

The Self in Mu'tazilah Thought*

Isma'il R. al Fārūqī

FROM WĀṢIL ibn 'Aṭā' who died in Baṣrah in 131 A. H./749 A.C. to Abū al Ḥasan al Aṣḥ'arī who died in Baghdād in 322 A.H./935 A.C. runs a line of brilliant thinkers who constitute the Mu'tazilah tradition.¹ Their time was the formative period of

* Address delivered at the Wooster Conference on Comparative Philosophy and Culture at Wooster College, Wooster, Ohio, April 22-24, 1965.

¹ The tradition, founded by Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' (died 131 A.H./749 A.C.) is divided into two schools: that of Baṣrah comprising among its distinguished members 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, Abū al Hudhayl al 'Allāf, Ibrahīm al Naẓẓām, 'Amr al Jāḥiẓ, Abū 'Alī and Abū Hāshim al Jubbā'ī; and that of Baghdād, founded by Bishr ibn al Mu'tamar (died 210 A.H./826 A.C.) and counting among its great members Abū Mūsā al Murdār, Aḥmad ibn Abī Du'ād (the Grand Qādī of the caliphs Al Ma'mūn, Al Mu'tasim and Al Wāṭḥiq, 204-232 A.H./820-848 A.C.), Thumāmah ibn al Aṣhras, the two Ja'fars (Ja'far ibn Ḥarb and Ja'far ibn Mubashshir), Muḥammad al Iskāfī and 'Abd al Raḥīm al Khayyāṭ. Abū al Ḥasan al Aṣḥ'arī was the last great Mu'tazilī who, having mastered their thought and method, overturned the tables against the Mu'tazilah and established the first crystallization of Sunnī theology. For a biographical and bibliographical study of the Mu'tazilah, see Ibn al Murtada, *Ṭabaqāt al Mu'tazilah*, ed. by S. Diwald-Wilzer (Catholic Press, Beirut, 1961). For systematic presentation of Mu'tazilah doctrine and extensive accounts of their history, see Jār-Allah, Zuhdī Ḥasan, *Al Mu'tazilah* (Al Nādī al 'Arabī fi Yāfā Publications, Cairo, 1366/1947); Nādir, A. N., *Falsafat al Mu'tazilah: Falāsifat al Islām al Asbaqīn*, 2 vols. (Dār Nashr al Thaḳāfah, Alexandria, 1950-51); *ibid.*, *Le système philosophique des Mu'tazilah (Premiers penseurs de l'Islam)* (Éditions les Lettres Orientales, Beyrouth, 1956). For works by members of the Mu'tazilah, see 'Abd al Raḥīm al Khayyāṭ's *Kitāb al Intiṣūr wa al Radd 'Alā Ibn al Rawandī*, ed. by A. Nyberg (Lajnat al Ta'līf wa al Tarjamah wa al Nashr, Cairo, 1925); and A. N. Nadir's Arabic edition and French translation (Catholic Press, Beirut, 1957; English edition and commentary by this author forthcoming, University of Chicago Press); Al Qādī 'Abd al Jabbār, *Al Mughnī ji Abwāb al Tawḥīd wa al 'Adl*, in serial volumes published by the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance (Cairo, 1959-); *ibid.*, *Sharh*

Islamic thought. It was the time when Islam, having come to the Fertile Crescent, had to answer the enquiries of friend and foe, of those who converted to, and those who resisted the new faith.

The Fertile Crescent was the crossroads of Christianity, Judaism, Hellenism, Manichaeism, Zoroastrianism and—by one degree removed—Indian religion. The array of ideas and thought currents it presented to the observer was most bewildering. Until this time, the Muslim's consciousness had been completely dominated by the vision of the divine pattern into the likeness of which the adherent of the faith stood under the command to transform space-time; and in his life, the Muslim had been too engaged in the business of making history to articulate his mission and ideology in systematic manner. He certainly argued about it, but controversy had no appeal for him. The greatest and final argument he had was "*Voilà!*" pointing to himself and his fellow Muslims as exemplars of the faith; and both he and his opponents were convinced by this argument. The spectacle of the Muslim hurling himself upon the realm of religious and moral values, realizing them with a completeness that hardly knew or tolerated exceptions while making history in the process, was as sublime as it was disarming. Three generations later, roughly a century or a little more, the job of controverting the opponents' opinions, of weighing alternatives and exposing their shortcomings, fell on the shoulders of the Mu'tazilah; and they certainly proved themselves in the many battles of ideas in which they engaged. Their history was as brilliant as that of their brethren who had spent themselves in the realization of the divine pattern within as well as without, in themselves as in the world around them.

FIVE BASIC PRINCIPLES

Mu'tazilah doctrine is founded on five axioms: First, *al tawhīd* or unization of God. This axiom was emphasized against the contentions of the Karaites (Jewish anthropomorphists), of the Manichaeism dualists, of the Christian trinitarians, and of the Near Eastern philosophers who were for the most part gnostic emanationists. Under this principle the Mu'tazilah sought to establish the existence, uniqueness and transcendence of God, which were threatened by those schools.

al Usūl al K̄hamsah, forthcoming edition by this author (Dar Iḥyā' al Kutub al 'Arabiyyah, Cairo).

The second axiom was *al 'adl* (justice), which was emphasized against the contentions of the advocates of racialism, election, predestination, irrationalism and justification by faith among all the above-mentioned groups, as well as against those Muslims who were determinists, intercessionists and advocates of the primacy of revelation over reason. Here, the Mu'tazilah sought to establish the universalism, rationalism, humanism and moral freedom of Islam.

The third and fourth axioms, namely *al wa'd wa al wa'id* (the promise of reward and threat of punishment) and *al manzilah bayna al manzilatayn* (the intermediate station between salvation and damnation) are subsidiaries to the principle of justice. On the one hand, reward and punishment were held to be necessary if God's disposal of man's destiny was to be an absolutely just one. Otherwise, i.e., if all man's deeds ended in forgiveness and paradise, in punishment and hellfire, or in neither, i.e., in vanity and futility, divine righteousness would be gravely compromised. On the other hand, the necessity of the intermediate station between faith and unfaith, or salvation and damnation, was held on account of the faithful who slips into grave sin. This axiom rehabilitated such a person in opposition to two kinds of extremism: that which regarded adherence to the faith as all that is necessary for salvation—the view under which the sinner is complacently regarded as saved; and that which regarded all salvation as logically and materially equivalent to works—under which view the sinner is summarily condemned to eternal punishment. Against both extremes, this principle kept the faithful, as faithful as well as sinner, under God's accusing finger for the sin of which he is guilty.

Finally, the fifth axiom is *al amr bi al ma'rūf wa al nahy 'an al munkar* (the enjoining of good and prohibition of evil), whose role was to establish the necessity of an imperfect yet perfectible creation for man's moral self-realization or fulfilment of the divine command; hence the need for man to engage himself in its woof and web, to take history into his own hands, and to knead and remould the world into the likeness of the divine pattern God had revealed.²

² A brief statement of these five cardinal principles of Mu'tazilah doctrine may be read in MacDonald, D. B., *Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York: Scribner, 1903), pp. 119-64; Tritton, A. S., *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac, 1947), pp. 79-106; Watt, W. Montgomery, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac, 1948), pp. 61-92; De Boer, T. J., *History of Islamic Philosophy*, tr. by E. R.

These five axioms were cardinal to the Mu'tazilah. Contention or denial of any one of them removed the contender from Mu'tazilah rank.³ And yet, if we were to characterize Mu'tazilah doctrine by a single dominant idea, we are compelled to say that the whole thrust of their movement revolved around man's ethical problem; that all their doctrine was an elaboration in Islamic key of the problem of man's ethical nature which they regarded as the central problem of the self. Their concern was a very Islamic one, since in Islam the be-all and end-all of human life—indeed, of all creation—is the realization in space-time of a divine trust. And their reasoning is clear. If God is transcendent—and the Muslim believes He is—He may not be said to invade, or be invaded by, creation. God is forever unique. Therefore, there is in Islam neither incarnation, nor pantheism; neither emanation from God nor fusion into God. These are all constructs devoid of foundation. The only unquestionable, given reality is that man, the creature, stands under an imperative, viz., the command of value; that he is commanded as well as moved by value to seek its realization in the realm of the actual.

According to the Mu'tazilah, four different principles follow from this given reality, and their establishment is the task of all religious and philosophical thought. These are, first, that there is

Jones (London: Luzac, 1933), pp. 41-64; Gibb, H. A. R., *Mohammedanism* (London: Oxford U. Press, 1949), pp. 110-17; Carra de Vaux, Baron, *Les penseurs de l'Islam* (Paris: Geuthner, 1923), Vol. IV, Chap. iv, pp. 133-156.

Statements of Mu'tazilah doctrine in Arabic are many. The following are classical: Al Ash'arī, (Abū al Ḥasan) 'Alī Isma'īl, *Maqālāt al Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al Muṣallīn*, ed. by Muhammad M.-D. (Abd al Ḥamid, Maktabat al Nahḍah al Miṣriyyah, Cairo), I, 216-311; Al Bāqillānī, Muḥammad (Abū Bakr), *Kitāb al Tanhīd*, ed. by R. J. McCarthy, S.J. (Librairie Orientale, Beirut, 1957), pp. 252-345; Al Shahrastānī, M. A.-K., *Al Milal wa al Niḥal*, ed. by M. F. Badrān (Al Azhar Press, Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 61-132; Ibn Ḥazm, 'Alī (Abū Muḥammad), *Kitāb al Fiṣal fī al Ahwā' wa al Milal wa al Niḥal* (Muhammad Amīn al Khānjī, Publisher, Cairo, 1321/1903), III, 4-164; Al Baghdādī, A.-Q., *Kitāb al Farq bayna al Firqah wa bayān al Firqah al Nājiah Minhum*, ed. by M. Badr (Matba'at al Ma'ārif, Cairo, 1328/1910), pp. 93-169; Al Rāzī, Fakhr al Dīn, *I'tiqādāt Firqah al Muslimīn wa al Mushrikīn*, ed. by 'Alī Sāmī al Nashshār (Maktabat al Nahḍah al Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1356/1938), pp. 38-45; Al Qāsimī al Dimashqī, Jamāl al Dīn, *Kitāb Tārīkh al Jahmiyyah wa al Mu'tazilah* (Al Manār Press, Cairo, 1331/1913), pp. 42-63. An excellent modernist presentation is Amīn, Aḥmad, *Duḥā al Islām*, Vol. III (Maktabat al Nahḍah al Miṣriyyah, Cairo, 1956), pp. 7-355.

³ Al Khayyāṭ, 'Abd al Raḥīm, *op. cit.*, Nādir ed., pp. 92-93.

a command, a law, or *sharī'ah*—a divine pattern which is the divine will for man; and that this pattern is not man's creation but is *sui generis*, for though the law is relational to man, it is not relative to him. Otherwise, if value or the so-called "divine command" is man's creation or is relative to him, then ethics is either the satisfaction of instincts and desires or the rule by convention. In either case the imperativeness and justification of the command are jeopardized.

The second principle is that man has an innate capacity to know that command or divine pattern, a capacity cultivatable and susceptible of higher and lower degrees of perceptive strength, but nonetheless internal to man's realities and devolving upon him. Otherwise skepticism and cynicism become unavoidable. Furthermore, such capacity liberates man from traditions, which can never by themselves be critical.

The third principle is that man, whether as subject or *materiel* of value-realization, has the capacity to act or not to act in accordance with the command. The aspect of man as subject of value-realization is precisely his moral freedom; his aspect as *materiel* is his malleability as well as that of creation, the openness of all space-time to in-formation by the divine pattern.

The fourth and last principle is that there must be an order in which the doing or non-doing of man, his realization or violation of the divine pattern, will not be in vain, but will be of consequence for him, as well as for the cosmos; that while the consequence for the cosmos is an objective, real plus or minus of value, the consequence for the subject is personal reward or punishment. Upon this principle depend the immortality of the soul, resurrection of the body, the Day of Judgment, and Paradise and Hell. It was the Mu'tazilah thinkers' investigation of the problem of the self in these terms which led to the establishment of these principles in the tradition of Islamic thought.

The Mu'tazilah approached the problem of the self from four sides: the constitution of the self, its liberty to know, its liberty to do, and its place in the order of eternity. Obviously, under each of these headings, the Mu'tazilah sought to establish one of the four principles to which it corresponds.

I. THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SELF

The Mu'tazilah held the self to consist of soul and body. According to whether the relation of soul and body is regarded as

substantial or accidental, two views may here be distinguished. The first was the view of Bishr ibn al Mu'tamar, who defined man as "consisting of body and soul, since both these are man; and man, the subject of acts, is both soul and body."⁴ This definition, together with his insistence on the inseparability of the two constituents in the act, on their interdependence in constituting man,⁵ betray the Aristotelian influence under which he laboured.⁶ Very few Mu'tazilah agreed with Bishr in this matter; and we may say that his view was not representative.

The second view—namely, that the soul-body relation is accidental—was elaborated by Al Nazzām and his master, Abū al Hudhayl, and was held by the majority of Mu'tazilah thinkers. While indentifying the self as that "on which the sight falls when it falls on a person," Abū al Hudhayl emphasized that "hair, nails and the like are not definitive of the self,"⁷ that "soul is accidental to the body,"⁸ and that "the soul is other than the life of the body."⁹ To the soul which is inseparable from the body and essentially related to it in the Aristotelian sense held by Bishr, he gave the name of "life." Such "soul" or "life" Abū al Hudhayl recognized as necessary to and interdependent with the body.

But in addition to the "body" its essentially-related "life," the self consists of a soul whose relation to the living body is accidental. The body and its life are *matériaux* with which and in which the soul, in the second sense, does its work. This work of the soul is manifold. But above all, it consists of cognition of a transcendent realm of being—namely, the divine will or value—and direction of the activity of "body-cum-life" towards the realization of the object of cognition. The accidental nature of the connection of the soul to body-cum-life gives priority to its rational knowledge, to its ethical action or its governance of the body, and to its survival after the body's death. Rather than to Aristotle, the simi-

⁴ Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, II, 25.

⁵ Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book II, Ch. 1, 2, at the end of which Aristotle defines the soul as "the actuality or formulable essence of something that possesses a potentiality of being be-souled."

⁷ Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, II, 24-25.

⁸ Ibn Ḥazm, *op. cit.*, V, 47; Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, II, 30.

⁹ Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, II, 29. To this he added the evidence of the Qur'an in 39:43, viz., the consideration of the fact that in sleep man may lose the soul without losing life.

larity is here to Plato, who was moved in his psychology by the same considerations.¹⁰

Whereas in Abū al Hudhayl the threefold constitution of the self was only implied, it was given express definition by his student al Nazzām. "The self," the latter said, is "the soul which is a light body penetrating the opaque body . . . the spirit which is the life in the web and woof of the body . . . [and] the body in which man is and is seen."¹¹ Moreover, this view of the self betrays two novel insights unknown hitherto in Islamic thought, viz., the Stoic view of the soul as a light body penetrating the opaque body, and the atomistic view which follows from this and the consideration of the soul as part of the self. For, as every part is infinitely divisible into smaller parts, this view of al Nazzām led him to regard the soul as consisting of an infinite number of small particles pervading the body.

The Mu'tazilah view of the self has combined, therefore, at once the insights of Stoicism and atomism¹² as well as of Platonic essentialism. From Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus, the Mu'tazilah borrowed the view of the soul as life-particles;¹³ from the Stoics the view that the soul is by itself capable, alive and leads a life of its own (i.e., rational cognition of that into the likeness of which it then moulds the *matériaux* of space-time); from Plato, the view that the soul is subject to incapacity in case of breakdown of the body which is its prison and oppressor,¹⁴ its instrument and vehicle.¹⁵ And they synthesized these insights under the driving idea of Islam. This idea, exclusive to Islam but not far removed from

¹⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, 73a-76d, for *anamnesis* (the theory of the a priori nature of rational knowledge) and 79d to 84b for the theory of immortality.

¹¹ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 117; Al Khayyāt, *Kitāb al Intiṣār*, *cit. supra*, p. 36.

¹² This was precisely the insight of 'Abd al Raḥman al 'Ijī who commented as follows: "What we call 'I' or my 'self' is in al Nazzām's view a number of light bodies which run through my body as perfume runs through the water, always the same and indestructible throughout my life. If the human body loses a member of an organ, the self that is in it withdraws to the rest of the body . . ." *Al Mawāqif fi 'Ilm al Kalām* (Cairo, 1357/1938), p. 281; and Al Jurjānī, al Sharif 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad, *Sharḥ al Mawāqif* (Istanbul, 1286/1870), p. 459.

¹³ For a brief statement of the Greek atomist view, see Freeman, Kathleen *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Blackwell's, 1953), pp. 288-89, 314; and for direct quotation from the source-works, Kirk, G. S. and Raven, J. E., *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge U. Press, 1957), pp. 404-405, n. 552, 583.

¹⁴ Plato, *Phaedo*, 86; al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, II, 274.

¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 92; al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 337.

Plato, is the subjection of the theory of man to the Islamic soteriological principle that man is obliged to fulfill God's will, i.e., value or the good, in space-time and that he is capable of doing so.

Upon this tripartite division of the self, the Mu'tazilah built a theory of separate functions for each part. Only "reasoning and willing," they held, are properly speaking "acts of the soul; everything else is an act of the body."¹⁶ Certainly, the soul is operative in the "life" as well as in the "body." But in "reasoning" as cognition of eternal truths and in "willing" as exercise of moral freedom, neither the "life" nor the "body" are the subject of cognition and decision, though they are, as they must be, the space-time carriers of both.

This radical differentiation of the soul, in nature and function, from the body as well as from "life" (or "soul" in the Aristotelian sense) served as grounds for an equally radical differentiation between the objects of each. The object of the soul in its cognitive function, i.e., reason, is rational truth and goodness. The object of "life" (*al rūḥ*, *al ḥayāt*) in its animation of the person is the satisfaction of the instincts and passions, the fulfilment of desires and quiescence of interests. The object of the body in its internal and external movement is the elements of nature. The first object is ideal, the second is subjective, the third is material.

The first, namely, the ideal, is for the Mu'tazilah the realm of reason. In it are the laws of thought as well as the laws of morality which together constitute an ideally self-existent realm which is as independent of man as the realm of body and nature. That is not the case with the second object, the realm of desires and desiderata, of interests and their quiescence patterns.¹⁷ These are essentially relative to man. On the other hand, truth and value are what they are in and by themselves. As qualities of propositions and deeds, they are essential to that which they qualify; and this relation is absolute, i.e., not liable to change.¹⁸ Even revelation plays nothing but a reportative role vis-à-vis them. Their revealed status is not constitutive of their truth or value but is only accidental to them. They are what they are independently of revelation.¹⁹ This extraordinary claim of the Mu'tazilah was supported by their metaphysic and theology. If we remember that in their

¹⁶ The view is that of Mu'ammār, see al *Shahrastānī*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹⁷ I.e., borrowing the expression of Ralph Barton Perry, *General Theory of Value* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1954), pp. 115 ff.

¹⁸ Al *Shahrastānī*, *op. cit.*, I, 76, 84.

¹⁹ Al *Ash'arī*, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

a priori and absolute character truth and goodness are also divine attributes, and that the divine attributes are not not-God, but that they are precisely Him,²⁰ then we can easily see how the Mu'tazilah perceived a separate metaphysical status for the moral laws which only a soul metaphysically separate from the body and its "life" can grasp.

II. RATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

The soul, then, is a constituent of the self, and its role is that of cognizing the divine attributes which are the divine will or command for man. Such cognition is precisely what the Mu'tazilah have called "rational knowledge." On its possibility depends moral obligation. It is all one whether we regard the animals not obliged morally because of their lack of rational knowledge, or we regard them lacking in rational knowledge because they stand under no moral obligation. Using this very comparison with the animals,²¹ the Mu'tazilah held the connection of the two absolutely necessary. The one falls without the other. For the Mu'tazilah, both are the first given facts of mature humanity and are reciprocally convertible.

According to the Mu'tazilah, the self is endowed with a faculty which has a dual role. This faculty is reason; and its two roles are *speculation*, whose object is knowledge; and *control*, whose object is guidance. By the former, i.e., by theoretical or speculative reason, "we acquire our knowledge"²² and reach "the universal by means of the particular," and grasp "relations between things."²³ By the latter, i.e., by practical reason, we plan and govern our existence and life. Although knowledge is prior to government, the latter is the more conditioned and hence, the higher. Anticipating the pragmatists, the Mu'tazilah recognized that knowing is for the sake of doing, and they put the higher premium on the work of

²⁰ Indeed, this is the characteristic principle of all Mu'tazilah theology and the axis of their *tawhīd* axiom. cf. Al Ash'ari, *op. cit.*, pp. 165, 484, 532-37; Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 85; Al Khayyāṭ, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²¹ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

²² Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

²³ Drawing on the etymological meaning of "reason" (Arabic *'aql*), Al Jubbā'ī said: "Reason is called reason because by it man controls himself against doing that which the insane man does not prevent himself from doing. The root of the term reason (*'aql*) is the reins (*'uqal*) of the camel by which the animal is prevented from doing what is not desirable for it to do." *Ibid.*

practical reason. Thus they regarded not instinct but insanity as the opposite of reason, and argued that it is precisely the insane who is free from self-imposed control.²⁴ Instinct, on the other hand, operates under strict laws.

This definition of reason determines at once the Mu'tazilah's interest—which is moral. If the self is to live a moral life, it must be endowed with a faculty by which it can know the good by its own effort, and by which it can freely govern the life of the person so as to pursue and realize that good. To know the good when it is impossible and unrealizable is vain; to govern life so as to realize an unknown good is impossible; and to do either in a determined, not-free manner is not ethical. That is the framework of the Mu'tazilah's theory of rational cognition.

They began their argument with a refutation of Plato's doctrine of knowledge as *anamnesis* or remembrance;²⁵ and again, their objective was moral. In order that the acquisition of knowledge be meritorious, they tell us, it should be free. *Anamnesis* is caused by the Platonic "midwife" and is therefore not free, but determined by the "midwifing" activity of the teacher. The learning activity of the self does not devolve entirely upon the learner. How then can he be responsible for his knowledge? But not to be responsible for one's knowledge implies not to be responsible for the deeds which follow from and are dependent upon that knowledge. Therefore, the Mu'tazilah concluded, *anamnesis* contradicts man's given moral freedom which imputes to man total responsibility for his acts, for their unfolding in space-time as well as for all that they presuppose, not excluding the very state of his knowledge.

According to Plato, knowledge does not depart completely from the soul, but is veiled therein and remains in a state of potentiality until the subject is reminded of it. For the Mu'tazilah, this too is a compromise of the freedom to know which is constitutive, though partially, of moral freedom. For the potential presence of knowledge in man determines already what he is to become aware of when *anamnesis* takes place. He is not then entirely free regarding his own acquisition of knowledge.²⁶ But if rational cognition is not a free activity, but determined first in its object that lies within the soul and then in the remembrance of such parts of this object

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Al Jurjānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 54 ff.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

as are determined by a person other than the knower, then the moral value of rational cognition falls to the ground. But rational cognition, according to the Mu'tazilah, is cognition of God, of the truth and the good, and is the prime moral obligation of all men, one of the two cardinal functions of the soul. For them, this is an axiom which may be denied only at the cost of a thoroughgoing skepticism; and they concluded that rational cognition must therefore be free and, hence, otherwise than as Plato had maintained.

Moreover, rational cognition, or the theoretical activity of the soul, is not accidentally related to the practical activity, to control and guidance. To know the good is not only the presupposition of doing it. The partition between knowledge and action is thin, despite the priority of the former. Indeed, if the prior presupposition of rational control is itself under determination, control cannot escape without injury. And it is doubtful whether moral freedom would remain possible in this case.²⁷ Contrary to Plato, the Mu'tazilah argued, rational cognition is not *anamnesis* but the free exercise of the rational faculty, its survey of truth and falsehood, of good and evil, and its recognition of the truth as true, of the good as good. This was their first point.

The second Mu'tazilah argument is that rational knowledge—both on the theoretical and on the practical levels—is not acquired suddenly as if by illumination, but progressively through the gradual exercise of the rational faculty.²⁸ That this is true of practical knowledge, to which experience can always add, is obvious. The case of theoretical knowledge, however, is otherwise. Abū al Hudhayl divided theoretical knowledge into two departments, the one obligatory on all men, and the other not necessary and capable of being acquired in different degrees without detriment. Necessary is the knowledge of God and of the evidence He gave of Himself and of His command;²⁹ contingent is the empirical knowledge of the world and of nature.³⁰ Only the former was held by the Mu'ta-

²⁷ Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.

²⁸ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

²⁹ "Al Jāhīz said: 'It is not permissible that a man attain the age of maturity and remain ignorant of God.'" Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 160. "All the Mu'tazilah agree that knowledge of God is rationally obligatory and insist on establishing such knowledge by reason, not by revelation or consensus of the community." Al Jurjānī, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁰ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

zilah as indispensable for adulthood.³¹ Al Jāhiz, for instance, was convinced that “no man may be said to have reached adulthood who has not known God.”³² Knowledge of God, he argued, is rationally obligatory (i.e., necessary) and must be acquired if the person is said to be a *‘āqil* (i.e., capable of self-imposed control, reasonable).³³ Such a person may be assisted by being told that a God exists who makes such and such commands. As soon as the claim has presented itself to his consciousness, adult man is duty-bound to examine the report, reach the inevitable conclusion and acknowledge God and His command.³⁴ He is not expected to know the full details of *tawhīd*;³⁵ but, in addition to God’s existence, he should be aware of the obligations which God has imposed upon him. Otherwise, “he would die a *kāfir* (unbeliever) worthy of eternal punishment in hell.”³⁶

While empirical knowledge is and must always be partial, probable and relative, the Mu‘tazilah regarded rational knowledge of God as certain and complete, a partial knowledge of Him being unthinkable.³⁷ That is a thesis hard to defend; but the Mu‘tazilah were driven to it by the consideration that there can be no middle road between *tawhīd* (or the strictly monotheistic thesis) and either polytheism or unbelief. Firstly, they argued, there is but one kind of knowledge of God; and that is rational knowledge. It is impossible that God be object of knowledge either by sense or by report. The former is obvious; the latter—namely, knowledge by report—is no knowledge at all, but a claim for knowledge. But only that knowledge which is acquired by sense or report can be complete or incomplete depending on how much of the object the senses have beheld or the report has covered. Such knowledge is ruled out in this case *ex hypothesi*. God’s being cannot be partial because it is indivisible; and since it is indivisible because in God

³¹ “Adulthood is not achieved except with the maturation of the reason and this implies not only the capacity to acquire rational knowledge but also the actual acquisition of necessary truths.” Al Ash‘arī, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

³² Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

³³ Al Jurjānī, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

³⁴ Al A‘sharī, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

³⁵ Al Nazzām here shows the deep insight latent in the assertion that “theologies are human creations.” Man’s divergent reports of the nature of God, he tells us, are “mere ideational representations of an essence that is one, perfect and complete, which is the presupposition of these representations.” Al Ash‘arī, *op. cit.*, p. 393.

³⁶ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

³⁷ Al Ash‘arī, *op. cit.*, p. 391.

there are neither parts nor aspects: God is one and simple, and being and perfection are His essence. Any knowledge of Him, they argued, must therefore be complete; and if any knowledge of God is necessary, a complete knowledge of Him (i.e., of His existence as well as of His will and command) must be equally so.

Apparently the Mu'tazilah here forgot their identification of God's essence with His attributes and the implication that, since the attributes are knowable partially, knowledge of God is so too. While such criticism of the Mu'tazilah position is legitimate, it should be remembered that it does not affect their position on the existence of God. That God is, that He has a will (or attributes) which is relevant for man—these are propositions which, by definition, admit of no middle answer. And it is probably this aspect of the matter that led the Mu'tazilah to shoot, as it were, beyond their target.

As for revelation, the Mu'tazilah assigned to it the role of assisting reason, especially in cases where, for lack of endowment or lack of cultivation, man is prevented from attaining knowledge of God and of moral principles. But even then, revelation does not excuse the subject from the exercise of reason but lays it all the more heavily upon him to seek conviction regarding the truths revealed. As it were, revelation here plays the role of breaking through the obstruction, of furnishing a short lift on the rough road. It never serves as a gratuitous dispenser of all truth.³⁸

It must be repeated that such a role for revelation is allowed only for the rationally handicapped, which, in one degree or another, we all are. That is why revelation is a highly needed corrective. For normal reason, or reason as such, revelation is not necessary, though its reports—having the same object—cannot but agree with the findings of reason. Exercise of the rational faculty does and should bring man to knowledge of God and of good and evil without external aids.³⁹ It is therefore clear that “normal” or “mature” reason is a distinction the Mu'tazilah made in order to canonize the rational method rather than any particular application of it.⁴⁰ Furthermore, what revelation brings is not an overpowering of the rational faculty; it is not a “creed” which must be consented

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 480.

³⁹ Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 51; Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁰ Consider in this regard the Mu'tazilah's division of the life of reason into stages (infancy to full maturity) in which the requirement and achievement of reason is progressively greater. Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 160; al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 65; Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, p. 480.

to despite its irrationality. Rather, the revealed content is itself part of the system of truth which is all rational and critical;⁴¹ and once its breakthrough is made, it should ensue in a renewal of rational activity and a recapture of the same content by rational means.

Knowledge of God and of His command may be rational. But how can it be necessary in the sense that man must seek and attain it? What if man is simply not interested in such pursuit? If he were interested, one can understand how one consideration, such as the givenness of moral obligation, may lead him to another and finally to the necessary conclusion concerning God. His knowledge would then be necessary in the sense that its propositional steps are related to one another according to strict rules of logical deduction. But can we say that it was necessary in the sense that the subject is compelled to initiate and follow such a logical escalation at all?

Yes, answer the Mu'tazilah; and to accommodate their new thought they invented the notion of "rational fear."⁴² The idea of God, they argued, anticipating Immanuel Kant as well as Rudolph Otto, is such that its mere presentation as a claim contending for rational establishment constitutes such a terrifying and appealing challenge that it puts man in a state of "rational fear" unless and until he considers the claim and reaches a conclusive decision regarding it. The specter of punishment and doom as well as the appeal of infinite beauty and goodness which the idea of God presents leaves unmoved only the man devoid of rational endowment and intelligence.⁴³ The man who does not fear the *tremendum* that is God so that he would seek to ascertain His existence and, if convinced, to conform to His demand, the man who is not moved by the *fascinans* that is God so that he would seek to contemplate, to praise, to "enjoy" His sublime character—such a man is simply unreasonable. We call insane whomsoever is guilty of much less than that. Since the Mu'tazilah were convinced that the claim to the truth which the idea of God presents, if it is to be decided, cannot but ensue in the recognition of His existence and of His

⁴¹ *Taqlid*, or inherited knowledge (tradition, communal practice, etc.), "is acceptable only when it is not opposed to reason. Until such knowledge is put to the test by reason and its veracity ascertained, it may be accepted as 'true guess' (*ẓann ṣādiq*)," —doubtless for its practical value. Al Jurjānī, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴² Al Jurjānī, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-78.

will which is the moral imperative, they counted "rational fear" tantamount to necessity.

III. MORAL FREEDOM

The Mu'tazilah thought that if, as the Qur'an says,⁴⁴ God offered His trust to the angels and to the mountains, and they rejected it with horror, but man accepted it, it must be integral to His will that the worthiest possible fulfilment of that trust is that which is done by man. Certainly the angels and the mountains, heaven and earth, actualize divine will. But they do so with the necessity of natural law. Great as their realization of the divine command may be, therefore, it is not as great as man's for whom the possibility of doing otherwise is always open. Man, the Mu'tazilah asserted with the Qur'an, is greater than God's angels;⁴⁵ and this is so precisely because the angels cannot disobey; they cannot not-do God's bidding, whereas man can. An obedience freely and deliberately preferred to a possible disobedience is worth far more than one entered into necessarily, without choice. Where the doors of evil are wide open and man nonetheless does the good, his deed rises to another level of being. It becomes the carrier of moral value. Conversely, without the freedom to do otherwise than to obey the divine imperative, without the possibility to realize dis-value, man's obedience may have all the utilitarian value of which it is capable, but is ethically worthless. That is why the Mu'tazilah regarded moral freedom as an axiom conditioning all their theology and philosophy. And in doing so, they thought they were true to the innermost core of Islam.

But freedom is not all that they found the faith of Islam to be speaking for. They found that the Qur'an also asserted that nothing takes place in heaven and earth except with God's knowledge;⁴⁶ that everything that happens, happens by His decree;⁴⁷ that it is He who moves sun and earth, stars and the moon;⁴⁸ that it is He who sends the rain and revives the earth,⁴⁹ who creates

⁴⁴ Qur'an, 33:72.

⁴⁵ Qur'an, 2:30.

⁴⁶ Qur'an, 34:3.

⁴⁷ Qur'an, 3:5; 35:11; 57:22

⁴⁸ Qur'an. 7:54,

⁴⁹ Qur'an, 6:99.

the embryo and sends it its food.⁵⁰ Determinism is thus complete in the realm of nature. But nature is not only the realm of moon and stars, mountains and rivers. Bringing this determinism closer to man, the Qur'an says that it is God who decrees when and how every man shall live or die,⁵¹ when and how every man shall carry out every little business of life.⁵² Thus Islam placed man squarely within the realm of nature.

Going still deeper, the Qur'an says that nothing social or communal happens in history except He knows it;⁵³ that the growth, life and decay of all societies is by His decree⁵⁴—in short, that the personal and the social are no less "nature" and completely determined by God than mountains and trees. Finally, going still deeper, the Qur'an tells us that nothing within the hearts of men is entertained or rejected, hated or loved but that it is so by divine knowledge and decree;⁵⁵ that every man's right decision as well as bad decision—even his conversion to or resistance of the faith—is determined by divine knowledge and decree;⁵⁶ indeed that man's moral life itself, his most personal moments of decision, are public in this sense, that God knows of and has ordered them.⁵⁷ Thus Islam has taught an absolutely complete cosmos, a creation so completely determined that it cannot admit even the smallest possibility of a gap in its ordering and determination.

This is certainly no defence of freedom. What Islam has offered its thinkers is an antinomy of freedom; and it is to this antinomy that the Mu'tazilah addressed themselves. Their predecessors, the earlier Muslims, lived and acted as if both thesis and antithesis were true, without feeling the need to explain or to elaborate. Indeed they could hardly be said to have been aware of the antinomic character of the problem. But when, in the second and third centuries A. H., the new converts, incapable of following the fathers in this total but intuitive commitment, began to question their understanding of the double aspect of man's freedom and to emphasize the one at the cost of the other, a danger point was reached. It was at this time that the Mu'tazilah arose to meet the challenge.

⁵⁰ Qur'an, 13:8; 41:47.

⁵¹ Qur'an, 3:145.

⁵² Qur'an, 10:61; 34:3.

⁵³ Qur'an, 7:34; 15:4.

⁵⁴ Qur'an, 17:58; 23:43.

⁵⁵ Qur'an, 27:74.

⁵⁶ Qur'an, 64:4.

⁵⁷ Qur'an, 14:27; 39:23 45:23.

To them, the Islamic tradition owes its breakthrough towards an explanation of the antinomy; and this remains the Mu'tazilah's noblest contribution.

The Mu'tazilah have argued for thesis as strongly as they did for antithesis. For determinism, they argued with Mu'ammār that all the accidents of a body (motion and rest, colour and taste, heat and cold, moisture and dryness, etc.) are acts of that body by nature;⁵⁸ that life is the act of the living and death the act of the dead;⁵⁹ that all the heavenly movement, the motion and rest of the planets, their harmony and distance are their own acts ("acts other than God's"—said by an opponent in emphasis of the non-deterministic nature of the Mu'tazilah view!).⁶⁰ Such a judgment was made possible after the Mu'tazilah had already established the nature of things as permanent and unchangeable and linked this permanence with God's eternal knowledge of them. With al Nazzām, the Mu'tazilah insisted that from the same substance two different effects cannot proceed; that the effects or acts of a substance must be peculiar to its nature, a nature which does not change without a change in the substance.⁶¹ On these Aristotelian premises the Mu'tazilah built the orderly cosmos in which there can be no causal gaps.

When the Mu'tazilah turned their attention to freedom, they found the issue encumbered with major misunderstanding; and they set themselves first to the task of defining the problem. They distinguished between acts by nature and acts by will, predicating the former to all things, dead and alive, and limiting the latter to man. This caused no mean consternation among their fellow Muslims who strongly disapproved of any attribution of creative power to nature lest monotheism be compromised.⁶² Indeed, their insistence that an essential difference separates the acts of nature and the acts of will caused the Mu'tazilah to be misunderstood as saying that there are two creators—God and man—and to be wrongly accused of *shirk*, or association of other gods with God. Actually, the intention of the Mu'tazilah was the very opposite. They had distinguished between the two in order to reserve creation for God and grant to man the lesser capacity of orienting already-created, fully-determined chains of causality. That is what they meant

⁵⁸ Al Ash'arī, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶² Al Khayyāt, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52; 60-61.

when they asserted man to be not the "creator" of his deeds, but simply their chooser or willer.⁶³

The point is as delicate as it is crucial. The doing of deeds, the production of effects is always the result of *tawallud*, or engendrance of one thing by another—in short, of chained causation or causal *nexus*. There is no effect without a cause however distant—indeed even inexistent—it may be from its effect. Willing of a thing, on the other hand, is never attached to the object of willing until the willing has taken place. Prior to this, the willing subject may always choose to will that object as much as another.⁶⁴ Thus, Al Iskāfī defined the *mutawallad* (determined) act as "every act which occurs without prior selection between it and other alternative acts," whereas the willed act is that which occurs only after such selection has taken place. To "create acts," or actually to produce real effects in space-time, is not possible for man; but to will such effects in space-time as would result from certain causes is man's prerogative, and it is all the power he has.⁶⁵ Effects are produced by their causes according to rule; and their subservience to rule is the orderliness of creation. In this domain man is utterly impotent and is determined as any other creature in the cosmos. To assert man's freedom, therefore, does not mean to assert his capacity to create or to generate anything, *ex nihilo*. Such a meaning of freedom is utterly impossible for man. God alone is capable of it. It is to the Mu'tazilah's immortal credit that they have separated the problem of moral freedom from this misconceived association of it with an impossible claim. The task of philosophy, then, is not to prove man's capacity to generate (*tawlid*), but to orient the causal chain. To this end the Mu'tazilah offered the following three arguments:

First, they claimed that there is an awareness of man's capacity to bring about a certain effect in response to felt needs—such as the capacity to move one's body or to put it at rest⁶⁶—and that this awareness is given. It is a datum inseparable from man's conscious life.

⁶³ Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, pp. 72, 80.

⁶⁴ "Al Nazzām said: 'The subject's capacity to act is always the capacity to do and not to do that act.'" Al Shahrastānī, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁶⁵ "Man can do no more than to will; all events are the acts of bodies by nature." Thus Thumāmah Ibn al Ashras, Mu'ammār, as well as al Jāhīz are reported to have said. Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

⁶⁶ Al Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al Iqḍām fī 'Ilm al Kalām*, ed. by A. Guillaume (Oxford, 1934), p. 79.

Secondly, moral obligation, which is the presupposition of every "do" and "don't," of every "ought" and "ought-not," is equally another given datum of human awareness. The greatest part of human life on earth takes this factuality for granted. For, it is impossible to feel obliged, or to expect any man to do so, unless obligation is real; and it is nonsensical to command or to obey, to deserve merit or demerit, without any sense in which one's command or obedience may be said to be the subject's responsibility. Without obligation, the difference between the imposition of duty (*taklif*), arbitrary caprice (*taskhīr*), and the impossible work (*ta'jīz*) falls to the ground.⁶⁷

Thirdly, even if we disregard the strictly moral and religious obligation (*taklif shar'ī*), the Mu'tazilah asked, is not our whole daily life woven around obligation and responsibility regarding the most common things? Are not these data at the base of the greater part of our feelings and emotions? Is it not the sophist alone who denies them and does so while contradicting himself by feeling, demanding and holding others responsible as we do?⁶⁸ Now obligation is impossible without freedom. As Kant has put it, "*du kannst*" is the necessary presupposition of "*du sollst*." For the Mu'tazilah there could be no rational doubt regarding freedom. Its assertion is supported by incontrovertible data of the moral consciousness. Its denial is a constructionist claim devoid of reality.

In addition to these arguments, the Mu'tazilah marshalled such verses of the Qur'an as they could find to support the claim for freedom. "We have shown man the path; and he may follow it with gratitude or deviate ungratefully";⁶⁹ "Say, the truth is from your Lord; whoever wills, may believe therein, and whoever does not, may not";⁷⁰ and others were utilized.⁷¹ But these verses, we must admit, must be seen in light of the other verses which support determinism. Together, they constitute evidence for the antinomic nature of freedom rather than for freedom *simpliciter*. It is in the moral overtone of the Qur'an as a whole, rather than in any such particular verse that evidence for moral freedom should be sought.

The foregoing proofs, whether psychological in nature or varieties of the *reductio ad absurdum*, all point to an incontrovertible

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Qur'an, 76:3.

⁷⁰ Qur'an, 18:9.

⁷¹ Qur'an, 6:152.

fact—that the Mu'tazilah subordinated everything in their system to moral considerations; that the cornerstone of their whole faith, Islam—its be-all and end-all—is the purely ethical question of man's direction of his own life on earth. The self, in their system, is nothing unless it is free to act by will. To use Qur'anic imagery, the self is called upon to grasp and to realize a divine trust. But this trust is not in a vacuum; neither is it imposed in abstraction from man's intricate engagement in nature, in society and history. These are the theater of the self's activity, the *matériaux* of its operations. For the self to implement the divine trust, it can only, and should, stand in the midst of the infinite causal chains of nature. There, acting as the focus at which the causal chains of reality converge, the self reorients, by its free decision, their causal efficacy. The self's theater, for the Mu'tazilah and for Islam, is an orderly one; and her decision makes all the difference between the realization and non-realization of the absolute on earth.

IV. THE PLACE OF SELF IN THE ETERNAL ORDER

The Mu'tazilah held that God is absolutely just and that His ordering of creation is no less so. His will is the good; and this realizes itself necessarily in nature, but only commands its own realization by man. Man, equipped by nature to discover divine will or the good, is capable of grasping it, and consequently, of falling under its moving power and appeal. Revelation has come to serve as a prop and guide, and its doing so constitutes a challenge which rational man cannot ignore. He must henceforth investigate revelation's claims; and truth being one as God is one, a genuine application of man's rational faculty cannot but confirm the propositions and judgments of revelation.

Having grasped the good, or divine will, man is obliged to realize it; but he is free to do so, or not to do so. Whereas man's realization is a positive contribution to the total value of creation, his non-realization is a real privation and positive loss to that total. Once done, every human deed belongs to history and its net contribution cannot be undone. This is an eternal order which admits of no tampering—whether in man's favour or against him. Otherwise, God's justice and righteousness and the order of the universe itself are gravely endangered.

God, however, does not work in vain. To do so would be contrary to His nature, once His will is identified with His essence-*in-*

percipi as well as with the good. That the good and evil deeds of men remain with all their disparity in eternal juxtaposition is not compatible with justice. Indeed, such a claim spells nothing short of disaster for morality, namely, the final futility of the moral life. A system of reward and punishment is indispensable to offset the disparities of actualized good and evil. And this system must be instituted after a reckoning which Islam calls the Day of Judgment.

The system itself is the order of paradise and hell. This order is not "the kingdom of God" in the Christian sense, in which the final realization of the absolute, ever denied on earth, is to take place. The absolute, in Islam, is possible of realization here and now, within space-time. Rather, it is a system of reward and punishment for man's success or failure to achieve that absolute. According to the Mu'tazilah, it is necessitated by the acknowledgement of the factuality of moral obligation as well as the freedom of the subject which the latter implies and which is equally given as a factum of ethical consciousness. Islamic history has also told us that many men have succeeded in such realization and have deserved the eternal reward.

The Mu'tazilah followed this reasoning of Islam and adapted it to their system of thought. According to them, the soul, being by nature different from the body-*cum*-life, does not suffer the same fate as the latter and is therefore not destroyed at death. It must, at least and above all, survive the body in order to meet, as real author of the human deeds, its deserved justification or rejection. But an analysis of reward and punishment quickly convinced the Mu'tazilah that the soul cannot stand to be judged, rewarded or punished without the body. Hence, they held resurrection of the body necessary in order that the soul may enjoy the only blisses or suffer the only hardships it knows.⁷² This is not to say that reward and punishment are all bodily; but that even the spiritual ones are inconceivable without the substratum that the body furnishes for the soul. A disembodied soul, though its existence is not dependent upon that of the body, is nonetheless not one which we know as capable of enjoying reward or suffering punishment. It cannot apprehend these without the body. The body must therefore be resurrected, rejoined to the soul and empowered to sustain itself in eternal life.

⁷² ". . . The joys of reward and sufferings of punishment are impossible unless the soul reenters its body . . ." Al *Khayyāt*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

It is hence obvious that the Mu'tazilah built their doctrines of the indestructibility of the soul, of the resurrection of the body, of the Day of Judgment and of paradise and hell on the grounds of rational ethics, as Immanuel Kant was to do a thousand years later.⁷³

Another conclusion to which the Mu'tazilah's rationalism led them was that only those persons who have earned reward or punishment would be resurrected and entered into either paradise or hell. The others who, either for lack of adequate endowment or of causal efficacy, had not disturbed the net total of value of creation—such as infants, the mentally deranged or retarded, and the incapacitated—would not be resurrected and would not share in either paradise or hell.⁷⁴ “Those whom God had not put under the obligation to know Him . . . are not responsible (*mukallafah*),” Thumāmah said; and “. . . their fate is dust.”⁷⁵ This is certainly a hard position to take in light of God's great compassion and mercy and not all the Mu'tazilah pursued the point to Thumāmah's merciless conclusion. Al Jubbā'ī, for instance, invented “the abode of peace” to accommodate this third class belonging neither to paradise nor to hell, and Al Nazzām discarded the idea of class in paradise, extending God's mercy, the vision of Him and the heavenly joys equally to all its inhabitants.⁷⁶

⁷³ As he did in his second critique, namely, *Critique of Practical Reason*.

⁷⁴ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Al Baghdādī, *op. cit.*, p. 161; Al Ṣhahrastānī, p. 80. The story is told that Al Ash'arī asked Al Jubbā'ī to tell him regarding the fate of three brothers, two adults, one virtuous and the other vicious, and an infant. Al Jubbā'ī answered that the virtuous will go to paradise, the vicious to hell and the infant to the abode of peace. Al Ash'arī rejoined: If the infant sought to join his virtuous brother, would he be permitted to do so? Al Jubbā'ī answered: No, because the virtuous brother reached paradise by his moral achievement and desert of which the infant had none. Al Ash'arī asked: What if the infant rejoined to God, “You have taken away my life too soon, before I could do Your will and earn what my brother has earned.” Al Jubbā'ī replied that God would answer thus: “I knew that if you lived you would not have done My will or earned any desert. I took away your life too soon because I was merciful to you.” Al Ash'arī asked: What if the condemned brother, overhearing this conversation, said “You knew that I would not realize Your will and would earn punishment in hell. Why were You not merciful in my case so as to have taken away my life before I earned my punishment?” Al Jubbā'ī had no answer. Such were the difficult problems posed by their opponents to the Mu'tazilah, and there was no solution to them once their inflexibly hard line of reward and punishment was taken.

CONCLUSION

We may therefore conclude that the Muʿtazilah were not only Muslim philosophers, but the philosophers of Islam. They condensed the faith to its essential principles and applied their mental energies to their establishment for thought. Their theory of the constitution of the self as a tripartite entity was a corollary of the principle of the ideal self-existence of a pattern for ethical activity (the ought, God's command or will), the fulfilment or otherwise of which demands a soul-subject other than the body-*cum*-life which is its carrier. Their theory of rational cognition is a corollary of the principle of such knowability and the moral responsibility for its achievement. Their theory of moral freedom is the corollary of the realizability of the divine pattern as well as of the malleability of the human and other *matériaux* of space-time for such realization. Finally, their principle of the place of the soul in the eternal order is the corollary of the principle of the world order as one of absolute justice, the moral aspect of the monotheistic principle itself, of *tawhīd*, without which the whole system may be as well ordered as clockwork but, in final analysis, futile and in vain, incapable of touching the person in his most individual moment. For it is this very person, this I and this body-*cum*-life that is the real and individual self of the person, that will and must some day stand in front of all being and reality to render account of itself and to receive, according to that absolute justice, every atom of reward and punishment it has earned.⁷⁷ And nothing less than that will save man from the doom of vanity, futility and cynicism.

⁷⁷ "When Earth is shaken with her (final) earthquake,
 And Earth yieldeth up her burdens,
 And man saith: What aileth her?
 That day she will relate her chronicles,
 Because thy Lord inspireth her.
 That day mankind will issue forth in scattered groups to be shown
 their deeds.
 And whoso doeth good an atom's weight will see it then,
 And whoso doeth ill an atom's weight will see it then."

Qur'an, 99:1-8 (trans. M. Pikhall)