

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MU'TAZILLITE VIEWS AND DUALISTIC VIEWS IN POST- SASANIAN PAHLAVI TEXTS

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W. Montgomery Watt (*The Formation Period of Islamic Thought*, University Press, Edinburgh, 1973, pp. 209-250) had dealt extensively with the Mu'tazillites. Watt states that as the liberal theology of the Mu'tazillites seemed quite appealing to the western scholars, it attracted their attention considerably. But more extensive reviews have revealed that "the Mu'tazilli were less purely rational and less liberal than was originally supposed." While "their contribution to the development of Islamic thought was of the highest importance," it needs to be understood why their distinctive ideas were not accepted by the Sunnite Muslims.

The name Mu'tazillite came to be restricted to those who adopted the Aristotelian logic to explain Quran. They also accepted the five principles, namely, unity, justice, the promise and the threat, names and judgements, or the intermediate position and commanding the right and forbidding the wrong.

Watt maintains that "those Muslims who believed in the absolute omnipotence of God had necessarily to admit that he was responsible for all the evil in the world. They presumably believed that, following the Qur'an, that he was essentially good, and accepted his connection with evil as largely inexplicable. The Mu'tazillites on the other hand hold man as responsible for evil, though they held God responsible for evil at times, which triggered "complex attempts" to avoid 'fixing evil upon God'.

Following the tradition of Basra rather than that of Bagdad, some Mu'tazillite thinkers emphasized the merit of doing things in one's own strength. They held that "it is better for man to have duties imposed upon him, to be given power to perform these and then, if he does so, to be rewarded with Paradise, than to be created in Paradise by the unmerited grace (Tafaddul) of God. This sounds like a veritable echo of what Bundalishn 3:23-24 expounds as mentioned by me in my paper on Dualism in Zoroastrianism. The similarity with the Zoroastrian notion is striking but is not surprising coming as it does as an impulse not from Bagdad but from Basra where Iranian influence prevailed for centuries. Watt notes that "the Mu'tazillites were taking over ideas which were already present in their intellectual environment; and it is interesting to try to trace these ideas backwards." (p. 241). It is regrettable, however,

that he sees only Christian and Hellenistic antecedents here, Zoroastrian notions that were rife in the area for centuries escaping his notice utterly. Watt concludes that as Sunnism came to be the established religion circa 850, the Mu'tazillites came to be regarded as heretics and their doctrines ceased to have importance but they "exercised an influence indirectly." (p.250) and even enjoyed a silver age up to 933. (pp. 297-318). Insofar as the Mu'tazillites held man, and not God, responsible for evil their views come somewhat close to those of the Pahlavi texts written in the post-Sasanian times, as reviewed at length by me in my paper on the Nature of Dualism in Zoroastrianism.

In 1970 Moshe Sharon submitted a doctoral thesis to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and reworked it into a book format: *Black Banners from the East, the Establishment of the 'Abbasid State: Incubation of a Revolt*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1983. In her review of Sharon's book, Patricia Crone points out that Sharon "combines conjecture with arbitrary selection from a mass of contradictory and frequently quite a historical material." She finds the book "riddled with contradictory claims" and gives a few examples of it. (See *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 50, No. 1, 1987, pp. 134-6).

In his review of Sharon's book, Elton L. Daniel too is very critical of many aspects of the book: Daniel finds Sharon making "extravagant claims and adopting the work of Shaban and Omar even though "it is at variance with his own evidence" Daniel wonders: how could a Muslim, whom Sharon depicts as "a novice in everything relating to Khurasan and ---relations within the Da'wah," so quickly and completely transformed and controlled the movement?" (See *International Journal of Middle East Studies* xxi, 1989, pp. 578-583.).