

al-Māturīdī and Atomism *

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Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the position of Imām al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) on atomism. It consists of three sections. The first section will delineate some theories of matter along with the meaning of certain pertinent terms, which were widely accepted during al-Māturīdī's time. The following section will discuss whether Imām al-Māturīdī understood such notions as body (*jism*), substance (*jawhar*), and accident (*‘araḍ*) within the frame of traditional Islamic atomism. Moreover, this section will give some information on how al-Māturīdī approached the issues pertaining to physics and cosmology. The last section will cover the development of atomism in the Māturīdiyya *kalām* school after Imām al-Māturīdī.

Keywords

Kalām, al-Māturīdī, Atomism, Substance, Accident

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İmam Mâtürîdî ve Atomculuk

Öz

İmam Mâtürîdî'nin (ö. 333/944) atomculukla ilişkisini ortaya koymayı hedefleyen bu çalışma, üç bölümden oluşmaktadır. Birinci bölümde İmam Mâtürîdî döneminde yaygın kabul gören madde teorileri ve bunlarla ilişkili cisim, cüz, cevher ve araz gibi kavramların anlamları açıklanacaktır. İkinci bölümde İmam Mâtürîdî'nin cisim, cüz, cevher ve araz gibi kavramları atomculuk ekseninde anlayıp anlamadığı tartışılacaktır. Ayrıca bu bölümde İmam Mâtürîdî'nin fizik ve kozmolojiye dair meselelere nasıl bir yöntemle yaklaştığı hakkında bilgi verilecektir. Üçüncü bölümde ise İmam Mâtürîdî sonrasında atomculuğun Mâtürîdiyye kelâmındaki gelişimi ele alınacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Kelâm, Mâtürîdî, Atomculuk, Cevher, Araz

Introduction

The theory of atomism, i.e. the view that all the objects in the universe are composed of indivisible parts known as atoms, has an essential place in classical Islamic thought. This theory, which was adopted for the first time by the Mu'tazilite scholars and introduced into the *kalâm* discipline at the end of the 2nd/8th century, was also accepted by the Ash'ariyya and Mâtürîdiyya schools in the classical period (4th/10th - 6th/12th centuries).¹ It is surprising that a theory that is defended by materialists of Ancient Greek thought, such as Democritus (B.C. 460 – B.C. 370) and Epicurus (B.C. 341 – B.C. 270), has been widely accepted by Muslim *mutakallimûn* (i.e., the scholars of *kalâm*) in the classical Islamic thought.²

Though atomism had been embraced by all *kalâm* schools in the classical era, how Imâm al-Mâtürîdî (d. 333/944), the founder of the Mâtürîdiyya, one of the important schools of the *Ahl al-Sunna kalâm*, viewed this theory has still not been thoroughly investigated. The fact that he did not engage in a discussion regarding atomism in his extant books, and that he interpreted some notions related to the issue such as body (*jism*), substance (*jawhar*), and accident (*'araḍ*) in a way different than their prevalent meanings in the

¹ For detailed information about *Kalâm* atomism, its criticism, and its assessment in connection with modern science, please see these books of mine: Mehmet Bulgen, *Klasik İslâm Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri = Criticisms of Atomism in Classical Islamic Thought* (İstanbul: İFAV Publication, 2017); Bulgen, *Kelâm Atomculuğu ve Modern Kozmoloji = Kalam Atomism and Modern Cosmology* (Ankara: TDV Publication, 2018).

² Regarding works on *kalâm* atomism, see. Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, trans. Michael Schwarz, ed. Tzvi Langerman (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1997); Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalâm: Atoms, Space and Void in Başra Mu'tazilî Cosmology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill Publishing, 1994). Munâ Ahmad Muhammad Abû Zayd, *al-Tasawwur al-Dharri fî al-Fikr al-Falsafî al-Islâmî*, (Beirut: al-Muassasa al-Jâmiyya, 1994). Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 466; D. B. Macdonald, “Continuous Re-Creation and Atomic Time in Muslim Scholastic Theology”, *Isis*, 9/2 (1927), 341; Josef Van Ess “Mu'tazilite Atomism”, in *Flowering Muslim Theology*, trans. Jane Marie Toldd (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 79-115; A. I. Sabra, “Kalâm Atomism as an Alternative Philosophy to Hellenizing Falsafa”, *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 2006), 152-201; Çağfer Karadaş, “The New Approach to The Source of Kalâm Atomism”, *ULUM 1 / 2* (December 2019): 225-244; Richard M. Frank, “Bodies and Atoms: The Ashcarite Analysis”, in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39-54.

classical period, and also that he seemed to include such concepts that are seemingly contrary to atomism as natures (*ṭabāʾi*) and prime matter (*hayūla*), have led some scholars think that al-Māturīdī may not have embraced atomism and even rejected it.³

My objective in this study is to refute the view that Imām al-Māturīdī did not embrace any form of atomism. Even though al-Māturīdī did not engage in detailed philosophical discussions concerning what bodies are and of what they are constituted, it is very likely that he accepted this theory, because he seems to have understood the terms “body”, “substance” and “accident” in accordance with early atomist *mutakallimūn*. Indeed, the fact that the Māturīdītes following him did not have doubts about Imām al-Māturīdī’s acceptance of atomism also supports my thesis. They also defended this theory, which maintains the idea that the universe is composed of indivisible parts or atoms, without any exception.

1. The Historical and Conceptual Background

As it is known, the science of *kalām* was established by Muʿtazilite *mutakallimūn* at the beginning of the 2nd/8th century. The early discussions of *mutakallimūn* revolved around some inner disputes with significant theological and political connotations such as the leadership (*imāma*) of the Islamic community, the status of the person who committed the grave sin (*murtakib al-kabīra*), the free will (*irāda*) and predestination (*qadar*).⁴ However at the end of the 2nd/8th century, they also started to engage in some philosophical and cosmological issues such as the nature of body, atom, substance, accident, void, motion, and causation.⁵ It is still a matter of debate why *mutakallimūn* became involved in such philosophical and scientific issues, which were named as “subtle” (*daqīq*) or “thin/fine” (*laṭīf*) topics in the classical *kalām*.⁶ It is commonly claimed that this is due to them being theologians in the first place, so they were dealing with these issues in order to demonstrate and defend the articles of Islam based on reason or to confront non-Islamic sects by using a universal language.⁷ However, the level of development and the variety of the cosmological theories put forward by *mutakallimūn* indicate that beyond being apologetic theologians,

³ On this issue, see. Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “İmām Mâtürîdî’nin Tabiat ve İlliyyete Bakışı”, *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmām Mâtürîdî ve Mâtürîdîlik: Milletler Arası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı* (İstanbul, 22-24 Mayıs 2009) (İstanbul: İFAV Publication), 55. Alnoor Dhanani, “al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī on Atomism and the Tabāʾi”, *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmām Mâtürîdî ve Mâtürîdîlik: Milletler Arası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı* (İstanbul, 22-24 Mayıs 2009) (İstanbul: İFAV Publication), 65 ff. Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden, Boston: Brill Publication, 2015), 245. Tahir Uluç, *İmām Mâtürîdî’nin Âlemin Ontolojik Yapısı Hakkında Filozofları Eleştirisi* (İstanbul: İnsan Publishing, 2017), 77.

⁴ Josef van Ess, “The Beginnings of Islamic Theology”, in *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning*, ed. J. E. Murdoch and E. D. Sylla (Dordrecht and Boston: Reidel, 1975), 87–111.

⁵ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought Arabic Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 70, 74; Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1983), 42, S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006) 123; Marwan Rashed, “Natural Philosophy”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson, Richard C. Taylor (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 288; G. C. Anawati, “Kalam”. *Encyclopedia of Religion* second editioned. Lindsay Jones (USA: Macmillan 2005), 8/5059.

⁶ On this issue see. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalam*, 3-4; Bulgen, “Klasik Dönem Kelâmında Dakiku’l-Kelâmın Yeri ve Rolü”, *Turkish Journal of Islamic Studies, İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 33 (2015), 39-72.

⁷ Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 471.

mutakallimūn were also interested in philosophical and scientific issues as seekers of the truth.⁸ Indeed, *kalām* atomism, which is our research topic, also has the characteristics of being a theory that was developed at a period when there were numerous creative ideas and different points of view about matter and the universe within *kalām* circles.⁹

It will be very useful to look closely at the 3rd/9th century, a time when *mutakallimūn* were in a spirit of enormous curiosity and investigation about the universe, in order to see upon what kind of historical and conceptual background Imām al-Māturīdī’s ideas regarding matter relied. In this context, the book of Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935-36), who is the founder of the Ash‘arīyya school, named *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn* (The Doctrines of the Muslims) is one of the rare surviving sources that could provide information about the ideas of *mutakallimūn* with regard to the physical and cosmological theories of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries. Al-Ash‘arī, who is a contemporary of Imām al-Māturīdī, begins the second chapter of his book by saying “Views of People on Subtle (*daqīq*) Issues” and in this chapter, he recounts the ideas of Muslim *mutakallimūn* about such issues as body, atom, substance, accident, motion in a detailed way.¹⁰

al-Ash‘arī reports that at his time *mutakallimūn* were divided into twelve groups regarding their understanding of body (*jism*). As these views relate directly to our topic, it will be important to mention them here. They can be arranged into the following seven groups:

- 1) **Body is that which carries/accepts the accidents.** The first view, which al-Ash‘arī assigns to the Mu‘tazilī *mutakallim* Abu’l-Ḥusayn al-Ṣāliḥī (3rd/9th century), defines the body as “that which accepts/carries (*yaḥtamīlu*) accidents” such as motion and rest. According to him, if an accident is carried by something, it cannot be anything other than a body.¹¹

The remarkable aspect of al-Ṣāliḥī in terms of our topic is that, he also calls both “the indivisible part” (*al-juz’ alladhī lā yatajazza’*) and also “the substance” (*al-jawhar*) as “*jism*” (body) because it accepts/carries accidents. According to him, all classes (*ajnās*) of accidents can be present in the indivisible part except the accident of aggregation/composition (*ta’līf*). Therefore, an atom or indivisible part is a body because it carries accidents, even though it can exist separately from other indivisible parts.¹²

- 2) **Body is that which is composite of indivisible parts.** This view, which is supported by *mutakallimūn* such as ‘Isā al-Ṣūfī (3rd/9th century) and al-Iskāfī (d. 240/854), who are among the Baghdād school

⁸ For example, on this issue see. Josef van Ess, *Theology and Science: The Case of Abū Ishāq al-Nazzām*, Ann Arbor: Center for Near Eastern and North African Studies, University of Michigan, 1978; Anton M. Heinen, “Mutakallimūn and Mathematicians”, *Der Islam*, 55/1 (1978), 57-73. Alnoor Dhanani: “Problems in Eleventh-Century Kalam Physics”, *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies*, 4/1 (Spring/Summer 2002), 73-96.

⁹ Josef van Ess, “Mu‘tezilite Atomism” in *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* translation Jane Marie Todd (England 2006), 79.

¹⁰ Along with al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt*, one of the books that we are going to frequently consult is *Kitāb al-Maqālāt* of Abu’l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931), who is among the leaders of the Baghdād Mu‘tazilites and a contemporary of al-Māturīdī. Al-Ka‘bī, like al-Ash‘arī, in his book opens a chapter, named “thin/fine (*laṭīf*) subject”, and here he recounts the opinions of *kalām* scholars regarding such issues as body, part (atom), substance, accident, motion, time, place, etc. Here the reason why we prioritize al-Ash‘arī but not al-Ka‘bī, who al-Māturīdī frequently mentions and criticizes, is that al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt* is more systematical and detailed compared to al-Ka‘bī’s *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*.

¹¹ Abu’l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 2000), 2/4.

¹² al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/4.

of Mu‘tazila, claims that bodies consist of indivisible parts which come together through the accidents of aggregation (*ijtimā‘*) and composition (*ta‘līf*). Accordingly, when an indivisible part (*al-juz’ alladhī lā yatajazza’*) comes together with another indivisible part, they both become bodies in a composite manner. However, if they separate from each other, they both lose the characteristic of being a body. According to al-Iskāfī, body means “composite” (*mu’talif*), and when two parts come together, composition occurs; thus, two parts are sufficient to form the smallest body.¹³

We must indicate that this approach of al-Iskāfī, which associates the body with the accident of composition and finds two atoms sufficient to constitute the smallest body, later on was also widely accepted by Ash‘arites and Māturīdīs.¹⁴

- 3) Body is that which has three dimensions.** Another view that al-Ash‘arī reports is that of defining the body as length, width, and depth. This view, accepted widely among the Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* at the time when al-Māturīdī lived, was supported not only by the *mutakallimūn* but also by some philosophers (*falāsifā*).¹⁵ Nevertheless, while philosophers argued that the three-dimensional body is compound *per se*, the *mutakallimūn* claimed that it is a composite entity consisting of indivisible parts that come together by means of the accident of aggregation (*ijtimā‘/ta‘līf*).¹⁶ These *mutakallimūn* pointed out that the indivisible parts are dimensionless. Moreover, they were not able to reach an agreement on the minimum number of parts that are necessary to form the smallest body.¹⁷ Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 235/849-59 [?]) claimed that six indivisible parts could form a three-dimensional body by coming together, whereas Hishām b. ‘Amr al-Fuwaṭī (d. 218/833) regarded what Abu’l-Hudhayl deemed to be a part as underlying element (*rukṇ*), and asserted that the smallest body consists of six underlying elements (*arkān*) in a manner that each of its underlying elements has six indivisible parts. Mu‘ammar b. ‘Abbād al-

¹³ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/4-5.

¹⁴ For example, see. Abū l-Ma‘ālī al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, ed. Muḥammad Yūsuf Musa – Al Abdullhāmid (Cairo: Maktaba al-hanci 1950), 17; on this issue see. Bulgen, *Kelām Atomculuğu*, 178.

¹⁵ al-Ka‘bī says as follows: “Mu‘tazilite and most *kalām* scholars (*aktharu ahl al-naẓar*) said: Body (*jism*) is that which is long, wide, and deep. (However) it is different from length, width, depth and other accidents. And, it (*body*) is the carrier (*al-ḥāmil*) of accidents. It is not permissible for the body to get rid of all the accidents and the accidents can only be found in the body.” al-Ka‘bī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 445. It is possible to interpret al-Ka‘bī’s expressions in a way that Mu‘tazilites and the most *kalām* scholars do not count a dimensionless thing as a body.

¹⁶ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/4.

¹⁷ Mu‘tazilite Mutakallim and Zaidī Imām Ibn al-Murtaḍā (d. 840/1437) explains the controversies which took place among *mutakallimūn* about the number of the atoms constituting the minimal body as follows: “Substance (*al-jawhar*) is that which is possible to occupy space (*taḥayyuz*) and impossible to separate (*yastahīlu tajazzia’*). If another one is added to it from the level of those who look at it, it becomes a line. If four square (*murabba’a*) comes together, they become surface. If [the surface] conjoins to its alike, it becomes a body. This is the least of the body. Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf says: Conversely, the least of the body is formed by a combination of six [atoms]. al-Ka‘bī says: It is four; one of them is placed above one of the remaining three. Ash‘arīs say: Instead, the least of it is two; because the body is that which is composite (*al-muallaf*). Karrāmiyya says, on the other hand, body is that which stands by itself. We say as follows: In the lexicon, the body means that something in which length, width, and depth come together (*ijtama’a*), and it only consists of eight substances. Based on this, if there is an increase in terms of these elements, they say: It becomes more voluminous (*ajsama*).” in Ibn al-Murtaḍā, “Riyāḍat al-afḥām fī laṭīf al-kalām” in *Al-Baḥr al-Zakḥkhār al-Jāmi‘ li-Madhāhib ‘Ulamā’ al-Amṣār*, ed. Muḥammad Tamir (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyah, 2001), 1/116

Sulamī (d. 215/830), whose body formula will be accepted widely later on, argued that eight parts must come together to form the smallest body.¹⁸

- 4) **Body is that which consists of substances.** Another noteworthy approach towards the nature of the body that al-Ash‘arī conveys belongs to al-Nazzām, who is among the sixth generation of Mu‘tazilī scholars. According to him, the only accident is motion, and such qualities as color, taste, smell, heat, and coldness that are regarded as accidents by the vast majority of *mutakallimūn* would indeed be interpenetrated substances within a body.¹⁹

Another characteristic of al-Nazzām is that he is a strong opponent of the *kalām* atomism. On the one hand, together with the above-mentioned scholars of the classical period, he defines the body as that which is long, wide and deep; on the other hand, he maintains that there is no end in dividing the body. Al-Ash‘arī reports that al-Nazzām held the opinion that there is a half for every half, and there is a part for every part.²⁰

- 5) **Body is that which consists of substances and accidents.** This opinion, which belongs to ‘Abbād b. Sulaymān, one of the eminent *mutakallimūn* of the Basra school within the Mu‘tazila, maintains that a body is made up of substance and accidents from which is not separated. According to him, the accidents that come apart from its substance are not body. Al-Ash‘arī also reports that ‘Abbād said that “body is the place (*al-makān*)”. ‘Abbād provides evidence for his claim that God is not a body by saying “If He were a body, He would be a place.” and “If He were a body, He would have a half.”²¹

¹⁸ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/4-5; Shī‘ī *Mutakallim* al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) narrates the ideas of *kalām* scholars on the topic in the following manner: “I say that bodies are substances which are combined together (*al-jawāhir al-muallafa*) in terms of length, width and depth. Bodies are composed of at least eight parts (*ajzā*). Two of them are in a manner that is above from the other in terms of length. [The other] two conjoin to these two substances from the right or left side, and consequently, width originates. The remaining four are at the opposite of the aforementioned four substances, and as a result depth occurs. Some *kalām* scholars are in favor of this opinion. While one group claim that bodies are composed of six parts, the other one state that they are constituted from four parts. Another group, on the other hand, said that bodies are composite things (*muallaf*) and compositeness can happen even by two parts.” al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī (Mashad: el-Mu‘tamar al-‘Ālam li Alfīyah al-Shaykh al-Mufid, 1413/2000), 97-98. The reason why Mu‘tazilī scholars focus on the idea that bodies are three-dimensional is that they believe that an atom or indivisible part has no dimension *per se*. Dimensionless of atom enabled them to defend that division is not only possible in actuality (*bi’l-fīl*) but also in mind (*wahm*). On this issue see. al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/5-6. Also see. Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Tadhkirah fī aḥkām al-jawāhir wa-al-a‘rāḍ*, ed. Daniel Gimaret (Cairo: Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, 2009), 1/9; Bulgen, *Klasik İslām Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri*, 68.

¹⁹ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/23; al-Ka‘bī tells that al-Nazzām said the followings: “According to us, visible body is nothing but such elements as color, taste, smell, sound, flexibility and etc. These things, which are bodies (*ajsām*) in themselves, combine (*ijtima‘a*), interpenetrate (*tadākhala*), and then form the dense body (*al-jism al-kathif*). Length is that which is long. Width is that which is wide. There no body other than interlocked length and width. This is his view of inanimate objects. As for the soul (*al-rūh*), it is a thin/transparent body (*jism laṭīf*) and one thing (*shay’ wāḥid*). All living things are one genre (*jins wāḥid*).” See. al-Ka‘bī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 444.

²⁰ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/6; That al-Nazzām said qualities are substances/bodies and regarded them as composed of infinite parts caused him to be subjected intense criticisms by both *kalām* scholars themselves and philosophers. al-Nazzām attempted to respond to these criticisms by introducing some theories such as interpenetration (*tadākhul*), latency (*al-kumūn*), manifestation (*al-zuhūr*) and leap (*tafra*). On this issue see. Bulgen, *Klasik İslām Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri*, 77-112.

²¹ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/6.

- 6) **Body is that which is formed through a collection of accidents.** One of the remarkable opinions that al-Ash‘arī recounts with regard to the nature of bodies belongs to Ḍirār b. ‘Amr (d. 200/815 [?]), who is among the first representatives of the Baṣra Mu‘tazilites. He claims that bodies are a bundle of accidents i.e. that they are constituted by a combination of different types of accidents. According to him, bodies cannot be abstracted from accidents such as color, taste, measurement, weightiness, weightlessness, heat, coldness, dryness, wetness, life, and death and from their opposites. al-Ash‘arī also reports: Ḍirār says that accidents cannot preserve their existence if they are separated from the body, and that for a body to cease to exist indicates the decomposition of accidents.²²
- 7) **Body is that which exists.** Another view about the body, which al-Ash‘arī conveys, is supported by Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795), who is a Shī‘ī *mutakallim*. He refers to “the existent, thing and that which exists by itself” by uttering the term “body.”²³ These opinions of Hishām, later on, will be subject to much criticism by many *mutakallimūn*, including Imām al-Māturīdī, because in this case, since Allah is also an existent, thing and that which exists by Himself, it will pave the way to call Allah a body (*tajsīm*) [corporealism] and thereby a likening (*tashbīh*) [anthropomorphism] between Allah and the creation will be brought about.

The most striking part of the above-mentioned accounts given by al-Ash‘arī with regards to the definition of body is that the Muslim *mutakallimūn* of al-Māturīdī’s age were in an environment of sharp disagreements and disputes. Almost all *mutakallimūn* accepted different theses concerning the nature of bodies and their qualities. At that time, there were *mutakallimūn* defending atomism, particularly Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf, on the other hand, there were some who objected to atomism such as al-Nazzām. Again, these controversies reveal that in that period, such concepts as “part”, “substance”, and “accident” took center stage on the subject of the elements that compose bodies.

If we take a closer look at these concepts, in that period, it can be realized that *mutakallimūn* mostly preferred the word “part” (*juzʿ*) to indicate the indivisible parts of the body. Imām al-Ash‘arī states that Muslim *mutakallimūn* are divided into 14 sects concerning whether it is permissible for things in a body to become entirely separate from each other as a result of the composition or for a body to turn into an indivisible part. The accounts that al-Ash‘arī reported can be put into three categories, first eleven of which

²² al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/6-7; al-Ka‘bī narrates Ḍirār’s opinions based on Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 301/913-14 [?]) in the following way: “Ḍirār said bodies are composed (*allafa*) and combined (*jumi‘a*) accidents. Thanks to this, they straighten up and become fixed, and turn into bodies that accidents inhere on themselves and transform into one state from one state. Bodies must consist of such accidents as life, death, colors and tastes and the contraries of them. However, such accidents, which neither themselves nor their contraries can be separated from bodies, as pleasure, anguish, knowledge, illiteracy are not among the parts of bodies, for a dead person becomes abstracted from all of these accidents. Because, according to him, these accidents cannot turn into bodies again after they exist once and then perish. It is only possible at the moment of their first creation. Because these accidents can only be originated collectively. According to him, when they are existent, they can all come together; however, they cannot be separated altogether. He (Ibn al-Rāwandī) said: When I told him (Ḍirār) that based on this analogy it would not be permissible for them to be separated (*al-iftirāq*)”; at one time he said, “their separation means their annihilation (*fanāʾ*)”, and at another time he said, “two bodies can be separated, but once they exist, the parts of bodies (*ab‘ād al-qjsām*) cannot be separated”. al-Ka‘bī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 443-444.

²³ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/6.

belongs to the *mutakallimūn* accepting atomism, and two of which belongs to those who oppose atomism and the last of which belongs to those on the fence i.e., agnostic, about the issue.²⁴

a) The Atomists

When al-Ash‘arī’s explanations are taken into consideration, it is seen that a vast majority of the Muslim *mutakallimūn* adopted the view that “atom” or “the indivisible part” is existent.²⁵ However, these *mutakallimūn* could not reach an agreement on whether the atoms are bodies, substances, or accidents, whether the atoms are visible; and whether parts have directions/sides (*jihāt*) and ends (*nihāyāt*). Also, they failed to agree on at least how many atoms are needed to form the smallest body, and how many atoms can come into contact simultaneously with the atoms like themselves, and which accidents the atoms can carry when they are not aggregated to another atom.²⁶ Similarly, the accounts he conveyed contain the hot debates among the *mutakallimūn* about the idea, which represent one of the key elements of the *kalām* atomism, that indivisible parts, when separated, do not have sides, ends and dimensions (*ab‘ād*) and that they attain such qualities as length, width, and depth (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*) after they come together and become a body.²⁷

Another outstanding view among the ones al-Ash‘arī reported belongs to “the proponents of accidents” (*aṣḥāb al-a‘rāḍ*) such as Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, Ḥaṣṣ al-Fard, and Ḥusayn al-Najjār, who support a bundle theory i.e., the thesis that bodies consist of the originated accidents such as color, taste, heat, coldness, firmness, and softness, have an atomists point of view as well. Just as other atomist *mutakallimūn* discussed the least required number of parts needed to form a body, in the opinion of the aforesaid *mutakallimūn*, i.e.

²⁴ For detailed evaluation of this classification see. Bulğen, *Kelâm Atomculuğu*, 176-186.

²⁵ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/13-16.

²⁶ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/13-16.

²⁷ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/13-16. Ibn al-Murtaḍā conveys the debates among the *mutakallimūn* regarding whether a substance has a directions/sides (*jihāt*) as follows: “Abū ‘Alī, Qāḍī al-Quḍāt and al-Ka‘bī says: Side of the substance (*jihat al-jawhar*) depends on what is outside of itself. On the contrary, Abū Hāshim says: It depends on the substance itself. We, on the other hand, say: We know this through an indication and do not assume it as seeing. Affirmation of the sides for a substance entails its separation (*tajazzia*). Abū Hāshim says: Substance can adhere to six [substances], which is equivalent to itself. Consequently, it happens to have six sides. I say: Because the second opinion requires the division of substance, the first opinion is more compelling (*aqwā*).” Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Riyāḍat al-afḥām fī laṭīf al-kalām*, 117. Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī (d. 415/1024) quoted the following in terms of the discussion on whether the aspect of the particle is external to it or belongs to it essentially: “Our Sheikh Abū Hāshim defended the view that the sides/directions (*jihāt*) belongs to the part. However, Abu’l-Qāsim (al-Ka‘bī) claimed that it is separate from it. Abū ‘Alī also supported him in this regard. The view, which is the closest to the truth in this issue, is that the sides belongs to the substance. For, thanks to its space occupation (*taḥayyuz*), it meets with six parts like itself. Those who do not accept that the aspect belongs to the substance do not deny this. See. Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī, *Masā’il fī al-Khilāf bayn al-Basriyyīn wa al-Baghdādiyyīn*, ed. Ma’n Ziyada and Ridwan al-Sayyid (Beirut: Ma’had al-Inma’ al-‘Arabi, 1979), 59-60; al-Nīsābūrī here considered that thanks to the feature to occupy space, the substance is located at a particular direction, it aggregates with six atoms like itself, it prevents another substance from being in the space it occupies. However, he also defended the view that this would not require the substance to be divisible in actual or conceptual terms. also see, Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Tadhkirah*, 86-89. By considering these discussions, Alnoor Dhanani states that the *kalām* atomism are formulated within the framework of a discrete geometry – similar to the Epicurean minimal parts. For, he reckoned that the following expressions, which are widely used by the *mutakallimūn*, make sense only in the context of discrete geometry: “the atom does not possess length, width, and breadth”, “the smallest line (or length) is made out of two atoms”, “the smallest plane (or length and width) is made out of two smallest contiguous lines”, and “the smallest body (or length, width, and breadth) is made out of two planes which are put on top of each other”. See Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalam*, 133.

at least ten parts must come together to form a body. Moreover, they also repudiated the thesis regarding the interpenetration of the bodies (*tadāhku*), supported by al-Nazzām, just as other atomist *mutakallimūn* did, and they maintained the idea that these parts can only come together through being adjacent (*mujāwara*) to each other.²⁸ Indeed, al-Kaʿbī, who is a contemporary of al-Māturīdī, reports that some *mutakallimūn* such as Ḥusayn al-Najjār, who supports the idea that bodies in the universe are formed through the unification of the accidents, say the following:

Big bodies (*al-aṣām al-ʿiẓām*) can be divided up to the last part which is indivisible (*juzʾ lā yatajazzaʾ*). This part is a body and it is the smallest of the bodies (*asgharu al-aṣām*). It has length, width and depth. However, it cannot be divided further or become separated (*lan yajūzu an yunṣafa aw yatajazzaʾa*). For it ceases to exist in this case.²⁹

The attention-grabbing part of this explanation of al-Kaʿbī is that those who claimed that bodies are formed by composition of the accidents, had atomistic approach by maintaining the divisibility of bodies up to the last indivisible part. On the other hand, they argued that this last indivisible part is also a dimensional body. This indicates that these atomist *mutakallimūn* who defend the thesis that bodies are composed of accidents, accept that these atoms can at least be divided not mentally but actually. However, according to them, this division results in the annihilation of atoms rather than causing the formation of ever smaller parts.

It will be significantly important for our discussion to note the details that al-Ashʿarī reports, such as atoms not having sides (*jihāt*) or ends (*nihāyāt*), or dimensions (*abʿād*), as well as that they attained these qualities after they come together through the accident of composition, and that this would be the reason why bodies could be called “composite”. We will return to these discussions when we are dealing with al-Māturīdī’s views on atomism.

b) The Anti-atomists

In the era when Imām al-Ashʿarī and Imām al-Māturīdī lived, there were some *mutakallimūn*, who opposed atomism by claiming that bodies could be divided ad infinitum, even though the majority of *mutakallimūn* adopted an atomistic approach with regard to the objects in the universe (*ʿālam*). Imām al-Ashʿarī makes a distinction between two anti-atomist views just as he put the atomists under different groups.

The first of two views is attributed to al-Nazzām. He is said to have claimed that every part has a part, every piece has a piece, and every half has a half. Therefore, according to him, bodies can be divided ad infinitum.³⁰

²⁸ al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 2/15-16.

²⁹ al-Kaʿbī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 451.

³⁰ al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 2/16. According to the accounts al-Kaʿbī gives, al-Nazzām based his opinion on a theological argument as follows: “Just as it is impossible (*muḥāl*) for God to create something and then to not be able to create something bigger than it, it is also impossible for him to be unable to create something smaller (*asgharu*) than it.” See. al-Kaʿbī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 451. *Kalām* scholars attempted to confront al-Nazzām’s criticism by introducing the “non-dimensional atom” idea. According to atomist *mutakallimūn* the reason that indivisible substance or part cannot be divided into smaller parts is not that it is too small but it is “dimensionless”, like “point” in mathematic. Because it is absurd to divide something dimensionless, i.e., that does not have sides (*jihāt*) or ends (*nihāyāt*), or dimensions (*abʿād*), it would also be absurd to associate God’s power with dividing atoms. For

al-Ash‘arī ascribes another anti-atomist view to some philosophers (*mutafalsifa*) without giving their names. They would have argued that bodies are finite in actuality (*fi fi‘l*), but there would be no end to divide them in terms of possibility (*fi l-quwwa wa l-imkān*).³¹ We know that this view, which is based on Aristotle’s hylomorphic (prime matter-form) theory, is advocated by some peripatetic philosophers such as al-Kindī (d. 252/866 [?]), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037).³²

The fact that al-Ash‘arī distinguished the two anti-atomist views of al-Nazzām and those philosophers from each other implies that al-Nazzām maintains the idea that bodies are formed through the composition of actual infinite parts. Indeed, that al-Nazzām adopts the “leap” (*tafra*) theory to solve the problem occurring about the movement in the infinitely divisible space and that he accepts the interpenetration (*tadākhul*) and latency (*al-kumūn*) and manifestation (*al-zuhūr*) of bodies indicate that he was in favor of the thesis that bodies are created through the composition of an infinite number of parts or substances.³³ Thus, whereas Islamic philosophers maintained that bodies have the potential to be infinitely divided, they did not need to produce such theories as leap, interpenetration, latency, manifestation, and they opposed these types of ideas.³⁴ However, it needs to be mentioned that some Mu‘tazilī *mutakallimūn* such as al-Ka‘bī and al-Khayyāt (300/913 [?]) are of different opinions about al-Nazzām.³⁵ For instance, al-Ka‘bī gives the following account of al-Nazzām:

Body (*al-jism*) can be divided (*yatajazzau*) ad infinitum (*bi-lānihaya*). Each part (*kulla juz‘*) of the body is again a body (*jism*). (Infinite division) does not occur in the body in actuality (*bi-al-fi‘l*). This is something that is only

God’s power is not related to absurd/impossible things. The fact that atomist *kalām* scholars substantiated their claim that a division would be absurd in all ways depending on the dimensionless nature of atoms led them to attach very much importance to the idea of atoms being dimensionless and bodies being three dimensional (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*). Concerning the arguments the atomist Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf and anti-atomist al-Nazzām put forward against each other, see my book, *Klasik İslam Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri = Critisims of Atomism in Classical Islamic Thought*, 79.

³¹ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/16.

³² On this issue see. Bulgen, *Klasik İslâm Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri*, 135.

³³ Ibn al-Murtaḍā relates the discussions of the *mutakallimūn* of the classical period regarding atomism in the following manner: “People of Basra claims that the individual substance (*al-jawhar al-fard*) cannot be separated, al-Nazzām, on the contrary, maintains that it can be divided infinitely (*lā ilā nihāya*). Some of them refrained from giving an opinion, and philosophers (*al-falāsifa*) have different views. We say: If it [atom] separated, it would be composite (*muallaḥ*), and it would not be impossible for each body to be infinitely divided. Because it [the division] would not end. Due to this entailment, Al-Nazzām had to defend the leap (*tafra*) theory. See. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Riyāzat al-afhām fī laṭīf al-kalām*, 117.

³⁴ Bulgen, *Klasik İslâm Düşüncesinde Atomculuk Eleştirileri*, 84.

³⁵ al-Khayyāt, who is one of the Mu‘tazilites *mutakallimūn*, especially exerted himself to make the views attributed to al-Nazzām and heavily criticized such as leap, latency, manifestation, interpenetration, infinite divisibility of bodies, coherent by moderating them. For instance, he defended the view that al-Nazzām did not advocate infinite division, rather he was of the mind that a thing, which is finite in one respect needs to be finite in other respects as well, which is compatible with the general views of the *mutakallimūn*. See, al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, 33. al-Khayyāt also stated that the view which is attributed to al-Nazzām “There is no such thing that is traversed and would not be infinite” is actually a slander brought forward by Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. 301/913-14 [?]). In al-Khayyāt’s account, Materialists (Dahriyya) claimed that bodies are not limited in terms of quantity and size, and by contrast, al-Nazzām demonstrated that bodies are limited in terms of quantity and size on the basis of the fact that bodies can be traversed. See, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, 35; al-Khayyāt also stated that the theory of latency and manifestation is also a slander mounted by Ibn al-Rāwandī against al-Nazzām. See, al-Khayyāt *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* ed. Albert Nasri Nader (Beirut: al-Matbaat al-Katulikiyya, 1957), 52.

imaginary (*mawhūm*) and intelligible (*maʿqūl*). Furthermore, bodies do not have a limit in terms of their sides (*jihātihi*).³⁶

As is seen, al-Kaʿbī, contrary to what is commonly believed, states that al-Naẓẓām does not defend the view indicating that bodies are formed by a combination of an infinite number of substances. According to him, al-Naẓẓām like the philosophers claimed that bodies could be divided infinitely in supposition (*biʾl-quwwa waʾl-imkān*).

c) Agnostics

According to al-Ashʿarī, at that time, some people had a skeptical approach towards atomism and said that they do not know whether the atom is divisible or not.³⁷

At the time when Imām al-Ashʿarī and Imām al-Māturīdī lived, another concept that left its mark on the discussions regarding the nature of the bodies and atomism was “substance”. Imām al-Ashʿarī lists the different views of people at that time about the concept of substance by dividing them into four groups:

(1) Christians (*al-Naṣārā*): Substance is that which stands by itself (*al-qāʾim bi nafsīhi*).

(2) Some philosophers (*al-Mutafalsifa*): Substance is that which stands by itself and accepts the contraries.

(3) Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915): Substance is that which bears (*al-ḥāmil*) the accidents when it exists. According to al-Ashʿarī, al-Jubbāʾī claimed that substances become substances by virtue of themselves and that they are known as substances even before they come into being.

(4) al-Ṣāliḥī: Substance is that which bears/accepts (*iḥtamala*) the accidents. According to him, a substance can exist without accidents being created for it, and it can carry accidents without being a locus for them.³⁸

The abovementioned accounts about the definition of the term substance (*jawhar*) given by al-Ashʿarī show that in that period, this term “substance” was not used to signify atoms alone as it was common in the later periods in kalām, but rather it had multiple meanings. The definitions of substance provided in that era draw more attention to such qualities of substances as being self-subsistent (*qāʾim bi nafsīhi*) and being a locus/substratum (*maḥāl*) for accidents.

al-Ashʿarī recounts the views concerning the question of whether all substances are bodies or whether there are some substances that are not bodies, by classifying them into three groups:

(1) Some atomist *mutakallimūn* such as Abuʾl-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, Muʿammar and al-Jubbāʾī defended the impossibility of a substance to be a body. This is because, according to them, body would be that which has length, width, and depth. Since a single substance does not have any dimension, it cannot be a body.³⁹

³⁶ al-Kaʿbī, *Māqālāt*, 445.

³⁷ al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 2/16.

³⁸ al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 2/8.

³⁹ al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 2/8; This opinion of them, which identifies the substance (*jawhar*) with atom, will be widely accepted by the Ashʿarites and Māturīdites with the name “single substance” (*al-jawhar al-wāḥid*). Regarding this see. Bulgen, *Kelām atomculuğu*, 186.

(2) The second view, which al-Ash‘arī mentions, is attributed to al-Ṣāliḥī, and as we can see based on his approach to body, he prefers to refer to substance as “body” because it accepts accidents, even though he adopts the theory of atomism.

(3) The last view divides substances into two categories. The first of them considers a substance as a being a compound (*murakkab*) whereas the second category regards substance as a being a non-compound. This shows that using the word “substance” in that period did not mean the adoption of the theory of atomism.⁴⁰

Another crucial debate about the substance (*jawhar*) is whether it is homogeneous (*jins wāḥid*). al-Ash‘arī classifies the views concerning this matter into seven groups. Accordingly, while (1) Aristotelians, who consider the universe to be one single substance, defended that substances might differ from or be similar to accidents, (2) Mu‘tazilī al-Jubbā‘ī claims that substances *per se* are homogeneous. (3) Dualists argued that substances are two genera being light and darkness. Also, whereas (4) Marqūnīya claimed that they are three genera (*ajnās*), (5) naturalists (*aṣḥāb al-ṭabā‘ī*) maintained that substances are four contrary genera hot and cold, moist and dry. Moreover, (6) some argued that substances are five genera consisting of four natures and the spirit (*rūḥ*) by adding spirit into the substance theory of naturalists. Lastly, (7) al-Nazzām regarded the accidents included on the contrary genus as accidents and enumerated them as whiteness, blackness, yellowness, redness, greenness, heat, coldness, sweetness, tartness, smell, taste, humidness, dryness, shape and spirit. According to him, all living beings have homogeneous spirits.⁴¹

What draws attention among al-Ash‘arī’s narrations is the subtle differences between Aristotle’s concept of substance (*jawhar*) and that of al-Jubbā‘ī who embraced atomism. Aristotle, who did not accept the existence of void and adopted the idea of the continuity of the universe, claimed that the universe as a whole is a single substance and that substances share differences and similarities based on the accidents alone. According to al-Jubbā‘ī, however, the universe consists of numerous substances, and they are homogeneous by themselves, not because of the accidents they inhere. This claim of al-Jubbā‘ī is significant in that it shows that each and every substance is individual and separate in itself. According to the atomist *mutakallimūn*, since substances carry accidents as secondary qualities, they do not cause an essential alteration, contrary to what Aristotle states. Even though the accidents are not durable, substances can have the accident of permanence/continuity (*baqā’*); therefore, they retain their existence.⁴²

⁴⁰ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/8.

⁴¹ *Maqālāt*, 2/9. Al-Sheikh al-Mufid expresses his opinion about the issue as follows: “All substances/atoms (*al-jawāhir*) are from the same genus (*mutajānis*). Differentiation only happens through the accidents (*al-a‘rāḍ*) that are different in themselves. Most of the *Ahl al-Tawḥīd* think the same.” *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, 95.

⁴² Ibn al-Murtaḍā demonstrates *mutakallimūn*’s different opinions about the persistence/continuity (*al-baqā’*) of the substance as follows: “The majority say: [substance] is that which is persistent, that is, whose existence is continuous (*mustamir al-wujūd*). al-Nazzām says: Instead, the existence of substance is renewed (*yatajaddadu*) from one state to another along with the agent (*bi al-fā’il*). We say: We necessarily know that a body we see today is the body we saw yesterday and that condemning an act belonging to yesterday is regarded as gratifying. A matter: Abu Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī claims that the substance is described with permanence (*al-baqā’*); conversely, Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā‘ī maintains that only Allah can be attributed with persistence (*al-baqā’*) and eternity (*qidam*). We say: Permanence only means the continuity of an existent within two-time units. Eternity, on the other hand, indicates the presence of existence before anything else. Therefore, the one that is in such a manner is described with these two.” See. Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Riyāḍat al-afnām fī laṭāif al-kalām*, 115; also see. al-Sheikh al-Mufid, *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, 96-97; Ibn Mattawayh

Before proceeding to Imām al-Māturīdī's ideas of atomism, we must highlight the concept of "accident" because this concept has a significant place and role in the classical *mutakallimūn* including al-Māturīdī.

al-Ash'arī's accounts in *Maqālāt* indicate that, except Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm⁴³ (d. 200/816), *mutakallimūn*, in general, have accepted the existence of accidents and that they used this utterance to refer to the secondary qualities, which are contrary to each other and attained by substances in time, such as motion, rest, composition, decomposition, color, heat, coldness, death, life, will.⁴⁴ According to the majority of *mutakallimūn*, these accidents, each of which indicates a certain meaning in the mind, cannot exist in the extra-mental realm by themselves without being carried by a locus. Similarly, accidents cannot carry accidents; instead, they are carried by substances standing by themselves. On the other hand, it is not possible for a substance to be devoid of accidents such as motion, rest, composition, and separation. If substances are incapable of being free from originated accidents, this implies that substances are also originated.⁴⁵

Based on al-Ash'arī's descriptions, it will be noticed that most *mutakallimūn* have accepted the substance-accident dualism; however, as previously mentioned, there were also those like Ḍirār b. 'Amr who defended the notion that the universe was formed completely out of accidents or others like al-Nazzām who accepted that only motion was an accident and that therefore other things which other *mutakallimūn* identified as accidents were in fact substances/bodies. Also, *mutakallimūn* were in disagreement regarding issues such as whether atoms carried certain accidents individually or as composites.

Another noteworthy dispute concerning our topic that al-Ash'arī recounted about accidents is the question of whether accidents are continuous. Most *mutakallimūn* accepted that bodies and substances were continuous, and some believed that some accidents were also continuous.⁴⁶ al-Ash'arī divides the views held by the *mutakallimūn* into six different categories. According to this classification, the first group, including Abu'l-Qāsim al-Ka'bī al-Balkhī from the Baghdad school (d. 319/913), a contemporary of al-Māturīdī, argued

al-Tadhkirah fī aḥkām al-jawāhir wa-al-a'rāḍ, 1/37; Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-Afkār fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*. ed. A. al-Mahdī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 2002), 3/36.

⁴³ al-Aṣamm, who is a member of Baṣra Mu'tazila, maintained that what really matters is bodies having length, width and depth, and that the existence of accidents, outside bodies, such as action, standing up, sitting, composition, separation, motion, rest, color, sound, taste and smell cannot be proven in actuality. It is attention-grabbing that this claim of al-Aṣamm resembles the antic Greek atomists, who state that all physical and spiritual qualities except from atoms are mere subjective ideas and reduce them into primary qualities such as shape and volume. On this issue, see. Bulgen, *Kelām Atomculuğu*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Maqālāt*, 2/44; for detailed information about accidents see. Bulgen, *Kelām Atomculuğu*, 199.

⁴⁵ al-Sheikh al-Mufid conveys the related discussions in the following manner: "I say that each accident can inhere (*ḥulūl*) in substance (*al-jawhar*). Substance becomes the recipient (*muḥtamil*) of the accident to exists. For substances cannot be devoid of accidents or other subsequent accidents. This is the opinion of Abu'l-Qāsim al-Balkhī and Abū 'Alī al-Jubbāi. Most of the preceding *kalām* scholars also thought the same way. On this issue, [Abū Hāshim] 'Abdussalām b. Muhammad al-Jubbāi [d. 321/933] thought differently and regarded it as permissible that substances can be detached from colors, tastes, smells, and similar accidents." *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, 96. However, we must note that this expression of al-Ka'bī does not mean that Abū Hāshim maintained that substances could be entirely free from accidents. Because according to him, substances cannot be devoid of such spatial accidents as motion-rest and composition-separation (*al-akwān*). Regarding this topic, see. al-Nisābūrī, *Masā'il fī al-Khilāf*, 62 ff.

⁴⁶ On this issue see. Ahmet Şenharputlu, *Klasik Kelām Döneminde Arazların Bekası Sorunu* (Unpublished MA Thesis, Marmara University Institute of Social Sciences, 2017).

that accidents could not exist in two separate time frames, even though they recognized the existence of all accidents including colors, tastes, smells, life, power, death, voice, and sounds.⁴⁷ Abu'l-Hudhayl and al-Jubbāi, from the Baṣra school, defended the idea that while certain accidents were continuous, others were not. For example, according to Abu'l-Hudhayl, accidents like colors, tastes, smells, life and power were permanent. However, motion was not permanent, and for this reason all movement in the hereafter, i.e. heaven and hell, would end one day, leaving its place for the permanent accident of rest. According to Ḍirār b. 'Amr and Ḥusayn al-Najjār, who believed that the universe was composed solely of accidents; accidents were permanent when they were inside of bodies, but those accidents, which are separated from bodies, could not exist in two different time units. However, as opposed to Ḍirār, Najjār did not consider human capacity for action to be a body; and therefore, argued that it was not permanent. al-Nazzām, who did not believe that any accidents existed besides motion, argued that motion was not permanent but continuously renewed. Lastly, Bishr b. al-Mu'tamir (d. 210-225/825-840), the founder of the Baghdad school of the Mu'tazila school, argued that all accidents were permanent and that an accident would never end unless it is replaced by its opposite.⁴⁸ The views of *mutakallimūn* regarding the issue of the continuity of accidents had an impact on their understanding of theological issues such as the creation of the universe, causality, human acts, miracles, and even the afterlife.

In summary, the discussions regarding the concepts of body, atom, substance, and accident, as derived from the work of *Maqālāt* by Imām al-Ash'arī and al-Ka'bī, show that, in the lifetime of Imām al-Māturīdī, there were many differing opinions held by the *mutakallimūn* on the structure and qualities of the entities that make up the universe. In that period, the conceptual solidification of 5th/11th century had not yet emerged. As there were those who said that the universe was formed by substances and accidents, so they were those who argued that it was formed only by accidents or by substances. Furthermore, different thinkers used the terms “substance,” “accident,” and “body,” in ways that carried different meanings. A

⁴⁷ *Maqālāt*, 2/44.

⁴⁸ *Maqālāt*, 2/44; al-Sheikh al-Mufīd narrates the opinions of *mutakallimūn* related to the matter as follows: “Substances are among the things whose persistence (*al-baqā'*) is permissible. Most of the time they exist and then they disappear from the world as soon as the persistence leaves them. Most of the members of *Ahl al-Tawḥīd* hold this opinion. Abu'l-Qāsim al-Balkhī also accepted this view. However, both himself and Abū 'Alī al-Jubbāi, also his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāi, as well as Nawbahtiyans out of the Imāmiyyah and their followers opposed this view we described above concerning the reason for the disappearance of substances. al-Nazzām, on the other hand, believed in a completely different way from all of them and claimed that Allah recreates bodies again and again (*yatajaddadu*) and brings them into existence (*yaḥduthu*) each moment. (...) Consequently, bodies are among persistent things and I have already said this about atom (*al-jawhar al-munfarida*). In my opinion, neither the accident of aggregation (*al-ta'lif*) nor other accidents are continuous. This opinion belongs to Abu'l-Qāsim al-Balkhī and a preceding group from Baghdad Mu'tazila. Apart from al-Nazzām, no one among the *Ahl al-Tawḥīd* has thought differently in this issue. al-Nazzām, however, asserted that bodies are being recreated (*tatajaddadu*) each moment.” See. *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, 96, 98; al-Sheikh al-Mufīd also says: “I say: Accidents are significances that needs locus. Persistence is not possible for any kind of accident. This is the opinion of most of Baghdad Mu'tazilites. However, Baṣras and other sects thinks differently on this issue.” *Awāil al-Maqālāt*, 97. In this regard, Imāmu'l-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) stated that al-Nazzām identified substances with the accidents and defended that substances are renewed on each instant by considering accidents substances. In al-Juwaynī's account, this view of al-Nazzām leads to a position which is not compatible with the necessary (*iḍtirārī*) knowledge. It would lead to absurd situations, in which two individuals, who discuss with each other, would not be the same persons at the end of the discussion, since they are renewed in time. See, al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, Ed. 'Alī Sāmī Nashshār, Fayṣal Budayr 'Awn, Suhayr Muḥammad Mukhtār (Alexandria: Munsha'āt al-Ma'ārif, 1969), 160.

kalām scholar who argued that the universe was completely made up of accidents or substances alone could have been a proponent of some type of atomism. At the same time, a scholar who held the opinion that the universe was only comprised of substances might have subscribed to an anti-atomist viewpoint. In that period, alongside those who defined indivisible particles that carried accidents as bodies, there were others who, despite being atomists, gave space in their systems for concepts such as nature and causality. Therefore, Imām al-Ash‘arī shows us that in the period of Imām al-Māturīdī, the mere use of the concept of substance by a *kalām* scholar, or his contention that the universe was formed out of substances and accidents, do not provide us with sufficient information to assert whether these scholars had accepted or rejected atomism.

On the other hand, the explanations made by Imām al-Ash‘arī in the midst of this conceptual confusion gives us certain indicators by which we may analyze which scholars were atomists and which were not. According to al-Ash‘arī, atomists were generally united in defending the understanding that a composite object or a body is formed through aggregation/composition of particles that are simple or finite in terms of division or separation. In other words, atomists believed that observable phenomena did not contain internal structures that were continuous, and that essentially individual particles formed as composites through the accident of aggregation/composition (*ta‘līf*). What separated Islamic atomists from non-Muslim atomists was that the former defended the idea that indivisibility was impossible not just in actuality but also impossible in theory based on the premise that an atom was dimensionless like a point. This understanding leads the Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* to describe atoms as having no sides (*al-jihāt*), ends (*al-nihāyāt*), or dimensions (*al-ab‘ād*), and bodies as three-dimensional (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*) and having directions and ends.

2. The Concepts of Body, Substance and Accident in the Thought System of al-Māturīdī

As it is known, Imām al-Māturīdī lived in the Transoxiana area within the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries. Most of his works are not extant today as it is the case with the other *mutakallimūn* from his times; however, while *maqālāt*, *firāq* and *tabaqāt* books recount numerous views about Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite *mutakallimūn*, they have fallen unusually silent concerning Imām al-Māturīdī. Sources we can refer to gather information about his ideas consist of a couple of extant manuscripts of himself and the views which are ascribed to him by his successors, primarily by Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114).⁴⁹

Imām al-Māturīdī’s most important surviving work in which we can find detailed information about his theological views is *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*.⁵⁰ His main aim in this book is not primarily to do research on the nature of physical objects and their properties in the same way that a physicist or naturalist does; instead, it is to demonstrate and defend the basic principles of Islamic revelation, particularly the principle of

⁴⁹ Regarding Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī’s theological opinions, see. Bekir Topaloğlu, “Māturīdī”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Publications, 2003) 28/151-157.

⁵⁰ The references will be made in this study to *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, are based on the Arabic publication made by late Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (Ankara: TDV Publication 2017) and the Turkish translation made by Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: TDV Publication 2015). The first-page number belongs to the Arabic publication, and the second one refers to the Turkish translation.

monotheism, i.e., *tawḥīd*.⁵¹ In this sense, the cosmological matters he alluded in to this book are more of a part of “natural theology”, which can be described as proving God’s existence by reason. Thus, contrary to the Muʿtazilite *mutakallimūn* such as Abu’l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf, Muʿammar and al-Nazzām, whose opinions Imām al-Ashʿarī mentioned above under the *daqīq al-kalām*-heading, and who meticulously discussed together such concepts as body, substance, accident and furthered their interests in this field up to the level of a physicist; Imām al-Māturīdī did not engage in matters of natural philosophy unless they were related to theological issues.

That Imām al-Māturīdī’s interest in the physical and cosmological matters had a religious apologetic purpose is not a general conclusion we have reached using his surviving works. Conversely, he himself demands from *mutakallimūn* to avoid participating in detailed debates on these kinds of scientific issues beyond the need. Indeed, he criticizes al-Nazzām, who argues with Sumaniyya about the constituent properties of living beings in detail:

These are all pointless expressions. What can be said about this subject is that those objects have been created as they are and been given their present natures (*tabāʿi*): Some substances (*jawāhir*) fly, some float in the water, and still others walk on the earth. Trying to find a cause for all these issues would mean an attempt to overpower God of the universe and probing into the matters that are not permitted and lie outside human conception. These issues are not among the ones that the religion is responsible for their explanation, as is with the investigating of material objects (*tahqīq al-aʿyān*).⁵²

In the text above, it is remarkable that Imām al-Māturīdī indicates that the detailed investigation (*tahqīq*) regarding the material objects or bodies (*aʿyān*) do not have a direct relation to religion and maintains that humans cannot ultimately grasp the very essence of such matters. Imām al-Māturīdī also seems to have a similar approach in his book, *Taʿwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, on the Qurʾanic exegesis. While he is interpreting the verse 24/25, “God created every moving (living) being from water,” he draws attention to the fact that humankind is not capable of knowing the true nature of the things. Thus, according to him, it will be a more accurate approach to account for the generation and evolvement observed in nature directly by God’s power, knowledge, wisdom and governance rather than explaining them through natures and causes.⁵³

The Māturīdite scholars who followed Imām al-Māturīdī also had a similar stance. They also stated that such detailed issues as nature of matter and the properties of the living beings, which are not directly related to the religion. Thus, one should avoid dealing with them in great depth. Abu’l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, a famous Māturīdite scholar, explains the fact that Imām al-Māturīdī did not participate in exhaustive debates about the meaning of “body” (*jism*) as follows:

The reason for this is that he does not want to engage in describing the true nature of anything (*ḥaqīqa shayʿ*) unless it is necessary for the matters concerning his religion (*fi amri dīnihi*). (...) As for al-Ashʿarī, he made an

⁵¹ For similar interperation, see Richard M. Frank, “Notes and Remarks on the *tabāʿi* in the Teaching of al-Māturīdī”, in *Melanges D’islamologie*. Ed. Pierre Salmon, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 139.

⁵² al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 239 (242). From now on, the references made to this book will be referred as *Tawḥīd* without using author’s name. The emphasis is added.

⁵³ Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Taʿwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Halil İbrahim Kaçar and Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2007), 10/185

effort to examine it. He was certainly convinced that a [body] could not be a name for a thing connected via three sides; length, width and depth.⁵⁴

As it can be seen, al-Nasafī says that Imām al-Māturīdī did not engage in describing the true nature of body because this was not essential in terms of religion. Also, he reports that Imām al-Ash‘arī, like a physicist/philosopher, took part in serious discussions about the body refusing to define it as three dimensional.

Concerning the issue of accidents, al-Nasafī states that Imām al-Māturīdī avoided expressing a strong opinion about the true nature of accidents by saying "it is more secure to keep quiet in this matter because we do not have any information indicating that not knowing this issue means repudiating a religious obligation."⁵⁵ Right after this, al-Nasafī generalizes about al-Māturīdī’s approach above to other notable scholars of the sect and says: "It is one of the renowned views of our companions (*aṣḥābinā*) that they did not try to understand the true nature of things (*ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’*) that were not essential in order to be able to confirm the principle of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*)."⁵⁶ According to al-Nasafī, what is essential about the matter of accidents is nothing more than proving that they originated in time and substances, which are parts of the universe, cannot be exempt from originated accidents; and thereby furnishing evidence for the creation of the universe altogether out of nothing. There is no need to know whether the elements that which exist themselves, among the ones constituting the universe, are related to the accidents, of which bodies cannot be devoid, or any other things apart from the accidents.⁵⁷

The stand of Imām al-Māturīdī and Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī that their interest in some concepts related to the matter such as body and accident had to be related to the religion is supported, by thinkers such as al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) who claimed that *mutakallimūn* dealt with physical and cosmological issues as much as what revelation had to say about it, but not to seek the truth.⁵⁸ Imām al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī’s approaches contradict some viewpoints that the science of *kalām* corresponds to the universal science or metaphysics within the domain of which the existence *qua* existence is examined.⁵⁹ However, we immediately express that the condition of “being required theologically” is an ambiguous statement, i.e., to what extent the religion will need this type of issues is vary from person to person. al-Nasafī’s criticism of Imām al-Ash‘arī that “whether a body has dimensions or not is not linked to religion” can be used by a follower of *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* against al-Nasafī by saying “engaging in such issues as substance and accident is unrelated to the religion”. Moreover, a philosopher, who examines the existence *qua* existence, will not be skeptical about to what extent what he does is significant and beneficial for the religion. Indeed, according

⁵⁴ Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣira al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn* ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Publication, 2004), 1/66 From now on, in the references, this book will be called as *Tabṣira al-adilla* without mentioning the author.

⁵⁵ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/72.

⁵⁶ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/72.

⁵⁷ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/72.

⁵⁸ On this issue see. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, ed. 'Uthman Amin (Cairo: Dār al-fikr al-‘arabī, 1949), 107; also see. Galip Türkan, “Klasik Kelâm’ın Apolojetik Değeri”, *Turkish Journal of Islamic Studies*, 17/4 (2004)/324-336; Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 75.

⁵⁹ On this issue see. Ömer Türker, “Kelâm İlminin Metafizikleşme Süreci”, *Dîvân: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 12/23 (2007/2), 75-92.

to al-Kindī (d. 252/866 [?]), the first Islamic philosopher, a prophet and a philosopher who is a seeker of truth are on the same road.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the statement “being required in terms of religion” might make up the reason why a person extremely absorbed in philosophical and cosmological issues. For instance, al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), one of the well-known scholars of the Baṣra Mu‘tazilite, phrases the motive for Mu‘tazilite scholars’ immense absorption in “subtle” (*daqīq*) subjects as follows:

Principles [regarding monotheism (*tawḥīd*)] can only be completed by subsidiary issues. This is the reason why members of our sect discuss on subtle (*daqīq*) matters. For the explanation of the principle is provided solely to amend the proof, answer questions and clear up doubts. And this contains speaking about establishing proofs for the existence of God, and the creation of bodies and others. Plenty of issues that are not counted among the subtle (*daqīq*) ones also fall under this. For example, if someone deduces the eternity of the universe from the infinity of numbers, invalidating this reasoning only happens using “atom” (*juzʿ*). When you need to establish the existence of the Creator, the situation is the same. Concerning this issue, you should be able to confront and debate with Zakariyyā al-Rāzī, who claims that God is incapable of creating the essence of the matter. Similarly, you should be able to discuss with him about the time and place issues, which he regards them as eternal.⁶¹

As it can be noticed, al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār asserts that *mutakallimūn* must be as expert as a natural philosopher in such subjects as space, time and matter to be able to ground and defend the principle of monotheism.

Therefore, “being required in terms of religion” is an open-ended expression, and does not imply that Imām al-Māturīdī did not take into consideration such issues as body, substance and accident at all and did not express an opinion concerning these issues.⁶² Since the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* has the characteristics of a work that is very well provided with especially cosmological arguments. I think that there are two significant reasons why *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* includes cosmological arguments even though Imām al-Māturīdī maintains that religion does not deal with issues concerning matter and its properties.

The first one is based on the epistemology that Imām al-Māturīdī adopted. Even though he has a flexible attitude towards the issues regarding matter, he establishes his overall system over stringent epistemological principles and in this sense includes himself within the general *kalām* trend about such subjects as the sources and types of knowledge. Again al-Māturīdī accepts the principles of the *mutakallimūn*

⁶⁰ al-Kindī, “Fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā (İlk Felsefe Üzerine),” in *Felsefî Risâleler* ed. and transl. Mahmut Kaya (Istanbul: Klasik Publication, 2013), 129.

⁶¹ al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Kitāb al-Majmū‘ fī al-Muḥīṭ bi al-taklīf*, ed. J. J. Houben (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1986), 26-27.

⁶² It is possible to interpret the adaptation of this type of opinion by al-Māturīdī as an attempt to reset the science of *kalām*, which has been going through a crisis by turning into a speculative investigation of the nature or the truth and has been inclined to turning into a natural philosophy or metaphysics, into the axis of revelation and the line of the prophet. In this context, the expression “required in terms of religion” distinguishes *kalām* from philosophy, with which it shares such matters as knowledge, being and the universe, or from science as the ultimate goal and demands from *kalām* scholars to utilize their energy in an appropriate way. Therefore, the expression “required in terms of religion” does not mean that *mutakallimūn* should not engage in cosmological and philosophical matters at all. Neither does it prevent *mutakallimūn*, including al-Māturīdī himself, from involving in cosmological and philosophical issues when it is necessary for the sake of defending the religion by expanding the limits.

of that era that “the existence of God is known by acquired (*iktibāsī*) knowledge based on reasoning and deduction, not given by empirical or self-evident (*iḍtirārī*) knowledge”.⁶³ This situation led al-Māturīdī to engage in cosmological arguments to prove such theological issues as the existence and the oneness of God and His attributes by using inference and reasoning (*al-ijtihād wa al-istidlāl*). According to Imām al-Māturīdī, all the beings in the universe, with their qualities, point out to the fact that they are originated in time and are creations of a Mighty Creator. Such that the universe alone would be enough to prove the existence of a creator even if there had been no prophets providing evidence for the existence of God.⁶⁴

Another reason Imām al-Māturīdī did not participate in cosmological debates is the way of the theological discussions at that time. If we look back on Imām al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt*, the Mu‘tazilite scholars were engrossed in philosophical and scientific subjects and examined religious issues by connecting them with physical matters. Moreover, some groups such as Dualists (*Sanawiyya*), Materialists (*Dahriyya*) and Naturalists (*Tabī‘iyya*), which were immensely active within the Muslim society at that time, defended their ideas based on some cosmological theories. This situation inevitably compelled Imām al-Māturīdī, to use common language in order to engage with his opponents in matters regarding body, substance and accident leading him to have a stance towards these subjects.

After these introductory remarks, if we pay closer attention to how Imām al-Māturīdī explains such concepts as body, substance and accident, we notice that he does not treat the subjects concerning the elements of the universe under a separate chapter in his book because he refers to this type of issues in theological contexts. A researcher, who aims to reveal al-Māturīdī’s opinions on body, substance and accident, must assemble the pieces of information scattered over different theological subjects in his works.

One of the issues Imām al-Māturīdī’s addressed about the subject matter of “body” (*jism*) by asking whether Allah can be referred to as a body. If we recall Imām al-Ash‘arī’s reports in *Maqālāt*, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam defined a body as “existent” and accordingly claimed that Allah could also be called “body” because He is existent. Again, some groups in Islamic thought, for example the *Mujassima* and *Mushabbiha* (the proponents of anthropomorphism) considered Allah to be a body.⁶⁵

Imām Māturīdī, however, in this chapter, states that the word “body” (*jism*) can be used in two ways. The first is about the nature of the body in the seen world (*al-shāhid*). According to this, a body “is the name of a thing that possesses the characteristics of having sides (*al-jihāt*) or ends (*al-nihāyāt*), or three dimensions (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*)”.⁶⁶ In the opinion of Imām al-Māturīdī, the word “body” cannot be used with reference to Allah, for its meaning implied “parts” (*al-ajza*) and “ends or extreme parts (*al-ḥudūd*)”. These qualities refer to the signs of being temporal (*al-ḥadath*).⁶⁷

Secondly, Imām al-Māturīdī does not approve of defining the body as “existent” (*mawjūd*). If that was the case, according to him, everything would have had to be named a body. However, it is widely

⁶³ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 331, 390 (356, 434).

⁶⁴ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 251 (257).

⁶⁵ Regarding the controversies on this issue see. Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 1/257.

⁶⁶ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 119 (90).

⁶⁷ According to al-Māturīdī, if Allah called body without the aforesaid senses being meant, in this case the word becomes removed from its known-status and it becomes impossible to come into an agreement about the issue through intellect and reasoning. See. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 119/90.

accepted that in the universe apart from existing bodies there are also existing attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) and accidents (*al-aʿrāḍ*) such as color, taste and the like that cannot be considered a body.⁶⁸

These explanations of al-Māturīdī provide us with some clues about the theory of matter he adopted. He speaks of the body as being three-dimensional. Defining body in this manner differentiates him from the definition adopted by subsequent Ashʿarite and Māturīdite scholars. By mainly focusing on the aspects of composition and combination of parts, they claimed that the composition two parts alone are enough to call something a “body”. This way they opposed definitions that regard bodies as three dimensional, which were made by philosophers (*falāsifa*) and the Muʿtazilite scholars.⁶⁹

What Imām al-Māturīdī draws attention here to such characteristics of the body as “possessing sides/directions (*al-jihāt*)”, “ends (*al-nihāyāt*)” and “dimensions” (*al-abʿād*) immediately calls to mind the atomist *mutakallimūn* who maintained that while a part alone does not have sides, ends or dimensions, bodies possess three dimensions (*al-abʿād al-thalātha*), ends and sides. However, this will not be sufficient to make the assertion that al-Māturīdī provided an atomist definition of body in the way that the Muʿtazilite school intended. Because peripatetic philosophers, who adopted a concept of body within the axis of prime matter-form theory (Hylomorphism), also accepted that a body has dimensions, ends and sides and that it can be divided. The distinction between them is that the compound body, in the mind of *mutakallimūn*, is a composite made up of dimensionless parts that do not allow for divisions at all (neither in actuality nor in mind); whereas, in the opinion of supporters of the hylomorphic prime matter theory, a single body is not formed through combination of parts. In other words, according to the hylomorphic theory, since the formation of dimensional bodies out of dimensionless parts is absurd, matter does not cease to have dimensions and sides after a certain point in the process of division, contrary to what *mutakallimūn* believe. Three-dimensional bodies emerge out of each division of dimensional bodies again just like themselves. That the elements appearing after each division are three-dimensional as is with the previous one's results in potentially endless divisions.⁷⁰ Therefore, al-Māturīdī's statement that the body has limits and sides and that it is three-dimensional still does not give a clear idea in favor of or against atomism. For a clear-cut definition of body, we need a description of the body that states that a ‘body forms when two or more parts are aggregated’. This description emphasizes the “composite” (*muallaf*) or compound (*murakkab*) aspects, and also signifies the components forming these composites as “simple” (*basīṭ*).

However, soon enough, Imām al-Māturīdī provides us with the very definition we have been seeking. While giving reasons for why God cannot be called “body”, at the next page, he uses the word “compound” for the body:

In the sensible realm (*al-shāhid*), the term *body* is not used for the things that do not possess the quality of being divided (*al-tabaʿūd*) and separated (*al-tajazziʿ*) into parts such as accident (*ʿaraḍ*), action (*al-fiʿl*), motion (*al-harakat*) and rest (*al-sukūn*). Thus, it is established that “body” is the name of that which has dimensions such as length (*al-tūl*) and width (*al-arḍ*) and that which is composite (*al-muallaf*). Even if compositeness were assumed about Allah, the apparent meaning of the term *composite* (*al-muallaf*), which is supposedly attributed to Him, still would not make sense to any action in Him. If our judgment were false, then speaking of a being

⁶⁸ *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 120 (91).

⁶⁹ On this issue see. Bulgen, *Kelām Atomculuğu*, 178.

⁷⁰ On this issue see. Ibn Sīnā. *Kitāb al-shifāʾ: Fizik II*, trans. Muhittin Macit, Ferruh Özpilavcı (İstanbul: Litera Yayıncılık 2005), 12-13.

that has existed by its essence in eternity (*mawjūd bi-dhātihi fī al-azal*) would also be untrue [because a composite cannot be eternal and existent by itself].⁷¹

al-Māturīdī's expressions mentioned above have great importance in terms of our topic. Because here, he not only indicates that accidents are not bodies but also maintains that anything that does not carry the characteristic of division (*al-tajazzia'*) cannot be named a body (*jism*). Saying that indivisible things in the sensible world cannot be referred to as body brings him closer to the atomist *mutakallimūn* who assert that an indivisible part cannot be a body. Moreover, this approach differentiates Imām al-Māturīdī from those who support that the bodies in the universe are made up of indivisible accidents (*aṣḥāb al-a'rāḍ*). For such *mutakallimūn* as Ḍirār b. 'Amr, Ḥaḥṣ al-Fard, and Ḥusayn al-Najjār, who believed that the bodies in the world consist of accidents, ascribed the term “body” to these indivisible accidents.⁷² Moreover, Imām al-Māturīdī's explicit use of the word “compound” (*al-muallaf*) for body distinguishes him from the defenders of the hylomorphic definition of body, which claims that the body is composite in itself, i.e., it does not carry parts that are apparently not bodies in themselves. Therefore, al-Māturīdī's statement that a “body is the name for that which has parts such as length and width and that which is composite.” were most probably made within the context of traditional kalām atomism.⁷³

Abu'l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī's ascription of a definition of body including elements of mathematics to some early Māturīdites and Mu'tazilite scholars is telling us that Imām al-Māturīdī's description of the body might have been shaped by kalām atomism:

As for the body, according to mathematicians (*al-ḥissāb*), it is that which has three dimensions (*al-ab'ād al-thalātha*). By three dimensions, they mean length, width and depth. They name the singular substance (*al-jawhar al-wāḥid*) that cannot be divided in actuality (*alladhī lā yatajazza' fī'lān*), a “point (*nuqta*)”. They say that if a substance (*jawhar*) aggregates (*tarakkaba*) another one similar to it, a length will occur which they call a “line”. They define the line as that which is adjoined (*al-mujtami*) in terms of length. Then, if it [accepts a] compound from the other side it is called surface. They say that the surface is that which has length and width. Afterwards, if it accepts another compound [surface] from the bottom or top side, it will have a depth and thickness, and is now called a body. Our early companions (*awāilu aṣḥābuna*) and Mu'tazilites as a whole (*bi*

⁷¹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 120 (92).

⁷² Abu'l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Ka'bī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, 451; also see al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/6-7.

⁷³ Imām al-Māturīdī's also use of the term “composite objects” (*al-a'yān al-murakkaba*) for bodies (*al-aqsām*) and the term “simple” (*al-baṣīṭ*) for the qualities and accidents (*al-ṣifat wa al-a'rāḍ*), also see. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 177 (161). Al-Māturīdī, when criticizing Christians, draws attention to the quality of divisibility of body. See. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 203 (195). al-Māturīdī's statement here implies that he maintains the idea that the composite bodies are composed of simple/indivisible accidents. But in my view, what he says that accidents are simple does not mean that he defends the view that compound objects are composed of accidents. We should keep in mind that atomist *mutakallimūn* who defended that the universe consists of indivisible substances and accidents also defend the idea that accidents have simple/atomic structure. For instance, Ash'arite Mutakallim 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 1093/1682) addresses this issue as follows: “Individuals (*al-mufradāt*) in the universe are of two types. One of them is the individual in its essence (*mufrad fī dhātihi*), such that it is impossible to divide (*al-inqisām*) it any further. The second is the individual with its kind (*jins*), but not its essence. Individuals in their essence (*mufrad fī dhātihi*) are two types: the first is the individual substance (*jawhar fard*), such that it is impossible to divide it any further; all bodies in the universe, when they reach the point to which it is impossible to divide any further, cease to do so. The second type, which is not divisible, is all accidents (*a'rāḍ*) in themselves, due to the fact that [an accident] is an individual which necessitates only one substratum (*mahāl wāḥid*).” 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, (Istanbul: Maṭba'at al-Dawla, 1928), 35. As it is seen, al-Baghdādī states clearly that accidents have basic or atomic structure as well.

‘asrihim) supported their view on this topic and asserted that the body is that which possesses length, width and depth.⁷⁴

It is quite remarkable that here al-Nasafī thinks of the indivisible part in connection with the concept of a point in the mathematical discourse just as the Mu‘tazilite scholars did. He also points out that the smallest body is formed by the composition of eight atoms.⁷⁵ Moreover, he also states that “the early members of our school and the entirety of the Mu‘tazilites supported mathematicians regarding this issue” and described the body as something that has length, width and depth. This opinion of al-Nasafī is totally in agreement with the definition of a body by some atomist Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* including Mu‘ammar reported by al-Ash‘arī in his *Maqālāt*.⁷⁶ That being so, does the expression “our early companions (*awāilu aṣhābuna*)” include Imām al-Māturīdī?

If the following explanations of al-Nasafī are taken into consideration, it is likely that Imām al-Māturīdī is subsumed under the expression “our early companions”. According to al-Nasafī, al-Māturīdī provided this definition in a manner of someone confident in not revealing deficiency and weakness while confronting his opponent at the moment of debate and discussion, and who addresses his adversary gently while expressing himself, but not like a hostile person. Subsequently, he said, “If in the sensible world, the body is the name of which that has sides (*al-jihāt*), or that is has ends (*al-nihāyāt*), or that has three-dimensions (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*), it is not permissible to use this utterance for Allah.”⁷⁷

The definition of body that al-Nasafī ascribes to Imām al-Māturīdī corresponds to the definition of body that we cited from *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, and gives us an idea about the context in which Imām al-Māturīdī made this kind of description for the body. Therefore, in the background of al-Māturīdī’s explanation of the body in this way is the atomist Mu‘tazilite scholars are also seen. This can also be sensed through the discomposure of al-Nasafī in between the lines about the fact that al-Māturīdī adopted a Mu‘tazilite definition of body. Classical *Ahl al-Sunnah mutakallimūn* including al-Nasafī himself opposed the definition of the three-dimensional body having at least for atoms provided by most of the Mu‘tazilite instead, they put the emphasis on the meanings of being compound (*murakkab*) or composite (*muallaḥ*) and claimed that the combination of only two atoms is enough to call something “body.”⁷⁸

Later, al-Nasafī tries to harmonize Imām al-Māturīdī’s opinion with the prevalent opinion of the of *Ahl al-Sunna*. Following this, in the first place, he draws attention to the fact that Imām al-Māturīdī mentioned the word “composition” (*ta‘līf*) while describing the body. On the other hand, al-Nasafī bases the fact that Imām al-Māturīdī did not define the body as “the name of that which is composite” but as something three-dimensional on Māturīdī’s reluctance to give an opinion about the issues unrelated to the religion. According to al-Nasafī, Imām al-Māturīdī probably believed that regarding the impossibility of

⁷⁴ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/66.

⁷⁵ Associating the indivisible part with the concept of point of mathematics is not a characteristic that belongs to Mu‘tazilite, rather it is also common among the Ash‘arīte *mutakallimūn*. For example, Imāmu’l-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī describes the indivisible part as follows: “There is a consensus among Muslims that bodies can be divided until the last part. No indivisible part has a particle and side to be separated. Masters of geometry adopted this opinion, defined the part in question as “point”, and asserted the indivisibility of it.” al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, 143.

⁷⁶ al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2/4-5;

⁷⁷ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/66.

⁷⁸ For example, on this issue see. Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Tadhkirah*, 1/9-10.

using the word “body” for Allah, there is no difference between its being a name for an absolute composition (which is formed by only two parts) and for a specific composition out of which three dimensions emerge (and which requires more parts for this).⁷⁹

Even though Imām al-Māturīdī avoided voicing an opinion about the issues that religion does not require, this does not indicate that he was at an equal distance to all definitions of body. In this regard he said that the body is three-dimensional, and mentioned its dimensions such as length and width, and expressed that it has sides and ends. Also, he emphasized the compositeness (*murakkab*) of the body, accepted the existence of simple (*baṣīṭ*) elements that are not able to be separated into pieces and maintained that these elements could not be called “body”.⁸⁰ This strongly implies that Imām al-Māturīdī adopted a concept of body close to the atomist *mutakallimūn*’ description of body, according to which the composite bodies in the universe consist of a combination of indivisible parts.

Moreover, that he objected the definition of body as “existent” (*mawjūd*) by saying there are other existent beings in the universe, which do not fall under the scope of the body such as accidents and qualities, means that he did not approve of the monistic approaches, which claim that the universe entirely is made up of only bodies (*ajsām*), accidents (*ʿarāḍ*) or substances (*jawāhir*). If we remember, Hishām b. al-Ḥakam maintained that the universe as a whole consists of bodies, conversely, Ḍirār b. ʿAmr defended that it comprises of accidents. al-Nazzām, on the other hand, believed that everything in the universe is but substance with motion being the only accident. Therefore, it seems that Imām al-Māturīdī agrees with the dualist thesis indicating that the universe is made up of substance/body (*jawhar/jism* or *ʿayn*) and accidents (*ʿarāḍ*), not the monist views maintaining that the universe consists of mere accidents or substances. In connection with this, he says the following:

The quiddity of the things (*māʾiyya al-ashyāʾ*) is two types: Material object (*ʿayn*) that is body (*jism*) and quality/attribute (*ṣifat*) that is accident (*ʿaraḍ*). With this expression of us, it becomes necessary to negate the quiddities of objects (*māʾiyya al-ashyāʾ*), which are nothing but bodies and that of qualities, which are nothing but accidents from the essence of God.⁸¹

Imām al-Māturīdī, in his book *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, more clearly demonstrates the distinction between substance and accidents. He comments on the 164th verse of Sūrah al-Baqarah (2), concerning the administration of God over winds and clouds as follows:

In this part of the verse, there is an indication that wind (*rīḥ*) is not accident (*ʿaraḍ*) but a body (*jism*). Because Allah has created the wind as a being that not only makes dizzy what is in its direction but also a being that touches (*māssa*) and hinders (*māniaʾ*). This is, however, a quality of bodies (*ṣifat al-ajsām*), not accidents (*ṣifatu ʾl-accidents*). Nonetheless, wind cannot be seen because of its transparency (*latāfatiḥā*). This also proves that it is a body. There are some bodies that are neither seen nor touched, such as air (*al-hawāʾ*). Air is a body that cannot be seen and touched. Also, there are particles (*dharraʾ*) of sun which emits in a certain aspect, they can be seen but not touched.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/66.

⁸⁰ See. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 203 (195); 120 (92); 177 (161).

⁸¹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 121 (93); Concerning al-Māturīdī’s reduction of the universe into two categories, namely substance/body (*jawhar/jism/ʿayn*) and accidents (*ʿarāḍ*), also see. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 200 (193); 209 (204); 236 (239); 227 (226).

⁸² Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ahmed Vanlioğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2005), 1/300-301.

It is quite remarkable that al-Māturīdī points out that wind is a subtle/transparent body (*jism laṭīf*) because accidents do not have the quality of touching and blocking. Also, his view that the existence of the transparent/invisible bodies is possible brings him close to the views of some *mutakallimūn* such as Imām al-Ash‘arī. This is because Imām al-Māturīdī regarded the human being as an apparent/visible body just as Imām al-Ash‘arī did, and refused the ideas implying that humans have a delicate body beyond his visible body or that there is an immaterial substance associated with it.⁸³ All these opinions bring Imām al-Māturīdī close to the classical atomist perspective, which defends that the bodies in the universe are constituted of indivisible parts and accidents.

When it comes to the subject of “substance” (*jawhar*), Imām al-Māturīdī uses this concept in an ambiguous way; therefore, it does not play a decisive role for [having a clear idea about] the type of matter theory he adopted.⁸⁴ His use of the term “substance” mostly as synonymous with the words “concrete individual” and “body” indicates that he disagreed with some Mu‘tazilite scholars such as Abu’l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf, Mu‘ammar, and al-Jubbāī, who claimed that a single substance could not be a body. Having said that in some cases, the meaning al-Māturīdī assigned for the term “substance” could be influenced by the description of the groups whose views he discussed. For example, while he sometimes names some accidents or natures (*ṭabā‘ī*) such as hot, cold, wet, and dry as “substance,” he also calls some objects causing benefit or detriment, good or evil and even human itself “substance.”⁸⁵

⁸³ al-Māturīdī explains the first verse of the Sūrah al-Mumtahinah (60), in his *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān* in the following manner: “O humans, worship your God!” and the other verses in the same sense point out to the human we see (*mā nushāhiduhu*). It does not mean that there is another subtle/transparent body (*jismun āhara laṭīfun*) in the human, as opposed to what al-Nazzām said. Here this verse shows that human is not a simple substance (*jawharun baṣīṭun*), unlike al-Nāshī believed. Each of them thought that this verse indicated that meaning. However, as we stated, human is nothing more than the being we perceive. Allah knows the truest.” *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, 15/102. Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) narrates from Imām al-Ash‘arī: “Know that he [al-Ash‘arī] said: “The competent authority (*marjī*) on this topic is that when we ask linguists ‘What is man?’” it is what they describe with the word “man” and what they point out. When we answer this question, we find them pointing to this apparent/visible body, composite (*murakkab*) with a special structure (*al-bunya al-makḥṣūṣa*). This implies that linguists apply this naming (*tasmiya*) to this entire composite (*jumla*).” Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī*, ed. Daniel Gimert (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1987), 211. Ibn Fūrak, provides us with details about Imām al-Ash‘arī’s views on air/wind (*rīḥ*) and soul (*rūḥ*): if we take into account what is conveyed by him, according to al-Ash‘arī, air is a subtle/transparent body (*jism laṭīf*) and becomes apparent when it moves. Wind is the air, in which a special motion subsists. This is named as soul when it subsists in the limbs of human body in a particular organic way. It is the air, which fills the skin, when blown into it. If air were an accident, it could not fill the skin in such a way. Air sometimes becomes dense and its length, width and depth becomes apparent. When a stray of sunlight becomes apparent upon its passage through a small whole, this is the thing that happens. Ibn Fūrak mentions Imām al-Ash‘arī’s statement that “angels and jinn are subtler bodies than air”. According to al-Ash‘arī those subtle bodies are types of dense ones. The indivisible particles, which aggregate in an intense manner, are called dense (*kasīf*). Bodies become dense when the number of their particles increases, and they become subtle when the number of their particles decreases. See, *Mujarrad*, 207. Ibn Fūrak also states as follows: According to [al-Ash‘arī], the soul (*rūḥ*) is wind/air (*rīḥ*), a subtle (*laṭīf*) object, and travels through the spaces inside the human organs. But man is alive with life, not with spirit. In other words, when man is alive, he becomes the place of the soul, or he is not alive with the soul. Can’t you see that *ḥayy* is derived from life (*ḥayāt*), and spiritual (*rūḥānī*) is derived from spirit (*rūḥ*). al-Ash‘arī brought evidence with the phrase “the spirit came out” to the truth of his view [that the spirit was air/wind].” Exiting/coming out is one of the attributes of body and substance (*jawhar*), because going out means moving from one place to another. (...) [al-Ash‘arī’s] judgment of the soul was like his judgment of the wind/air (*rīḥ*), and even the soul (*rūḥ*) itself (*bi-‘ayniḥā*) meant wind/air.” See, Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 257;

⁸⁴ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 94 (59); 143 (120).

⁸⁵ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 84 (47); 190 (180); 245 (249); 251 (255); 253 (259); 227 (226).

Furthermore, that he mentions the term “substance” generally together with the terms “accident” and “attribute,”⁸⁶ and reduces the universe as a whole to substances and accidents might be given as examples of the cases where he brings such denotations of the word substance as “that which exist by itself, and bearer of accidents” into focus.⁸⁷ Most of the time, he relates and connects substances to accidents. According to him, the substances in the universe, regardless of whether they are material objects or bodies, cannot be devoid of such accidents as motion, rest, composition and separation. As can be seen from the following statements, al-Māturīdī’s attempt to reduce everything in the cosmos including natures into substances and accidents brings him closer to the prevalent universe model that is supported by Ash‘arites and Māturīdīs in the classical sense:

The natures (*al-ṭabā‘ī*) that materialists (Dahriyya) refers to, such as air and fire, could not be other than substances (*jawāhir*) or accidents (*‘arāḍ*). If they are substances, they exist together with accidents while being in the state of composition (*al-ijtimā‘*) and separation (*al-iftirāq*). If it were not for these two states, each one of their substance would be scattered all over (*mutafarriq*). Despite the fact that qualities pertaining to matter come together in substances, that they exist in different states (e.g. being combined with other substances or separated from them) shows that substances fall under the control of accidents (*‘alā ghalabati l-‘arāḍi fiha*) and that they are transformed from one state to another by accidents. It must also be added that accidents do not stand (*lā taqūmu*) by themselves and affect (*lā taqdaḥu*) things (*al-ashyā’*). Thus, it becomes apparent that it is only possible due to a Being who knows the role accidents play on substances and their various functions. Additionally, it also emerges that only a Being who has the power to create and organize substances in a manner that they are susceptible to carry accidents (*yaṣluḥu li iḥtimali tilke al-‘arāḍ*) can know such a thing. By all means, such knowledge is impossible except for someone who makes the previously described arrangement. Such an inference also leads the conclusion that there is only one Being who is omniscient and omnipotent, to whom nothing remains hidden, and who does not encounter any difficulty in creating anything He wishes to exist. If natures (*al-ṭabā‘ī*) that constitute objects are nothing more than accidents, it is impossible for them to attain existence by themselves and maintain it (*muḥālun wujūduha li anfusiha wa qiyāmuha*). Therefore, it is inevitable to conclude that there is an Eternal Creator (*mūjid qadīm*), that everything in the universe is created by Him, and that the world only comes into existence by His creative act. We must also say further that there is not an opposing view about the temporal origination of the accidents (*ḥadathu l-‘arāḍ*). Allah is the Almighty and the Omnipotent.⁸⁸

This fragment we have excerpted from Imām al-Māturīdī is quite remarkable. First of all, even though al-Māturīdī appears to give a place to natures in his thought system, he interprets these in a different manner from the proponents of natures (*aṣḥāb al-ṭabā‘ī*). According to al-Māturīdī, if there are natures as Dahriyya claims, they do not imply the nonexistence of a creator. In the opinion of al-Māturīdī, that natures come together although they are contrary to each other and that they form extremely complicated and various bodies even though they are limited in number demonstrate that everything in the universe is

⁸⁶ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 236 (239); 209 (204).

⁸⁷ For the expression “there is no universe except the one that consists of accidents and substances”, see. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 171 (155). “Moreover, there is no material object (*‘ayn*) or attribute in the universe that is not put under command and overpowered.” *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 143 (120). “Because when it is established that God the Almighty has created objects having different qualities along with their substances and accidents, it becomes proven that His act is not by nature but voluntary.” *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 125 (97). “In this case, divine providence fulfills such functions as creating other substances and accidents, and determine the time and places in which the actions are going to take place.” *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 412 (464).

⁸⁸ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 227 (226).

created by a God who has the power to arrange everything as He wishes without depending on causes (*min ghayri asbāb*).⁸⁹ Thus, here, al-Māturīdī does not absolutely assert that the cosmos is made up of natures ontologically; instead he tries to show that naturalists’ claim that the universe is formed of natures does not mean denial of a creator but rather can be used as evidence of the temporal creation of the world.⁹⁰

Another striking aspect of the text we quoted above is al-Māturīdī’s attempt to explain natures by reducing them into the terms “substance” and “accident”. This points out to the fact that, according to al-Māturīdī, the terms substance and accident are two fundamental principles depending on which everything in the cosmos must be explicated. Therefore, natures (*al-ṭabāʿī*) must be interpreted in accordance with the rules required by the higher ontological principles, which are substance and accident. Consequently, one who wants to understand al-Māturīdī’s view on the matter needs to focus on how he perceived the terms substance and accident, rather than the term nature.

As for the issue of accidents, among the concepts we have examined so far, his ideas on the accidents undoubtedly played the most prominent role within the thought system of al-Māturīdī. In fact, as we mentioned above, that which establishes the existence of substance and turn it into a key concept are again accidents. In our opinion, there are two reasons why he might have attached this much importance to the concept of accident.

The first is of a theological nature. As is known, accidents constitute the backbone of the classical *kalām* cosmological argument regarding the temporal creation (*ḥudūth*) of the universe. Imām al-Māturīdī establishes the createdness of the world through accidents as follows:

The universe (*al-ʿālam*) is not far away from these alternatives: It is either eternal together with the qualities it has, such as composition-separation, motion-rest, dirty-clean, good-evil, and excessive-deficient. Yet characteristics described above are temporally originated (*ḥawādith*) based on the proofs both senses and the intellect provide. Because contraries cannot come together [at once], so they must occur successively [in a manner that one of them perishes and then the other one comes into existence], and this is a justification for being temporal (*al-ḥadath*). All temporal things are under the category of coming-to-be (*al-kawn*) while they

⁸⁹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 227 (226).

⁹⁰ In the same page, al-Māturīdī continues to say regarding natures (*al-ṭabāʿī*) as follows: “As is known, the natures (that were assumed to constitute the universe) are contrary (*mutaḍāddatun*) to each other. Being contrary implies to reject and push each other. In this state, however, separation is an unavoidable consequence, and so are decomposition and annihilation in the state of separation. In spite of the contradiction which I described earlier, it is improbable for the origins/roots of the things (*ʿaṣūl l-ashyāʾ*) to exist (*kāina*) on their own and stand (*qāima*) their existence. Accordingly, if prime-matter attains existence, it does so thanks to a Being who prevents the state of pushing by which decomposition occurs. This Being combines decomposed parts of matter and subjugates them. The universe has been formed through this combination, so its temporal origination (*ḥudūth*) has become established. This corroboration also shows the falsity of the view that the universe is constituted by natures (*fasād al-qawl al-ṭabāʿī*). This is because, the origination of something out of nothing (*lā ʿan shayʾ*), in the intellects (*fī al-uʿqūl*), is not more unlikely than the origination of it by its contrary. Since the creation of the cosmos *ex nihilo*, in the opinion of the naturalists, is improbable, they embraced an alternative view. Considering that the trouble they avoid encountering reappears in front of them within the view they offered, their claim becomes nullified, and the situation that is supposed to justify themselves disappears. Protection from error is only possible with God’s help.” See. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 226-227 (226), These statements of al-Māturīdī shows that he does not accept a nature idea that is the source of the motion by itself and that is the governor of the universe in the same way that the proponents of natures (*aṣḥāb al-ṭabāʿī*) believe. Also see. al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, 10/185.

were once non-existent. The objects that cannot be exempt from these [temporal accidents] and that cannot precede them are in the same position.⁹¹

If we elaborate on the expressions mentioned above of al-Māturīdī, looking at the outside world, it can be realized that the material object (body or substance) becomes moving when resting and vice versa. This situation indicates that states such as motion and rest observed in the body are different from the bodies themselves. This is because something is a body when it is in motion just as it is a body when rests. If the body was inherently moving or at rest, these essential qualities could not to be exempt from the body in any way. However, it is evident that bodies start moving when at rest and turn to rest when they move. This means that when motion occurs in a body, the accident of rest disappears completely, and when the accident of rest occurs in it, motion goes out of existence. Otherwise, two contrary qualities would come together in a body, which is impossible. Thus, a body becomes then a substratum for the temporally originated qualities, i.e. accidents, which occur and disappear on themselves. It is out of the question for bodies to be devoid of these temporal and contrary qualities. In the universe there cannot be a single object that is neither in the state of motion or rest nor composition or separation. This demonstrates that not a single body or substance in the universe can be separated from temporally originated accidents.

Conversely, the accidents of coming-to-be (*al-akwān*) such as motion, rest, composition and separation cannot exist in the extramental world unless there is a substance to carry them. For example, motion or a rest cannot stand by itself (*qā'im bi-nafsihi*) alone in the universe without being carried by a material object. This means that individual substances and accidents need each other to exist. Here according to Imām al-Māturīdī, this substance-accident relation indicates the createdness of the world in two ways: first, the fact that bodies cannot be devoid of temporally originated accidents, which disappear and re-appear, requires that bodies themselves be temporally originated. Second, that the material objects and the accidents in the universe cannot exist by themselves and need each other to exist manifests the absurdity of the claim that they could come into existence by themselves.⁹²

al-Māturīdī also produces some original arguments for beginning of the universe based on the temporal nature of the accidents. He argues that the sensible accidents such as motion and aggregation are the last of the past ones of that type. If the accidents continued towards the past eternally, a past without a beginning should not have ended at the moment. Therefore, according to al-Māturīdī, the fact that contrary accidents such as motion-rest, composition-separation, heat-coldness, consecutively disappear and reappear shows that there must have a beginning for this reoccurring process in the past. Otherwise, if they were eternal things, an eternal thing could not have ended in this way. This means that the material objects, bodies or substances, which cannot be separated from accidents, also must have a beginning.⁹³

The second reason that al-Māturīdī gives importance to the concept of the accident is epistemological. As mentioned before, he asserts that human's relation with the visible world must be grounded on the empirical knowledge and in respect to God it must be based on acquired (*muktasab*) knowledge. In other words, he accepts the general principle of the *mutakallimūn* that the knowledge of the

⁹¹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 95 (60).

⁹² *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 100 (66).

⁹³ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 97 (62).

existence of God cannot be attained direct observations but through reasoning (*istidlāl*).⁹⁴ Accordingly, humans using the necessary knowledge about the universe, which they acquired through their senses, make analogies from that which is perceptible to that which is imperceptible (*qiyās al-ghāib ‘alā al-shāhid*), so they attain the knowledge of the existence of God.⁹⁵ For knowledge through acquisition (*kasb*) [reasoning] to be valid, it must be based on necessary (*iḍṭirārī*) knowledge, which is regarded as empirical and a priori knowledge. According to the *mutakallimūn*, the intellect can judge what is necessary or impossible; however, it cannot form a definite opinion about the universe, which is a “possible” realm of existence. Here, considering this epistemological framework, Imām al-Māturīdī establishes an epistemological principle that “The world is known by observation (*baṣar*), not by [rational] evidences (*dalāil*)”.⁹⁶ This principle makes the accidents related to senses such as color, taste, smell, hearing and touching of primary importance for perceiving the universe.

However, this kind of epistemological approach grounded on sensationalism towards the world causes some problems concerning whether a category of existence in the sense of “standing by itself”, i.e., the substance, is included in the universe. For most of the time, *mutakallimūn* attain the knowledge about the existence of a substance not by their senses but by reasoning based on the principle that accidents cannot stand/subsist by themselves. This, however, contradicts the principle, Imām al-Māturīdī established, that “the universe is known not by reasoning but via the senses”, and leads him to have a sympathetic attitude towards the view that the universe consists entirely of accidents. Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī also reports that, in his no longer existing work, named *Maqālāt*, Imām al-Māturīdī was in favor of the idea, supported by Ḍirār b. ‘Amr and Ḥusayn al-Najjār, that the universe is entirely collection of accidents, and he gives the reasons for this as follows:

The owners are of this opinion claim that speaking of the existence of something that does not consist of these accidents described earlier and that occurs by itself is deviating from the results provided by senses. For without the accidents we expressed before, nothing can be perceived by senses. He regarded this opinion as more preferable.⁹⁷

As it is seen, al-Nasafī indicates that, in certain parts of his life, Imām al-Māturīdī sympathized with the idea about the origination of the whole universe from accidents depending on epistemological reasons. However, later on, al-Nasafī does not forget to report that al-Māturīdī eventually distanced himself from this view. He attributes the reason for this to the unwillingness of Imām al-Māturīdī about giving an opinion about an issue unrelated to the religion.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 331, 390 (356, 434); about the relation between reason and revelation, also see. Hülya Alper, *İmam Mâtürîdî’de Akıl-Vahiy İlişkisi* (Istanbul: İz Publication, 2009).

⁹⁵ For example, while interpreting the verses of Sūra Yûnus (10) between 90-92, Imām al-Māturīdī explains the reasons why the faith of Pharaoh, who said he believed in Allah near-drowning, was not counted as valid on the basis that belief in Allah should be grounded on the method of deducing the invisible through the visible. However, it becomes impossible in the moment of drowning or when the process of death starts, and a human begins to see the creatures (angels), which he does not see under normal conditions according to principle of faith (*bi al-qhayb*). see. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, ed. Ertuğrul Boynu Kalın, Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2006) 5/105.

⁹⁶ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 94 (59).

⁹⁷ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/71.

⁹⁸ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/71.

These descriptions of al-Nasafī enables us to comprehend the meaning of al-Māturīdī’s expressions, which we sometime come across in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, implying that the composite bodies in the universe are composed of simple accidents.⁹⁹ In one of these expressions, Imām al-Māturīdī justifies the idea that nothing in the world is like Him based on the Qur’ānic verse (42/11) “There is nothing similar to Him”, and says the following:

There is nothing similar to Him”; as a result of this expression the reification/thingness of things (*shay’iyya al-‘ashyā’*), that is to say, simple elements (*al-arkān al-baṣīṭa*) that are accidents (*al-a‘rāḍ*) and qualities (*al-ṣifāt*) and compound objects (*al-a‘yān al-murakkaba*) that are bodies (*al-‘ajsām*) become excluded from the essence of God.¹⁰⁰

As it can be understood from his expressions mentioned above, Imām al-Māturīdī groups the things in the universe into two categories: composite objects/bodies (*al-a‘yān al-murakkaba*) and simple elements (*al-arkān al-baṣīṭa*) that are accidents and qualities. The fact that he makes a classification of this type implies the belief al-Māturīdī holds that the composite bodies of the world consist of simple accidents, which are non-divisible in any way.

Nonetheless, concerning our issue, we have to state right away that even if Imām al-Māturīdī accepted the idea that bodies are a bundle of accidents, it does not mean that he opposed atomism. This is because we previously revealed while examining the *Maqālāt* of al-Ash‘arī that some scholars, “the proponents of accidents” (*aṣḥāb al-a‘rāḍ*) such as Ḍirār b. ‘Amr, who maintained that the composite bodies in the universe are composed by accidents, also had an atomistic perspective. Furthermore, the reports of Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī below support our opinion:

Ḍirār b. ‘Amr al-Basrī, leader of Ḍirāriyya, and Ḥusayn b. Muhammad al-Najjār al-Basrī, the leader of Najjāriyya, denied the existence of any other thing in the universe, apart from accidents. They claimed that the world is made up of bodies and accidents. Bodies, on the other hand, are accidents, which are aggregated (*mujtami‘*) and carrying/accepting (*iḥṭamala*) other accidents. According to them, bodies are formed by the combination of such accidents as color, taste, smell, life, death, four natures and their contraries, of which bodies cannot be devoid of. (...) In the opinion of them, each part of a divisible body is also a body. Moreover, after the division, when the body becomes indivisible both in actuality (*bi’l-fi‘il*) and in mind (*bi’l-wahm*), it is also a body (*jism*), according to them. As for the thing, we described as the substance (*jawhar*) in accordance with the opinions of the majority of *mutakallimūn* who believe in the indivisible part, even though it does not consist of the combination (*mutarakkib*) of the accidents that are existent by themselves, because it is constituted by the accidents described earlier, they called it “body”. In this case, although they state that parts are made up of accidents, that bodies cannot be formed by different parts which are separated, and that the indivisible part is a body because it is originated by the composition of various accidents, they support the opinion of those who think that the part cannot be separated.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ For example, see. *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/65. While al-Māturīdī usually seems to differentiate between the body and its visible qualities, he draws attention to the fact that whether these visible qualities are named accidents or qualities is a matter of linguistics. He even underlines such Qur’anic verses as “You wish for the temporal goods of this world (*a‘rāḍ al-dunya*).” (*al-Anfāl* 8/67). “If there was a property of the world (...) near-grabbing (*a‘rāḍ qarīb*).” (*al-Tawba* 9/42), so that he indicates that things (*al-ashyā’*) themselves in the universe can be called “accident”. See. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 99 (65).

¹⁰⁰ *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 177 (161).

¹⁰¹ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/71-72.

These explanations of al-Nasafī hold a great significance for our topic. Indeed, these statements corroborate our understanding that someone who defends the idea that the entire universe is composed of accidents can maintain an atomist perspective, as we also saw when examining the views of the *mutakallimūn* concerning bodies in Imām al-Ash‘arī and al-Ka‘bī’s *Maqālāt*.¹⁰²

On the other hand, Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī opposes the idea that the universe is comprised of accidents by stating that “that this view is absurd (*istiḥāla*) can be seen if it is considered that it is impossible for accidents to conjoin or to accept other accidents, as it is also impossible also for accidents also to perdure by themselves.”¹⁰³ This might give us an idea as to why despite having sympathy for the notion that the entire universe is made of accidents, Imām al-Māturīdī still rejects this concept in the final analysis. Indeed, also according to al-Māturīdī accidents cannot exist by themselves, cannot move from one location to another, and cannot impact objects through contact or touch. Also, according to him an accident does not endure or last (*lā yabqā*) for two units of time.¹⁰⁴

This last view, that of accidents are not continuous or persistent, holds a very important role in al-Māturīdī’s *kalām* system.¹⁰⁵ In addition to basing his defense of the proof-from-creation on the discontinuity of accidents, the discontinuity of accidents is also the basis for his arguments in defense of God’s creation of the human acts and of the existence of miracles as well as his rejection of natural causality. This approach brings al-Māturīdī close to the Ash‘arite scholars in terms of his adoption of an occasionalist doctrine regarding the creation of the universe.¹⁰⁶

al-Māturīdī explains the discontinuity of accidents on the basis of continuity (*bakā’*) itself an accident. According to him, if an accident had a quality of permanence, then this would lead to the problem of an accident carrying another accident. Therefore, as it is impossible for accidents such as motion, composition, division, heat, coldness, power, etc., to exist or carry by each other, so it is impossible for them to possess the accidents of continuity.¹⁰⁷

According to al-Māturīdī, even if accidents do not endure (*lā yabqā*), bodies in the universe can still carry the accident of continuity. However, the temporal origination (*ḥudūth*) of bodies in the universe; in other words, for them to possess a first creation, means that continuity for them is not an essential quality but an accidental quality acquired in time. Therefore, just because they were subject to being created at some point in the past does not mean that they now have a quality of the accident of continuity that is an

¹⁰² Besides, al-Nasafī’s declamations demonstrate a clear terminological difference between Imām al-Māturīdī and those who argue that the universe is made completely through the combination of accidents. Indeed, Ḍirār and Najjār defend the notion that a body composed of accidents remains a body even when it reaches a state where it can no longer be divided, whereas al-Māturīdī defines accidents as “simple” and does not consider a thing that is composite (*murakkab*) or combined (*muallaḥ*) as a body.

¹⁰³ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/71.

¹⁰⁴ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 227 (226).

¹⁰⁵ This claim distinguishes al-Māturīdī also from the *kalām* scholars who have asserted that the universe consists of accidents. If we look back to al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt*, they had claimed that some accidents are persistent. However, al-Māturīdī believes that no accident is continuous without any exception.

¹⁰⁶ Nazif Muhtaroglu, “Al-Māturīdī’s View of Causality” in *Occasionalism Revisited: New Essays from the Islamic and Western Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Nazif Muhtaroglu. (Abu Dhabi: Kalam Research and Media, 2017), 3-21.

¹⁰⁷ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 96 (61); also see the controversy about whether the accident of power (*qudra*) precedes the act or vice versa. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 361 (396).

essential quality and that they are therefore completely independent of God. Indeed, since the continuity is also an accident, this situation would require this accident to be impermanent/discontinuous. al-Māturīdī explains this situation in the following manner: “The creation of continuity (*ḥudūth al-baqāʾ*) in a body makes that body persistent, and the continuity of the body (*yadūmu baqāʾuhu*) proceeds through the successive occurrence of the [accidents of] continuity in it.”¹⁰⁸ In this way the discontinuity of accidents not only posits the necessity of the creation of the universe, but implies furthermore that the universe is continuously re-created (*tatajaddadu/taḥduthu*) and that in each moment everything is under the complete power of God.

According to al-Māturīdī, the discontinuity of accidents leads to important conclusions in regard to the relationship between God and the universe. Indeed, the discontinuity of accidents in two different frames of time necessitates the disappearance of an accident the moment it is created.¹⁰⁹ The multiplied continuity of similar kind accidents is related to God’s recreating of them. al-Māturīdī states that he connects the continuous need that creatures have for God beyond the first act of creation to this principle of the discontinuity of accidents.¹¹⁰ Therefore according to him, if the arguments of some Muʿtazilites that accidents are perpetual and that the creation of God is limited only to the first moment of creation were accepted, then what we would have an autonomous universe that functions by itself according to certain laws of nature and mechanical causality. Besides, according to al-Māturīdī, if accidents and bodies were able to exist by themselves, then they would also persist by themselves without any outer factor acting on them. Moreover, this situation would also render the temporal creation argument (*ḥudūth*) debatable. The conclusion that the universe is created *ex nihilo* is arrived by accepting of accidents observable now. Their discontinuity consists in the disappearance of one accident and its replacement by another in succession.¹¹¹

Imām al-Māturīdī also uses the argument of the discontinuity of accidents against the Muʿtazilite scholars who defend the notion that humans create their own actions.¹¹² In contrast to al-Ashʿarī’s thought, al-Māturīdī argues in favor of granting humans the ability to act to a certain extent,¹¹³ but he also defends the idea that God is the sole creator of the successively recreated accidents including motion, rest, composition, separation, and power.¹¹⁴ If human acts, which can be considered continuously renewed accidents, come out of non-existence, then the disappearance and once again recreation of them deemed to be dependent on the formation of their agents. Thus, some sort of “creation” attribute would be ascribed to humans.¹¹⁵ According to al-Māturīdī, if it were to be said that any kind of accident could belong to someone other than God, then the creation and existence of the universe would become the possession of both God

¹⁰⁸ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 97 (62).

¹⁰⁹ See the issue of capacity (*istiṭāʿa*) regarding al-Māturīdī’s claim that the accident of power (*qudra*) continuously re-occurs (*tatajaddadu*) and comes into existence (*taḥduthu*). *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 356-359 (389-392).

¹¹⁰ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 383 (425).

¹¹¹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 93 (64).

¹¹² *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 361 (396).

¹¹³ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 322 (344).

¹¹⁴ According to al-Māturīdī, human actions can be reduced into accidents of motion and rest, and Allah governs over all the acts of motion and rest. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 329 (352).

¹¹⁵ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 329 (352).

and another agent. However, this view goes against the fundamental Muslim concept of oneness of the Creator of the universe (*tawḥīd*). Muslims have not disagreed on the oneness of the Creator of the universe.¹¹⁶

According to al-Māturīdī, the fact that accidents such as power (*qudra*) and capacity (*istiṭā'a*) are not continuous proves that God is the creator of human acts. In relation to this al-Māturīdī says the following:

Given that power (*quwwa*) is not among the parts of the body, it is, in fact, an accident. Accidents are not persistent (*lā tabqā*) because the continuity (*baqā'*) of something that possesses the quality of annihilation is only possible through permanence outside of itself. An accident, however, cannot accept (*yaqbulu*) the others because it cannot stand by itself. A thing cannot be persistent through permanence presents in another thing (for example, in the body). Therefore, continuity of the power is out of the question.¹¹⁷

al-Māturīdī also accuses al-Ka'bī, who on the one hand claims the discontinuity of the accidents, and on the other hand maintains that humans create their action on their own, of being inconsistent.¹¹⁸ al-Māturīdī criticizes some Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn* who on the one hand maintain that the power (*al-qudra*) does not last during two units of time (*lā tabqā waqtayn*), and on the other hand two actions can be performed with it.¹¹⁹ al-Māturīdī himself *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* explains the topic of capacity (*istiṭā'a*) in the following manner:

Capacity is the capacity of states, and as we stated earlier, it occurs before the action. Knower of the ultimate truth is God. As for the capacity to act, this type of capability occurs simultaneously with the occurrence of the actions and actions take place through it. It is the same with time units, i.e., no time unit can be present in a second-time unit. So, the capacity to act is similar to the time unit that cannot exist in the second time unit. Knower of the ultimate truth is God.¹²⁰

The foregoing declarations of al-Māturīdī are very important. Indeed, al-Māturīdī not only emphasizes the discontinuity of accidents, but further defends the idea that time has an atomic structure. This implies that he was likely maintaining that matter, space, time and motion, and the universe as a whole, have atomic structures, like the majority of atomist *mutakallimūn* defended.¹²¹

Imām al-Māturīdī uses the concept of the indivisible particle most clearly within the Mu'tazilite context of whether the universe contains any agents other than God. According to him, Mu'tazilites argue that motion, rest, composition and separation in the universe can be caused by others beside God. They maintained that certain beings are the creators of their own actions. In this sense, ships, buildings, and writing are all formed through the endeavors of humans. According to al-Māturīdī, if it is possible for these types of things to be created by humans, then, due to the part-whole relationship, it becomes possible for the entire universe to be formed by God and by creatures. In this case, more than one agent would be involved in the creation of the universe.¹²²

¹¹⁶ See. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 331 (355).

¹¹⁷ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 361 (396).

¹¹⁸ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 354 (386).

¹¹⁹ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 364 (400).

¹²⁰ *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, II, 256.

¹²¹ On this subject, see Mūsā b. Maymūn, *Dalālat al-ḥā'irīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1979), 197-198.

¹²² *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 171 (155). al-Māturīdī argues that if it were accepted, just as Mu'tazilites did, that such accidents as motion, rest, composition, and separation were created by beings other than Allah, the temporal creation argument (*ḥudūth*) would also be

For al-Māturīdī, the Mu‘tazilites’ defence of this criticism is invalid. They argue that God’s act of creating takes place in the imperceptible/atomic planes of existence, and that therefore within the perceptible macro plane humans are also capable of creation. Indeed, if the possibility of the possession of accidents such as motion, rest, composition and division is granted to certain creatures, then following from the law of analogy of the unknown to the known (*qiyās al-ghāib ‘alā al-shāhid*), the need for these to be attributed to God in the imperceptible world is also lifted. This is because although certain accidents including adhesion and annihilation are sometimes observed, the composer that gives them motion is not perceived. This function may belong to some others besides God, because these kinds of functions, whose agents are invisible, are similar to functions, whose agents are perceptible. In this case, the above-mentioned view of the Mu‘tazilites is similar to the views defended by naturalists and the Sanawiyya.¹²³ He explains this in the following manner:

If it is imagined that the “thin/fine” (*laṭīf*) bodies are divided into indivisible parts (*ajzā’ mimmā lā yatajazza’*), it becomes impossible for each of these parts to be perceived by sense and to lead us into the field of reasoning and deduction. For substances can also come together without a divine intervention over their thinness and density. Accordingly, the theological proofs for understanding that bodies (are created and governed by Allah) can be formed by the influence of others. It means that Allah has not revealed to humans the proofs that the creation and governance belong to Himself in a manner that these proofs did not eliminate the possibility of belonging these qualities to the others and reinforce the relation of them to Himself. Indeed, (according to the Mu‘tazilites) Allah has not done this in the sensible world, then, how can this happen in a non-sensible world [that is in the atomic level]?¹²⁴

These statements are a rare example that are extant today and which show how al-Māturīdī uses the concept of the indivisible part. Here, he appears not to have a problem with the concept of an indivisible

affected negatively by this. Because, what provides the *kalām* scholars with the createdness of the objects constituting the universe is the fact that these objects have never been free from being in the state of separation, adhesion, motion, or rest. Allowing that these previously described states have not been created by Allah in a similar way to the act of human, whose action occurs on his own hands and in the real sense, it would be impossible to find a chance to prove the existence of any bodies or substances that have been originated by God’s action and that is perceivable as it is. For [in that case], the actions mentioned above can come about without the intervention of God. Therefore, according to al-Māturīdī, it should be accepted that all human acts occur in the manner that Allah creates them in the hand of whoever He wishes, also in the condition and under the scheme that He pleases. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 330, 332 (353, 356).

¹²³ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 171 (155-156).

¹²⁴ *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 172 (156). al-Māturīdī also provides other pieces of argument on the origination of the human acts by Allah in reality. For instance, according to him, in the field of *kalām*, the analogical reasoning (*al-qiyās*) is either used or is not. If it is not going to be used, the method, which opponents of the *kalām* scholars adopted as to know about the Creator (*al-ṣāni‘*), will become nullified. Because Allah cannot be perceived through senses (*al-ḥawās*), His existence can only be known using reasoning. Here, the reasoning is nothing more than making inferences based on the sensible world (*al-istidlāl bi l-shāhid*). There is also this: We observe that all the meaning in the universe, along with their accidents, are present in acts of creation (*aḥḥāl l-khalq*). If the acts are not deemed as being created [by rational arguments], the concept of “creation” will only be understood through revelation (*al-sam‘*). In that case, either the general principle established by the divine revelation, meaning “He is the Creator of everything” (al-An‘ām 6/102), will be rendered authority –because it is not possible to grasp the existence of creation for everything through its special name (*ism al-hāsiyya*)–, or as previously described the necessity of the reasoning (*al-qiyās*) will be accepted. Besides, humans do not reach the status of the creator just because they own their actions. Then, his act is originated by someone else beyond himself. It should also be noted that the way to know the agent (*al-fā’il*) is in the traces that his action leaves behind. *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 331 (356-357).

part except that it cannot be perceived by senses. Despite the fact that al-Māturīdī defends the principle that “the universe can be known not through reasoning but through the senses,” this does not mean that he rejects the self-evident rational argument of the *mutakallimūn* who in support of atomism claim that “that which is restricted by ends and boundaries cannot contain the infinite.” This is because, in his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, he develops an argument for the creation of the universe with the statement that “Something that is formed by the combination of finite parts (*ijtimā‘ ajzā’ mutanāhiya*) cannot be infinite (*gayru mutanāhiya*)”.¹²⁵ Also, while interpreting the Sūra al-A‘rāf (7) in his *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, al-Māturīdī indicates that “the parts of the universe are finite as a whole (*ajzāu’ l-‘ālamī huwa bi kulliyyatihā mutanāhun*).”¹²⁶ As it seen from these examples, al-Māturīdī seems to benefit from the concept of the indivisible part, which supports the finiteness of the universe in terms of divisibility and separation.

Undoubtedly, indications that al-Māturīdī embraced the concept of the indivisible particle are not limited to these. This is also clear from his rejection of other theories of matter, all of which had emerged in his lifetime as rivals to atomism. In this context, further clear indications that al-Māturīdī opposed the idea of an eternal universe include his rejection of theories including that of bodies interpenetrating one another (*tadākhul*), substances occupying the same space and manifesting after being latent inside each other (*al-kumūn wa al-ḡuhūr*), both related to al-Nazzām’s well-known defense of the view that bodies are composed of substances which are infinitely divisible,¹²⁷ and also his criticism of the Aristotelian hylomorphic theory of matter which propounds that bodies have an infinite potentiality in terms of division.¹²⁸

In the conclusion of our section on Imām al-Māturīdī’s views on bodies, substance, and accidents, we should note that Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī indicates that al-Māturīdī embraced atomism and defended the prevailing *kalām* view that “the universe is composed of indivisible substances and accidents.” For example, al-Nasafī describes the constituents of the universe as follows:

As for the parts of the universe (*aqsām al-‘ālam*), most of the *mutakallimūn* claimed that it has three parts: Substances, bodies, and accidents. Sheikh Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, however, did not approve of this

¹²⁵ *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 171 (155-156).

¹²⁶ See *Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān*, 5, 381.

¹²⁷ These expressions al-Māturīdī can be given as an example of this: “Several times of the volume of something, which is in the process of manifestation (*ḡuhūr*), cannot be present within the object in which that thing exists. Consequently, the theory, claiming that human is present within the sperm, and that tree is present within the seed, is regarded as unfounded.” *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 95 (60). “Generation (*kawn*) of something out of another thing only means that the latter becomes manifested (*ḡahara*) after being latent (*mustajinna*) within the former. That, however, is impossible (*muḥāl*). That is, a human as a whole and a tree as a whole together with all the fruits it will bear happen to be existent inside the previously described origin/root (*al-‘aṣl*)! Or, all humans, along with the substances (*jawāhir*) constituting them, happen to be hidden in the sperm, which is inside the father’s core! Then, uncountable layers happen to be existent in a single object! Certainly, that is one of the cases that a healthy soul cannot imagine, and a sound mind cannot adopt.” *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 112-113 (82). They can say that objects with their substances (*jawāhir*) are latent (*mustajinna*) in the origin (*fi al-‘aṣl*) and afterward become manifest (*taḡhuru*) in actuality. (...) There is a point in this opinion that the mind opposes: Substances that are as voluminous as several times of a thing are impossible to reside in that thing. For such an assumption implies contradiction (*tanāquḍ*), deterioration (*fasād*) [of the internal structure] and disregard for the observation.” *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 145 (123). The latency (*kumūn*) is improbable (*lā yaḡtamilu*), for it is absurd for something to be a place (*makān*) for something ten times bigger than itself. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 200 (193).

¹²⁸ See. *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 232-237.

classification because there is a possibility of interpenetration among them. Since bodies are composed (*murakkab*) of substances (*al-jawāhir*), they are also substances at the same time.¹²⁹

Here, al-Nasafī’s explanations, and in particular his statement that “bodies are composed of substances,” contains an indication that al-Māturīdī embraced an atomist model that posited that bodies in the universe consist of indivisible substances known as atoms. In fact, al-Nasafī moves on to say that “material objects” (*ʿayān*) are divided into those that are not compound (*gayru l-mutarakkib*)– which are defined by the *mutakallimūn* as “substances” – and those that are compound (*al-mutarakkib*) – which are defined by the *mutakallimūn* as “bodies.” In this way, it is understood that each body is considered to be a substance.¹³⁰ He also says, in relation to Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, al-Naẓẓām, many early philosophers (*awāil*) and mathematicians, “they denied the indivisible part (*al-juzʿ alladhī lā yatajazzaʿ*), which we have named ‘substance’ (*jawhar*).”¹³¹ Both of these statements by al-Nasafī strongly indicate that in the final analysis, al-Māturīdī did not embrace the idea that composite bodies were comprised of simple accidents, but they were formed by substances understood to be indivisible particles or atoms.

3. Atomism in Māturīdiyya Kalām After Imām al-Māturīdī

Even though Imām al-Māturīdī had a loose approach concerning the theories of matter, the Māturīdites who came after him possessed a clear view of atomism, which they supported with established concepts regarding body, substance, and accident.

Upon stating that in general “substance” (*jawhar*) is defined as “that which stands by itself (*al-qāʾim bi al-dhātihī*)” al-Nasafī indicates that this meaning, which is ascribed to the term “substance,” has caused some controversies because of the fact that Allah also stands by Himself. Also, he argues that therefore it is more appropriate to give the meaning of “origin/root/foundation” (*al-ʿaṣl*) to substance. al-Nasafī explains the reason for this as follows:

Our evidence is that substance only refers to “origin/foundation” (*al-ʿaṣl*) in the dictionary. About the individuals famous for their goodness and generosity among the honorable and eminent people, it is said that such and such person is acting in terms of beneficence suited to his noble, substantial, glorious, and immaculate ancestry. If a dress is sewn beautifully and has a good quality fabric, it is called “substantial dress (*thawbun jawhariyyun*)”. Based on this, they [the speakers of the language] named indivisible parts of the body (*mā lā yatajazzau min al-qjzāʿ al-jism*) “substance (*jawhar*).” For out of which the combinations (*al-mutarakkibāt*) are made, are in the state of the foundations of them (combinations).¹³²

Afterwards, al-Nasafī states that a meaningful name denominates that which contains the meaning attached to its name for no reason other than that it comprises the meaning of that which it describes. In this sense, according to the dictionary the meaning of the utterance of substance is that while it does

¹²⁹ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/62-63.

¹³⁰ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/63.

¹³¹ *Tabṣira al-adilla* 1, 70.

¹³² *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/150.

connote stand by itself, it carries a meaning related to its being “origin/root (ʿaṣl)”. Therefore, according to him, to accord the notion of origin to substance is better than to give it the meaning of standing by itself.¹³³

In regard to the debates and controversies surrounding atomism in Islamic thought, Abu’l-Muḥīn al-Nasafī says, “this is an important subject that contains in itself many proofs as well as many suspicions,”¹³⁴ and thereby indicates that he is clearly in favor of atomism. This is because, he thinks that the rejection of atomism –since a thing with infinite particles cannot be larger or smaller than another thing that also has infinite particles- can lead to absurd conclusions such as that a mustard seed is not smaller than a mountain, or that a mountain is not bigger than a mustard seed. Indeed, to deny that a mountain is bigger than a mustard seed is to deny what is clear before the eye.¹³⁵

al-Nasafī then speaks of an argument that is put forward against the above-mentioned claim that runs as follows: “Even though the objects of knowledge and power of God are infinite, because His Self is the object of knowledge of Himself but not an object of power, the things included in God’s knowledge are more than the things included in His power.” In this case, a situation in which an infinite thing is more than another infinite thing occurs. However, according to al-Nasafī, this opposition is invalid. Because it leads to an illogical conclusion in the same way with decomposition of atoms, mustard seed, and mountain. Performing reasoning about an impossible thing is not right.¹³⁶

On the other hand, in response to those arguments pertaining to Allah’s knowledge and power brought against him, al-Nasafī provides the following counter-argument: “Who is the creator of the composition that occurs in the parts of a certain body? They must say “Allah”. Then they are said to as follows: “Is Allah capable of creating annihilation of composition instead of composition and separation?” According to al-Nasafī, if they respond by saying “No”; they happen to regard Allah as incapable of destroying something and creating its opposite instead of it. If they answer by saying “Yes”; then when composition of the part is annihilated, there does not remain a single part that is recipient of division, as the recipient of division does not become composite by itself. What is not composite, on the other hand, does not receive division. So that which emerges when all parts become non-recipients of division and turn into the indivisible parts is the meaning of what are called ‘substances’.”¹³⁷

On the definition of body (*jism*), the shift between Imām al-Māturīdī and those Māturīdites who come after him becomes more evident with Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (d. 580/1184). After treating the concepts of substance and accident in a manner similar to that of al-Nasafī, and providing arguments like that of the piece of mustard in relation to atoms, he says the following concerning the definition of body:

According to some mathematicians, the body is that which is three-dimensional consisting of length, width, and depth. In the opinion of us, however, a combination (*tarakkub*) of two substances is enough to call it

¹³³ This definition of al-Nasafī was also shared by other Māturīdite *mutakallimūn* at that time. For instance, Abu’l-Yusr al-Bazdawī (d. 493/1100) also says that “Substance (*al-jawhar*) is the name for the indivisible part (*al-juz’ alladhī lā yatajazza’*) that is recipient (*al-qābil*) of accidents. It is called body because it is the origin/foundation of bodies (*ʿaṣlu l-aṣām*), for the substance of something is the origin/foundation (*ʿaṣl*) of it.” *Uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Hans Peter Linss (Cairo: Dār Ihyā al-kutub al-ʿarabiya), 12.

¹³⁴ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/70.

¹³⁵ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/70.

¹³⁶ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/70-71.

¹³⁷ *Tabṣira al-adilla*, 1/71.

“body.” For if one more substance (*al-jawhar al-wāḥid*) is added to any of the three dimensions (*al-ab‘ād al-thalātha*) that belong to one of the two bodies of the same volume, this body can be said to be “more voluminous than the other”. If an absolute and a smallest composition were not enough to call two substances “body”, it would not be right to accept that the body described above is more voluminous than the other just by the addition of one dimension/substance (*bu‘d wāḥid*). Therefore, the true definition of the body must be as follows: Body is that which consists of (*mutarakkib*) or is composed of (*mujtami‘*) two or more substances.¹³⁸

As can be seen, the mathematically-inspired three-dimensional body definition of Imām al-Māturīdī has here been replaced by Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī’s linguistically-based definition of body. This situation shows that even though Māturīdite scholars differed from Imām al-Māturīdī on the three-dimensional definition of bodies, there was not a great difference between them regarding the fact that bodies are compounds that are formed by the composition of simple parts or point-like atoms, which are not called “body.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, Imām al-Māturīdī, the founder of an important *kalām* school that had a significant impact on Islamic thought, lived in a period which may be termed as the golden age of the Mu‘tazilites of the 3rd/9th century. In this period, the Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* felt a deep interest in the nature, functioning, and origination of universe that exceeded apologetic concerns and furthermore developed a rich understanding of matter and the characteristics of bodies. At the same time, the Mu‘tazilites residing in Baghdād and Basra discussed in detail subjects including atoms, void space, motion, change, causality, continuity and discontinuity.

On the other hand, the decline of the Mu‘tazila school following the *mihna* period brought criticisms on the views expressed by Mu‘tazilites on concepts such as body and accident, as well as on other fields of knowledge in which they had previously engaged. These criticisms aimed against the Mu‘tazilites led to the search for more conservative approaches to subjects related to physics and cosmology, which in turn resulted in Imām al-Māturīdī’s and Imām al-Ash‘arī’s *Ahl al-Sunna kalām* schools, in Transoxiana and Basra respectively.

If we approach Imām al-Māturīdī and the subject of atomism within this context, we see that one of the fundamental aspects of his thought is certainly that his approach to the study of matter is not a topic to which primacy is granted in terms of the elucidation of religion. Abu’l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, one of his followers, also notes that as long as there was no necessity in regard to religious matters, al-Māturīdī was not interested in seeking to describe the true nature of a thing (*ḥaqāʾiq al-ashyāʾ*) and that therefore, he abstained from attempting conclusive definitions of concepts like body, substance, and accident.

al-Māturīdī’s religious approach to physics and cosmology presents certain difficulties for our study. These difficulties are not limited to the fact that al-Māturīdī does not systematically deal with subjects related to physical theories or that his cosmological views are found in fragments scattered in his works on theological matters. Imām al-Māturīdī’s adoption of a religiously minded approach to cosmological issues, as opposed to one that seeks absolute truths, lead in many instances to him not possessing sets of concepts

¹³⁸ Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Bidāyah fī Usūl al-dīn/Matūrīdiyye Akaidi*, ed. & trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: IFAV 2014), 20.

particular to his own thought. For this reason, he was able to shift between different meanings when using concepts like substance, accident, and body, so that sometimes the meanings he accorded to these concepts were shaped by the individuals with whom he was interacting. This factor makes it difficult to ascertain Imām al-Māturīdī’s actual views regarding matter and atomism.

On the other hand, Imām Māturīdī’s assertion that theories of matter do not directly involve religious issues allowed him certain advantages in regard to *kalām*. Firstly, this situation enabled him to refrain from subscribing to a specific theory of matter, while also giving him the opportunity to Islamicize the views of his opponents as opposed to outright rejecting those views. According to al-Māturīdī, many theories of matter comprise truths attained through observation, and if interpreted correctly, these theories demonstrate the createdness of the universe, and the existence of a Creator. al-Māturīdī’s focus on multiple theories of matter also allowed him to apply the method of the cumulative case of evidences in his approach to proving the existence of God. In this sense, he was able to present a variety of different forms of argument pertaining to the existence of God and the creation of the universe, including the finitude of particles in the universe, Aristotle’s prime matter and form (*hayūla wa sūrah*), the substances of light and darkness (*nūr wa zulma*), the temporal origination of accidents and bodies (*ḥudūth al-a’rāḍ wa al-ajsām*), and the theory of natures (*ṭabā’ī*). al-Māturīdī’s flexible approach to different theories of matter, and his preference for reconciling these theories with belief in creation, shows us how atomism, which was an Ancient Greek materialist theory, was Islamicized.

al-Māturīdī’s flexibility towards theories of matter, and his adoption of them in proving the createdness of the universe and the existence of God, has allowed for space to form where mistaken interpretations have been made about him like the idea that he accepted theories such as prime matter-form, natures, causality, and continuity. However, al-Māturīdī did not embrace these theories of matter in-themselves. Rather, he appropriated some of their arguments to prove the existence of a sovereign Creator. In this manner, he was able to refute his opponents’ views regarding the eternity of the universe while at the same time using their theories for his own theological purposes and thereby adapting them to belief in creation.

For instance, the fact that al-Māturīdī considers “natures” (*ṭabā’ī*) as substances or accidents and includes them into his system of thought does not mean that he accepted these concepts as materialists (*dahriyya*) and naturalists (*tabī’iyya*) understood them. Because he does not accept the idea of nature understood as the source of the motion by itself and the causal factor of the phenomena in the universe in the same way that the proponents of natures (*aṣḥāb al-ṭabā’ī*) believed. According to him, even though such natures as hotness, coldness, wetness and dryness are numerically finite and have a one-way/uniform motion, the objects in the universe that are constituted out of them have incredible diversity. Natures must be put together in a very delicate way to be able to constitute the objects that are so complicated and diverse. However, because natures lack intelligence and consciousness, they cannot establish a uniform composition on their own. Moreover, the fact that natures exist in objects proportionally despite the fact that they cannot come together due to being contrary to each other, indicates that they are combined by a volition of an agent radically different from themselves, i.e. a sovereign Creator.

Even though Imām al-Māturīdī’s apologetic approach to issues regarding matter and physical bodies provided him with some theological advantages in terms of not necessarily devoting himself to a specific

scientific or philosophical doctrine, and making use of different matter theories for the sake of religious aims, we should point out that this apologetic attitude might have had some adverse effects on his school in the historical process. While the Māturīdiyya kalām, especially after Abu'l-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, mostly remained stagnant, the Ash'ariyya school, which pivots on a model that is integrated or mixed (*mamzūj*) with philosophy and science, brought forth such renowned names as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), Qāḍī Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) and Sayyid Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413). Therefore, it might be a more accurate attitude to base the stagnation of Māturīdites relative to the Ash'arites on the former's principle of not engaging in scientific and philosophical issues unless it is required theologically and less so on their geographical setting

At the same time, however, all of this does not mean that Imām al-Māturīdī did not base his thoughts on certain cosmological theories, and that he did not feel himself closer to certain theories of matter. Despite the fact that al-Nasafī states how al-Māturīdī chose not to describe the true nature of things as long as there was no religious necessity to do so, we see that his views regarding “accidents” had a major impact on his general thought. By taking as a basis the view of the “discontinuity of accidents,” al-Māturīdī seeks to establish many theological principles including proof from origination, the existence of God, the continuity of God's act of creation, human acts and miracles. The discontinuity of accidents is also behind his confident approach to other theories of matter including natures (*ṭabā'ī*). It is certain that al-Māturīdī placed a subject like the discontinuity of accidents, which was controversial among the *mutakallimūn*, at the center of the relationship between God and the world and thereby he interpreted many different issues of *kalām* such as the creation of human acts (*khalq af'āl al-'ibād*) in a manner that exhibits an occasionalist perspective of the universe like Ash'arites.

As for atomism, this subject appeared in many different ways in the period in which Imām al-Māturīdī lived. In this sense, an individual's assertion that the entire universe is composed by accidents, or his use of substance in the sense of body, would not mean that this individual, within the scope of that period's conceptual frameworks, was either a proponent or opponent of atomism. In the time-period in which al-Māturīdī lived, there were those who defined an indivisible particle as “body,” as well as those who argued that the entire universe was composed of substances and rejected atomism, or those who defended atomism and claimed that the entire universe was composed of accidents. For this reason, any study that attempts to consider al-Māturīdī's views regarding atomism must keep in mind both his own particular approach to these types of subjects as well as the conceptual frameworks of his time-period.

Although al-Māturīdī's general approach did not involve detailed considerations of atomism, this does not mean that he rejected atomism. Indeed, if we take into consideration the conceptual and problematic background of his period, we will find that there are important clues which indicate that al-Māturīdī's thought system was based on a view structured on atomism. Examples include his use of Mu'tazilite scholars' atomist terminology when speaking of bodies, his reference to things that are not composites as bodies, and his argument that there exist in the universe things that are “simple”, in other words not composite (*muallaḥ*). Also notable is al-Māturīdī's acceptance of the principle of “a thing that is limited by limits and boundaries cannot contain infinite things,” an argument used by the *mutakallimūn* of the time close to atomism, and his critical approach to theories of matter that support infinite divisibility such as interpenetration (*tadākhuḥ*), latency (*al-kumūn*), manifestation (*al-ẓuhūr*), and prime matter-form.

Also, it should not be forgotten that al-Māturīdī uses the argument that “something that is formed by the combination of finite parts (*ijtimā‘ ajzā’ mutanāhī*) cannot be infinite (*gayr mutanāhī*),” a premise also commonly used by atomist *mutakallimūn*. Moreover, accidents, which played an important role in his thought system, have a simple structure and are therefore atomic in nature. al-Māturīdī not only emphasized the discontinuity of accidents, but further defended, like the majority of atomist *mutakallimūn*, the idea that time has an atomic structure.

Therefore, what should be considered here is not whether Imām al-Māturīdī’s approach to atomism is agnostic or whether he subscribed to anti-atomism; what should be considered is the type of atomism which Imām al-Māturīdī accepts. Even though at one time in his life, due to various epistemological justifications, Imām al-Māturīdī felt sympathy towards the notion that bodies in the universe are collection of accidents, in the final analysis he did not adhere to this view. Upon closer inspection, important differences arise between al-Māturīdī’s views on accidents and “the proponents of accidents” (*aṣhāb al-a‘rāḍ*) such as ʿAṣṣar b. ʿAmr and Husayn al-Najjār. Firstly, according to ʿAṣṣar and al-Najjār, these accidents which are regarded indivisible parts are themselves bodies whereas Imām al-Māturīdī argues that simple (*basīṭ*) things that comprise bodies cannot be called “bodies” because they do not possess the accidents of aggregation (*taʿlīf*). Besides, according to Imām al-Māturīdī accidents do not stand by themselves; they do not involve states like composition, contact, motion and interaction. Furthermore, according to Imām al-Māturīdī, accidents are not durative/continuous. This situation shows why in the final analysis Imām al-Māturīdī does not accept the view that bodies in the universe are comprised of accidents.

Finally, we should note that close and distant classical-period followers of al-Māturīdī, like Abu’l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, who possessed books of his that have not reached us, did not have any doubt that al-Māturīdī after all embraced the standard model of *kalām* atomism, defended atomism to the degree that they sometimes charged anti-atomists to be heretical. In Classical Islamic thought, anti-atomism is attributed to al-Nazzām and other marginal groups like the *falāsifa*, and it is not possible to consider Imām al-Māturīdī within these groups that are commonly regarded as heretical. Therefore, Imām al-Māturīdī’s reluctance to engage directly with atomism in his extant works should not be interpreted as indicating that he was opposed to atomism; rather, this factor would be better explained if tied to Imām al-Māturīdī’s general reluctance to engage with scientific/philosophical issues which are not directly related to religion or commonly held, as indicated by al-Nasafī.

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