d) the exception of certain benefits and harms, and (e) theoretical training (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 31). For al-Rāzī, all motives are instilled in the agent's heart by God himself, including those that prompt the agent to alter other motives within himself. In *Kitāb al-Jabr*, he states that "all the knowledge and ignorance that occur in people's hearts and minds are from God and are brought into being by God" (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 32). According to al-Rāzī, seeking benefit, pleasure (*ladhdha*) or joy (*surūr*), and abstaining from harm, pain, or grief (*ghamm*) are the fundamental instincts that outline all humans' motivation (Shihadeh, 2006). As for the harm, it can be classified into three main types: (a) real harm with immediate experience of pain, (b) the negation of benefit, and (c) the negation of what prevents harm (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 23). Similarly, benefits are classified into three types: (a) real benefit with immediate experience of pleasure, (b) the prevention of harm, and (c) the prevention of what impedes the benefit (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 23).

After establishing that the combination of motivation and power is what ultimately dictates an action, al-Rāzī maintains that both stages are deterministic and hence all human action in general is determined. He explains this conclusion by stating that:

Man finds in himself that unless he wants to act, he will not be able to act, and unless he wills to abstain, he will not be able to abstain. That will is not due to another will, for otherwise, this would entail infinite regress. It is thus certain that those will go back to a necessary will that occurs in the heart without will. (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 30)

So according to al-Rāzī, that necessary will, which serves as a precedence to the act in both cases, is from a decisive will that occurs in the heart without will, which is from God. Al-Rāzī summarizes his position in *Kitāb al-Jabr* by stating that the combination of power and motivation affects (*mu'aththir*) the act, and the creator of this combination is God, the Exalted. He further states that "since this combination necessitates the occurrence of these acts, it becomes true that all is by God's decree and determination" (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 41). For al-Rāzī, rejecting determinism and affirming free human will would result in a more severe consequence, mainly the refusal of the Creator's existence. So, he concludes that while the human is a voluntary agent in the sense of acting with awareness, he is nonetheless compelled in his choosing (*muḍtarr fī ikhtiyārih*) and affirms determination by stating that "there is nothing in existence but determination" (*mā fī l-wujūd illā l-jabr*;

Shihadeh, 2006, p. 37). However, al-Rāzī's approach towards the issue, where he took a firm attempt to synthesize primary philosophical (*falsafī*) argument and *kalām*, was criticized by Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who explicitly states that:

Whenever al-Rāzī and his follower's debate with Mu'tazilīs on matters of destiny, they hold on that an agent can preponderate only by a complete preponderator. Whenever they debate with *falāsifa*, they follow the route of Mu'tazilīs and Jahmīs in saying that an agent may preponderate over the other without a preponderator. (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 36)

Even though al-Rāzī was considered as upholding a deterministic position, he admits in one of his later work *Maḥāṭib al-Ghayb* the fact that the question of human destiny and free choice does not bear a conclusive solution by stating that "there is a mystery (*sirr*) in this issue, that providing the existence of God compels one to uphold determinism (*jabr*) while proving prophecy compels one to uphold human autonomy (*qudra*)" (Shihadeh, 2006, p. 38).

3. MATURIDITES

3.1 Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī

Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī hailed from a village outside of Samarqand, known as Māturīd, and played a significant role in shaping the Ḥanafī theological tradition in the region, although a doctrinal school attributed to him did not occur until several generations later (Correa, 2022). Al-Māturīdī was a disciple of Abū Naṣr al-ʿIyādī (d. 275/888), affiliating himself with the institutional lineage of the Ḥanafī learning circle, which traces its origins to Abū Sulymān al-Juzjānī (d. 200/816; Dorroll, 2022ab). His disciple Abū'l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114) even bestowed al-Māturīdī with the honorific title of "the most knowledgeable person on the views of Abū Ḥanīfa" (*a'raf al-nās bi madhāhib abī Ḥanīfa*; Rudolph, 2015, p. 5). Furthermore, Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) characterized the doctrine of Māturīdī as the doctrine of *aṣḥāb abī Ḥanīfa* (Rudolph, 2015). Al-Māturīdī was a part of an intellectual center in Samarqand that gained recognition for its theological rationalism and engaged in conflicts with theological circles attributed to the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (Dorroll, 2022b). Despite being a devoted Ḥanafī adherent, al-Māturīdī further possessed an independent stance in theological matters. His extensive theological work *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*² mentions Abū Ḥanīfa's name only four times, indicating that he utilized the school's thought but was capable of applying it to the demanding problems of his day on his own (Ceric, 1995).

With regard to human actions, al-Māturīdī advocated for a balanced stance between

2 Daniel Gimaret in his *Theories de l'Acte Humain en Theologie Musulmane* after making a comparison between *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and Abū'l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī's *Tabṣirat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn* further affirms that fact *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* was indeed al-Māturīdī's works. See Ceric (1995, p. 50). Al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* documents his debates with leading Mu'tazilī theologian Abū l Qāsim al-Balkhī/al-Ka'bī (d. 319/931). See Omari (2022, p. 179).

the two opposing extremes of Jabrites and Qadarites. Al-Māturīdī, in his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, states that “the correct approach to this problem is that of the middle way between these two views” (*al-madhhab al-mutawassit*; Ceric, 1995, p. 210).

According to al-Māturīdī, two forms of capacity (*istiṭāʿa*) serve as a prerequisite for every action. The first capacity is inherent and by nature, where humans possess soundness (*salāma*) and health (*ṣiḥḥa*) to the body and the intellect (Rudolph, 2015). The second form of capacity is granted to perform two contrary acts during the action itself (*maʿa l-fiʿl*), enabling humans to choose between two opposing actions. It is at this point that al-Māturīdī introduces the terminological expression of choice (*ikhtiyār*), where it gained popularity and became a central theme in theological discourse (Rudolph, 2015). Al-Māturīdī, in his *Taʿwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, states that “the performance of the act belongs to the servant and the realization of it belongs to God. From the servant comes the move to either choose to act good or evil, and from God comes the creation (*khalq*) [of the act]—this is what apprehends from the path of justice and fairness (*al-ʿadl wa-l-ḥaqq*)” (Ozaykal, 2022, pp. 148–149). Like Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, al-Māturīdī asserted the omnipotence of God and that every act originates from God; however, he argued that God chooses to make the intelligibility of the acts accessible through human reasoning itself (Omari, 2022). For al-Māturīdī, God has bestowed human beings with the capacity of knowledge so that they can ascertain and choose good over evil on their own. In *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, al-Māturīdī further states that “He [God] has made them[humans] capable of knowing and distinguishing the praiseworthy things (*maḥmūd*) from the blameworthy things (*madhmūm*)” (Dorroll, 2022a, pp. 192–193). So, the ability to choose (*ikhtiyār*) between good and evil is known through knowledge based on sensory perception (*ʿiyān/hawāss*), reported knowledge (*samʿ/akhbār*), and speculation (*naẓar/ʿaql*; Dorroll, 2022b). In contrast to the Asharites, al-Māturīdī was dealing with the issue of human actions from a different perspective, where he brings into the discussion the difference between human beings’ natural inclination (*mayl at-ṭabiʿa*) and reason (*ʿaql*). Al-Māturīdī states that “human beings’ own nature becomes one of the enemies of their use of their own intellect in ascertaining the goodness and evilness of things” (Dorroll, 2022a, pp. 198–199). So, human beings’ nature changes from state to state, sometimes forcibly, whereas that is not the case with intellect. The goodness of things is ascertained by the intellect, which never perceives goodness as evil and emphasizes that “for that which the intellect ascertains to be good or evil and does not change from state to state” (Dorroll, 2022a, pp. 198–199). Al-Māturīdī further states that:

He [God] enjoins those people to adhere to that which the intellect shows them to be good; even if there is a repulsive from his own nature and to avoid (*ijtināb*) what is evil according to intellect; even when his own nature tends to accept it. (Dorroll, 2022a, pp. 198–199)

For al-Māturīdī, humans themselves are the authors of their actions within the limits of God’s will, in which the evil deeds will not happen with the contentment (*riḍa*) of God (Shah, 2006).. Furthermore, al-Māturīdī rejects the notion of Muʿtazilites’ *al-aṣḥāḥ* (most

beneficial) on the ground that everything is from God, including evil, and it relies solely on God's absolute divine wisdom (*ḥikma*). Al-Māturīdī goes on to say, "God must be described with every and each action He creates by wisdom and justice or grace" (Cerić, 1995, p. 218). For al-Māturīdī, regardless of the nature of the acts, God is wise because He "puts everything in its place" (*wa d'u kulli shay'in mawḍi'ahu*; Rudolph, 2015, p. 299).

3.2 Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī

Even though Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142) did not mention al-Māturīdī nor his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in his famous *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*, it was an important creedal text that was written in the early classical period to summarize the Māturīdī school's theological imprints. Najm al-Dīn, in his work, extensively relied on his master Abū'l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī's *Tamhīd li-Qawā'id al-Tawḥīd*, which is widely recognized as the second-most influential text within the Māturīdī tradition after Māturīdī's seminal work *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Alper, 2022). Al-Nasafī, by following al-Māturīdī's epistemological framework, outlines the sources of knowledge as sound senses (*al-ḥawāss al-salīma*), reported knowledge (*al-khabr al-sādiq*), and reason (*al-'aql*; Al-Nasafī, 2014). He then elucidates the conundrum surrounding the coexistence of human actions and predetermination by incorporating God's eternal will by stating that "Allah is the creator of all actions of His creatures including disbelief, belief, obedience and disobedience" (*wallāhu ta'alā khālīqu liaff'aal al-'ibād min-'l-kufr wa-l-imān, al-tā'a wa-l-iṣṭiyān*) and all these according to Nasafī is by Allah's will (*bi-'irādathihi*; Al-Nasafī, 2014, pp. 167–169). Then Al-Nasafī addresses the conundrum by stating that "His creatures possess an action of choice (*ikhtiyār*), based on which they are rewarded (*yuthābūna biha*) and punished (*yu'āqibūna 'alayhā*); and the goodness (*ḥasan*) in those actions is by the contentment (*riḍā*) of God, while the badness (*qabīḥ*) in those actions is not by His contentment" (Al-Nasafī, 2014, pp. 167–169). Unlike the Mu'tazilites, al-Nasafī acknowledges that all human actions, regardless of their status, originate from the Divine. However, humans are granted the ability to choose among them, and it is by aligning their actions with divine contentment that they are rewarded or punished.

3.3 Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 792/1390) commentary on al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya

Al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya of Najm al-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī was concise, eloquent, and considered a synthesis of the Maturidite theology, as it attracted many Ash'arī scholars and theologians. Among them, Al-Taftāzānī was a significant figure in the later phase of classical Sunnī theological tradition, and his commentary on *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* integrated elements from both Ash'arī and Māturīdī schools that further receive commentaries to the present day (Harvey, 2021). In his commentary on human actions, al-Taftāzānī states that the early Mu'tazilites refrained from applying the concept of creation (*khalq*) on humans and restricted the terminology to *mūjīd* (bringer into existence) and *mukthari* (inventor). Later, when al-Jubbā'ī and his followers defined creation as the act of one who brings existence from nonexistence, they employed the word creator

(*khāliq*; Al-Taftāzānī, 2014). Al-Taftāzānī also addresses the claim by Mu‘tazilites that if God is the creator of all actions, then He would be the One sitting and standing. For al-Taftāzānī, this is ignorance (*jahl*), as the one who is the creator of actions and the one who is performing those actions are distinct. It is for God to create attributes such as the blackness and whiteness of bodies, but this does not entail that these are God’s predicates (*muttaṣif*; Al-Taftāzānī, 2014). Rather, God should be maintained as the creator only. If someone claims that we should be pleased with one being unbelief (*kufṛ*) and evil doer (*fāsiq*) as this is part of divine decree, al-Taftāzānī clarifies that God willed for them unbelief and evil doing by their own choice (*bi ikhtiyārihima*), but not by obligation (*taklīf*; Al-Taftāzānī, 2014). For al-Taftāzānī, God did not make human agents legally responsible for something that was not irreversible, such as evil deeds or unbelief. Rather, they had a choice in both choosing and refraining from those acts. In his discussion on the Maturidites’ notion of choice (*ikhtiyār*), al-Taftāzānī gives a detailed commentary on how it should be perceived.

Al-Taftāzānī addresses the notion of *ikhtiyār* by affirming that God both knows and wills whether humans will choose to undertake an action or abstain from it by their own choice, and there is no confusion (*ishkāl*) about it (Al-Taftāzānī, 2014). In addition to that, al-Taftāzānī reconciles the notion of *ikhtiyār* and *kasb* by stating that while God is the creator (*khāliq*) of actions, humans, through their choices, are acquirers (*kāṣib*) of those actions. When a human exerts their power and will in performing any action, it is an acquisition (*kasb*); whereas when God brings that action into existence (*‘ijād*), it is regarded as the creation (*khalq*). The act, which is subject to power, falls under two forms of powers (*maqḍūr*), each with differing capacities: one in relation to God, who brings the action into existence, and the other in relation to humans, who acquire the action (Al-Taftāzānī, 2014). Addressing the potential accusation that this combination of powers implies a form of co-association with God (*shirk*), al-Taftāzānī defends his position by saying that “in each scenario, one power detaches itself from the other, with each belonging to its respective source, just as an action is ascribed to God from the standpoint of creation and to the human from the standpoint of acquisition (*kasb*)” (Al-Taftāzānī, 2014, p. 86). If someone raises the objection as to how the acquisition of reprehensible actions (*qabīh*) is deemed blameworthy (*dhamm*) and subject to punishment (*‘iqāb*), while the very creation of such reprehensible actions is not considered vile, Al-Taftāzānī in line with al-Māturīdī refutes it by asserting that creators’ actions are inherently wise (*ḥikm*) and are grounded in beneficial matters (*masalih*) in which human beings are incapable of fully comprehending the wisdom behind it (Al-Taftāzānī, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that both al-Ash‘arī and al-Māturīdī emerged as luminary theologians whose discussions on theological matters left indelible marks and thoughts that continue to reverberate throughout history up until today, demonstrating how both theologians worked in tandem for the orthodox theology while maintaining differences in opinion. In the case of al-Ash‘arī, he primarily laid down the theological foundation on various issues,

which was subsequently developed, refined, and altered by his successors. Al-Ash'arī emphasized that every event, including human actions, is created by God and acquired by humans, with free will existing within the prescribed bounds of God's ultimate control. That very notion of acquisition (*kasb*) and theories on human actions underwent substantial revisions within the Asha'rite theological framework, as we have seen through figures like al-Bāqillānī and al-Rāzī. This becomes apparent when al-Taftāzānī worked on Nasafi's creed and tried to reconcile between the two notion of theories—*kasb* and *ikhtiyār*. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī sought to craft out a delicate equilibrium between Divine sovereignty and human agency, endowing humans with the capacity and intellect to exercise *ikhtiyār* (meaningful choices), and it was concisely summarized by al-Nasafi as well. For al-Māturīdī, there is no criterion for absolute divine wisdom to be measured on the status of acts and thus rejects the Mu'tazilite notion of *al-aṣḥaḥ* (most beneficial). Allah knows best.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naseeh Moyikkal

Naseeh Moyikkal is a student of the PhD program in Islamic Studies at the College of Islamic Studies, Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). He holds a Master's degree in Islamic Studies from the same university. His research interests focus on classical works in theological studies and Sufi intellectual traditions, exploring their intersection within Islamic scholarship. Moyikkal is also a recipient of the prestigious Gold Medal from His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Amir of Qatar, awarded in recognition of academic excellence during his Bachelor's study in Sharia and Islamic Studies at Qatar University.

mnaseeh321@gmail.com

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