

Review of Recent Works in Maturidi Theology

RAMON HARVEY. *TRANSCENDENT GOD, RATIONAL WORLD:
A MĀTURIDĪ THEOLOGY*. EDINBURGH: EDINBURGH
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LEJLA DEMIRI, PHILIP DORROLL, AND DALE J. CORREA,
EDS. *MĀTURĪDĪ THEOLOGY: A BILINGUAL READER*.
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Within Islamic studies, the subfield of theology has been one of steady growth over the decades. With respect to the Māturīdī school of theology, indebted to the eponymous Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), a noticeable increase in publications, scholarly monographs, and peer-reviewed journal articles has appeared in recent years. Joining this expanding scholarly effort are the following two works: an Arabic-English reader entitled *Māturīdī Theology* edited by Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale Correa and Ramon Harvey's scholarly monograph *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, which is both analytical and constructive in its approach.

The reader begins with an impressively thorough survey of the field as part of its three-part introduction. Each of the volume's editors

contributes to this important opening. Correa opens with a clear, careful, and insightful review of literature entitled “An Overview of the Current Scholarship on Māturīdī Kalām in Arabic, Persian and European Languages,” which is complemented well by Philip Dorroll’s following essay examining the immense academic contributions made in Turkish over the last two decades, or what Dorroll names “The Māturīdī Renaissance” (Demiri, Dorroll & Correa 16). Closing the introduction is Demiri’s piece that introduces the chapters and texts of the reader itself. What the editors have provided at the outset of their reader is a highly detailed map of the scholarly field, in both its analytical studies and critical editions, that will prove a foundational reference point for future researchers interested in extending and deepening our scholarly understandings of the Transoxanian Ḥanafis and the Māturīdīs that would emerge afterwards.

As for the reader’s content, rather than the work of a few translators, the reader brings a more novel, but ultimately suitable approach. Scholars from across the subfield of Māturīdī studies have been invited to introduce key texts from across the school that address a specific theological subject or theme. Preceding every thinker and their text is a concise, but insightful introductory essay. Then the selected passage is provided in Arabic and then English translation. The figures and passages are divided into five parts based on the theological subject matter being address. The reader begins with “Epistemology and Ontology” before turning to “Metaphysics,” “Prophethood,” “Faith, Knowledge and Acts,” and “Free Will, Predestination and the Problem of Evil,” an ordering chosen to mirror classical works of scholastic theology. While Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī is naturally featured thrice in the reader, with selections drawn from his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, the other selections come from a wide array of theologians introduced by an equally impressive array of contemporary scholars who furnish annotated translations in English. The theologians featured run the full historical gamut including contemporaries of al-Māturīdī like the Mu‘tazilī scholar Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) and the more obscure Abū Salama Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Samarqandī (c. 4th/10th cent.) and Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Bushāghiri (c. 4th/10th cent.) to scholars from later centuries like the

Ottoman *şeyhülislam* Kemalpaşazâde (d. 940/1534) and Ismail Gelenbevi (d. 1205/1791). In the end, the reader is an achievement for the expansive window that it provides into the complex richness still waiting to be plumbed from those scholars related, affiliated, or close to the Mâturîdî school of theology.

Before moving onto the next work, it is noteworthy that Dorroll identifies in his introduction to “Mâturîdî Studies in Turkish” three major areas of scholarly contribution. The first two are expected genres of scholarly work, namely historical studies and critical editions and Turkish translation. The third area, however, he terms “systematic theological contributions” describing such works as “constructive theological projects and theological analysis based on Mâturîdî texts” (20). Methodologically, these works follow one of two approaches. An author either assumes a “constructive” approach where Mâturîdî theology is brought to bear upon contemporary issues or adopts an “analytical” approach that seeks to adapt Mâturîdî thought to figure within an imagined greater Sunnî whole. Harvey’s monograph, in English, is a similarly spirited foray into constructive theology that applies both approaches at different times. For example, in the introduction, Harvey describes his book as an undertaking in *kalâm jadîd* or “renewed theology.” (Harvey 3-5). More concretely, he aims to place key concepts from al-Mâturîdî and the broader “Mâturîdî tradition in conversation with contemporary philosophical and theological thought, to see how well it holds up and what further modifications may be required” (Harvey 6).

The author admirably pursues this end over the course of seven chapters. The first chapter opens with an insightful look into the dyad of reason and tradition in Mâturîdî epistemology before furnishing a historical survey of the school that also aims to couch Harvey’s current project, which also engages with modern European thinkers like Husserl, Gadamer, and MacIntyre (among many others), as a contemporary outgrowth of that continuously unfolding tradition. In chapter two “Rational Reality,” Harvey’s deep philosophical engagement continues as he traces how al-Mâturîdî’s epistemology and ontology map against other sophisticated systems of rational discernment. These comparisons, however, are not always raised to demonstrate congruence, but also for sharp critique

for the sake of contradistinction or as adaptive refinements in Harvey's own theological theorizing.

A critically comparative analysis of al-Māturīdī's arguments for God's existence constitutes chapter three "Natural Theology," while chapter four "Divine Nature" explores that subject through al-Māturīdī's theological understanding of time and eternity, necessity via modality, and the nature of God. On this last point, Harvey argues that al-Māturīdī's notion of God's *dhāt* differs from latter conceptions that conceive of it as an "essence" distinct from the attributes. Rather, the Central Asian theologian appears to conceive of it in a more Aristotelian manner "as a complete 'subject' who possesses attributes" (Harvey 142). From here the remaining three chapters turn to particular attributes: chapter five "Omniscience and Wisdom," chapter six "Creative Action," and chapter seven "Divine Speech and the Qur'an." The work ends with a summative conclusion that reviews the major arguments of Harvey's analytic study, while also delineating both the contours and principles of his own constructive theological endeavor with the enticing prospect of more to come.

In the end, *Transcendent God, Rational World* is a careful and thought-provoking analysis of al-Māturīdī's theology that places this sophisticated premodern system of thought in conversation with contemporary discourses of philosophical theology. Throughout its chapters, critical attention is brought back to conceptions supposedly eclipsed by later Māturīdī theologians and important interventions are made concerning al-Māturīdī's originality (or perhaps ingenuity) as well as his abiding relevance, such as his contribution concerning the divine attribute of *ḥikma* or wisdom or the mediating role and limitations of human language (or human reasoning for that matter). Indeed, both the *Māturīdī Theology* reader and the monograph study of al-Māturīdī carry far more insights than can be sufficiently or justly enumerated in the span of this review. Rest assured that a careful and patient reader will be richly rewarded in exploring the numerous strands of thought presented in both books. Advanced students and researchers of the wider field will find both works indispensable in broadening their appreciation for what al-Māturīdī and the many other theologians of his eponymous school

have to offer for our understanding of Islamic theology both past and present.

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