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Divine Wisdom and God's Acts in the Classical Schools of Kalām: A Comparative Study of the Mu'tazila, Ash'ariyya and Māturīdiyya

Klasik Kelām Ekollerinde İlahî Hikmet ve İlahî Fıiller: Mu'tezile, Eş'arilik ve Mâtürîdîlik Üzerine Mukayeseli Bir İnceleme

الحكمة الإلهية والأفعال الإلهية في المدارس الكلامية الكلاسيكية: دراسة مقارنة بين المعتزلة والأشعرية والماتريدية

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Abstract

The concept of divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) signifies that God's acts are neither futile nor arbitrary, but unfold within a framework of purpose and order. For this reason, divine wisdom has long occupied a central place in *kalām* discussions, especially in relation to divine acts (*af'āl Allāh*). These debates concern whether God's actions have a reason or purpose, to what extent divine wisdom is accessible to human reason, and how it relates to God's absolute power. Although these issues have been widely discussed in both the classical tradition and modern scholarship, a comparative discussion explicitly organised around divine wisdom in relation to divine acts still requires further clarification. Against this background, the article examines the conceptions of divine wisdom articulated by the Mu'tazila, the Mātūrīdiyya, and the Ash'ariyya within a comparative theological framework, asking in what sense, and to what extent, divine wisdom functions as an explanatory principle in accounts of divine acts. It analyses how each school accounts for divine acts through causal explanation (*ta'līl*), through moral value theory centred on moral rightness and wrongness (*ḥusn* and *qubḥ*), through related notions such as justice (*ʿadl*) and welfare (*maṣlaḥa*), and through the relative weighting of divine will and power. The article argues that the central disagreement is not whether God is all-wise (*al-Ḥakīm*), but what explanatory role divine wisdom may legitimately play in relation to divine acts. In this respect, the Mu'tazila, drawing on ethical rationalism, interpret divine acts in accordance with moral rightness and most benefit (*ṣalāḥ* and *aṣlaḥ*), prioritising human welfare; the Mātūrīdiyya affirm purposiveness and the non-futility of divine acts without reducing them to rational necessity, and the Ash'ariyya explain divine wisdom primarily through divine will and power, while limiting its reconstruction in creature-centred terms. By comparing these perspectives, the article aims to contribute to a more integrated and analytically grounded understanding of divine wisdom and the intelligibility of divine acts in *kalām*.

Keywords: Islamic Theology (*Kalām*), Divine Wisdom (*Ḥikma*), Divine Acts, Causality, Justice.

Öz

İlâhî hikmet kavramı, Allah'ın fiillerinin ne abes ne de keyfî olduğunu, aksine bir gaye ve düzen çerçevesinde gerçekleştiğini ifade eder. Bu sebeple hikmet, özellikle ilâhî fiiller bağlamında, kelâm tartışmalarında öteden beri merkezi bir yer tutmuştur. Bu tartışmalar, Allah'ın fiillerinin bir sebep veya gayeye nispet edilip edilemeyeceği, ilâhî hikmetin insan aklı tarafından ne ölçüde bilinebileceği ve bunun Allah'ın mutlak kudretiyle nasıl ilişkilendirileceği gibi meseleler etrafında şekillenmektedir. Bu meseleler her ne kadar klasik literatürde ve modern araştırmalarda geniş biçimde tartışılmış olsa da ilâhî hikmetin ilâhî fiillerle ilişkisini karşılaştırmalı bir zeminde ele alan analitik çerçevenin henüz yeterince belirginleşmediği görülmektedir. Bu çerçevede makale, Mu'tezile, Mātūrīdiyye ve Eş'ariyye'nin ilâhî hikmet anlayışlarını karşılaştırmalı bir teolojik bakışla ele almakta ve hikmetin ilâhî fiillerin açıklanmasında hangi anlamda ve ne ölçüde açıklayıcı bir ilke teşkil ettiğini incelemektedir. Çalışma, her bir ekolün ilâhî fiilleri ta'līl, hüsün-kubuh eksenli ahlâkî değer anlayışı, adalet ve maslahat gibi irtibatlı kavramlar ile ilâhî irade ve kudretin öncelenmesi çerçevesinde nasıl temellendirdiğini analiz etmektedir. Makale, asıl ihtilafın Allah'ın Hakîm oluşu konusunda değil, hikmetin ilâhî fiiller bağlamında hangi açıklayıcı rolü meşru biçimde üstlenebileceği konusunda bulunduğunu göstermektedir. Bu doğrultuda Mu'tezile, hüsün ve kubhun aklen bilinebileceği anlayışından hareketle ilâhî fiilleri ahlâkî doğruluk ve en uygun yarar ilkeleri doğrultusunda yorumlamakta ve mahlûkatın maslahatını incelemektedir. Mātūrīdiyye, ilâhî fiillerin gayeliliğini ve abes olmayışını kabul etmekle birlikte bunları akî zorunluluğa bağlamamaktadır. Eş'ariyye ise hikmeti öncelikle ilâhî irade ve kudret çerçevesinde açıklamakta, onun mahlûkat merkezli terimlerle yeniden kurulmasını sınırlamaktadır. Bu yaklaşımların karşılaştırılması suretiyle makale, kelâm düşüncesinde ilâhî hikmetin ve ilâhî fiillerin anlaşılabilirliğinin daha bütüncül ve analitik bir çerçevede ele alınmasına katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kelâm, Hikmet, İlâhî Fiil, Nedensellik, Adalet.

الخلاصة

يدل مفهوم الحكمة الإلهية على أن أفعال الله لا تتصف بالعبث ولا بالاعتباط، بل تجري في إطار من الغاية والنظام. ولذلك شغلت الحكمة مكانة مركزية في مباحث علم الكلام، ولا سيما في سياق الأفعال الإلهية. وقد تشكلت هذه المباحث حول جملة من القضايا، من أهمها: هل يجوز نسبة أفعال الله إلى سبب أو غاية، وإلى أي مدى يمكن للعقل الإنساني إدراك الحكمة الإلهية، وكيف ترتبط هذه الحكمة بقدرة الله المطلقة. ومع أن هذه القضايا نوقشت على نطاق واسع في التراث الكلاسيكي وفي الدراسات الحديثة، فإن الإطار التحليلي الذي يتناول علاقة الحكمة الإلهية بالأفعال الإلهية في سياق مقارن لم يتبلور بعد بالقدر الكافي. وفي هذا السياق، تتناول هذه المقالة تصورات المعتزلة والماتريدية والأشعرية للحكمة الإلهية من منظور كلامي مقارن، وتبحث في المعنى الذي تتخذه الحكمة من حيث كونها مبدأ تفسيريًا في بيان الأفعال الإلهية، وفي مدى هذا الدور وحدوده. كما تحلل الدراسة الكيفية التي يؤسس بها كل مذهب تصوره للأفعال الإلهية في ضوء التعليل، وفهم القيم الأخلاقية القائم على الحسن والقبح، وما يرتبط بذلك من مفاهيم العدل والمصلحة، فضلًا عن أولوية الإرادة والقدرة الإلهيتين في هذا الباب. وتظهر المقالة أن موضع الخلاف الأساس لا يكمن في إثبات كون الله حكيمًا، بل في تحديد الدور التفسيري المشروع الذي يمكن إسناده إلى الحكمة في سياق الأفعال الإلهية. وانطلاقًا من ذلك، ترى المعتزلة، بناءً على القول بإمكان إدراك الحسن والقبح بالعقل، أن الأفعال الإلهية تُفهم في ضوء الصواب الأخلاقي والأصلح، مع تقديم مصلحة المخلوقين. أما الماتريدية فتثبت غائية الأفعال الإلهية وتنزهها عن العبث، من غير أن تربطها بضرورة عقلية ملزمة. في حين تفسر الأشعرية الحكمة أساسًا في إطار الإرادة والقدرة

الإلهيين، مع الحد من إعادة بنائها بمفاهيم تتمحور حول المخلوق. ومن خلال المقارنة بين هذه الاتجاهات، تهدف المقالة إلى الإسهام في تناول أكثر تكاملاً وتحليلاً لمسألة الحكمة الإلهية ومعقولية الأفعال الإلهية في الفكر الكلامي.
الكلمات المفتاحية: علم الكلام، الحكمة، الأفعال الإلهية، العلية، الغدل.

Introduction

Despite broad agreement across the major kalām traditions that God is all-wise (*al-Hakīm*) and that His acts cannot be characterised as futile or purposeless (*'abath*), classical debates remain divided over how divine action is to be related to divine wisdom (*ḥikma*) and purpose (*ghāya*) without undermining the requirements of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and the affirmation of God's sovereign, unconstrained agency. More specifically, the point of contention concerns the admissibility and meaning of causal explanation (*ta'līl*)—that is, whether, and in what sense, divine acts may be accounted for in terms of cause (*'illa*) and finality, including appeals to welfare (*maṣlaḥa*) and normative value. The dispute also turns on the epistemic question of what, if anything, human reason can legitimately apprehend regarding such purposiveness. Against this background, this article asks how, and to what extent, divine wisdom functions as an explanatory principle in Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and Māturīdī accounts of divine acts, and how these accounts shape the intelligibility of divine action within the God–human–cosmos relationship.

This article aims (i) to clarify the conceptual content of divine wisdom as applied to divine action, (ii) to compare school-based explanatory models across the Mu'tazila, the Ash'ariyya, and the Māturīdiyya, and (iii) to show how these models diverge with respect to causal explanation, moral value theory centred on moral rightness and wrongness (*ḥusn* and *qubḥ*), related notions such as justice (*'adl*) and welfare, and the weighting of power (*qudra*) and will (*irāda*) in accounting for divine agency. Methodologically, the article adopts a comparative conceptual analysis developed through close reading of selected representative primary kalām texts alongside relevant secondary scholarship. At the level of representative doctrinal formulations, the discussion draws primarily on authors such as Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), and Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1115). These scholars are selected because their works reflect foundational and representative approaches to divine wisdom and divine action within their respective kalām traditions. The analysis is organised along three interrelated axes: (i) the extent to which divine acts may be described in terms of causal explanation and how this is articulated without compromising divine transcendence; (ii) the role of moral value theory and related notions such as justice and welfare in grounding claims about wise action; and (iii) the relative emphasis placed on power and will in accounting for the God–world relationship. The scope is limited to the three major classical schools at the level of school-defining doctrinal patterns; it does not seek to exhaust intra-school diversity, but rather to clarify how each tradition conceptualises divine wisdom and its implications for the intelligibility of divine action.

While divine wisdom has been widely discussed in both the classical tradition and modern scholarship, contemporary studies have often examined the major kalām schools separately.¹ This article does not claim that comparative work on the subject is entirely absent; rather, it argues that the relationship between divine wisdom, causal explanation, moral value theory,

¹ İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelâm* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ahmed İhsan, 1339), 275–282; Osman Oral, *Māturīdī'nin Hikmet Anlayışı* (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, PhD Dissertation, 2014), 45–46.

and the relation between divine power and will has not always been examined within a single comparative analytical frame.² In this respect, the article aims to contribute to the field by offering a comparative reading that makes the principal doctrinal priorities and explanatory patterns of the Mu‘tazila, the Ash‘ariyya, and the Māturīdiyya more analytically explicit.³

It must be emphasised that there is no disagreement among kalām scholars concerning God’s being all-wise and the impossibility that His acts involve evil, injustice, or absurdity (*safah*).⁴ This broad consensus is rooted in the principles of oneness of God (*tawhīd*) and divine transcendence, which require that the divine essence be affirmed as free from incapacity, deficiency, and all created attributes.⁵ Within this shared framework, however, the theological schools differ over how divine wisdom may be invoked in explaining divine acts without compromising transcendence.

Kalām debates concerning this issue primarily revolve around whether God’s acts may be explained in terms of wisdom, purpose, or end; whether His acts and creation can be attributed to a cause; and whether such acts possess an underlying reason or goal.⁶ In articulating these questions, the theological schools emphasise different attributes within the God–human relationship: justice in the Mu‘tazilī tradition, divine wisdom in Māturīdī theology, and divine power in Ash‘arī theology.⁷

The Mu‘tazila approach the problem of divine wisdom from a rationalist perspective, maintaining that divine will is bound to necessary or inferential truths known by reason. According to them, God’s acts necessarily rest upon divine wisdom and conform to principles of justice and purposive order.⁸ Ash‘arī theologians, by contrast, approach divine wisdom primarily through divine will and power. For them, God exercises sovereign authority over His

² Ali Bardakoğlu, “Hüsn ve Kubh Konusunda Aklın Rolü ve İmam Maturidî”, *Erciyes Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5/4 (1 January 1987), 59–75; İlyas Çelebi, “Klasik Bir Kelam Problemi: Hüsn-Kubuh”, *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 16–17 (1999), 55–90; Şehmus Bayler, *Kelâmcılara Göre Hüsn-Kubuh ve Değerlendirilmesi* (Konya: Selçuk Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Master’s Thesis, 2006); Bilal Taşkın, *Kelâmcılar ile Usûlcülere Göre Hüsn-Kubuh Meselesi* (Sakarya: Sakarya Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Master’s Thesis, 2011); Sibel Kaya, *İlâhî Fiillerde Zorunluluk: Vücûb Alellah* (Kayseri: Erciyes Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2021); Mustafa Bilal Öztürk, “Hüsn-Kubuh Bağlamında Kelâm’ın Ahlâk Kuramları”, *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İslam Tetkikleri Merkezi Dergisi* 7/2 (1 December 2021), 403–438; Fatıma Sümeyye Kılaç, *Sadrüşşeria’nın Osmanlı Kelâmına Etkisi: Hüsn-Kubuh Meselesi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2024); Hikmet Şavluk - Muhammed Emin Efe, “Mâtürîdîlerin Hüsn-Kubuh Meselesindeki Özgünlük İddialarına İlişkin Bir İnceleme”, *Bingöl Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 25 (30 June 2025), 39–57.

³ Mahmut Ay, “Kelâm’da Adalet, Kudret ve Hikmet Bağlamında Tanrı Tasavvurları”, *Eskiye* 31 (11 December 2015), 25–30; Faruk Özdemir, “Kur’ân Ayetleri Bağlamında Kelâm Ekollerinin İlah Tasavvurlarına Dair Bir İnceleme”, *Tefsir Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2/1 (20 April 2018), 1, 8, 16, 20; Resul Ersöz, “Kur’ân’ı Maksatları Bağlamında Okumanın Değeri: Makâsîdî Tefsir Yöntemi”, *Tefsir Araştırmaları Dergisi* 5/2 (30 October 2021), 747–778.

⁴ Nūr al-Dīn al-Şābūnī, *Kitāb al-Bidāya min al-Kifāya fī al-Hidāya fī Uşūl al-Dīn*, Critical ed. Fath Allāh Khulayf (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1969), 106; M. Sait Özervarlı, “Hikmet”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 15 October 2025).

⁵ Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 47, 50, 68–69; Metin Yurdagür, “Tenzih”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 16 December 2025).

⁶ Özervarlı, “Hikmet”; Hulusi Arslan and Mustafa Bozkurt, *Sistematik Kelâm* (Malatya: Ensar Neşriyat, 2018), 295–298.

⁷ Ay, “Kelâm’da Adalet, Kudret ve Hikmet Bağlamında Tanrı Tasavvurları,” 25–30; Özdemir, “Kur’ân Ayetleri Bağlamında Kelâm Ekollerinin İlah Tasavvurlarına Dair Bir İnceleme,” 1, 8, 16, 20; Muhammed Bilal Gültekin, “Mütekkaddimîn Dönemi Eş‘arî Kelâmında İlâhî Hikmet: Hikmet Neden Salt Fayda Olarak Yorumlanamaz?” *Kader* 23/2 (31 December 2025), 443–445.

⁸ İbrahim Özdemir, “Mu‘tezile’de Hüsn-Kubuh ve Kelâmî Ta‘lîl,” *Bingöl Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 13 (25 June 2019), 11–31.

dominion, and His acts are subject to no external obligation.⁹ In al-Māturīdī's understanding of God, wisdom is presented as the central divine attribute upon which all other attributes are grounded.¹⁰

The article first establishes the Quranic and conceptual framework of divine wisdom, then examines the Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and Māturīdī positions with particular reference to causal explanation, moral value theory, and the relation between divine power and will, and finally offers a comparative synthesis of their theological implications.¹¹

Conceptual and Terminological Framework of Divine Wisdom (Ḥikma)

To situate the ensuing school-based analyses, this section outlines key textual points of departure for purposiveness and clarifies the conceptual contours of divine wisdom that inform classical kalām discussions of divine action.

In the classical Islamic sciences, kalām functions as a foundational discipline for articulating doctrines of God, creation, and human responsibility through rational-theological argumentation. For this reason, kalām is positioned as a discipline that seeks to understand the relationship between God, the universe, and humankind by engaging not only with reason but also with prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and revelation. When the Quran, as divine revelation, is examined, it becomes clear that it employs a rational method in addressing the human mind and directs it to contemplate and reflect. In this context, the Quran encourages human beings to observe the order and harmony in the universe and to infer from this the existence of a Creator. It does so by frequently drawing attention to natural phenomena and by presenting them as signs (*āyāt*) that point to divine wisdom and divine power. It can be said that this emphasis forms one of the foundational methodological principles of kalām.¹²

This methodological emphasis is further reinforced by the fact that a significant portion of the Quran consists of verses that call human beings to reflect upon their spiritual and biological constitution, their social life, historical events, and the phenomena occurring in the heavens and the earth. These verses clearly instill notions of balance (*mizān*), purpose, divine wisdom, and divine providence (*'ināya*). In the history of Islamic thought, many cosmological proofs demonstrating the existence and unity of God, particularly the arguments from order and wisdom, derive their foundations from this Quranic emphasis on order, purpose, and divine wisdom.¹³

⁹ Özervarlı, "Hikmet."

¹⁰ Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Fath Allāh Kholeif (Cairo: Dār al-Jāmi'āt al-Miṣriyya, 1970), 23–25, 44, 141, 262, 287.

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, Quranic translations are adapted from *The Holy Qur'an and Its Meaning* (A. Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 5th ed., Presidency of Religious Affairs/Diyanet, 2020), with references given by sūrah and verse number. Arabic technical terms and names are transliterated consistently according to a single EI3-/IJMES-based system used throughout the article. For concise encyclopaedic clarifications of selected theological terms and figures, relevant entries in the Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi have also been consulted.

¹² *The Holy Qur'an and Its Meaning*, trans. Ali Abdullah Yusuf (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2020), al-Baqarah 2/29–30, İbrāhīm 14/52, al-Nahl 16/78, al-Ḥajj 22/46, Yā Sīn 36/33–35, Şād 38/75, al-Jāthiya 45/13, al-Mu'min 40/67, al-'Alaq 96/5.

¹³ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17, 80, 141; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *al-İbāna wa-Uṣūl Ahl al-Sunna: Eṣ'arī Akāidī*, trans. Ramazan Biçer (Istanbul: Gelenek, 1st ed., 2010), 131–134, 149; Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa: Mu'tezile'nin Beş İlkesi*, trans. İlyas Çelebi (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2013), 156; al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 38–39; Mehmet S. Aydın, *Din Fel-sefesi* (İzmir: İzmir İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı, 2002), 62–67; Şaban Ali Düzgün, ed., *Kelam El Kitabı* (Ankara: Grafiker Yayınları, 2015), 212.

This human intellectual endeavour leads reason (‘aql) to recognise that the order and function observed throughout existence (mawjudāt) point to the absolute power of God, who possesses infinite knowledge, will, and omnipotence. Indeed, within the God–human–world relationship, principles of order, purpose, and providence, and consequently the principle of divine wisdom, come to the fore. This perspective indicates that God’s creative acts involve both purpose and divine wisdom. Such an understanding of divine wisdom constitutes the basis of the principle, widely accepted in Islamic thought, that “there is no futility in God’s acts.” Accordingly, the conviction that there is no coincidence, meaninglessness, or absurdity in the universe and in the world we inhabit has become a foundational methodological principle within the Islamic kalām tradition.

The Quran explicitly affirms that creation has a purpose and an end. It states, for example, “We did not create the heaven and the earth and what lies between them in vain; that is the assumption of those who disbelieve”,¹⁴ and “Not for (idle) sport did We create the heavens and the earth and all that is between!”¹⁵ These verses clearly convey, in a comprehensive sense, that a definite purpose underpins the creation of the universe. This purpose entails that the human being recognises their place within the order of existence, gets to know God’s power and wisdom, worships God accordingly, and thus lives, both individually and socially, upon justice, balance, and wisdom. Hence, according to the Quran, creation is not the result of purposeless chance but the manifestation of an order determined by God’s will, knowledge, and divine wisdom.¹⁶

Likewise, the Quran emphatically states that the human being has not been created in vain: “Does Man think that he will be left uncontrolled (without purpose)?”¹⁷ In this verse, human creation is grounded in a purpose, a cause, and divine wisdom.¹⁸ Numerous verses emphasising that the earth and all that is within it have been created for humanity, that the heavens have been subjected to them, and that God has taught human beings what they did not know assign humanity a vital position within creation in terms of the divine plan of wisdom. In this context, one of the key concepts for understanding the purpose of creation is *ḥikma*. The Quranic conception of creation not only explains the coming-into-being of existence but also invites reflection upon the meaning and intent of the divine will underlying it. The concept of divine wisdom thus emerges both as an intellectual framework enabling the comprehension of this intent and as a moral principle guiding the human relationship with existence. Consequently, attaining a holistic understanding of the purpose and goal of creation is only possible through a proper grasp of the nature of divine wisdom. At this point, it is appropriate first to examine the lexical and technical meanings of the term *ḥikma*.

Lexically, *ḥikma* derives from the Arabic root ḥ-k-m (حكـم) and is explained in dictionaries with meanings such as “origination”, “a rational statement conforming to truth”, and “knowledge accompanied by action”.¹⁹ Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311) defines wisdom in *Lisān al-‘Arab* as the harmony between knowledge and action,²⁰ while al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791), in *Tāj*

¹⁴ Ṣād 38/27.

¹⁵ al-Anbiya 21/16.

¹⁶ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17–19, 256–258.

¹⁷ al-Qiyāma 75/36.

¹⁸ İlhan Kutluer, “Gâiyyet,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 16 December 2025).

¹⁹ al-Jurjānī, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad, *al-Ta’rīfāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1st ed., 1405), “al-ḥikma,” 61–62.

²⁰ Muḥammad b. Mukarram Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, ed. ‘Abdallāh ‘Alī al-Kabīr (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1968), “ḥkm,” 12/140.

al-'Arūs, emphasizes the meaning of “placing everything in its proper position”.²¹ According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's formulation in *Mufradāt al-Qur'ān*, wisdom encompasses “beneficial knowledge and righteous action”.²² Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī further notes that within kalām literature wisdom has been interpreted in two principal ways, lexical and theological: some lexicographers understood it directly as knowledge; others associated it with restraining the soul from base desires and reprehensible acts; and yet others defined it as knowing the realities of things and placing them appropriately. According to these interpretations, the opposite of wisdom is identified either as ignorance (*jaḥl*) or as foolishness and absurdity (*ṣafah*). Within the kalām schools, Ash'arī theologians define wisdom as the conformity of acts to their intended end, the Mu'tazila understand it as the benefit resulting from acts, and Māturīdī theologians conceive it as acts yielding praiseworthy outcomes.²³ Accordingly, wisdom is understood as the manifestation of an act grounded in knowledge and purpose in practical life. While such definitions pose no difficulty when applied to created beings, attributing acts conforming to purpose and knowledge to God has become a central subject of debate in kalām.

Against this framework, the following sections examine how the Mu'tazila, the Ash'ariyya, and the Māturīdiyya differently conceptualise divine wisdom in relation to causal explanation, moral value theory, and the relation between divine power and will.

1. Wisdom in Mu'tazilī Theology

One of the distinctive features of Mu'tazilī theology is the conviction that God created existence intentionally, with purpose and divine wisdom. Mu'tazilī theologians have drawn upon this fundamental perspective when proposing solutions to a wide range of theological problems, from the creation of all animate and inanimate beings to the moral dimension of human acts, the doctrine of acting rightly and promoting the best possible good (*ṣalāḥ–aṣlah*) to the problem of evil.²⁴ Indeed, it is suggested that the principles of justice they advance in explaining many human-related questions rest upon the premise that this exalted Creator is qualified by perfection and characterised as all-wise.²⁵ Divine wisdom entails divine justice, which in turn requires that all divine acts be good; therefore, the goodness of all divine acts implies that God neither performs actions that are reprehensible nor violates obligations.²⁶ Accordingly, the claim that God's creation of beings is not grounded in any wisdom or cause would be taken to imply that creation is vain and meaningless. What is meant by the “cause” of creation is the wisdom that renders the act of creating good and fitting with respect to God. To refrain from doing what is good and instead to do what is harmful is to act contrary to divine wisdom; to act contrary to divine wisdom is to perform vain, that is, meaningless, acts and this cannot be attributed to God.

²¹ Abū al-Fayḍ Muḥammad al-Murtaḍā b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Bilgrāmī al-Ḥusaynī al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'Arūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1386/1966), “ḥkm,” 8/352.

²² al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2011), “ḥkm,” 1/199.

²³ Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Critical ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Yayınları, 1993), 1/504–507.

²⁴ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa-al-'Adl*, Critical ed. Ibrāhīm Madkūr and Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1958), 15/6–48; Abū al-Faṭḥ Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2004), 290.

²⁵ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 4/49. See also İbrahim Özdemir, “Mu'tezile'de Hüsün-Kubuh ve Kelâmî Ta'lîl,” 26–27.

²⁶ Muḥammad Abū Zahra, *Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya fī al-Siyāsa wa-l-'Aqā'id wa-Tārīkh al-Madhāhib al-Fiḥriyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, n.d.), 121, 170.

In this respect, within Mu‘tazilī thought, the notion of futility is positioned directly as the opposite of divine wisdom. Hence, it is inconceivable that God—who possesses infinite divine wisdom—should perform an act of futility. The creation of the universe and the human being must therefore have a purpose and an end.²⁷ It would not be inaccurate to say that, for the Mu‘tazila, the most general purpose behind God’s creation of the world and humanity is to bestow goodness upon them and enable them to benefit from His bounties.²⁸ This approach, often described as the theory of benefit (*nazariyyat al-manfa‘a*), occupies a central place in Mu‘tazilī kalām as an explanation of the end of divine acts. On this account, God created beings not for His own essence but with a view to their welfare and benefit. Since no benefit accruing to God, nor any divine need, can be conceived, the goodness and benefit in question pertain directly to creation above all to human well-being in this world and the next.²⁹ For God’s acts are held to possess a dimension of divine wisdom and justice that encompasses all created beings; they are not confined to His essence alone. In this understanding, divine wisdom and justice consist in creating beings on the basis of knowledge and purpose, meaning that God, in an absolute sense, knows and brings into being what is desirable and beneficial.³⁰

When treating divine wisdom in relation to the end of divine acts, Mu‘tazilī theologians also assigned a specialised meaning to the term motive (dā‘ī). For them, this term refers to a motive that brings an act about. While this concept is intelligible and explanatory in the case of human acts, its application to God leads to a significant theological problem. For although the Mu‘tazila affirm that God’s acts occur or are guided by His divine wisdom, claiming that there is a dā‘ī “behind” those acts raises the question of whether there can really be anything outside God that determines or limits the divine will. Nevertheless, the Mu‘tazila considered it acceptable to use dā‘ī in the sense of a non-compelling reason in virtue of which God brings creatures into existence.³¹ Within the horizon of divine wisdom, it may be said that the purpose of creation is to benefit creatures and to bestow goodness upon them; in this sense, divine wisdom functions as the dā‘ī of creation and of moral responsibility (taklīf). Accordingly, since the divine creative will is intrinsically characterised by goodness and divine wisdom, creation is not construed as bearing a meaning other than goodness and benefit.³² In the same context, it may also be said that the end of God’s imposing moral responsibility upon human beings is to provide them with the opportunity to merit reward.³³

In explaining divine wisdom in relation to divine acts, Mu‘tazilī theologians did not limit themselves to moral responsibility; they also employed notions such as intended aim (*gharaḍ*), beneficence (*ihsān*), and gracious favour (*tafaḍḍul*). Here *gharaḍ* denotes the intended aim behind an act or the outcome expected from it, whereas *ihsān* and *tafaḍḍul* refer to God’s beneficence and gracious favour toward His servants. Yet, for the Mu‘tazila, it is not sufficient for an act to have merely an aim or an outcome to be described as “wise”; rather, that

²⁷ al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, 396–397. See also Özdemir, “Mu‘tezile’de Hüsün-Kubuh ve Kelâmî Ta‘lil,” 26.

²⁸ al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, 397.

²⁹ For further details, see Hulusi Arslan, “Yaratma ve Gâyelik Bağlamında Mu‘tezile’nin Fayda Teorisi,” *Kader* 14/2 (10 September 2016), 344, 348, 349.

³⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin: İlk Dönem İslām Mezhepleri*, trans. Ömer Aydın (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), 368–369; Hüseyin Maraz, “Mu‘tezile’de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlahî Fiillerin Değer Analizi,” *Kader* 18/1 (30 June 2020), 90.

³¹ Maraz, “Mu‘tezile’de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlahî Fiillerin Değer Analizi,” 87.

³² Maraz, “Mu‘tezile’de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlahî Fiillerin Değer Analizi,” 90.

³³ Orhan Şener Koloğlu, *Cübbâiler’in Kelâm Sistemi* (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2017), 360.

aim must be in full conformity with principles of divine justice, welfare, and beneficence.³⁴ Thus, within the Mu'tazila, what removes creation from meaninglessness and futility is God's intending, in creating, the goodness and benefit of creatures. At its most fundamental level, this intention may be described as the benefit and well-being of a human being. Indeed, for a Mu'tazilī interpretation of divine wisdom that places the human being at its centre, it may be said that creation as a whole is for the human being; even the occurrence of the Last Hour, that is, the dissolution of the world, is related to the termination of the process of moral responsibility.³⁵

At this point, the Mu'tazilī grounding of divine wisdom in a human-centred conception of benefit made it necessary to account for the "problem of evil".³⁶ For if the end of all divine acts is human welfare and goodness, then one must explain how phenomena such as pain, calamities, oppression, and natural disasters observed in the realm of existence are to be understood within this framework. At first glance, an absence of divine wisdom might be presumed. Nevertheless, according to the Mu'tazila, beings that appear ugly or harmful in fact contain many forms of divine wisdom and benefit. Moral evils belong to human beings and cannot be ascribed to God; and within the natural order, what we perceive as evil contains numerous instances of wisdom. Even if some of these are not manifest in this world, they are held to yield benefit in the hereafter; in the final analysis, therefore, they too are good.³⁷

The notion of "benefit" used to explain the divine wisdom in human creation occupies a central position in the doctrine of moral rightness and most benefit, one of the issues for which the Mu'tazila have been most frequently criticised and contested. This approach also generated a range of further debates. For once it is granted that "the purpose of God's creating is to consider the servant's benefit," certain questions inevitably arise. If the purpose of creating human beings is to benefit them, then is it permissible for God to create something that is less beneficial when the most beneficial option is available? Is it obligatory upon God to create what is most beneficial?³⁸

At this juncture, it may be said that three distinct positions emerged within the Mu'tazila.

The first position belongs to those who claimed that it is obligatory upon God to do what is most appropriate and most beneficial (aṣḥaḥ) for the human being. They maintain that God must do what is best for the servant in this life and the next. Since these proponents assume that God performs in all acts pertaining to human beings, what is most beneficial for them, they evaluate all divine acts, including the creation of the human being and the imposition of moral responsibility within the category of obligation.³⁹

The second position is the doctrine of divine assistance (*luṭf*) advocated by those affiliated with the Baghdad Mu'tazila. They regarded neither the bestowal of divine assistance upon the morally responsible agent nor the observation of what is most beneficial for the servant as

³⁴ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 2/332.

³⁵ Koloğlu, *Cübbâtiler'in Kelâm Sistemi*, 360.

³⁶ al-Taftāzānī, A Commentary on the Creed of Islam, 34–35.

³⁷ Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 2/332; Abū Manṣūr 'Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *al-Asmā' wa-al-ṣifāt* (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2022), 2/51.

³⁸ Arslan, "Mu'tezile'nin Fayda Teorisi", 356.

³⁹ Arslan, "Mu'tezile'nin Fayda Teorisi", 356.

obligatory for God. They believe that God can always create something better than the best, so there is no limit to His power and omnipotence. It is therefore impossible to describe anything as obligatory for God, whose power is absolute.

In addition to the views noted above, there is a third position that maintains that God's responsibility regarding what is most beneficial begins only with the imposition of moral responsibility upon a human being.⁴⁰ According to this view, associated with Abū Hāshim, Abū 'Alī, and Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, although moral responsibility itself is not intrinsically obligatory, once moral responsibility has been imposed, it becomes obligatory for God to provide the capacities and conditions necessary for the servant to fulfil their responsibility. Here, the institution of moral responsibility becomes the source of obligation.⁴¹

The cause (*'illa*) that prompts God to create the universe is not an eternal reason that renders creation necessary.⁴² In other words, God is not compelled to create anything, let alone mankind.⁴³ However, after creating mankind and addressing them with moral responsibility *taklīf*, it becomes obligatory to provide them with the capacity required to discharge that responsibility.⁴⁴ According to the Mu'tazila, the most important and necessary conditions are that the responsible agent has full freedom with respect to performing the act and possesses the power to do so. Moreover, there must be no impediment preventing the person from performing their act.⁴⁵

Closely related to the *ṣalāh*–*aṣḥāh* debate, the question of divine wisdom is seen to occupy the centre of the Mu'tazilī moral theory. For if all divine acts are wise and beneficial, then the nature of the evils observed in existence must be explained accordingly. According to the Mu'tazila, wrongness or ugliness (*qubḥ*) and evil (*sharr*) are not, in an absolute sense, properties of being; rather, they belong to the sphere of moral evaluation. The fact that something is found pleasant or beautiful by people does not entail that it is truly advantageous; likewise, the fact that it is deemed ugly does not mean that the act is necessarily evil. Hence, whether an act is good or ugly must be determined not by personal tastes but by reason's moral criteria. In this context, while aesthetic judgements may vary from person to person, moral values, according to the Mu'tazila are objective and do not change with the agent.⁴⁶ By framing the conception of divine wisdom in an ethical framework, this approach aims to cultivate in human action a consciousness of rational and moral responsibility. Even from a contemporary perspective, this line of thought retains its importance as a theological ethic that is defensible, explicable, and in principle intelligible in terms of human cognition.

2. Wisdom in Māturīdī Theology

For Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *ḥikma* signifies *iṣāba* in the sense of “perfect appropriateness.” It is also expressed as “putting everything in its proper place” and at the same time corresponds to justice (*'adl*). To describe wisdom in terms of justice attributes a moral quality

⁴⁰ Maraz, “Mu'tezile'de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlahî Fiillerin Değer Analizi,” 100.

⁴¹ Koloğlu, *Cübbâiler'in Kelâm Sistemi*, 412–413; Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Cübbâî, Ebû Ali,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 30 November 2025).

⁴² Maraz, “Mu'tezile'de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlahî Fiillerin Değer Analizi,” 100.

⁴³ Özervarlı, “Hikmet.”

⁴⁴ Arslan, “Mu'tezile'nin Fayda Teorisi”, 356.

⁴⁵ Koloğlu, *Cübbâiler'in Kelâm Sistemi*, 351.

⁴⁶ Hulusi Arslan, “Ahlâkî Değerlerin Nesnelliği ve Öznelliği Açısından Mu'tezile ve Eş'arilik”, *Hikmet Yurdu* 9/17 (2016), 18.

to the divine acts, for, according to Māturīdī, any agent who is unaware of the consequences of what he does and does not know why he acts is devoid of the quality of being *ḥakīm*.

According to Māturīdī, what causes one to depart from divine wisdom in this world is human ignorance and need. Divine wisdom, by contrast, is grounded in God's infinite knowledge. He knows all existence in the best manner. God is the supreme being, so no one else can know the essence of all things. Therefore, the true *ḥakīm* is God alone, for He is, in Himself, the possessor of judgement and wisdom.⁴⁷

Māturīdī considers fatuity or senselessness (*safah*) to be the opposite of wisdom (*ḥikma*). He defines *safah* as an act performed without expecting any outcome or as a careless deed committed despite knowing that it is wrong. The phrase is also used as a term of reproach; one person may say to another, "O *safīh*," meaning "fool, imprudent person, or senseless". For this reason, such terms cannot be applied to God.

God Most High did not create the heavens, the earth, and what lies between them in vain. Rather, God brought creatures into existence for a discernible purpose. Māturīdī states that this purpose is the testing of living beings in the heavens, the earth, and what lies between them.⁴⁸

In worldly affairs, the action of someone who undertakes an activity yet expects no result from it is meaningless. For Māturīdī, the claim that God acts without wisdom would validate the unbelievers' assertion that "we were created in vain." Yet God refutes this claim by His saying: "Did ye then think that We had created you in jest, and that ye would not be brought back to Us?"⁴⁹ If there were no resurrection, reckoning, and recompense, then the creation of the heavens, the earth, and what lies between them would be in vain.⁵⁰

Māturīdī also notes that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) held similar views regarding divine wisdom. According to Baṣrī, God created the heavens and the earth not in vain but in accordance with divine wisdom.⁵¹ This divine wisdom consists in showing to those who observe the sky and the earth God's oneness, creative power, sovereignty, and knowledge; thus, all these are signs that point to God. Māturīdī's approach is based on the belief that divine acts are purposeful and that the cosmos has a meaningful order. Nevertheless, Māturīdī theologians do not treat divine wisdom as a necessary cause or as a determinant that compels God's acts, because God is not subject to accountability for what He does. Māturīdī explains this by three considerations:⁵²

1. God performs His acts within His own dominion and sovereignty, whereas those who act in another's property are held accountable for their actions.
2. God is not accountable for His acts because He is, by His essence, wise; His acts cannot fall outside wisdom. Only those beings whose acts may fall outside wisdom are subject to interrogation.

⁴⁷ Özervarlı, "Hikmet."

⁴⁸ Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu and Yusuf Şevki Yavuz (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2015), 350–356.

⁴⁹ al-Mu'minūn 23/115.

⁵⁰ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 9/354.

⁵¹ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 9/350.

⁵² al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 9/356.

3. It is also impossible for God to be subject to commands and prohibitions in His acts. A command can only be issued by a higher authority to one below; since there can be no authority above God, this too is impossible.

Māturīdī explains the divine wisdom in God's creation of creatures and human beings within a Quranic framework. In his view, the universe and all that it contains are signs indicating God's existence and oneness and were created for the human being. The universe is a field of observation in which human beings engage in deep and coherent reflection. Through such observation, the human being will grasp that the universe did not arise mechanically, turn towards divine unity, recognise the majesty of the divine bounties, and respond with gratitude.

The universe is for humans, who are created to be tested for happiness in this life and the next.⁵³

Māturīdī maintains that, due to the limits of human knowledge and cognition, the human being cannot encompass all dimensions of divine wisdom. Fully understanding the nature, aims, and scope of these pieces of wisdom is beyond human comprehension. In this respect, Māturīdī's position differs from that of the Mu'tazila, who emphasise the sufficiency of reason in grasping God's acts. Whereas the Mu'tazila hold that all wisdom in divine acts can be comprehended by reason, Māturīdī argues that reason can recognise the existence of divine wisdom but cannot fully grasp its nature and limits.⁵⁴

This line of reasoning may be seen more clearly in Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, a major later representative of the Māturīdī tradition. In al-Tabṣira, divine wisdom is affirmed as a real and meaningful quality of God's acts, but it is not treated as an external principle that imposes necessity upon the divine will.⁵⁵ A comparable tendency appears in Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 493/1100), who maintains that nothing may be deemed obligatory for God and that God's acting wisely does not arise from any necessity imposed upon Him, but rather from the fact that He is ḥakīm.⁵⁶ Taken together, Māturīdī, Nasafī, and Bazdawī suggest an approach that affirms purposiveness and intelligibility in divine action without reducing that action to rational compulsion.

According to Māturīdī, to create without the aim of reviving living beings and granting life is contrary to divine wisdom. For in worldly life, someone who constructs a building only to demolish it cannot be wise; such an act is meaningless. Likewise, the verse, "Did you think that We created you only in vain and that you would not be returned to Us?" indicates that creation is not purposeless.⁵⁷

In his view, God created worldly life to test human beings and originated a second realm to grant the recompense of this test. If there were no afterlife, the creation of the world and what it contains would be meaningless, for a creation without outcome is futility. The existence of the afterlife completes the divine wisdom of creation.⁵⁸ For this reason, Māturīdī holds that

⁵³ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 1/85; Hulusi Arslan, "Maturīdī'ye Göre Evren ve İnsanın Yaratılış Hikmeti," *Hikmet Yurdu, İmam Matürîdî ve Matürîdîlik Özel Sayısı* 4 (December 2009), 71.

⁵⁴ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 107, 141; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 1/85.

⁵⁵ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 1/504–507.

⁵⁶ Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī, *Ehl-i Sünnet Akaidi*, trans. Şerefettin Gölçük (Istanbul: Kayhan Yayınları, 1988), 179.

⁵⁷ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 354.

⁵⁸ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 1/84–85.

if there were no afterlife, the abilities bestowed upon the human being would also lose any intelligible meaning.⁵⁹

In everything God has created, there are pieces of wisdom for human beings: in the creation of the heavens and the earth, in night and day, in water, in the living beings on earth, in the winds, and in the clouds suspended between heaven and earth, there are many instances of wisdom. Māturīdī says that those who do not see this divine wisdom cannot understand the value of beings; for those who do not know the wisdom of creation, existence and nonexistence are the same.⁶⁰

From this perspective, the Māturīdī conception of wisdom, grounded in divine justice and beneficence, requires human beings to apprehend the universe from the perspective of wisdom. According to Māturīdī, in order to understand God's acts and live in a state of well-being in the world, mankind should look at everything from the perspective of wisdom and discern the positive aspects of all things.⁶¹

Within the divine wisdom-based system outlined above, by incorporating justice as an immanent dimension of the concept of wisdom, one may say that Māturīdī views God's acting in accordance with divine wisdom as acting in accordance with moral norms that He has Himself established. Accordingly, since God's acts are morally fitting by virtue of divine wisdom, the human being derives the basis of moral existence from this. The existence of a Creator who acts by intelligible and predictable principles and measures grounded in divine wisdom may be regarded as a foundation that makes the existence of a moral order possible for human beings.

3. Wisdom in Ash'arī Theology

Like the other two schools of kalām, Ash'arī theologians affirm that God's acts are wise. However, the Ash'ariyya approach divine wisdom primarily through divine will and power. In this framework, divine acts are wise because they proceed from God's eternal knowledge, will, and power, not because they are grounded in creature-centred welfare or externally identifiable purposes. Accordingly, divine wisdom is not explained with reference to the creature's welfare, but rather by reference to God's eternal knowledge and will. Therefore, one should avoid seeking purposes or welfare considerations from the perspective of created beings. To enquire into the aim or end of divine governance presupposes a cause that would delimit God's absolute will, a presupposition that conflicts with the very notion of divinity. Since nothing can be conceived as restricting God's will, Ash'arī kalām is generally reluctant to explain divine wisdom in terms of purpose, cause, or welfare as a necessary basis of divine action.⁶²

In Mu'tazilī and Māturīdī thought, divine wisdom is more readily invoked to explain divine acts in terms of order, purpose, and welfare. In Ash'arī theology, by contrast, an act is wise precisely because it proceeds from God. Hence, one cannot speak of an additional aim,

⁵⁹ al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 1/84.

⁶⁰ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 17–19; al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān Tercümesi*, 1/324.

⁶¹ Oral, *Māturīdī'nin Hikmet Anlayışı*, 4; Sami Şekeroğlu, "Māturīdī'de Hikmet-Ahlak İlişkisi," *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 41 (15 June 2019), 138.

⁶² Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1989), 48, 96–97; al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, 390, 392; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyin: İlk Dönem İslām Mezhepleri*, trans. Ömer Aydın (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2019), 236; al-Baghdādī, *al-Asmā' wa-al-Şifāt*, 2/47–48, 53; Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd al-Awā'il wa-Talkhīş al-Dalā'il* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1987), 50.

intent, or motivating cause standing behind divine acts as a determining rationale. Divine wisdom is understood through God's will and divine power, and no cause or necessity may be posited that would constrain His boundless agency. In this sense, Ash'arī theology does not favour explaining divine wisdom in creature-centred terms of welfare or purpose.⁶³

In reaction to the Mu'tazilī view that regards creating what is 'most beneficial' (aşlah) as obligatory for God, Ash'arī theologians foreground the attribute of will and resist treating divine acts as dependent upon a purpose or welfare accessible to human reason.⁶⁴ From this perspective, the point is not that divine acts are devoid of wisdom, but that such divine wisdom is not to be reconstructed primarily in creature-centred terms. Explaining divine wisdom by appealing to aims and welfare graspable by human reason risks implying that a determinate end restricts God's will.⁶⁵ Ash'arī kalām therefore does not favour accounts of divine wisdom that make creaturely benefit or purposive teleology the necessary basis of divine action, and instead places greater explanatory weight on divine will and divine power.⁶⁶

For Ash'arī theologians, creation belongs to God alone, and all beings are brought into existence directly by Him. Hence, one cannot speak of a necessary principle of causality (*'il-liyya*) in the universe. This position rests on a conception of God's boundless will and divine power: whatever is possible with respect to God is wise. In some presentations of Ash'arī voluntarism, it has been taken to follow that, considered solely from the standpoint of divine power, scenarios such as the punishment of those deemed "innocent," the differential distribution of blessings, the creation of persons known to disbelieve, or the assignment of disproportionate recompense cannot be ruled out in principle; and such possibilities are interpreted as not constituting an objection to divine wisdom in that framework.⁶⁷

While emphasising God's absolute divine power, Ash'arī theologians also affirm that God knows by His eternal knowledge. For this reason, no cause is sought in the creation of the world or of humankind. The existence of a cause would imply deficiency or need in the agent, whereas God is exalted above need. To search for a cause would be to suppose that God's act is completed only through a reason, which is incompatible with the principle of divine transcendence.⁶⁸ Yet this account raises an important question: if divine wisdom is affirmed while its purposive and creaturely intelligibility is sharply restricted, in what sense can the divine attribute "wise" retain a clear meaning in theological discourse? Since revelation addresses human beings through concepts accessible to human understanding, one may ask whether such a construal risks weakening the connection between theological language and the order of creation. In this respect, the Ash'arī position powerfully safeguards divine transcendence. At the same time, however, it leaves open the question of how divine wisdom can be meaningfully

⁶³ Muzaffer Barlak, "İtikadi Mezheplerde İlahiyyat ve Nübüvvet Bahislerinin Bütünlüğü Sorunu," *E-Makalat Mezhep Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10/2 (30 December 2017), 569–572; Maraz, "Mu'tezile'de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlâhî Fiillerin Değer Analizi," 91; Muhammed Bilal Gültekin, "Mütekaddimîn Dönemi Eş'arî Kelamında İlâhî Hikmet: Hikmet Nedeni Salt Fayda Olarak Yorumlanamaz?" *Kader* 23/2 (31 December 2025), 448–451.

⁶⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma' fi al-Radd 'alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa-al-Bida'* (Beirut: Dār Lubnān li-al-Ṭibā'a wa-al-Nashr, 1987), 148–153; İrfan Abdülhamit Fettah, "Eş'arî, Ebü'l-Hasan," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 21 December 2024).

⁶⁵ Y. Şevki Yavuz, "Eş'ariyye," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Access 21 November 2025).

⁶⁶ al-Jurjānī, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, trans. Ömer Türker, 3 vols. (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2021), 1/104–105; Yavuz, "Eş'ariyye."

⁶⁷ Hikmet Yağlı Mavil, *Eş'arî* (Ankara: DİB Yayınları, 2017), 82; Maraz, "Mu'tezile'de Yaratılışın Gayesi ve İlâhî Fiillerin Değer Analizi," 114.

⁶⁸ Arslan, "Maturidî'ye Göre Evren ve İnsanın Yaratılış Hikmeti," 76.

affirmed apart from some analogical relation to humanly intelligible notions of order, purpose, and fittingness.

A number of criticisms have been directed against this Ash'arī view of wisdom, which is often associated with rejecting causality. For example, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) argued that denying that each being has its own distinctive nature is contrary to Islam, since the Prophet's hadiths employ terms such as *ṭabī'a*, *gharīza*, and *jibillīyya* and do not repudiate them. If the principle of causality is not accepted, miracles would lose their meaning, because events such as a camel emerging from stone or a staff turning into a serpent can be regarded as miracles only if beings possess determinate natures.⁶⁹

An even sharper critique comes from Ibn Rushd (d. 1198). In his view, causality accords with reality; cause–effect relations are established by experience and observation.⁷⁰ To deny or ignore such evidence does not correspond to what is actually the case. In that event, one not only rejects causality but also rejects the divine laws that secure the orderly and wise functioning of the universe. Some contemporary discussions have suggested that this stance can sit uneasily with certain scientific assumptions and may complicate apologetic engagements with the natural sciences.⁷¹

This Ash'arī conception of divine wisdom, grounded in divine power and will, offers a different account of how divine acts may be rendered intelligible at the human level. It safeguards divine sovereignty by resisting creature-centred teleological explanation, while at the same time narrowing the extent to which purposiveness may be reconstructed from the standpoint of human moral appraisal.

Conclusion

This article has examined the conception of divine wisdom in classical kalām through a comparative analysis of the Mu'tazila, the Māturīdiyya, and the Ash'ariyya. The comparison suggests that the central disagreement is not whether God is all-wise, a shared affirmation, but what explanatory role divine wisdom may legitimately play in accounts of divine acts under the requirements of divine transcendence and the affirmation of God's sovereign, unconstrained agency. Viewed through the interrelated questions of causal explanation, moral value theory, and the relation between divine power and will, the three traditions emerge as offering distinct accounts of how divine action may be described as wise and rendered theologically intelligible.

On the axis of causal explanation, the Mu'tazilī account renders divine action intelligible by binding divine wisdom to purposiveness and creature-centred benefit, thereby grounding moral accountability in objective value and in a justice-oriented understanding of divine agency. The main tension within this strategy is that rationally accessible norms can appear to function as constraints upon divine volition. The Ash'arī account, by contrast, safeguards divine sovereignty by resisting creature-centred teleological and welfare-based explanations that would operate as determining rationales behind the act; divine wisdom is affirmed, but its explanatory weight is located in the act's derivation from God's pre-eternal knowledge and will.

⁶⁹ Yavuz, "Eş'ariyye."

⁷⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, trans. Simon van den Bergh (London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2008), 319–320.

⁷¹ Özgür Koca, *Islam, Causality, and Freedom: From the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 231–254

This secures divine freedom while narrowing the extent to which purposiveness may be reconstructed from the creaturely standpoint. The Māturīdī model may be read not simply as a mediating option but as a distinctive account of divine wisdom with its own explanatory logic: it affirms purposiveness and non-futility while maintaining an epistemic distinction between recognising wisdom and comprehending its ultimate grounds. This calibration preserves both divine transcendence and a meaningful account of moral responsibility without implying that divine action is compelled by an external normative standard.

These comparative findings also show that divine wisdom functions in kalām not merely as a shared divine predicate, but as a key point of divergence in explaining divine acts. Where causal explanation is admitted more robustly, the moral dimension of divine governance becomes more readily intelligible within a rational-ethical horizon; where it is more sharply restricted, divine freedom and sovereignty are more strongly foregrounded, but the extent to which purposiveness may be reconstructed in creature-centred terms correspondingly narrows. In this sense, the disagreement over divine wisdom may also be read as a disagreement over how far explanatory language about God may proceed without compromising divine transcendence.

Accordingly, the contribution of this study lies in offering a more clearly delimited comparative account of divine wisdom across the Mu‘tazila, the Ash‘ariyya, and the Māturīdiyya, organised around causal explanation, moral value theory, and the relation between divine power and will. In this respect, the article aims to clarify more precisely where these traditions converge and diverge in their accounts of divine acts. Future work on divine wisdom may build on this comparison by specifying more closely the sense of causal explanation at stake—cause, purpose, and welfare—and by tracing its interaction with moral rightness and wrongness and the relation between divine power and will as an integrated cluster rather than as isolated themes.

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