

Ahmet Mekin Kandemir. *Mu'tezilî Düşüncede Tabiat ve Nedensellik* [Nature and Causality in Mu'tazilî Thought]. Istanbul: Endülüs Yayınları, 2019. 364 pages. ISBN: 978605210519.

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The theory of nature can be seen as one of the important differences separating the science of *kalām* [speculative theology] from the science of *'aqīda*, which explains and defends the doctrines of belief. Whether in the essence-based works from the early period or the more advanced texts of the later period, nature-related discussions corresponded to the intermediary topics between knowledge and divinity. As the theological intensity of the texts increased, subjects branching out around essence (*jawhar*) and accident (*'araḍ*), as well as the ones focusing on explaining the physical structure between ontology and the divine were elaborated upon. Nature in this respect had become the premise and method for demonstrating the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*) and had also enabled identifying the relationship between God and the world, in other words, the manifestation of the divine attributes in the universe. Therefore, physics-related subjects stand as the area where the *kalāmī* identity became dissociated from other religious and philosophical schools, and studies regarding this field never should be neglected at the expense of making a contemporary theology or be restricted to a mere pursuit of understanding the past.

Right from an early age, the Mu'tazilites had presented all the acquis in theoretical physics, despite the many risks it carried, in order to perform theological demonstration and ensure the consistency of the ideology they

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had introduced. In fact, at the beginning of the formative period, several models were introduced centered around the concepts of essence, accident, body (*jism*), and nature. The intended audience of these theories was not limited to deists and materialists only, but as the tension between Abū al-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām shows, many had built strong and consistent systems while also addressing each other's theories. This structure, in which Mu'tazilites had identified their basic concepts and propositions, was at first subjected to criticism from the Ahl al-ḥadīth. However, Sunnī theology upheld the Mu'tazilites' tradition by building upon it. From this point onwards, atom (*al-jawhar al-fard*) became a form of creed and an integrated part of almost all matters of the *kalām*. The Mu'tazilites, in conducting their research centered on the principle of justice, emphasized the nature-reality relationship in order to avert evil. This, as will be seen in the theory of custom (*āda*), generated significant differences regarding the power-based model.

The book of *Nature and Causality in Mu'tazilite Thought* by Ahmet Mekin Kandemir, the outlines of which this review will introduce, appears among the most assertive and latest studies in this field in terms of its claim, subject, and method.

Based on a recently defended doctoral dissertation, the book mainly consists of an introduction and two chapters.<sup>1</sup> The book's introduction prepares the reader for the next chapters; the theoretical framework section introduces the problem, the method with its limitations, the resources, and the terminologies; and in the section on causality in the history of thought summarizes the predominant theories.

The section on terminology is critical, for it defines concepts that the author will refer to later on. Therefore, this section delineates concepts such as *ṭab'* [nature], *'illa* and *sabab*, and the causality principle that has been derived from these. Drawing attention to the cautious and conscious usage of the words cause (*'illa*) and reason (*sabab*) is imperative here in the studies on physics within *kalām*. Although difficult to distinguish in early-period texts, cause and effect began to correspond to a relational causality, and *'illa-ma'lūl* to a necessary causality in later-period when problems became more rigorous. As the book notes, the method

1 This study is based on the dissertation defended under the name of "The Thought of Natural Causality in Mu'tazila Kalām" at Konya Necmettin Erbakan University Faculty of Theology Department of *Kalām* in September 2019. For another recent work by the author, see Ahmet Mekin Kandemir, "Debates on Causality in Islamic Kalām and Modern Physics: A Comparison Between the Theory of *Ṭab'* and the Soft-Deterministic Interpretations of Quantum Theory", *Bilimname* XLI (2020/1): 691-722.

of generation (*tawliḍ*) could be shown as an example of such a terminological distinction. In addition, whether derived from *sabab* or *'illa*, causality is not a principle that is absolutely denied within *kalām*. Therefore, the claim that causality is rejected in *kalām* can only be meaningful if this relationship is characterized within the domain of physics as determinism. The concept of nature is looked upon unfavorably because the word contains the connotation of an active essence that autonomously performs its acts against the agent of willpower. Theologians, in particular, have criticized natural causality using nature at the expense of voluntary causality (*istiṭā'a*) within the context of human actions. The book's emphasis on this point is also remarkable in that it indicates the discussions in *kalām* about causality to have begun in the field of ethics and transitioned to the domain of nature.

Kandemir devotes the first chapter of the book mainly to the structure of nature and its operation in Mu'tazilite *kalām* and examines the concepts of essence, accident, body, and void (*khalā*) in the first section. Information given at this stage is essentially based on the classical texts putting forth information available in secondary works written in this field while proposing solutions to the remaining issues. When one considers the references made to the pre-Islamic tradition, a wide database is understood to have been used. The definition of the concept of essence and its properties is given under the heading "Essence," which summarizes criticisms regarding the notion of the indivisibility of a part. The underscoring of the impact from reasoning based on the conception of language during the formation of the conceptual framework in the first period of *kalām* is remarkable here. Similarly, when the referral is made to the point analogy while defining an essence/part, dwelling upon the examination of geometrical demonstrations and their implications becomes a matter of necessity.

Under the heading "Accident," the definition of accident is given within the context of discerning between attribute, meaning (*ma'nā*), and accident, afterward transiting to the subject on the forms of accidents, their numbers, and their persistence (*baqā*). In the section on the body theories regarding the structure of the body are presented after mentioning the definitions applied in the early period. Accordingly, those who argued the body to consist of either essence and accident or only accidents, and those who claimed the universe to consist of bodies, as well as those like al-Bāqillānī who regarded the part (*al-juz'*) and the body as identical, could have been categorized as a single body. Under the heading "Void," theologians are mentioned to have expressed two main views: the vacuum in the world and the vacuum outside the world. Even though the author attributes the acceptance of vacuum to the idea of a dimensionless

essence and the theory of space (*makān*), the issue should have been systematically examined based on the cited sources. The question of how Baghdadian Mu'tazilites reconciled their rejection of vacuum with their acceptance of atomism is one that requires in-depth scrutiny. Similarly, highlighting the empirical evidence provided during discussions related to the vacuum between the Basran and the Baghdadian schools would have been a major contribution.

The second subsection of the first chapter scrutinizes the theories and concepts that had been developed to explain the operation of the world which are listed as *ma'nā*, nature, hiddenness-appearance (*kumūn-ẓuhūr*), reliance (*i'timād*), motion (*ḥaraka*), rest (*sukūn*), annihilation-persistence (*fanā-baqā*), and generation (*tawliḍ*). While these titles are divided into sub-units, new classifications and concepts are also suggested. When trying to understand the classical texts, beyond attempting to provide different perspectives and an opportunity to understand, producing/suggesting new terms is also crucial in bringing information closer to the modern mind. Thus under the heading of "Nature," expressions such as "atomic naturalism" when comparing Mu'ammār b. 'Abbād (d. 215/830) with al-Nazzām, and "anti-atomic naturalism" while comparing al-Nazzām with al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 255/869) provide the possibility to discern in essence between the orientation of the two groups. The same interpretation is also applicable to those who accept dividing the actualization of *kumūn-ẓuhūr* into proximity (*mujāwara*) and intervention (*mudākhalā*) and the actualization of annihilation-persistence into this notion of creation either consisting or not consisting of persistence.

The views conveyed in this work regarding *ḥaraka* and *sukūn* are such that they suggest theologians to have not acted purely out of theological concerns but had instead followed the ancient universal heritage after a certain time. Accordingly, in addition to the classical speculative and the vision-based methods, the information referring to an experimental method is noteworthy. In this context, the examination of phenomena can be enumerated upon, such as the floating of a log on water and the stretching of a rope in al-al-Jubbā'i's theory of *i'timād*, the apple and feather experiments of al-Ka'bi (d. 319/931), al-Nazzām's monitoring of physical events such as the spinning of tops and mills to overcome the Menon paradox. Although not included in the text, the most striking examples in this regard belong to al-Jāḥiẓ. His experiments and observations on various animals, especially scorpions and mice, and the method he used to explain the conditioning of dogs should have been emphasized.

The second main chapter of this book, which is devoted to discussions on natural causality, starts by underlying the pre-Islamic sources concerning this phenomenon. Under the heading “Philosophical Origin,” Anaxagoras (d. 428 BC), Stoics, and Aristotle (d. 322 BC) are studied mostly in relation to their impacts on al-Nazzām. Here, one sees that the Mu‘tazilites, who had taken the idea of nature into account, had revived some of their opponents’ concepts in order to preserve the attribute of eternality (*qidam*). This cultural integration took place over decades and not only were thoughts passed down as a consequence but as will be seen when references are made to al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and al-Nazzām, this enabled the Sunnī theology to encounter a systematic collection of knowledge.

The second section of this chapter in the book is entitled “Causality, Necessity, and Possibility” and it examines necessary causality within the context of *ma’nā* and nature, partial necessity within *i’timād* and *tawlid*, and contingency (i.e., rejection of causality) within the boundaries of the theories of *‘āda* and coupling (*iqtirān*), resulting with a heading that differentiates between the ideas of partial necessity and contingency. Outlining the titles of this section would have been more appropriate not by referring to concepts, but rather by pointing out the discussions within the contents and simultaneously maintaining a problem-oriented attitude, thus preventing the possibility of interpenetration. In doing so, theories on nature and *ma’nā* could have been studied in conjunction with divine intervention and miracle, due to their entailing of a form of determinism. The premise conveyed in certain circles regarding al-Nazzām and Mu‘ammar’s being both naturalists must also be taken with caution considering what that might entail. In the event of disregard for the history of thought, such a premise could be made a stepping stone for claiming that these two had ultimately been influenced by the Greeks. Nonetheless, if one takes into account that their ideas had taken shape around a critique of their opponents, the true nature of their conceptualization of nature becomes understood. What al-Nazzām acknowledges as *zuhūr* [becoming manifest] is the manifestation of the divine *ṭab‘* [nature] within an object during every generation [*kawn*], whereas what al-Jahīz and al-Ka‘bī had accepted nature to be had been, as al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār also indicates, the one-directional movements that stand out in objects. Even though a comparison of the theories of *i’timād* and *tawlid*, and the theories of *‘āda* and *iqtirān* had been made between the Mu‘tazilites and the Ahl al-Sunna, the dissimilarities between these should have been pointed out. According to both schools, the universe is open to the divine influence in exceptional situations (miracle) and from the standpoint of rational possibility. The Mu‘tazilites, however, had construed this habitude as the bare minimum and a necessary principle for a predictable life.

The other title of the second main chapter dwells upon secondary causes and their relationship to divine acts. It also sums up the topic regarding the differences between individuals figures and schools. Within this context, both the attributes of justice and wisdom and their relationship to the universe are conveyed by drawing attention to matters of the actor on will (*fā'il mukhtār*), *'illa-ma'lūl*, and nature-act. *I'timād* and *tawliḍ*, both of which are attempted explanations invented within this context, were brought over this event, and the indication was made that creating by taking into account causes (i.e., indirectly) corresponds to the Mu'tazilites' principle of justice. Under the heading "Laws of Nature and Divine Acts," the relationship between the functions of nature and causality is explained by referring to higher principles. As the author indicates, the law of nature or the idea of law was developed to explain the relationship between physical objects and the fixed principles embedded in nature. The lack of such a physicalist approach within this book's boundaries necessitates an accurate predication of meanings for the avoidance of semantic shifts. Similar attention needs to be given in the sections regarding the Quran and the laws of nature. The aim of the Quran, a text that is centered on Unity (*tawḥīd*) and divine power, is not to enact natural laws but to cleanse the universe from all mysterious, obscure, occult, mystical, autonomous, or parallel structures that may prevent the intervention of almighty attributes. The heading on "Causality and the Demonstration of the Necessary (*ithbāt al-wājib*)" is important for it tackles the main motive empowering this idea of nature. The reason for this is that naturalist theologians had benefited from this concept to refute the dualist and materialist's claims regarding the non-existence of the divine and also to expound upon the relationship between God and the world.

One of the important topics in this chapter is discussed under the title "Miracle and Causality." Miracles are important in that they confirm the truthfulness of prophets and represent the authority of the divine over the world. Therefore, when nature is acknowledged, it is the first phenomenon that needs to be explained. Here, after summarizing the approaches to miracles and specifying the significance of the issue within a context of causation, theologians' viewpoints are grouped either as al-Nazzām-al-Jāḥiẓ's or as Mu'ammār-al-Ka'bi's. Although the first group accepts miracles and divine intervention in a form more closely resembling the classical understanding, the two differ on their approaches to physical (*ḥissi*) miracles and Quranic miracles. Al-Nazzām, in addition to his rejection of consensus, is stated to have met testimonies regarding this subject with caution and championed the idea of averting (*ṣarfā*) with regard to the linguistic miracles (*i'jāz*) of the Quran. Mu'ammār and al-Ka'bi claimed that divine

intervention occurs within the well-accepted conception of causality. This can happen either by pre-designing the objects in such a way that such possibilities are predicable for them or by acting upon them, at the moment of miracle, in a manner that conforms with the standard procedure for miracles.

In the last section of this chapter and the book, the naturalist theologians' views on causality, apart from being discussed with a focus on the phenomena of continuity and change, are also studied in contrast with atomism (the theory of regeneration), which is considered as a discontinuity. Accordingly, by adopting the ideas of power, the persistence of accidents, and accidents that are impacted by bodies out of the need to argue for human responsibility (a theme that stems from their principle of justice), naturalist theologians have rendered change partially connected to the object, distinct from the Ahl al-Sunna, and connected the intervention of divine will to certain conditions. However, this model implies that the theologians' idea of continuous creation does not happen by direct intervention but through intermediary causes, and also that each generation [*kawn*] occurs as a divine creation. Here, a serious discussion has been carried out regarding the domain of fixed-unstable (i.e., continuity-discontinuity) relationship, constantly regenerating accidents, and the essence upon which they are conveyed. Naturalist theologians, however, established an explicit connection between objects and the differences between them by adopting a structure based on continuity in this world. Nonetheless, they had disagreed among themselves because of their interpretation of the relationship between essence and accidents. Mu'ammār claimed that essences (bodies) are created with certain dispositions and that differences are a result of these. Thus, nature is the creation of an essence in a way that accidents are ascribable to it and also given, albeit partially, a space for movement. However, even though al-Ka'bi had acknowledged the discontinuity of accidents regarding nature, he specified that this structure is continuous with respect to *tawlid*. The last subtitle of this chapter concerns al-Nazzām's position and is discussed based on the opposing testimonies regarding his opposition to the idea of continuous creation. His continuous creation was not understood as the continuous creation of accidents from nothing but as the emergence of properties hidden in nature from the very beginning. Thus, as al-Nazzām had on one hand laid the groundwork for his idea of causality and continuity, and on the other, he had been examining the divine attributes and their relation to the universe, taking into account the distinctive doctrines of the school. As the author also indicates, even though this approach is described as continuous creation, it seriously made him distinct from the Sunnī theologians. Although this chapter ends by stressing



that naturalist theologians had adopted partial continuity, I instead suggest the use of “controlled continuity,” for the term partial continuity as noted here seems logically contradictory. The book ends with a conclusion section that reemphasizes the obtained results and makes suggestions for further studies.

Kandemir’s work that I introduced here is an important one, for it expands our knowledge regarding an area upon which so little information is found, and thus opening the door to new discussions and triggering scholarly production toward this end. Collecting information from the incomplete and likely biased information contained in the heresiographical works regarding Mu’ammar and al-Nazzām, both of whom are relevant figures for this work, prevents complete enlightenment regarding their theories on nature, at least for the time being. The works of al-Jāhiz to a great extent are available; however, filtering out claims devoted to this subject-matter from his encyclopedic works or treatises with different interests is difficult. As for al-Ka’bi’s works, not enough are currently available for obtaining systematic ideas about them. Despite these challenges, *Nature and Causality in Mu’tazilite Thought* does justice to the topic it deals with and lays the groundwork for further studies by problematizing the existing material. The establishment of a holistic metaphysical paradigm within which the theory of nature, as an integral part of *kalām*’s identity, can be constructed and have a meaningful place has yet to be accomplished.