

Osman Demir. *Causality in Kalām: Nature and Man according to Early Mutakallimūn [Kelâmda Nedensellik: İlk Dönem Kelâmcılarında Tabiat ve İnsan]*. Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015. 320 pages. ISBN: 9786055245719.

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Within the history of Islamic thought, and especially the history of *kalām*, research on topics related to natural philosophy has had a slow start. Although this field, which has a rich literature and an unmistakable originality, is intrinsically valuable for a historian of thought, the state of current research is particularly unfortunate, considering that for the earliest Muslim theologians these subjects were at least as important as purely theological subjects. Some notable research has been done in the past century by researchers in the West as well as in the Islamic world, and interest in this field has been on the rise in recent years in Turkey. Nonetheless, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the literature in Turkish is extensive. Therefore, Osman Demir's latest book, *Causality in Kalām: Nature and Man according to Early Mutakallimūn [Kelâmda Nedensellik: İlk Dönem Kelâmcılarında Tabiat ve İnsan]*, wherein he takes on the earliest theologians' views on nature and man with respect to causality, is an important contribution.

Demir, who focuses his research mostly on the theologians' views regarding natural philosophy, also recently published a Turkish translation of the "Kitâb al-Tawlid," the ninth volume of Qâdi 'Abd al-Jabbâr's *al-Mughni*.<sup>1</sup> The book under review, on the other hand, is based on the author's PhD dissertation, "İlk Dönem Kelâmcılarında Sebep-Sonuç İlişkisi [Causality among Early *Mutakallimūn*]," which he submitted in 2006 to Marmara University. A quick comparison of the Table of Contents and Introduction shows that no fundamental changes were made, although, as can be seen from the bibliography, the author has updated his findings and incorporated scholarship published after his dissertation was completed.

1 Kâdi Abdülcebbar, *Nedensellik kitabı (Kitâbu't-Tevlîd min el-Kitâbi'l-Muğni)*, edited and translated by Osman Demir (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2015).

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The book consists of an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. In the introduction, after formulating his research problem, briefly touching upon his method, and providing information about his sources, the author explains several key terms in some detail, among them *sabab*, *'illa*, determinism, and occasionalism in order to prepare the reader for what lies ahead. The first chapter looks into the theologians' conception of divine attributes, which inform their views on change and human actions. The second chapter deals with alternative theories put forward concerning the structure and the operation of the world. Finally, in the third chapter opposing theories concerning human actions and freedom are studied.

In the Introduction, Demir notes that the debate on causality in Islamic thought originated in discussions about human actions with regard to *jabr* and *ikhtiyār*, and that this consequently evolved into more comprehensive theories. Accordingly, the debate around causality took shape in an effort to find a balance between God's perfection and transcendence on the one hand, and human freedom and responsibility on the other. The author points out that the theologians' interest in philosophical and scientific topics is generally religiously motivated, and that therefore their thoughts on nature should be considered as metaphysics instead of physics (p. 21). Demir, who states his research goal as "laying bare the extent and conceptual framework of the discussions on causality, evaluating the various ideas that were defended along with their sources, and elucidating the historical developments" (pp. 18-9), restricts his study to the period before al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Nonetheless, throughout the book he refers to later theologians as well as to authors in other traditions in order to reveal the originality of the early theologians.

In the first chapter, "Causality in the God-World Relation," the author gives a systematic overview of the views of the various traditions regarding those divine attributes that are directly related to causality, namely, knowledge (*'ilm*), will (*irāda*), power (*qudra*), and creation (*takwīn*), as well as their relation to their specific objects. Some related issues, among them the implication for ethical theory and God's actions being caused, are also taken up. The author notes that the reason for later theologians accepting different views on causality is related to their understanding of the divine attributes. It is noteworthy that the attribute of creation is discussed from the viewpoint of *actual* creation, without delving further into the controversy between the Ash'arites and the Māturīdites on whether creation is a separate divine attribute.

Here, we should point out the author's easily misunderstood choice of words in terms of regarding a Mu'tazilite view. Unlike what the author claims, when the Mu'tazila uses "thing" (*shay'*) to denote the non-existent (*ma'dūm*), they do not mean that it is "really existent," nor do they suppose that it is an "existent principle prior [to the act of creation]" (p. 64). On the contrary, the Mu'tazila explicitly

distinguish between existence (*wujūd*) and permanence (*thubūt*) and claim that the possible non-existents, in their state of non-existence, are merely permanent (*thābit*), meaning that they are ontologically distinct essences. Furthermore, while the author rightfully points to the centrality of the concept of relation (*ta'alluq*), it would have been fitting to separately examine this concept more fully. Since this is the concept, also used by later theologians, on which their theories regarding the relation between God and the world are founded, it would be of unmistakable value to see its corollaries in the debates of the early period.

The second chapter, which is also the book's most voluminous part, is entitled "Causality in the Structure and the Operation of the World." The alternative theories examined in detail in the first part are the *atomic* theory, which later becomes the reigning view of *kalām*; the theory of *natures* (*ṭabī'a*), which had some notable proponents; and two theories that, although advocated for in the early period, were never widely accepted, namely, the theory of bodies (*jism*) and the theory of accidents (*a'rād*). Demir, who argues that these theories originated within the bounds of the general debates on divine knowledge and power, says that the atomic theory, in essence, was developed to show that nature did not have the power to act on its own and that God was the one and only true cause of everything.

After evaluating the different views on the origin of atomism within *kalām*, Demir acknowledges that it more or less resembles Indian atomism. At the same time, he thinks that when considered in its entirety, *kalām* atomism must be accepted as an original development. The theory of natures, which is studied subsequently, stands in sharp contrast to the non-necessity of the atomic theory and claims that physical things have within them a God-given nature that determines their actions. Because this theory was seen to lead to necessary natural causation, it was severely criticized by later theologians, particularly the Basrian Mu'tazilites. Finally, the author evaluates the theories of bodies and accidents only briefly, since the source material on them is very limited. Nonetheless, Demir's underscoring of different elements of these theories which were influential on later theologians is noteworthy.

In the second part of the second chapter, "Causality in the Operation of the World," the author surveys the different views put forth by the theologians in order to explain the cause of physical change. He first tackles the origin of the theory of *'āda*, which is linked to the atomic theory and essentially denies natural causation and assigns all regularity within the world to God. Demir attempts to contextualize its historical developments separately within the Ash'arites and Basrian Mu'tazila schools. As he also shows, although the Basrian Mu'tazilites accepted this theory, their application of it was more limited because of their views on human actions.

Next, he deals with the theory of *kumūn* and *zuhūr*, attributed to al-Nazzām, which claims that everything is created simultaneously in one creative action but remains hidden (*kumūn*) within each other until they appear (*zuhūr*). Demir also evaluates different uses of hiddenness (*kumūn*), which are attributed to al-Nazzām's contemporaries, and concludes that these are not, in fact, alternative theories in order to explain physical change; rather the term *kumūn*, in those contexts, is used in the most general sense of bodies *having* certain properties. Despite being another theory put forth in order to defend the transcendence of God, Demir finds the theory of *kumūn* and *zuhūr* to be "quasi-deistic" because of its metaphysical implications (p. 169).

Another one of the theories that tries to account for natural causality is that of *i'timād*, which Demir tackles in the next section. After summarizing the different and sometimes overlapping meanings of this term, such as power, resistance, stress, heaviness, force, and natural inclination (*al-mayl al-ṭabī'ī*), he criticizes the supposed views on *i'timād* attributed to al-Nazzām and claims that they are based on an erroneous interpretation. He claims that al-Nazzām, instead of trying to put forth a theory of *i'timād*, was instead trying to refute rest (*sukūn*) and claiming that things, even in the first instant of their creation, were in motion. Demir shows that the theory of *i'timād* was, in reality, developed within the Mu'tazila school after al-Nazzām and highlights various debates within that school. He also points out that although the Ash'arites used the same concept, they did not go into similar physical details; rather, they were more concerned with the concept being linked to necessary natural causation. Rounding out the theories concerned with physical causality, the author surveys the alternative views of theologians regarding the persistence (*baqā'*) and annihilation (*fanā'*) of atoms and accidents, which he considers to be a distinct theory.

The third chapter, "Causality in Human Actions," deals with the principal subject that is needed to make sense of all the previous debates, considering the theological nature of the early theologians' goals. In the first subsection, the general characteristics of the *jabr* and *tafwīz* views regarding human actions, which first appeared in early politically influenced debates, as well as their respective historical developments, are laid down. The theories of *tawlīd* (generation) and *kasb* (acquisition), which are a further theoretical development based upon these general views, are dealt with in the second subsection. The Mu'tazilite theologians used the theory of *tawlīd* to support their claim that human agents could bring about actions outside of themselves, explain the essence of these actions, and give an ontological account of their responsibility.

After evaluating in detail the alternative views on the agent of the actions generated by the process of *tawlīd*, Demir argues that the Mu'tazila did not view

*tawlid* as entailing natural necessity. Although some expressions that appear in the sources might point to such an interpretation, he argues that the reality is more in line with an occasionalist reading (p. 25). The passages from Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār quoted by Demir show clearly that any necessity in the relation between cause and effect is indeed denied. However, the author does not, in our view, sufficiently argue whether the central concept of *sabab* is regarded as a deficient cause (*al-‘illa al-nāqisa*) – to use a later conceptualization – or not. It remains ambiguous how *tawlid*, if it implies the acceptance of secondary causality, avoids necessity; and if it does not, how it is distinct from the theory of *‘āda*.

Finally, Demir analyzes the origin of the theory of *kasb*, which he views as an attempt to reconcile divine power and human responsibility, and the Ash‘arite and the Māturīdite interpretations of this theory. He emphasizes that the Ash‘arite interpretation, although, in denying the influence of human power, might come close to *jabr*, should not be understood thus (p. 267), while later he himself claims that “the Ash‘arite view ends in *jabr*” (p. 270). In this section, al-Juwaynī’s views are especially remarkable. According to Demir, al-Juwaynī, who was closest to the position of *jabr* in the Ash‘arite tradition, in one of his later works (i.e., *al-‘Aqīda al-Nizāmiyya*) changed his view and became someone who emphasized human power most clearly within the tradition. Having said that, after citing the alternative interpretations of al-Juwaynī’s position on the matter, Demir does not adequately argue these views and therefore misses the opportunity to clarify this interesting issue in the reader’s mind.

Demir’s evaluation of the Ash‘arite theory of *kasb* containing logical and ethical difficulties is, in essence, in line with the anti-Ash‘arite tradition. Indeed, one can dispute his claim that al-Ash‘arī, in allowing one act to be generated by two agents while at the same time denying the influence of the created power, ran into a contradiction. For al-Ash‘arī’s words can be understood in ways that do not lead to any contradictions, as was done by the later Ash‘arite tradition. Furthermore, the view of allowing one act to be generated in some sense by two agents, is, within the Ash‘arite tradition, generally attributed to Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī and al-Bāqillānī. Again, their views are also generally interpreted as being in line with or close to the classical Ash‘arite position. On the other hand, as Demir points out, according to the Māturīdite interpretation actions are generated by two powers – one of which is said to be *kasb* and the other *khalq* (creation) (p. 281) – and can be attributed to humans and God in the real sense (p. 283). Although Demir says that the Māturīdite position is clearer and more coherent, and probably closer to the truth, it seems hard for the reader to judge this claim, as he does not convey any ontological justification for it.

Having said that, we would like to point out a couple of things that might arguably have been expected to be included but are missing from the book. For example, although the copious footnotes clearly show that the author evaluated the classical as well as the modern literature comprehensively, a separate literature review of modern scholarship would have been valuable in making his own contributions and approach more apparent.

Also, a separate chapter or section devoted to providing an evaluation of the physical theories of early *kalām* and to determining some unifying general principles, if any, that guided the enterprise, would have been a valuable contribution to the field. It is generally known that post-Ghazālian theologians, because of their interaction with the philosophical tradition, were less insistent on atomism.<sup>2</sup> However in order to answer the question of whether they were guided by some general principles inherited from the earlier period, while they were apparently appropriating the philosophical physical theories, these supposed principles should first be determined.

Another point is that all of the sections on the different theories are mostly composed as independent research subjects, which causes some undesirable repetition. However, this approach does make the book more suitable to be used as a reference work. With this in mind, we would like to advise the publisher that adding a glossary would make it more practical for students and new researchers.

In conclusion, I can say that this book constitutes an important contribution to research on the history of *kalām* in Turkish. It provides an overview and an ability to evaluate physical theories in early *kalām*, especially for graduate students and new researchers. The fact that research in this area has been steadily increasing in recent years shows that we can hope that this heritage will be more comprehensively evaluated and that modern researchers' interest toward natural philosophy will be rekindled.

2 Ömer Türker, "Giriş," in Seyyid Şerif Cürcânî, *Şerhu'l-Mevâkıf*, translated by Ömer Türker, vol. 1 (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2015), 74 ff.