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Navigating the Anthropocene: Responsibility Ethics as a Necessary Moral Orientation in a Transhumanist World

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Abstract:

This paper explores the intersection of Islamic ethics, the Anthropocene, and transhumanism, focusing on the necessity of integrating responsibility ethics into Islamic thought. It argues that traditional frameworks of deontological, intentional, and virtue ethics, while foundational, are insufficient to address the complex ethical dilemmas posed by globalization, environmental crises, and technological advancements. Drawing on Al-Māturīdī's theological insights, particularly his defense of free will and the concept of the "moment of inner resistance," this study proposes a responsibility ethics framework that complements traditional Islamic teachings. This framework emphasizes human autonomy, the rejection of blind imitation (*taqlīd*), and the necessity of considering long-term consequences. By reimagining ethical decision-making, this work highlights the potential for Islamic theology to engage with contemporary challenges, fostering a balanced coexistence of technological and spiritual progress.

Keywords: 1. Islamic Theology, 2. Islamic Ethics, 3. al-Māturīdī, 4. Responsibility Ethics, 5. Anthropocene, 6. Free Will, 7. Transhumanism

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I will argue that we need "checks and balances" for an ethical system whose moral horizon does not extend beyond adhering to "halal certificates" in which individual responsibility is handed over to the legal rulings of a religious authority, absolving Muslims from independently and comprehensively reflecting on their moral responsibility. To this end, I am arguing that we need to integrate a philosophically grounded principle of responsibility that emphasizes the autonomy of each believer into our canon of ethical theories.[1] Before proceeding to outline how this extension of the ethical discourse might be formulated, I will first provide an overview of the problem horizon and explain why such an extension is necessary.

2. On the Anthropocene

The term "the Anthropocene" marks a new geological epoch, denoting humanity's profound and often devastating impact on Earth's ecosystems. This era is characterized by climate change, habitat destruction, species extinction, and the unsustainable exploitation of natural resources – problems that will ultimately lead to the self-destruction of mankind (Gordon, 2023; Davies, 2016; Steffen et al. 2007). Thus, it

[1] The need for such an approach has already been highlighted by Florian Zemmin (2011). However, his own work is historically descriptive (Zemmin, 2011). A systematic approach in this direction has yet to be attempted. This article is intended as an attempt in this direction.

represents the secular equivalent of what is known as "the Apocalypse" within the framework of the religious discourse (Douglas, 2021; Dalby, 2016). But since the Anthropocene follows from our own actions and systems of life and thus is devastation self-inflicted, it raises urgent ethical questions about humanity's responsibility toward the environment and future generations (Biermann & Lövbrand, 2019; Field et al. 2014). Rooted in Enlightenment ideals of progress and human dominance over nature, the Anthropocene urges us to reflect on the unintended consequences of a worldview that prioritized technological and economic growth over ecological balance (Münster et al. 2023). The same ideals that empowered humanity to reshape its environment have now led to a critical juncture where the sustainability of life itself is at stake.

This unbalanced pursuit of progress and control over nature, demarcation lines of the Anthropocene era, finds its logical extension in Transhumanism – a movement that seeks to push the boundaries of human potential through advanced technologies while perpetuating the same anthropocentric ideals rooted in Enlightenment philosophy (Sorgner, 2021). With this, transhumanists are criticized for intensifying the principles of relentless progress and resource exploitation, thereby exacerbating the defining dynamics of the Anthropocene (Fukuyama, 2004; Romero, 2022; Herbrechter et al., 2022; Banerji & Paranjape, 2016). The widespread integration of advanced technologies – such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and digital systems – into nearly every aspect of modern life aligns with transhumanist ideals of enhancing human capabilities and transcending biological limitations. The development of these and other technologies necessitates us to control the natural world by redesigning it and modifying it to our needs and wants, which is why societal values, particularly in technologically advanced regions, often emphasize optimization, efficiency, and control, which are hallmark principles of the transhumanist worldview (Joy, 2000; Chung et al., 2023).

Thus, for what it's worth, it is reasonable to assert that we are increasingly living in a transhumanist world. Although instinctively this raises all sorts of alarm sounds, it must be pointed out that the transhumanist movement offers a vision of a future where diseases and physical limitations can be eradicated. Prominent proponents like Ray Kurzweil and Nick Bostrom suggest that such advancements could lead to unprecedented improvements in health, longevity, and cognitive abilities (Kurzweil, 2005; Bostrom, 2014). So, in acknowledging all the dangers associated with the transhumanist pursuit, we must in all fairness recognize that if there was any chance that these promises could be fulfilled, it would be equally unethical to categorically dismiss these efforts aimed at alleviating suffering in the world.

However, in sight of debates on the principle of constant growth as a driving force of the climate crisis, the Enlightenment project that harbors that principle loses credibility.[2] The belief that human reason and technological advancement could solve all problems is now seen as overly optimistic and insufficient for addressing complex ethical and environmental issues (Tucker, 2001). This realization has opened up space for the revival

[2] Critics of the rule of pure reason, such as Hannah Arendt and Max Weber, have long argued that Enlightenment philosophy neglects the emotional, spiritual, and ethical aspects of human existence and therefore cannot propose a holistic answer to the question of what "being human" means. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1998) explores how the Enlightenment's privileging of reason has led to the neglect of the 'vita activa'—the active life of human engagement that includes emotional and moral dimensions. Similarly, Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001) critiques the reductionist view of human behavior as merely the result of rational calculation, arguing instead that ethical values, religious beliefs, and spiritual motivations play a crucial role in shaping economic and social institutions.

of spiritual and emotional dimensions in our understanding of the world (Riesebrodt, 2001; Pollack, 2003). In response to the crises of the Anthropocene, there is a growing recognition of the need to reintegrate the emotional and spiritual dimensions into our worldview. This revival of spiritual and emotional reason brings renewed attention to the value of scriptural wisdom, which provides ethical teachings, moral values, and a sense of purpose that the enlightened reason appears to lack.

3. The Principle of Responsibility in the New Age

While this may present an encouraging opportunity for religious scholars to engage more actively in the ethical discourse surrounding the Anthropocene, the solution cannot simply involve replicating traditional teachings on ethics, in our case within Islamic theology or philosophy, to address the pressing challenges outlined above. This is a circumstance that Hans Jonas already highlighted in 1979 in his reflections on the Principle of Responsibility:

"[Technology] reveals through its effects that the nature of human action has, in fact, fundamentally changed and that an entirely new category—nothing less than the planet's entire biosphere—has been added to what we must take responsibility for because we have power over it. [...] No previous ethics had to account for the global condition of human life or the distant future, let alone the survival of the species." (Jonas, 2003, p. 27)

The most important thing to be learned from this quote is Jonas's assertion that the nature of human action has fundamentally changed. This shift implies that the paradigms that rule the discourse have also changed which means that the nature of the problem of morality is a different one now. It is one that pre-industrialization and pre-globalization thinkers could not have addressed, as such issues could not have been conceived as existential threats within their historical contexts. To illustrate this point further, one might reflect on the following question:

If it was within our powers to eradicate an evil in the world through a specific action, would it be moral to refrain from doing so?

The answer to this question seems quite straightforward: No, it would not be moral to refrain from doing good, nor would it be moral to allow evil to persist when we have the means to prevent it. If someone invented a definitive cure for cancer and chose not to share it, we would naturally think the worst of them. This principle aligns closely with Islamic ethics, which emphasizes the moral obligation to do good (*maʿrūf*) and prevent harm (*munkar*) whenever possible. This concept of *amr bil maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* stems from the Qur'an (Q. 3:110) and represents a cornerstone of Islamic moral teaching, underscoring the responsibility of individuals and communities to actively promote righteousness and prevent wrongdoing. Failing to act when capable of doing good is considered morally deficient in Islam. It is not enough to passively avoid evil; active engagement in rectifying harm and promoting welfare is a central ethical duty. Therefore, to address the fundamental question posed here does not require a new ethical theory. So, let us consider the same question in the context of contemporary transhumanist discourse:

What if a pill was devised that could rejuvenate the cells in our body, allowing us to maintain our physical and mental condition in its prime? What if we could even remove our mind from our body and transfer it into a more capable body, genetically engineered in a laboratory? If such feats were indeed within our reach, we could eradicate all physical and mental illnesses. Would it then be moral to refrain from doing so?

The answer to this question no longer appears straightforward; now it seems far too complex to be resolved with a simple "yes" or "no". A mere recourse to the previously quoted verse no longer seems sufficient. Instead, we find ourselves needing to contextualize our response and provide more nuanced arguments to legitimize our perspective. This is precisely what Jonas meant when he stated that the nature of the problem of morality has fundamentally changed, necessitating a new set of questions to be addressed in order to construct a framework capable of systematically engaging with these novel ethical challenges.

4. On the Moral Blind Spot

Within the tradition of Islam, the ethical framework is constituted by a mix of deontological ethics with intentional ethics (*fiqh* and *kalām*), and virtue ethics (*falsafa* and *taṣawwuf*). Deontological ethics describes an ethical system that determines the value of an action not by its immediate or indirect consequences but by the adherence to rules, duties, or obligations as the basis for moral decision-making (Alexander & Moore, 2021). Intentional ethics focuses on the inner intention of the actor. This principle is generally known to Muslim believers as *niyya*, the inner intention with which a Muslim begins an action (al-Ġazzālī, 2010; Powers, 2004). Virtue ethics is a philosophical approach that emphasizes an individual's character and virtues as the key elements of ethical thinking and moral behavior rather than rules or consequences (Hursthouse & Pettigrove, 2023). Thus, this creates an environment where a Muslim individual strives for virtuous perfection and, in moral dilemmas, relies on pure inner intentions, trusting that God is fully aware of them and understands them.

It must be pointed out, however, that while virtue ethics inhabits a central role in shaping the religious moral worldview of Muslims, the strive for the perfection of character laid down within it serves more as an ideal than an integral part of the decision-making process in the everyday life of a believer. This is, of course, a generalization, and there will always be exceptions where virtue ethics plays a more immediate and tangible role in practical decisions. Nevertheless, this distinction becomes more evident when considering specific examples, where practical decisions often prioritize adherence to legal rulings (*fiqh*) and pure intentions (*niyya*) over the cultivation of virtuous traits.

Scenario 1: Consider for instance a political actor who launches a campaign that spreads misinformation targeting certain groups, aiming to discriminate against and criminalize them. The actor justifies these actions by obtaining a fatwā from a respected scholar, affirming the permissibility of their actions within an Islamic legal framework (*fiqh*). They further assert that their intentions (*niyya*) are pure, claiming their goal is to protect and strengthen the *umma* against their foes. However, the campaign is strategically designed to gain more influence and consolidate power, while the misinformation perpetuates harm, sows division, and damages the credibility of the *umma* on a global scale. By focusing solely on legal justification and the purity of their stated intentions, the actor neglects accountability for the broader and long-term harm caused, exposing a critical moral blind spot in their decision-making (Bunt 2018, pp. 84-93).

Scenario 2: A consumer habitually opts for industrially produced *halal*-certified meat over sustainable organic meat, justifying their choice by emphasizing adherence to Islamic dietary laws. They view the *halal* certification as a non-negotiable requirement that fulfills their religious obligations under Islamic law. Additionally, they assert that their intention is to follow divine commandments, framing their decision as an act of devotion and moral compliance. However, the consumer dismisses the significant environmental harm caused by industrial meat production—such as deforestation, carbon emissions, and resource depletion—as beyond their personal responsibility. By prioritizing the *halal* label

above all else, they overlook the broader ethical implications of their choice, sidelining concerns about sustainability, animal welfare, and their collective duty as stewards of the Earth (*khalīfa*) (Eslami Ardakani, 2012; Rahman et al. 2024).

Scenario 3: Consider a hypothetical Muslim soap company. While producing a product that ostensibly improves hygiene and public health, it simultaneously generates toxic water that harms the environment. First, the company might argue that its intentions are pure because it produces soap, a commodity that enhances public health, and second, that its business model aligns with the ethical teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith, making the acquisition of a fatwa relatively straightforward. Finally, it could claim that by promoting cleanliness — considered a fundamental stepping stone to virtuousness in Islamic tradition — it is fostering moral development within the community. However, doubts remain as to whether the board, operating within the pressures of a capitalist economy, would truly adhere to these ethical principles when faced with the consequences of their toxic waste, or if they would continue to prioritize profit until regulatory scrutiny forces a change in practices. A company practicing responsibility ethics would prioritize environmental sustainability for future generations, even at a higher cost, based on its duty to protect the environment, without the need for regulatory scrutiny.

This is where it differs from a consequentialist approach, which evaluates the morality of actions based solely on their outcomes (Sinnott-Armstrong, 2023; Burdon, 2020). A consequentialist approach would consider the overall benefits of sustainable practices, such as improved public health and economic stability, and deem actions to promote them right if they produce the greatest overall good. The "greatest overall good" in the case of a company that runs on the principle of constant growth, though, is the maximization of profit margins. So, the right thing to do in this case would be an approach that ensures maximum profits while avoiding too much negative press. The responsibility towards the environment and the well-being of future generations is a secondary concern and cannot be pursued if the company would lose profit margins or even make a loss because of it.

The examples can be multiplied. These scenarios aim to underscore a moral blind spot, where strict adherence to legal and intentional ethics neglects the long-term environmental and ethical consequences of personal decisions. The protagonists believe to act within the confines of Islamic law and, therefore, to be sin-free, or at least morally not reprehensible. They believe this either because they can refer to a given *fatwā* that would deem their actions admissible from a legal point of view or because they can relieve their consciences by having faith in the purity of their intentions. However, within these responses, one can observe a lack of motivation to reflect on personal accountability beyond "legalizing" one's own wrongdoing through the means of utilizing a given *fatwā*. This is where the ethics of responsibility, as proposed by Hans Jonas and Max Weber, comes in: Responsibility ethics focuses on the duties and obligations inherent in roles and relationships, emphasizing accountability and the foresight of long-term consequences (Jonas, 1984; Morris, 2013; Weber, 2001).

5. The principle of *taklīf* vs. the philosophical principle of responsibility

One might ask, however, why such an extension to our ethical systems is necessary, given that the notion of personal responsibility for our deeds is already deeply embedded within Islamic teachings. Two arguments can be put forward to underscore this notion: 1. The concept of the Day of Judgment emphasizes that every person will be held accountable for their actions, as stated in the Qur'an: "And every soul will be fully compensated [for] what it did, and He is most knowing of what they do" (Qur'an 39:70). This clearly places responsibility at the forefront of Islamic ethics. 2. The concept of *taklīf* (lit. imposition or obligation) establishes a framework of moral and legal accountability that inherently

encompasses the principle of responsibility. The concept of *taklīf*, therefore not only defines the obligations and prohibitions set by Islamic law but also presupposes the individual's capacity for reasoned judgment and moral accountability, highlighting the believer's role as a responsible agent in fulfilling divine and societal duties. (Nasir, 2016)

As to the first objection: The proposition of a philosophically framed responsibility ethics is not at odds with the wisdom of Qur'anic teaching. Instead, it places a finger on the wound, urging us to take this responsibility far more seriously than we observably do. Hans Jonas emphasized that our responsibility extends to everything over which we have power and influence, highlighting the profound ethical weight of our actions in a world shaped by interconnectivity and technological advancements. While we might feel powerless against a system built on ruthless exploitation ruled by global corporations, Jonas's principle reminds us to remain aware of how we support this system, even in seemingly innocuous daily activities. For instance, buying coffee — a seemingly harmless act — often involves supporting industries that exploit labor in developing countries, underpay farmers, perpetuate poverty, and contribute to deforestation through unsustainable farming practices. Consumers, including Muslims seeking affordable food products, might not realize how their consumption habits contribute to biodiversity loss and the displacement of Indigenous communities. As long as we continue to enjoy the conveniences of modern life, consuming without regard for the indirect detrimental effects of our choices and finding moral satisfaction in a mere "halal" label, we cannot claim to have truly internalized the Qur'anic teachings on responsibility.

As to the second objection: Even though one might argue that the concept of *taklīf* in legally grounded intentional ethics places significant emphasis on human responsibility, it does not constitute a systematic framework for an ethics of responsibility that is philosophically grounded and independent of pre-defined templates of commandments and prohibitions. The distinction between responsibility as legal accountability in the context of *taklīf* and a philosophical notion of responsibility lies in the fact that *taklīf* does not require believers to independently position themselves morally. Instead, *taklīf* offers a list of commandments and prohibitions that a legally accountable believer (*mukallaf*) must follow, being answerable to God according to the rulings of jurists.

Responsibility in the sense of responsibility ethics, however, transcends legal rulings and allows one to ask whether it is morally right to follow a legal command if its observance might contribute to other harms in the world. It commands believers to refrain from what is legally permissible when they foresee such repercussions. This shift does not negate the central relevance of Islamic jurisprudence for theology or the inner world of Muslims but highlights the need for a more nuanced discourse that internalizes the problems that arise from our embeddedness in a globalized context which could, in turn, provide valuable impulses for Islamic legal philosophy. In this sense, responsibility ethics functions as a system of "checks and balances," not replacing but complementing intentional ethics. While intentional ethics emphasizes the believer's inner world and relies on self-regulation, responsibility ethics introduces an additional moral complexion by emphasizing accountability beyond religious legal concerns.

6. The Algorithm of Responsibility and its Burden

To summarize the ethical decision-making process, which integrates responsibility ethics, it may be helpful to conceptualize it as an algorithmic prompt. These involve the following steps:

1. *Clarify the Action and Its Purpose:*

- Step 1.1: Define the proposed action and its intended outcome.
- Step 1.2: Identify the stakeholders affected by the action.
- Step 1.3: Verify alignment with Islamic legal rulings (*fiqh*). If the action is obligatory (*wājib*) or forbidden (*ḥarām*): Any contradiction with Islamic rulings is a violation of the believer's duty (*mukallafiyya*) towards God.
- Output: Reject the action if it contradicts *fiqh*. If the action is permissible (*mubāḥ*), proceed to Step 2.
- If the action contradicts *fiqh* but aligns with universal ethical principles: Step 1.4: Pause and proceed to a deeper analysis in Step 4 (Responsibility Ethics).
- Output: Do not immediately reject the action; instead, explore whether the contradiction with *fiqh* can be reconciled through ethical discretion or public interest (*maṣlaḥa*).

2. *Evaluate Intentions and Motivations:*
   - Step 2.1: Assess whether intentions are pure and aimed at moral good, benefiting the *umma*, or promoting universal well-being.
   - Step 2.2: Recognize that while pure intentions are necessary, they do not justify the action if other ethical or legal criteria are not met.
   - Step 2.3: If intentions are impure or misaligned, they will have detrimental effects on religious virtuousness (*taqwā*) and ethical integrity.
   - Output: If intentions are impure or misaligned, reconsider or refine the action.
3. *Analyze Consequences and Impacts:*
   - Step 3.1: Assess the short-term and long-term consequences of the action for all stakeholders.
   - Step 3.2: Use predictive analysis to foresee unintended consequences and adjust the plan accordingly.
   - Step 3.3: Ensure alignment with principles of preserving the greater good (*maṣlaḥa*), minimizing harm (*mafsada*), and promoting universal well-being.
   - Step 3.4: Consider the proportionality of the action—whether the benefits outweigh the harms in a meaningful and justifiable way.
   - Output: If consequences lead to significant harm or violate ethical principles, revise or abandon the action.
4. *Apply Responsibility Ethics. Accountability and Foresight:*
   - If the action aligns with *fiqh* but contradicts universal ethical principles (e.g., environmental harm), consider the following:
   - Step 4.1: Evaluate the severity of the harm caused by the action (e.g., carbon emissions from driving, deforestation from coffee production).

- Step 4.1.2: Explore alternatives that minimize harm while still fulfilling the intended purpose (e.g., using public transport or buying sustainably sourced coffee).

- Step 4.1.2: Weigh the action against the Islamic principle of preserving the environment, which is part of the broader concept of *maṣlaḥa* (public interest). The Qur'an and Sunnah emphasize stewardship of the Earth (e.g., Quran 7:85, "Do not cause corruption on the earth after it has been set right").

- Step 4.1.3: Prioritize actions that protect vulnerable individuals, communities, and the environment, in line with the duty of care inherent in responsibility ethics. If the action cannot be modified to reduce harm or align with the principle of responsibility, consider abandoning it or finding a more ethical alternative.

- If the action contradicts *fiqh* but aligns with universal ethical principles, consider the following:

- Step 4.2: Evaluate whether the contradiction with *fiqh* is absolute or subject to interpretation (e.g., differences among schools of thought or contextual factors).

- Step 4.2.1: Explore the principle of *rukhṣa* (dispensation), which allows for flexibility in Islamic law under conditions of hardship or necessity.

- Step 4.2.2: Assess the nature and severity of the harm: Is the harm minor, major, or catastrophic? Who or what is affected (e.g., individuals, communities, the environment)? Is the harm temporary or permanent?

- Step 4.2.3: Evaluate the necessity of the action: Is the action essential (*ḍarūriyyāt*) or non-essential (*ḥājiyyāt* or *taḥsīniyyāt*)? If essential, explore ways to minimize harm while fulfilling the need. If non-essential, consider abandoning the action to avoid harm.

- Step 4.2.4: Apply the principle of proportionality: Weigh the long-term benefits of the action against the harms it causes. If the benefits outweigh the harms, proceed only if harm is minimized. If the harms outweigh the benefits, abandon the action.

- Step 4.2.5: If the action serves a compelling public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) and aligns with the principle of *rukhṣa*, it may be permissible under Islamic law, provided the harm is minimized and the action is limited to the specific context.

- Step 4.2.6: If the action cannot be reconciled with *fiqh*, even after consultation and analysis, abandon it.

- Output: A decision that embodies accountability, foresight, and a commitment to the well-being of all stakeholders, while striving to reconcile Islamic and universal ethical principles.

It is evident that this showcase is unrealistic in a real-life situation, as no one employs such an algorithmic thought process in their moral decision-making. Real-world decision-making is infinitely more complex and multifaceted, incorporating emotional, social, and cultural dimensions that cannot possibly be captured by a generalized algorithm like this. Nevertheless, this demonstration serves to highlight one crucial point: responsibility ethics significantly slows down decision-making processes by requiring the moral agent

to consider a wide range of consequences, including long-term and indirect impacts. This is a major drawback to be acknowledged when considering its practicability. Furthermore, responsibility ethics always stems from a position of caution and uncertainty, which is why no decision can be final, and continuous reflection and review are necessary. This comprehensive evaluation demands time and resources, which may not always be feasible in urgent situations where swift action is required. Moreover, the constant need to anticipate and account for all possible outcomes places a heavy cognitive and emotional burden on the moral agent, potentially leading to decision paralysis or moral fatigue. The weight of continuously evaluating one's role in complex, interconnected systems can create a persistent sense of stress and self-doubt, making it challenging to balance ethical deliberation with practical action. While responsibility ethics fosters deeper awareness, its demands risk overwhelming the agent, particularly in a fast-paced and highly interconnected world.

Is it even practicable when it needs so much consideration and mental and emotional effort? Furthermore, it is not yet clear what exactly leads us to the recognition of what the responsible thing to do is. Exactly how do we know the right thing to do in every given situation? Take the trolley problem, for example: If we are to decide whether to pull the lever and divert a train to save five people at the cost of one, we are faced with a morally taxing decision that requires weighing the value of lives against one another. One could say that according to the above-mentioned principles of ethics of responsibility, we should abstain from any action that puts us in a situation where we cause harm, so we shouldn't pull the lever. If we don't do anything, we can't be held responsible for it. But on the flip side, if I am exactly aware of the consequences of my inaction, it must also count as a deliberate action so that I would be responsible for the death of five people instead of one. This highlights the difficulty of acting responsibly when the stakes are high and immediate action is required. Moreover, the emotional burden of such a decision raises questions about whether human beings can realistically bear the weight of responsibility in every situation without experiencing significant strain. Furthermore, in contrast to ethics of intention, ethics of responsibility do not provide fixed principles or moral guidelines by which one can orient their actions. This only adds to the confusion and can lead to an ethical relativism or opportunism which could mean the undoing of the project of responsibility entirely.

These considerations surely have some weight to them. So, given that it slows us down and only makes everything more complicated, why should we still pursue the integration of this kind of systematical complexion into the ethics of Islam? My perspective is that I regard it less as a possibility to consider and more as a necessity to bear. The Anthropocene is a consequence of our actions within a globalized system that is guided by the principles of constant growth and acceleration. The problem of the Anthropocene is exactly the trolley situation playing out in real life, where we're forced to make impossible choices— whether to prioritize immediate needs and conveniences or take actions that may harm some for the greater good of preserving the planet for future generations. As in the trolley example, inaction is not a solution, meaning if we stop participating in the modern world and boycott everything, this also would have massive repercussions on the well-being of our societies. Many people would lose their livelihood, which would lead to more poverty, instability, and potentially catastrophic consequences for the stability of our societies.

While wrestling with the guilt, responsibility, and sheer complexity of trying to do what's right in a tangled mess of competing needs, maybe slowing down is exactly what we need. Taking deliberate, sustainable actions can help us reduce harm and align our development with the ecological limits of the planet, making slowing down a necessary step toward true resilience and sustainability. While it holds true that responsibility ethics doesn't

provide clear guidelines on which basis we might determine our course of action, it is again to be pointed out that I don't consider it as a replacement for traditional ethics but rather as a complimentary addition to them. It should serve to overcome the moral blind spot that the traditional teachings bear, but the moral insights of the spiritual wisdom would provide the guidance needed.

7. Integrating the Principles of Responsibility within Kalam

At this point, one wonders what this paradigmatic shift in the ethical discourse would entail: What would be the foundational principles within kalam that make such an approach both necessary and viable, and how would they determine the orientation and course of the discourse? In what follows, I will suggest five principles, with each necessitating the other: 1. Freedom (*ikhtiyār*); 2. Autonomy and Rejection of Blind Imitation of Religious Authority (*taqlīd*); 3. Accountability and Foresight (*taklīf*); 4. Rejection of Anthropocentrism; 5. Global Solidarity and Endorsement of a Pluralist Society. I stem these principles from the philosophical notion of responsibility argued above, providing a framework for the paradigmatic shift in discourse. With regard to the limited scope of this paper, I will only explain the first and most important principle in greater detail.

As for the integration into the kalam discourse, it finds a theological representation in the works of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE/333 AH), a prominent figure in Sunni kalam. His theological framework emphasizes the harmony between reason and faith (Cerić, 1995, p. 70). He argues that human reason is well equipped to establish moral values on its own and furthermore, to recognize the existence of God without the help of divine revelation (Kam, 2019, pp. 88–97). However, he also emphasized that reason alone is not sufficient and must be complemented by spiritual wisdom found in scripture. His approach to theology in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* furthermore highlights the interplay between divine wisdom and human responsibility, making him a suitable candidate for incorporating responsibility ethics into Islamic thought.

7.1 Freedom as the Foundation of Ethics

Freedom is not something that can be proven theoretically, as Immanuel Kant most famously pointed out in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1998, B vii–B xvii):

"Reason is by its nature plagued with questions which it cannot dismiss, because they are posed to it by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, because they transcend the capacity of human reason. Reason thus falls into perplexity, from which it cannot extricate itself by any appeal to the authority of its established dogmas. Its peculiar fate is rather that it is troubled by questions which it cannot dismiss, but also cannot answer, because they transcend all experience. Such are the questions concerning the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God." (Kant, 1998, A vii–viii)

The theoretical discourse on freedom suggests that we have more reason to believe it does not exist than to believe it does (Skinner 1971; Harris 2012). Yet, without freedom, there would be no basis for discussing responsibility, let alone developing an ethics around it. Without freedom, all discourse on ethics would be in jeopardy. Freedom is the cornerstone of any ethical system because, without the ability to choose concepts like responsibility, rights, and morality become meaningless. Therefore, it must be established as a foundational principle.

The picture doesn't look very different within the kalam discourse either and theologians have ever since put an immense amount of intellectual energy into the question of whether free will is possible (Van Ess, 2019, pp. IV:535-572; De Cillis 2014). My choice to address this issue with reference to al-Māturīdī is due to his unique approach to the problem of evil for which the question of free will is of utmost importance. In a refreshing manner, he first and foremost accepts the existence of evil as an undeniable part of our reality without attempting to rationalize or disguise it as a form of good and even makes the recognition of evil a precondition of recognizing the existence of God (Kam, 2019). Central to his theodicy is his unique proof of the existence of free will through his concept of the "moment of inner revolt," as I like to call it. It posits that we need not lose ourselves in discussion about the physical preconditions that may allow for the existence of free will. Its existence is obvious, and we should search for it where it appears, namely in the realm of emotions. The "moment of inner revolt" describes our innate capacity to resist coercion and thereby most naturally exercise free will (al-Māturīdī, 2001, p. 321; Pessagno, 1984, pp. 182–184). This notion reflects a shift towards discussing theodicy and free will through the lenses of emotionality and psychology, rather than through physics and metaphysics. Since this is a crucial point to make, it needs some deeper explanation.

His systematic framework to arrive at this conclusion involves a three-pronged approach: First, he introduces the *kasb*-theory (theory of acquisition) which distinguishes between God's role as creator and human responsibility for actions. Then, to underscore his position, he addresses the topic of predestination and argues that God's foreknowledge of human actions does not negate human freedom. Finally, all these considerations culminate in the concept of inner resistance. This framework maintains that humans freely choose their actions within the context of God's omniscience, ensuring moral responsibility while acknowledging God's ultimate role. I will attempt to summarize his core argument here.

7.2 Freedom as Aquisition (*kasb*) or Two Agents Pulling on One Rope

Kasb-theory refers to the idea that while God creates human actions, humans acquire these actions through their intentions and choices. This concept suggests that every human action is a result of divine creation, yet it becomes the individual's action through the act of acquisition (Watt, 1943, pp. 234–247; Pessagno, 1984, pp. 177–191; Abrahamov, 1989, pp. 210–221). Against the objection that both God and humans participating in the creation of an act would inevitably lead to associating partners with God (*šarika*), al-Māturīdī counters that the supposed impossibility arises from a fundamental error of viewing ontological levels as reflections of each other. If the essential difference between God's actions (*afʿāl Allāh*) and human actions (*afʿāl al-ʿabd*) is recognized, it is indeed possible for both to participate in the same action. The involvement of two actors in an effected act does not mean they are involved in the same action. He gives the example of two people pulling a rope: both pull the rope, causing it to break. Thus, something effected can involve two actors without assuming their ontological equivalence. God creates the effect, and humans perform the action, making it an effected act.[3] Or to put it differently: He maintains that every act's phenomenological existence is attributed to God, who creates everything. Humans, on the other hand, acquire actions not only by performing the act but primarily by choosing the action (*ikhtiyār*) and deciding to undertake it (*yakūnu ikhtiyāran min ḥayṭ al-kasb*) (Māturīdī, 2001, p. 321). Once a person decides to act, God creates the necessary power (*qudra*) in them to execute it. This means God creates the act or the capacity only after the human decides to act exercising his freedom of will (*irāda*) (Māturīdī, 2001, pp. 342-343, 375-376).

[3] In his own words: "*wa-fiʿl al-ʿabd mafʿūluhū lā fiʿluhū*." (Māturīdī, 2001, p. 319).

7.3 Freedom as a Paradox: Who's got the Power?

But since it is always God who creates and brings the action with all its effects into existence, the objection remains that He is complicit in every evil act in this world. To avoid this conclusion the Muʿtazila argue that *qudra* (power) must precede action and introduce the concept of potentiality (Kam, 2019, pp. 233-237). This means to give human beings exclusive access to the power of acting without Him being directly complicit. In this case, God creates all power in a pre-packaged manner and presents it to humans in the form of their overall capability to act, without Him being directly involved in the decision-making process. al-Māturīdī's cannot subscribe to the idea of potentiality. Referring to the principles of kalam-Atomism, on which basis the Muʿtazilites premise their arguments, he states that there can be no continuously present thing in the world if everything is an accident, and accidents only exist for one moment in time and vanish. Thus, in rejection of the Muʿtazilite claim, he divides *qudra* into two types: the first type refers to God-given powers that exist regardless of their use, such as senses, intellect, and limbs. The second type refers to the specific power for a particular action, created by God at the time of action and lasting only as long as the action itself (Pessagno, 1984, pp. 185-188). This second type of *qudra* is an accident, either created by God at the time it appears or non-existent. Since, therefore, the power to act cannot exist beforehand humans cannot be the creators of their actions, they are to take full responsibility for their consequences as it was their will to act that lead God bringing it to existence.

With this framework, al-Māturīdī is trying very hard to avoid a fatalistic view, which he regards as a fallacy leading to absurd consequences, like God commanding himself to act unfaithfully and punishing the human for his own wrongdoings. But still, one crucial question remains unsolved: If God is the creator of everything, then He must be the creator of my will. Even if we would now go one step behind and say freedom lies in the intention to act before the will to act is created, well then intentions also have to be created by God since they are accidents themselves like everything else. So, this leaves no room for an autonomous action of humans. Al-Māturīdī is aware of this impasse, but he sees this just as a showcase for the shortcomings of human reason. Free will for him is a precondition of faith and a premise to be set unconditionally for the holistic integrity of the qur'anic message to come into full fruition, speaking of eschatology and the divine decree on the day of judgment. He argues that the only solution to the problem is to accept both premises at once, namely that God is omnipotent and yet humans are beings endowed with the gift of free will. This is to say that we have to accept a clear contradiction logic which seems odd. In calling for epistemic humility on this point he refers to some Qur'anic verses amplifying the notion that God is beyond our grasp: "He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward, and He is Knower of all things."[4] And "He has concealed who He is. He is the one before whom language falls silent, evidence is inadequate, imagination fails, and intellect is baffled. This is God, the Lord of the Worlds."

7.4 Freedom is Evident: The Moment of Inner Revolt

Al-Māturīdī puts an emphasis on continuous divine agency and creativity without which nothing can exist. While this ongoing divine activity ensures that the world operates according to a purposeful order established by God, it appears to contradict the concept of free will. If God continuously intervenes and sustains every aspect of the universe, then human actions would also fall under this divine control implying that humans do not truly possess autonomy over their choices and actions. Thus, the notion that humans are capable of independent decision-making and moral responsibility seems undermined.

[4] Q. 57:3. Translation M. Pickthall

Al-Māturīdī is very aware of this fact and goes to great length to prove that humans possess free will and explain how that doesn't contradict the omnipotence of God. Since without free will, we would face inevitable fatalism, and it would also mean that humans are not free in their faith (*īmān*). Al-Māturīdī emphasizes the fact that free will is a precondition for faith and that there can be no compulsion in matters of faith, even from God (al-Māturīdī, 2001, p. 388). If faith is coerced, it cannot be considered faith. Free will is indisputable. For him, it would be nonsensical for the Qur'an to command someone incapable of action with a task. If human actions weren't genuinely theirs, God's commands and prohibitions would apply to Himself, which is absurd. Thus, human actions must be their own.

On the other hand, however, if humans were creators of their actions, it would contradict divine revelation and imply humans are worthy of worship since they would be able to create an action in spite of the will of God. For example: Denying that God creates faith would imply placing humans above God, as having faith is the highest and most beautiful act. If a pious person creates their faith, they would be attributed more good than God, who also creates unclean, corrupt, and ugly things (al-Māturīdī, 2001, p. 316). Hence, the comparison implies a radical anthropocentric view where humans commit no sins. But for al-Māturīdī this is a quandary that arises from the limits of our logical reasoning, and one shouldn't be irritated by that. He proposes that free will should be understood primarily through psychological insights rather than by introducing complex physical theories about tiny particles and abstract metaphysical arguments. For him, the existence of free will is so self-evident that no logical effort is required to prove it. The psychological moment of inner resistance, when a person is forced to act, is sufficient proof of this view. Considering these arguments in al-Māturīdī's epistemological context, it becomes clear that this argument is central. It is the first indubitable premise, rooted directly in sensory perception, thus constituting necessary knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*), denoting a knowledge beyond doubt (al-Māturīdī, 2001, pp. 8, 70, 377).

8. Concluding Thoughts

In navigating the complexities of the Anthropocene and the promises of transhumanism, integrating a framework of responsibility ethics into Islamic thought emerges as both a necessity and an opportunity. Traditional Islamic ethics, while deeply rooted in spiritual wisdom, must evolve to address the unprecedented challenges of our era. Al-Māturīdī's emphasis on human autonomy, the rejection of *taqlīd*, and the affirmation of free will provide a robust foundation for this integration. Responsibility ethics offers a complementary lens through which Muslims can critically engage with their roles as stewards of the Earth, addressing ecological and technological dilemmas with moral clarity.

This approach demands slowing down, fostering deliberate and reflective decision-making, and aligning human actions with broader ethical goals. While it acknowledges the emotional and cognitive burden of responsibility, it also underscores the importance of embracing this burden as a moral imperative. By doing so, Islamic ethics can transcend its traditional scope, offering not only a framework for individual conduct but also a vision for collective resilience and sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

As I have argued before, it is imperative to develop a robust framework of responsibility ethics within Islamic thought so we can aspire to a future where technological and spiritual progress coexist, minimizing suffering through a deep-seated commitment to ethical principles. In the face of the Anthropocene, it is essential to revisit and integrate traditional Islamic theological perspectives to address contemporary ethical dilemmas. Al-Māturīdī's unique defense of free will offers valuable insights to bridge traditional

ethics with modern concerns. The cornerstones of his theological reasoning on moral values with its emphasis on human autonomy through the rejection of blind adherence (*taqlīd*), the affirmation of free will as demonstrated by the "moment of inner resistance," and the harmonious integration of empirical science and rational inquiry with theological principles, provides a robust framework for developing comprehensive responsibility ethics to address contemporary environmental and technological challenges as a Muslim *umma*.

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