

MAZDEAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM



BERSERKER

BOOKS



Zoroastrian Critique of Islam

**Chapters 11-12 of the *Škand Gumānīg-Wizār* by
Mardānfarrox son of Ohrmazddād**

Introduction, Chapter 11

The (Muslim) God and the problem of a single origin

- 11.1 From this point, I will write about the contradiction¹ which is between their idle chatter and the observable truth.
- 11.2 Let him evaluate it with a knowledgeable eye.
- 11.3 First of all, those who believe there is only one principle²
- 11.4 Who say there is one god who is beneficent, knowing, powerful, generous, and forgiving³

NB: when transliterating key terms and phrases, I provide both the Pāzand original and the reconstructed Pahlavi. All section headings are my own and not part of the original work.

1 Pāz. *aṇbasānī*/Pahl. *hambasānīh*: a common term in this section and throughout the text (e.g., *ŠGW* 1.32, 10.78, 13.1, 14.1, 15.1, 15.71, 15.77, 15.108, 16.42, per de Menasce, 26–27, 118–19, 182–83, 210–11, 214–19, 254–55). Mardānfarrox’s goal is to expose what he sees as the “contradictions” of rival religions. For him, the truth of a religion lies in its intellectual consistency and coherence, something he believes is found only in Zoroastrianism.

2 Pāz. *ōi i yak buniiašt-xvaškār*/Pahl. *ōy ī ēk buništ-uskār*: Mardānfarrox never refers to Muslims by name but describes them according to their belief in a single cosmic principle (*buniiašt*/*buništ*), i.e., God. This contrasts with the Zoroastrians’ belief in two cosmic principles, i.e., God (Ohrmazd) and Ahrimen.

The *Dēnkard* uses similar language to describe monotheists (e.g., 3.122, 3.203, 3.383, all variations on the phrase, “the sects whose doctrine is there exists only one principle,” *kēšdārān kē bun ēk ēwāz ast kēš-išān*, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 124, 215, 341–42), 3.263 (“And the sectarians whose doctrine is there does not exist a principle other than one which causes evil,” *ud kēšdārān kē-šān anīy bun ī anāgīh aziš nēstīh kēš ī-šān*, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 268) 3.393 (“the sects whose doctrine is there cannot be a principle other than the one,” *ud kēšdārān kē buništ jud az ēk būd nē šāyistan kēš ī-šān*, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 351).

Explicit references to Muslims are uncommon in Pahlavi literature. Zoroastrian authors tended to refer to Muslims with generic labels such as *agdēnān* (“adherents of an evil religion, infidels”) or *anērān* (“non-Iranians”), which they applied equally to Jews, Christians, and host of other religious outsiders. They sometimes also used the label *tāzīgān* (“Arabs”). For very rare instances in which the term “Muslim(s)” does appear see Bahrami, “Term for Muslims in Pahlavi Literature”; and in later Zoroastrian New Persian literature see Hartman, “Secrets for Muslims.”

3 Pāz. *kərbagar u dānā u tuuqnī xvāṇar aḫaxšāišnigar*/Pahl. *kerbakkar ud dānāg ud tuwānīg xwābar aboxšāyišngar*: possibly a calque on several attributes or names (Ar. *ṣifāt, asmāʾ*) of God in the Islamic tradition (e.g., *al-barr*, *al-ʿalīm*, *al-qādir*, *al-rahmān*,

120 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.5 [Who say] that good deeds and evil deeds,⁴ truth and falsehood, life and death, goodness and wickedness come from Him
- 11.6 Now ask them:
- 11.7 Is God always generous, forgiving, beneficent, and just?⁵ Does He know what is, what was, and what will be?⁶ Does His will prevail over everything? Is His intercession according to justice?⁷ Or [is there a time] when He is this way and when He is not?
- 11.8 For if He is generous, beneficent, and forgiving, then why did He cast Ahrimen, the demon, hell, and all bad punishment upon His own creatures, by His own generosity, beneficence, and forgiveness?

al-ghaffār, “beneficent, knowing, powerful, generous/compassionate, forgiving,” as well as others). At the time the *ŠGW* was written, these attributes were the focus of intense debate among Muslim theologians. The Muʿtazilīs believed that emphasizing God’s attributes risked compromising His oneness (*tawḥīd*): that is, it was impossible to ascribe any one quality to God. For this reason, Muʿtazilīs were known by their critics as *al-muʾaṭṭila*, “those who divest [God of His attributes].” By contrast, the Ashʿarīs were known as *al-ṣifātiyya*, “those who uphold the attributes.” See Gilliot, “Attributes of God,” *EP*.

A later Zoroastrian text in Pāzand lists 101 names of God, clearly a Zoroastrian riff on an Islamic theme (which remains popular among Parsis today): Antiā, *Pāzend Texts*, 335–37; cited in de Menasce, 156.

4 Pāz. *kərbaa baʿaa*/Pahl. *kerbag bazag*: these terms appear throughout the text (and the Zoroastrian tradition generally), but they also have parallels in medieval Islamic theology, which speaks of a dichotomy between morally good (*ḥasan*) and bad (*qabīḥ*) deeds. For an overview of these and related terms in Muʿtazilī thought see Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 35–36.

5 Pāz. *dāestqnī*/Pahl. *dādestānīg*: Mardānfarrox refers to God as “just” or discusses God’s “justice” (*dāestqn/dādestān*) at several points in the sections on Islam (11.10, 11.102, 11.146, 12.30) but nowhere else in the text. This suggests that he may be reacting to Islamic concepts here. Muʿtazilīs emphasized the idea of God’s justice (Ar. *ʿadl*), hence the name *ahl al-tawḥīd wa-l-ʿadl*, “those who uphold God’s oneness and justice.”

The *Dēnkard* (3.107) also critiques those who believe that eternal punishment is part of God’s justice. This may also be a reference to the Muʿtazilīs, their doctrine of *ʿadl*, and the related concept of “promise and threat” (Ar. *al-waʿd wa-l-waʿīd*): that is, God’s promise of heaven to the virtuous and the threat of hell to the sinful (see de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 79–80).

6 Formulaic language commonly found in Zoroastrian texts of the period as well as Islamic ones. For fuller discussion see below, n. 47.

7 Pāz. *miqṣāi*/Pahl. *mayānjīgīh*: on this term in Zoroastrian literature see Shaked, “Mihr the Judge”; Dehghani Farsani and Rezania, “Ibn al-Malāḥimī,” 728. Mardānfarrox uses the term only in the sections on Islam, suggesting that he may be reacting to Islamic concepts of justice (11.10, 11.110, 11.204, see above, this section, n. 5).

- 11.9 If He did not know, then where is His knowledge and all-awareness?⁸
- 11.10 If He did not wish to hold back suffering and evil⁹ from His creatures [and did not wish] to give goodness to every obedient person, then where is His justice and intercession?
- 11.11 If He was not able to give it, then where does His omnipotence come from?
- 11.12 Let us consider and discuss how all this can be.
- 11.13 As long as they say that all goodness and suffering come from God,¹⁰ it is because they separate from Him these four qualities¹¹ which are needed for Him to be God: all-awareness, omnipotence, goodness, and forgiveness.

8 On the omniscience of Ohrmazd and the deficient knowledge of Ahrimen in the Zoroastrian creation story see Shaked, “Dualists against Monotheists,” 10.

9 Pāz. *anāi u vaq*/Pahl. *anāgih ud wad*.

10 Pāz. *yazaq*/Pahl. *yazd*: in the sections on Islam, Mardānfarrox refers to God by His Zoroastrian proper name (Ohrmazd) only once (12.76). Elsewhere in the treatise, he uses the name “Ohrmazd” more liberally, including in the opening chapters in which he answers the questions of Mihrayār son of Mahmād, who may well be a Muslim (esp. *ŠGW* 3–4, see above chapter 2, section I). If these questions do indeed relate to Islam (or monotheism generally), as I believe they do, the discrepancy between the two sections is interesting. In *ŠGW* 11–12, Mardānfarrox typically uses *yazaq*/*yazd*, a generic term for a divinity (from Avestan, *yazata*-, “worthy of being sacrificed to,” cf. NP. *īzad*/*īzadān*). When writing about Zoroastrianism, Muslim authors sometimes referred to Ohrmazd as *allāh* (per Dehghani Farsani and Rezania, “Ibn al-Malāḥimī,” 710 n. 38) and sometimes as *yazdān* (NP. lit. “gods,” per ‘Abd al-Jabbār in Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 137, 267; al-Shahrastānī in Shaked, “Some Islamic Reports,” 53–55, 61).

In this period, Zoroastrian texts underwent an interesting shift from using the introductory formula “in the name of the gods” (Pahl. *pad nām ī yazdān*) to “in the name of God” (*pad nām ī yazd*), presumably under Islamic influence (Weber, “A Pahlavi Papyrus from Islamic Times,” 225). A Pahlavi translation of the Islamic profession of faith is found on a coin from Sijistān from ca. 691–92 (a unique example of Pahlavi in an Islamic religious context) which uses *yazd* instead of *allāh*, as in the *ŠGW* (Mochiri, “A Pahlavi Forerunner of the Umayyad Reformed Coinage”; Sears, “Hybrid Imitation”). Philippe Gignoux (“Bismellāh,” *Elr*) has gone so far as to suggest that the Arabic *basmala* originated in the Zoroastrian formula *pad nām ī yazd(ān)*, per above, but this seems far-fetched and also overlooks earlier Jewish and Christian antecedents. As Shaked has pointed out (“Some Iranian Themes,” 152–54), the epithets that typically follow the “Zoroastrian *basmala*” are not at all Islamic: “full of light” (*rāyōmand*), “full of glory” (*xwarrōmand*), etc. (adjectives which are themselves based on Avestan *Vorlagen*).

11 Pāz. *hunar*/Pahl. *hunar*: possibly a calque on Ar. *ṣifa*, “attribute” though de Menasce (156) sees a parallel with Ar. *‘araḍ*, “accident, property.” I wonder if the verb *judāinənd*/*judāgēnēnd* (and below, 11.15. *jaṭ kunənd*/*jud kunēnd*) is a calque on the Arabic *‘aṭṭala*, *ta’īl*,

122 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.14 Otherwise, there is no remedy.
 11.15 Also, if they separate just one of these four qualities from Him, then He is not complete in being a god.
 11.16 For if God is an all-aware, all-powerful, good, and forgiving being, then the being who is not all-aware, all-powerful, good, and forgiving is not God.¹²

A ruler must protect his realm¹³

- 11.17 Furthermore, this: if He is a ruler whose will prevails over everyone and everything, why has He clearly not protected His domain and His dominion from every enemy and adversary by His own action in such a way that there would be no violence, oppression, lawlessness, or complaint in His realm?¹⁴
 11.18 For a man who is ruler and lord is praiseworthy for being a ruler and being a lord, since he is able to hold his domain and dominion through his own wisdom,¹⁵ in such a way that by their own action they do not help the enemy trample or cause sin or harm.

“to divest, strip, separate,” which was commonly used in relation to the attributes of God (and on account of which the Mu’tazila were called *mu’aṭṭila*, “those who divest [God of His attributes],” per above, this section, n. 3; cf. van Ess, “Tashbīḥ wa-Tanzīḥ,” *EF*).

12 Mardānfarroḡ thus ends his introductory comments by raising the “classic problem of evil.” He will go on to develop this theme in later sections.

13 Echoes of this passage are found in *Dēnkard* 3.46 (per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 57–58); and in the writings of ‘Abd al-Jabbār (Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 247–48).

14 In both Zoroastrianism and Islam, God is said to preside over His creation like a ruler (Pāz. *xwadāe*/Pahl. *xwadāy*) or king (Ar. *mālik*, *malik*). Mardānfarroḡ is thus saying that God is a lousy king because He allows evil to thrive in His domains. God’s sovereignty is a particular preoccupation of the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW* (e.g., 11.48, 11.51, 12.41, 12.52–53; cf. *Dēnkard* 3.96, 3.253 concerning monotheists—*kēšdārān*, “sectarians”—who misunderstand God’s lordship by ascribing evil to Him, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 101–02, 259–60). For background see Shaked, “Who Gives Lordship to Ohrmazd?”

In New Persian, *khudā* (cf. MP. *xwadāy*) eventually became the standard term for “God” (usually not *allāh*), per Shayegan, “Concept of *Xwadāy*.”

15 Pāz. *xard*/Pahl. *xrad*: an important concept in Zoroastrian thought and the subject of a key Pahlavi text of the period, the *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad* (“Judgements of the Spirit of Wisdom”), per Tafazzoli, “Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad,” *EIr*; on the influence of Zoroastrian ideas of wisdom on early Islam see Shaked, “A Facetious Recipe and the Two Wisdoms,” esp. 30–33.

- 11.19 Or when the enemy strives for it by his own action, by his own thinking he empowers his friends to hold back [the enemy] and to make each person free from violence.

Can God be described as triumphant if He has no opponent?

- 11.20 Furthermore, this: if He is triumphant, valorous, and strong¹⁶
 11.21 Then upon whom is His triumph, valor, and strength?
 11.22 For His triumph and valor shall be upon enemies and opponents.
 11.23 One cannot be an opponent and an enemy unto oneself.
 11.24 As long as He has no enemy or opponent upon whom He shall be triumphant and valorous
 11.25 Then triumph and valor cannot be ascribed to Him.
 11.26 For even cows and sheep, when they have no opponent or destroyer, are valorous and triumphant upon themselves.¹⁷

Is God aware that He allows the destruction of His own creation?

- 11.27 Furthermore, this: is He cognizant of and satisfied¹⁸ by being God and being great or not?
 11.28 If He is cognizant of and satisfied by this, then is He content to make enemies and evil-doers through His own knowledge and

16 Pāz. *aβarvāž u cēr u pādiiāβand*/Pahl. *abarwēz ud cēr ud pādyāwand*: another possible allusion to the names of God in the Islamic tradition (e.g., *al-qāhīr*, *al-nāṣir*, *al-qawī*, *al-‘azīz*, etc.), “triumphant, valorous, strong”). The first of these, *abarwēz*, was also the epithet of the Sasanian king Khusraw II (r. 590–628).

17 Pāz. *gāβica u gōspənd*/Pahl. *gāw-iz ud gōspand*: Zoroastrians divided the animal kingdom into two groups: “beneficent creatures” (*gōspandān*) and “evil creatures” (*xrafstarān*). The former included domestic animals who could be tamed and used for food, such as sheep and cows. The latter included wild animals, reptiles, and mythical creatures who should be killed. The two classes were sworn to enmity against one another, an idea alluded to here (cf. *ŠGW* 3.22, 15.106); see Moazami, “Mammals iii,” *EIr*.

18 Pāz. *xvarasand*/Pahl. *hunsand*: possibly an allusion Ar. *al-rāḍī*. The concept of “satisfaction” (Ar. *riḍā*) was important in early Islamic thought; it appears several times in the Qur’an (*riḍwān*, “satisfaction with the divine decree,” e.g., Q. 9.72, 57.20, etc.). It was also an important concept for theodicy: that is, the believer’s willing acceptance of tribulation because this tribulation comes from God. The term appears only in the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW* (11.27–28, 11.124, 11.194–95), suggesting that Mardānfarrox may be reacting to Islamic concepts here. See Winter, “Islam and the Problem of Evil,” 232; Anonymous, “*Riḍā*,” *EF*.

- will to cast destruction on the entire land for the good of the land and His creation?
- 11.29 What does it behoove Him to seek wicked deeds and suffering for them, Himself being their enemy and curser, Himself making people destined for suffering and hell-bound?¹⁹ What is the point of that?

Does God speak the truth?²⁰

- 11.30 Furthermore, this: everything which He says, is He reliably saying the truth or not?

19 Pāz. *dōžaxī*/Pahl. *dōšoxīg*, “hell-bound”: the idea here is that a benevolent God would not punish men by casting them into hell because this would contradict His benevolent nature. This may be an allusion to the concept of *al-wa’d wa-l-wa’id*, “promise and threat,” one of the five pillars of Mu’tazilī thought (see above, chapter 2, section II). According to this doctrine, God promises eternal recompense to those who obey Him and threatens eternal punishment to those who disobey Him. In essence, it was a theory of eschatology. On *al-wa’d wa-l-wa’id* see the concise overview in the *Sharḥ uṣūl al-khamsa* of Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), the great Mu’tazilī systematizer in Martin et al., *Defenders of Reason*, 45–54; generally, El-Omari, “The Mu’tazilite Movement (I),” 131.

The Zoroastrians refused to ascribe evil to God, so it is unsurprising that they took issue with this particular doctrine. It is interesting that the term appears only in the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW* (e.g., 11.46, 11.114, 12.15, 12.16), suggesting the Mardānfarroxx may be critiquing a specifically Islamic concept here. This is underlined by the fact that the term also appears frequently in *Dēnkard* 3 in connection with the beliefs of the sectarians (*kēšdārān*)—who are probably Muslims, as argued above (per chapter 3, section IV)—who are criticized for believing that God punishes humans by casting them into hell, another possible echo of a Mu’tazilī idea.

20 For Zoroastrians, God’s defining characteristics were truthfulness and justice; by contrast, Ahrimen was often called simply “the Lie” (*druz*); see Kellens, “Druz-,” *Elr*.

As has already been noted, Mu’tazilīs also regarded God’s defining characteristic as justice. This is curious, because “just” (Ar. *ādil*) is not one of the divine epithets enumerated in the Qur’an (the closest we find is Q. 3.18, where God is said to “uphold justice,” *qā’iman bi-l-qist*, though the term for “justice” here is obviously different). For this reason, van Ess (*Theology and Society*, iv, 566–67) speculates that the Mu’tazilīs may have been influenced by older Iranian ideas about God’s nature, especially His truthfulness and justice. That being said, it is important to note that God’s justice is by no means conceptually missing from the Qur’an, e.g., Q. 22.10: “[It will be said], ‘This [punishment] is for what your [own] hands have sent forward, and [know] that God is not an evildoer to [His] servants.’” The Qur’an also frequently denies that God might do wrong (*ẓ-l-m*), e.g., Q. 3.182, 11.101, cf. 11.45, 95.8. See also Rahbar, *God of Justice*.

- 11.31 If He is reliably saying the truth when He says, “I am the friend of good deeds and the enemy of evil deeds”²¹
- 11.32 He keeps creating more evil deeds and evil-doers than good deeds and doers of good.
- 11.33 Then is He truly saying that?

Is God’s will good or bad?

- 11.34 Furthermore, this: Is His will²² to be good or to be bad?
- 11.35 If His will is to be bad, then where does His being God come from?
- 11.36 If His will is to be good, then why are there more bad people and badness than good people and goodness?

Is God forgiving?

- 11.37 Furthermore, this: Is He forgiving or not?
- 11.38 If He is not forgiving, then where does His being God come from?
- 11.39 If He is forgiving, then why does He say, “I have sealed the hearts, ears, and eyes of men so that they would not be able to think, speak, or act except for what behooves me.”²³
- 11.40 There are those He made great and noble needlessly.

21 Pāz. *kərbaa dōst u bažaa dušman hom*/Pahl. *kerbag dōst ud bazag dušmen ham*: this is the first of several passages in which Mardānfarrox appears to quote from an unidentified source—in some cases, clearly the Qur’an. This “quotation” does not have precise parallels in the Qur’an, though there are echoes of related themes in Q. 2:195, 2:201, 28:77, etc. (per de Menasce, 157). The idiom (esp. *kerbag* and *bazag*, per this section, n. 4 above) is fully Zoroastrian.

22 Pāz. *kām*/Pahl. *kām*: note that “will” is a secondary meaning of sorts, with *kām* usually meaning something closer to “wish, desire.” Contemporary Muslim theologians also debated the nature of God’s will (Ar. *irāda*, *mashī’a*). On the divine will in the thought of two early Mu’tazilīs, Bishr ibn al-Mu’tamir (d. 210/825) and al-Nazzām (d. btw. 220–30/835–45), see van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 131–36, 435–37.

23 Pāz. *čim gōeṭ kum dil gōš čašm ī mardumq bē hafast kušq nē tuuq minīdan guftan kardan bē q ī mən ābāiiaṭ*/Pahl. *čim gōwēd kū-m dil gōš čašm ī mardōmān bē āwišt kū-šān nē tuwān menīdan guftan kardan bē ān ī man abāyēd*: unlike 11.31, this is more recognizable as a pseudo-Qur’anic quotation (Q. 2:7): “God has sealed (*khatama*) their hearts and their ears, and their eyes are covered [...].” cf. Q. 6.25, 6.46, 45.23. See above, chapter 3, section V.

126 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.41 There are those He killed by many ways of death, destroyed,
and cast into eternal Hell.
- 11.42 [Saying], “So that those I shall restore will be better and do
more good deeds.”²⁴
- 11.43 Now, too, those He restored do just a few [good deeds].
- 11.44 They are more evil-doing and sinful than those before.

Why did God create if His creatures merely turn against Him?

- 11.45 Furthermore, this: if everything He does He does with
knowledge and purpose
- 11.46 Since He does not have any opponent or adversary, then why
has the first creation²⁵ which He fashioned turned His servants
to demon-like disobedience and to hell-bound wickedness
among humankind?
- 11.47 If He did not know that they would turn, then He should have
ordered a test.
- 11.48 For now, the tens of thousands He fashioned to serve Him and
magnify His rulership have all become disobedient and deaf to
advice.²⁶
- 11.49 For given humankind’s little knowledge, which He neither
fashioned nor prepared, that is what people wish.
- 11.50 Also, if it is something which they prepared and fashioned so
that it would not turn out according their wish, they would not
set about fashioning that thing but instead refrain from it.

24 Pāz. *ku aṇdā q i aβāž kunom vahə kərbagartar bənd*/Pahl. *kū tā ān ī abāz kunam weh-kerbagtar bēnd*: the use of the indirect speech marker (*kū*) and the first-person singular (“I,” as in God) suggests this may be a quotation from the Qur’an, but, if this is true, its origin is unclear. As with ŚGW 11.31, the idiom is more Zoroastrian than Islamic.

25 Pāz. *apurašni i naxustīn*/Pahl. *āfurrišn ī naxustīn*: it is not clear what Mardānfarrox is referring to here. At first blush it is tempting to see the “first creation” as Ahrimen, but, according to the Zoroastrian creation myth, Ohrmazd and Ahrimen were co-eternal; the latter was not a creation of the former (Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 13). Rather, Mardānfarrox may be referring to the Devil of the Bible and the Qur’an, who was indeed created by God and was responsible for sowing destruction throughout the world.

26 Possibly an allusion to Q. 51.56, “I did not create the jinn and humans except to worship me,” per de Menasce, 158. The Mu’tazilīs quoted this verse to demonstrate that God commands only good, and any evil that humans produce is contrary to God’s will.

- 11.51 The omnipotent and all-aware lord from this point made and fashioned so many things, but not even one of them succeeded according to His will, even though he never refrains from fashioning and creating anew.²⁷

The angels and the fall of Ahrimen²⁸

- 11.52 From the time when He created the first angels, whom He fashioned out of fire²⁹ on account of His affection for them, [it took] a few thousand years
- 11.53 Who, as they say, kept serving Him

27 The point here is simple: if God has the power and knowledge to create in a manner that suits Him, then why do His creatures so consistently fail Him, and why does He persist in creating them?

28 Here begins Mardānfarrox's account of the fall of the Devil (*ŠGW* 11.52–60). In the Qur'an, this character is called Iblīs or Satan (Ar. Shayṭān), but Mardānfarrox refers to him as Ahrimen, thereby conflating the two. Muslim theologians writing about Zoroastrianism sometimes conflated these characters as well (e.g., de Menasce, "Témoignage de Jayhānī," 55–56; Shaked, "Some Islamic Reports," 56–59; Dehghani Farsani and Rezaia, "Ibn al-Malāhimī," passim)

The fall of the Devil is mentioned several times in the Qur'an (e.g., Q. 2.30–39, 7.11–18, 15.26–42, 17.61–65, 18.50), each with close parallels to concepts, words, and phrasings found in the *ŠGW*. I will note specific parallels below. For general comment see Algar, "Eblīs," *Elr*; Rippin, "Devil," *EQ*, i, 524–27.

Of all the stories found in the Qur'an, it is curious that Mardānfarrox had so much to say about that of the Devil's fall. Shaked ("Some Islamic Reports," 48) notes that al-Shahrastānī (fl. first half of 6th/12th c.)—who possessed detailed knowledge of Zoroastrianism—remarked on the existence of Zoroastrian groups who held that a substance could change into its opposite: that is, good could become evil and evil could become good. This was a heresy for "orthodox" Zoroastrians, who saw the cosmic principles as being immutable (a subject Mardānfarrox raises explicitly in *ŠGW* 3.16–18, per de Menasce, 38–39). Yet this is precisely what we find in the story of the Devil, a good being who became evil. This may be one reason Mardānfarrox found the story so objectionable. The other explanation is that the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW* deal with the problem of evil; to critique the Islamic approach to the problem of evil, therefore, Mardānfarrox had to grapple with the origins of the Devil as described in the Qur'an.

29 Pāz. *əž ātaš vīrāst*/Pahl. *az ātaxš wirāst*: nowhere in the Qur'an is it said that the angels were created from fire. That being said, the Devil is portrayed as being one of the jinn (Q. 18.50), and the jinn are said to have been created from a "smokeless fire" (Ar. *min mārijin min nārin*, Q. 55.15) or "scorching fire" (*min nār al-samūm*, Q. 15.27). Indeed, the Devil boasts of having been fashioned from fire (*min nārin*, Q. 7.12) while Adam was merely fashioned from clay (per n. 30 immediately below).

128 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.54 Finally, [one of the angels] left undone a single commandment which He issued, “Pay homage to this first man whom I fashioned out of clay.”³⁰
- 11.55 He made an excuse, giving as a reason, “It is not seemly for me to pay [homage].”³¹
- 11.56 Then he despised and belittled him for being made of clay, accused, and wrathful.
- 11.57 And He turned him to behaving like a devil and a demon, casting him out of paradise.
- 11.58 He gave him life lasting for millennia and eternal rulership³²

30 Pāz. *namāz ō īn mardum i naxustīn yam aē gil vīrāst barāy*/Pahl. *namāz ō ēn mardōm ī naxustīn ī-m az gil wirāst barēd*: the *ŠGW* speaks of the angels “paying homage” (*nāmāz burdan*; *namāz* is etymologically related to *nām-*, “to bend, prostrate”), whereas the Qur’ān speaks of their “bowing down” (Ar. *sajada*, *sujūd*, Q. 2.34, 7.11, 15.29–30, 17.61, 18.50), which are close enough.

The idea that Adam was fashioned from clay (here, *gil*) also comes from the Qur’ān, e.g., “from clay” (*ṭīn*, Q. 7.12, 17.61), “from dried clay and dark mud” (*min ṣaḥālin min ḥamā’in masnūnin*, Q. 15.26, 28, 33), “from dried clay like pottery” (*min ṣaḥālin ka-’l-fakkhār*, Q. 55.14), per Schöck, “Adam and Eve,” *EQ*, i, 24.

In Zoroastrian lore, the first man Gayōmard is said to have been fashioned from clay, for which he was sometimes called *gilšāh*, “King of Clay,” apparently under Islamic influence. For their part, Muslim writers also conflated Gayōmard and Adam. See Hartman, “Identifications de Gayōmart”; Daryaei, “Gayōmard.”

31 Pāz. *nē sažēd burdan cimīhā guft*/Pahl. *nē sazēd burdan čimīhā guft*: this is a summary of the Qur’anic story as opposed to a direct quotation from the Qur’ān. In only one passage in the Qur’ān does the Devil speak in the first person when refusing to prostrate (Q. 15.33), “He said, ‘I shall not bow down before a creature you [O God] have created,’” and nowhere does the Devil explicitly state that bowing is “unseemly,” though the sentiment may be understood to be implicit (e.g., Q. 2.34, 7.11–12, 15.31–33, etc.).

The Devil’s refusal to bow is also alluded to in the *Dēnkard*, e.g. 3.241 (where the sectarians, the *kēšdārān*, are criticized for claiming that creatures should not pay homage to anything but God, but at the same time for claiming that God instructed the angels to pay homage to man, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 252; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 511–12 n. 204) and 5.24.15 (where the adherents of the evil religion, the *agdēnān*, are criticized for believing that at the beginning of time the gods [*yazdān*] paid homage to man, per Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, *Cinquième livre*, 86–87; Rezaia, “*Dēnkard* Against its Islamic Discourse,” 343). The idiom in both passages is similar to what we find in the *ŠGW*, per de Menasce, 158.

32 *ŠGW* 11.58–59 may allude to a curious feature of the Qur’anic story: after God expelled the Devil for refusing to bow before Adam, the Devil asked Him for respite until the day of resurrection, which God then granted (Q. 7.14–15, 15.36–38). In doing so, God acted out of mercy to the Devil but also guaranteed that his trickery would continue until the end of time.

- 11.59 [Saying], “I shall go and lead astray my bondsmen and servants and make them lose their way.”³³
- 11.60 And He made him a destroyer and adversary against His own will.

Ahrimen, Adam, and the expulsion from the garden³⁴

- 11.61 Finally, that very man, who on account of his affection and honor, [God] ordered the greatest angel along with many servants to pay him homage.
- 11.62 He put him in the garden of paradise.
- 11.63 [Saying], “Cultivate and eat all the fruit”
- 11.64 Except for that one tree which he ordered him, “Do not eat [from it]!”³⁵
- 11.65 And with them He fashioned the deceiver who leads astray.
- 11.66 He left him in the garden.
- 11.67 Some call him the serpent, some [call him] Ahrimen.³⁶

33 Another summary of a Qur’anic verse as opposed to a direct translation (Q. 7.16–17, 15.39), in which the Devil, having been cast from God’s presence, promises to seduce and mislead humankind.

“Bondsmen,” *bandagq/bandagān* from OP. *badaka-* (cognate with “bond”); the term only later came to mean “slave.”

34 Here begins Mardānfarrox’s account of the expulsion from the garden (Pāz. *bōstqn/* Pahl. *bōyestān*) (*ŠGW* 11.61–78, cf. 11.352–58). The story features prominently in the Qur’an (e.g., Q. 2.35–39, 7.19–25, 20.116–23, cf. Schöck, “Adam and Eve,” *EQ*, i, 22–26; Johns, “Fall of Man,” *EQ*, ii, 172–73) as well as the Bible (Genesis 2–3). Mardānfarrox also discusses it in two lengthy passages in the section on Judaism (*ŠGW* 13.15–45, 13.106–48) and a shorter one, mentioning only the tree, in the section on Christianity (*ŠGW* 15.132–45). Elsewhere, Mardānfarrox likens Ohrmazd to a gardener and his creation to a garden (*ŠGW* 4.63–80, cf. Shaked, “Dualists against Monotheists,” 10).

On these overlapping images of the garden in the *ŠGW* see Thrope, “Contradictions and Vile Utterances,” 116–59, arguing that Mardānfarrox addressed the story at such length because it was ubiquitous in Near Eastern culture, because it was already a stock feature of Manichaean and Marcionite polemics against Jews (which Mardānfarrox, in turn, developed for Zoroastrianism), and because the garden was an important symbol of kingship and order in ancient Iranian culture.

35 *ŠGW* 11.63–64 do not come directly from the Qur’an; instead, the wording is closer to that of Genesis 2.17. Compare Q. 2.35, 7.19: “Eat freely of it [i.e., the tree] as you wish, but do not go near this tree.” The Qur’an contains no commandment to cultivate the garden, nor any injunction against eating the fruit.

36 Pāz. *i hast kə mār gōeṭ hast kə āharman/* Pahl. *ī ast kē mār gōwēd ast kē ahrimen*: an interesting line suggesting the existence of people (Muslims? Zoroastrians?) who conflated

130 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.68 And He Himself gave that humankind the nature to eat and to be greedy.³⁷
- 11.69 Then they were deceived to eat from the tree by the one who leads astray.
- 11.70 Some say he is Adam.³⁸
- 11.71 And they ate because it was their nature to eat.
- 11.72 After eating, they became so full of knowledge that they recognized and knew what is good and bad.³⁹
- 11.73 [They were deprived] of such honor and affection because they forgot that one piece of advice.
- 11.74 And that forgetfulness came from that same cause.
- 11.75 With his wife, he was cast out of the garden with intense wrath and dishonor.

the Devil and Ahrimen (per this section, n. 28 above). If this is true, it may be an expression of the same impulse we saw in the conflation of Adam and Gayōmard, per this section, n. 30 above. Early Muslim writers such as al-Ṭabarī famously combined Iranian, Jewish, and Islamic legends into a single universal narrative featuring characters from different religious and cultural traditions, per Shaked, “Zoroastrian Polemics,” 89–91; Savant, *New Muslims of Post-Conquest Iran*, 137–69.

Note that the Qurʾan does not refer to the Devil as a serpent (Pāz. *mār*/Pahl. *mār*), whereas the Bible does (Genesis 3). Mardānfarrox thus seems to be importing a detail from the Jewish version of events. Although this detail is inconsistent with the account in the Qurʾan, it serves to link *ŠGW* 11.61–78 (the Islamic sections) to *ŠGW* 15.141 (the Christian section) per Thrope, “Contradictions and Vile Utterances,” 128–29.

37 Pāz. *cihar i xvardārī āžūrī*/Pahl. *čīhr ī xwardārīh āzwarīh*: the reason Mardānfarrox emphasizes this point here and below (*ŠGW* 11.71) is that he regarded it as contradictory for God to bestow on man the nature to eat and to be greedy, on the one hand, yet to forbid him from eating from the tree, on the other. If He had wished for man to avoid eating from the tree, He should have never bestowed these natures on man.

From the earliest period, Muslim theologians puzzled over the same question, including the Umayyad-era “heretic” and Qadarī Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (fl. ca. 100/719), who was asked whether God willed for Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. See Judd, “The Early Qadariyya,” 50.

38 Pāz. *hast kē ādam gōēf*/Pahl. *ast kē ādam gōwēd*: on Adam in Iranian and Zoroastrian lore see this section, n. 30.

39 Another detail missing from the Qurʾan and seemingly imported from the Bible (Genesis 3.5, 3.22). The Qurʾan never explicitly mentions knowledge of good and evil in connection with the tree (though it is easy to see why Mardānfarrox would have wanted to incorporate this). The Qurʾan refers to “the tree of eternity” (*shajarat al-khuld*, per Q. 20.120) and states that Adam and his wife realized their nakedness after eating from this tree (Q. 7.20–25, 20.121), but these details are missing here.

- 11.76 They were delivered to the hands of the enemy who is deceiving and leads astray.
- 11.77 So that he could carry out his will and accomplish it over them.
- 11.78 Now, which injustice, inattention to orders, slow-mindedness, and little-knowledge is more absurd and more evil than this?⁴⁰

Why does God allow Ahrimen to live but allows His own prophets to be killed?

- 11.79 This too: why did He not make that garden so fortified and strong that the one who leads astray would not go in?⁴¹
- 11.80 Still now He has led and continues to lead astray many of His bondsmen and servants.
- 11.81 And for the same reason He fashioned many messengers and prophets⁴² from epoch to epoch for the world.

40 By the end of the section, it is worth noting which elements of the Qur'anic story do not feature. These include the Devil telling Adam and his wife that if they eat from the tree they will become like angels or immortals (Q. 7.20); Adam and his wife's realization that they are naked and their covering themselves with leaves (Q. 17.21–25, 20.121); and Adam's repentance for his disobedience (Q. 2.37–39, 20.122). These absences underline the fact that the *ŠGW* rarely quotes from the Qur'an directly, but usually summarizes and reworks the narrative.

41 This returns to themes raised in *ŠGW* 4.63–80, where Ohrmazd is likened to the “wise gardener” who sets traps for the beasts that prowl around his garden; it is a metaphor for Ahrimen and the evil forces that inflict suffering on the world. See above, this section, n. 34.

The idea of paradise as a walled garden (per the wording here, *drūpušt/drubušt*, “fortress”) is an old one in Iranian culture (e.g., Fakour, “Garden i. Achaemenid Period,” *Elr*; Fauth, “Der königliche Gärtner”; Stronach, “Garden as a Political Statement”). The Qur'an may be alluding to the same idea when it describes the presence of a wall or barrier (Ar. *ḥijāb*) between heaven and hell, per. Q. 7.46.

42 Pāz. *pādqbarq vaxšūrq*/Pahl. *paygāmbārān waxšwarān*: the distinction between these two words roughly maps onto the distinction between *rasūl* (“messenger”) and *nabī* (“prophet”) in Arabic (*paygāmbār* from OP. **pati-gāma-*, “message” plus *bar[ān]*, “bearer”; *waxšwar* from *waxš*, “word” plus *bar[ān]*, “bearer”). The terms are used frequently for messengers and prophets throughout the Zoroastrian tradition, including for Zoroaster himself (e.g., *Dēnkard* 3.101, 3.102, 3.225, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 104–05, 237; and *Dēnkard* 5.1, 5.2, 5.18, cf. Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, *Cinquième livre*, 24–25, 28–29, 58–59). *Dēnkard* 3.35 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 50; cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 511–12 n. 204) alludes to Muhammad as the “seal of the prophets” (*paygāmbārān āwišt*), echoing what would become the standard title for Muhammad in New Persian (*payghambar*). See above, chapter 3, n. 54.

With one exception (*ŠGW* 14.66), Mardānfarrox discusses “messengers” and “prophets” (the former word being much more common) only in the sections on Islam

132 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.82 [Saying], “So that they may save my bondsmen from the hand
of the one who leads astray”⁴³
- 11.83 “They shall bring [them] on the way and the straight path”⁴⁴
- 11.84 Also, His own servants and messengers, whose duty was to lead
humankind to the way and to give them sound advice, they were
all killed and rejected by His will in terrible deaths.⁴⁵
- 11.85 [Meanwhile], the one who originally led astray and made them
lose their way has been left alive eternally

(*ŠGW* 11.79–87, 11.256, 11.364–68, 12.39), suggesting that Mardānfarrox may be reacting to Islamic concepts here.

Prophecy was a major bone of contention between Zoroastrians and Muslims in the medieval period. Most Muslims did not regard Zoroaster as a legitimate prophet. In light of this, one way of reading the elaborate biographical traditions about him from the Islamic period (e.g., in *Dēnkard* 7, cf. Josephson, “The ‘Sitz im Leben’”) is as an attempt to rebut this claim. For his part, the Mu’tazilī Ibn al-Malāḥimī asked how Zoroastrians, given their belief that the Devil is at work in all humans, could arbitrarily follow their particular prophets while denying the real prophets of God; that is, those of the Bible and Qur’an. The point seems to be that their choice to embrace one set of prophets and reject another was not a rational one (see Dehghani Farsani and Rezania, “Ibn al-Malāḥimī,” 715).

43 The line is introduced by *ku/kū*, indicating a quotation (from the Qur’an?), though, if so, its origin is unclear.

44 Pāz. *rāh u rastaa i rāst*/Pahl. *rāh ud ristag ī rāst*: the notion of the “straight path” is found in many ancient religions, including Islam (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaḳīm*, per Q. 1.6). *Dēnkard* 5.7 (cf. Amouzgar and Tafazzoli, *Cinquième livre*, 38–39) also states that a central responsibility of prophets is to lead humankind on the straight path; cf. Skjærvø, “Avestan Quotations in Old Persian,” 48–50.

45 Cf. *ŠGW* 12.39–40. The suffering and killing of prophets is a major theme in the Qur’an (e.g., Q. 2.61, 2.91, 6.112, etc., per Rubin, “Prophets and Prophethood,” *EQ*, iv, 301; Marshall, “Punishment Stories,” *EQ*, iv, 318–22; Winter, “Islam and the Problem of Evil,” 230–31), echoing similar passages in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., 1 Kings 18–19, Jeremiah 2.30, 29.21, etc.) and New Testament (Matthew 23.30, 23.37, Acts 7.52, Romans 11.3, etc.). In the Qur’an, stories about the suffering of the prophets were told to reassure Muḥammad that his trials were perfectly normal. For his part, Zoroaster also experienced suffering during his prophetic career, per Williams, “Zoroaster iv. In the Pahlavi Books,” *EIr*.

The *ŠGW* is not the only dualist tract to attack the idea of the suffering of the prophets. The anti-Islamic treatise attributed to Ibn al-Muqaffa’ argues that the Muslim God is powerless to overcome evil or control His own creation. As evidence of this, it argues that He cannot prevent His enemies from killing His own prophets, nor can He take swift revenge on them, needing instead to postpone punishment to Judgement Day (see above, chapter 3, section IV). Mu’tazilīs such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār may have been sensitive to such critiques, arguing that God was in no way responsible for the punishments experienced by His prophets; after all, He was incapable of doing what was ethically wrong (*qabīḥ*) (see Martin et al., *Defenders of Reason*, 28).

- 11.86 So that now, his will for leading astray and making them lose their way is more triumphant and more effective than God's [will].
- 11.87 For those who have been led astray and lost their way are more numerous than those who are on the straight path and have not been led astray.

Does God act for a reason?

- 11.88 Furthermore, this: everything He does, does He do it for a reason⁴⁶ or not?
- 11.89 If He acts without reason, what He does is foolish.
- 11.90 And one should not praise the one who acts foolishly for being a wise God.
- 11.91 If He acts for a reason
- 11.92 Then if He did not have any opponent or adversary, then what was the point in creating all these creatures, such as demons and humans who are disobedient and struggle against His will, those who lead astray, and innumerable [other] useless creatures?

Why does God create things that are contrary to His will?

- 11.93 Furthermore, this: if He knows everything that is, that was, and that will be,⁴⁷ then it is not appropriate for Him to create something by his own knowledge and will for which He is sorry and which stands contrary to His will and command.

46 Pāz. *pa cim*/Pah. *pad čim*: to be clear, this is not the philosophical sense of "reason," but something more mundane. The question is whether God had a purpose in creating demons, humans, and other creatures who disobey His will.

This has an echo of a key concept in *kalām*: namely, for God to act without cause is vain or useless (Ar. *'abath*). According to Mu'tazilī ethical categories, *'abath* is bad. For Mu'tazilīs, God does act for a reason, namely, the benefit of His creatures (since He is not motivated by any need in Himself). Classical Ash'arīs, by contrast, denied that God acted for a reason.

47 Pāz. *haravisṣ hast būi bahōi*/Pahl. *harwisṣ ast būd bawēd*: this is an idiom found elsewhere in the *ŠGW* (11.7, 11.156) as well as contemporary Zoroastrian texts (e.g., *Dēnkard* 3.100; cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 104), reflecting an old Indo-European formula in the Avestan (Hultgård, "The One Who Was, Who Is, and Who Shall Be"). Incidentally, the idiom is also echoed in al-Jayhānī's account of Zoroastrianism, which is structured as a series of questions and answers between Zoroaster and Ohrmazd. This suggests that Muslims may have also been aware of certain Zoroastrian expressions: de Menasce, "Témoignage de Jayhānī," 51 ("Zoroaster asked, 'What was, what shall be, and what exists presently?' Ohrmazd replied, 'Me, the *Dīn*, and the Word.'").

134 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.94 And [what He created is] the adversary of His messengers, who carry out His will.
- 11.95 If they say,⁴⁸ “This adversary was originally created from what is good and noble and later turned to wickedness and leading His creatures astray.”
- 11.96 Then let him say, “If He is all-powerful, why is the will of the adversary more triumphant and stronger than that of God in terms of turning to wickedness and leading His creatures astray?”
- 11.97 For wickedness is more powerful than goodness in this age.

Is God just if He allows evil?⁴⁹

- 11.98 Furthermore, if He is an evil-doer also in His will
- 11.99 And He Himself corrupted the thought of the evil-doers
- 11.100 And He Himself sowed the seed of evil

48 Pāz. *agar gōēnd ku*/Pahl. *agar gōwēnd kū*: Mardānfarrox uses this phrase throughout the *ŠGW* (11.141, 11.144, 11.149, 11.159, etc.) to quote the beliefs of his anonymous opponents. This reflects the polemical and dialectical purpose of the work as a whole, as if Mardānfarrox were providing his readers with rebuttals to commonly held critiques of Zoroastrianism. This underscores the fact that the *ŠGW* may originate in the milieu of interreligious debate (Ar. *munāẓara*). For discussion see above, chapter 2, section III.

49 The following reads as a strongly anti-Muʿtazilī argument. For the Muʿtazilīs, the key consequence of God’s justice (Ar. *ʿadl*, with a possible calque in *ŠGW* 11.102, *dāestqnmandī/ dādestānōmandīh*, “power of justice”) was that He is incapable of acting in a way that is morally wrong (Ar. *qabīḥ*). God is obliged to act in a way that is morally good (Ar. *ḥasan*), though this does not mean He is incapable of doing so. For a Zoroastrian critic such as Mardānfarrox, the fact that the Muslim God is an evil-doer (*baʿazar/bazakkar*) was self-evident, for if He is sovereign over creation, then He must also be responsible for the good and the bad in it; otherwise, He would not be sovereign. For a useful summary of these views see Gimaret, “Muʿtazila,” *EP*; for a concise statement by ʿAbd al-Jabbār see Martin et al., *Defenders of Reason*, 12.

In later periods, the Ashʿarīs would oppose the Muʿtazilīs on this very point. They argued that God was not subject to a transcendent ethical framework that dictates His actions, much as it dictates the actions of humans. For the Ashʿarīs, good and bad were not independent moral categories, but simply the result of what God permits and prohibits. In other words, calling God “good” or “bad” was considered irrelevant. For the disagreement between Muʿtazilīs and Ashʿarīs on this point see Gimaret, “Un problème de théologie musulmane”; Frank, “Can God do What is Wrong?”

Earlier in the text (*ŠGW* 7.11–20, cf. de Menasce, 88), Mardānfarrox seems to echo Muʿtazilī beliefs when he refers to God’s actions as being required or obligatory: that is, bound by a transcendent ethical system beyond His control, per the comments above. For the Muʿtazilīs, the key Qurʾānic proof texts for this included Q. 6.12 (“He has taken it upon Himself to be merciful”) and Q. 30.47 (“We made it our duty to help the believers”).

- 11.101 Which grew and took root
 11.102 Then He killed one and rewarded another; from which comes
 [God's] power of justice?

Why did God create the world?⁵⁰

- 11.103 Furthermore, this: did He make and create this world with
 reason for His own pleasure, for the sake of ease and goodness
 of humans, or [did He make and create it] without reason, for
 His own displeasure, as well as the haste, blame, pain, and the
 death of humans?
 11.104 For if He acted without reason, He acted foolishly.
 11.105 Anything without reason is unacceptable among those who are
 knowledgeable.
 11.106 If He acted with reason and He created for His own pleasure, as
 well as the ease and goodness of humans
 11.107 Then why did He not make [the world] prosperous and full of
 goodness?

What benefit is there in God killing and destroying His own creatures?

- 11.108 If pleasure and goodness come from His arranging humankind
 and creation, then what benefit is there in His killing and
 destroying [them]?⁵¹

50 The following is a caricatured account of how monotheists, including Muslims, saw the creation of the world (cf. *Dēnkard* 3.408, de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 367). For their part, Zoroastrians saw creation differently: it came about as the result of an agreement between Ohrmazd and Ahrimen, whereby the two pledged to resolve their rivalry by conducting a duel within a restricted space, that is, the created cosmos (the *gētīg*, said to be in the shape of this egg; on the egg see above, chapter 3, n. 115–16). In this sense, Ahrimen's consent was essential for the creation of the world. But because Ahrimen was slow-witted he did not realize that the cosmos was actually a trap and a prison that would limit his ability to wreak havoc and inflict pain. Thus, when Mardānfarrox asks why God created the world, it must be understood against the backdrop of the Zoroastrian belief that Ohrmazd and Ahrimen both participated in the process, yet only Ahrimen was responsible for “the haste, blame, pain, and the death of humans” mentioned by Mardānfarrox (*ŠGW* 11.103). See Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 5–15; generally, idem, “Cosmic Origins”; and Pakzad, *Bundahišn*, 4–25 (Pahlavi); Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 3–15 (English).

51 The notion that God permits or is involved in killing (*aβazanašni/ōzanišn*) and destroying (*vašōβašni/wišōbišn*) His own creatures appears elsewhere in the text, e.g. *ŠGW* 11.41, 11.84, 12.39.

136 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.109 If He Himself did not give evil thought to humankind, then who is the one who gives evil thought independently of His command and will?⁵²
- 11.110 If He Himself gave it and now faults them [for it], then from where do His truth and intercession⁵³ come?
- 11.111 For since humankind, with its little-knowledge and little-wisdom, does not let lions, wolves, and other *xrafstars* into the refuge of its children, as much as it can⁵⁴
- 11.112 So they do [not] ruin it

Does God permit evil in order to test His creatures?

- 11.113 Now, why has a forgiving God let Ahrimen and the demon amidst His own creation?
- 11.114 So that they were made blind, corrupt, wicked, and hell-bound?
- 11.115 If He did this in order to test them, as they say, “He created that evil in order to test His creatures”⁵⁵

When Mardānfarrox questions the “benefit” (*sūl/sūd*) of wicked actions, he may be invoking the Muʿtazilī concept of *al-aṣḥāḥ*: this is the idea that God may not always act in a manner that is good, but He always acts in a manner that is “most beneficial,” that is, pursuing the best of all possible scenarios. Mardānfarrox may be echoing Muslim critics of the Muʿtazilīs who also wondered how the present world—filled with egregious pain and suffering as it is—could really be the “most beneficial.” On the critics of the idea of *al-aṣḥāḥ* see Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 219–20; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iv, 569. For a fuller treatment of *al-aṣḥāḥ* in the context of the *ŠGW* see below, this section, n. 82.

52 A leading question; for Mardānfarrox, as for any Zoroastrian, the answer was simple: Ahrimen.

53 Pāz. *mitqāzāi*/Pahl. *mayānjīgīh*: a fairly uncommon word in Pahlavi, but attested several times in the Islamic sections (*ŠGW* 11.7, 11.10, 11.204). For a thorough study of this term see Shaked, “Mihr the Judge,” esp. 1–10.

54 For echoes of this passage see esp. *ŠGW* 3.37 (“lions, wolves, and *xrafstars*”), *ŠGW* 4.63–80 (Ohrmazd as the gardener who sets traps for beasts in his garden). See also *ŠGW* 15.99–104, where Mardānfarrox paraphrases Matthew 18.12–14, Luke 15.3–7, and John 10.11–18, by likening Jesus to a shepherd who protects his flock from wolves. On the *xrafstars*, the “evil creatures” of Zoroastrian belief, see above, this section, n. 17.

55 The term for “test” is Pāz. *xužmāišni*/Pahl. *uzmāyišn*: the trial gives humans an opportunity to exercise virtue and resist sin; without this trial, they would never have such an opportunity. The question reflects the caricatured views of monotheists generally and Muslims specifically and seems to reflect statements in the Qurʾān (the key word in the Qurʾān is Ar. *balā*, *balāʾ*, “to put to the test,” e.g., Q. 11.7, 18.7, 67.2, 76.2, etc.), per Winter, “Islam and the Problem of Evil,” 234.

- 11.116 Then why did He not know humankind and creation before that?
 11.117 For someone whose authority relies on testing should not be called “all-knowing.”
 11.118 The summary is this: if God did not have any opponent or adversary and was capable of creating all creatures and creation, then why did He not create without harm?
 11.119 Or did He want [to do that] but was not able?
 11.120 If He wanted to but was not able, is His power not complete?
 11.121 If He was able but did not want to, does He not act with forgiveness?
 11.122 If He knew, “Among these creatures and creation which I shall create, there shall be something and someone which are not according to my will.”⁵⁶
 11.123 But He did it anyway.
 11.124 Now then, it makes no sense for Him, being unsatisfied, to attach [creation] to His wrath⁵⁷ and cursing and to cast it all to the punishment of hell.⁵⁸

56 This statement may reflect the Muʿtazilī doctrine that God endowed humankind with free will; sometimes this produces human actions that mirror the will of God—i.e., when humankind does what is good (*hasan*, *wājib*)—but at other times this produces actions that contradict His will—i.e., when humankind does what is evil (*qabīḥ*), for which God cannot be held responsible. See de Menasce, 161; with further discussion of the Muʿtazilī doctrine in van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iv, 569–70; and parallel Zoroastrian discussion in *Dēnkard* 3.174 (cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 184).

57 Pāz. *xašm*/Pahl. *xešm*: Zoroastrians believed in a demon named Wrath (Xešm, from Av. *aēš[ə]ma-*, per Asmussen, “Aēšma,” *Elr*) whom they associated with Arabs and Islam. In Islamic-era Zoroastrianism, Wrath was also connected with the dragon Dahāk, who, in turn, was considered to be the progenitor of the Arabs (Skjærvø, “Aždaha,” *Elr*). Zoroastrian texts in Middle and New Persian played on the fact that *xešm/khishm* and “Hāshim” (as in the Banū Hāshim, the tribe of the Prophet Muḥammad) were homonyms: Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats*, 457ff, 481ff; cited in Choksy, *Conflict and Cooperation*, 54; Hartman, “Secrets for Muslims,” 69–71; Bahrami, “Term for Muslims in Pahlavi Literature.” In the *Gizitag Abāliš*, the disputant Abāliš falls under the influence of the demon Wrath then abandons Zoroastrianism and becomes a *zandik* (“apostate, heretic”). This leads him to confront Ādurfarnbag at the court of al-Maʿmūn: per Sahrner, “Zoroastrian Dispute,” 67.

The term appears elsewhere in the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW* (11.75, 12.46), but most interestingly also in the Jewish sections (*ŠGW* 14.9, 14.18–19), where the Biblical God is denounced for being wrathful.

58 Cf. Q. 2.88 (“God has cursed them for their unbelief”), Q. 4.93 (“If anyone kills a believer deliberately, the punishment for him is hell eternal, and there he shall remain; God is angry with him and curses him”), etc.; cf. Asha, “*Šak-ud-gumānīh-vizār*,” 124.

Do evil, pain, and suffering exist by the will of God?⁵⁹

- 11.125 Furthermore, this: if it is not possible for all the evil-thinking, [evil-speaking], evil-doing, and sin that humankind thinks, speaks, and does [to exist], along with pain, sickness, poverty, punishment, and hellish suffering, except by the will and command of God
- 11.126 The will and power of God are eternal.
- 11.127 For His selfness is also eternal.
- 11.128 Now it is also certain there is no hope of saving someone eternally from suffering and punishment.⁶⁰
- 11.129 For it is manifest in detail that there is not any master of learning or teacher⁶¹ who holds Him back from suffering or having an evil will.

59 Mu'tazilīs (like Zoroastrians) did not believe that God was responsible for evil, pain, and suffering in the world. At the same time, they did believe in the concept of *lutf*—"divine assistance"—whereby God was thought to help and motivate humankind to fulfill the obligations imposed on them. This may come in the form of prophetic teachings as well as certain forms of pain. These, in turn, serve as a warning of the negative consequences of ignoring God's obligations. For more see Shihadeh, "Theories of Ethical Value," 386.

While God may not have been responsible for most forms of evil, pain, and suffering, He was not incapable of choosing them. For Mu'tazilīs, the point was that God was a voluntary agent, capable of good acts as well as evil ones, exactly like humankind; the difference was that God could not perform the latter on ethical grounds (though there was debate about this among the Mu'tazilīs). See Frank, "Can God do What is Wrong?"; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 131–39 (Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir), 151–52 (al-Murdār), 298–301, 437–43, 448–51 (al-Nazzām).

Of course, God could have simply prevented the existence of evil in the world as an expression of His justice and goodness, but He did not. Attempts to explain why not led Mu'tazilīs to develop the concept of *al-aṣḥāḥ*—that God always acts in a way that is "most beneficial," though not necessarily objectively good—per n. 82 in this section.

60 Another possible allusion to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'id*, "promise and threat," whereby God promises heaven to those who perform good acts and threatens hell to those who perform bad ones, per n. 5 and 19 above.

In short, Mardānfarrox saw it as cruel for God to punish His creatures with hellfire, even if they deserved it, a point that also came up in a debate between a group of dualists and the Shī'ī imam Ja'far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765). To defend their position, the dualists allegedly cited Q. 4.56, which describes how God constantly replaces the skins of the damned in hell once they have burned away in order to prolong their suffering, which the dualists took as a sign of God's cruelty. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, i, 531.

61 Pāz. *farahangbaṭ ʾostat*/Pahl. *frāhang-bed awestād*: cf. *Dēnkard* 3.256.2 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 261).

- 11.130 If the servant is of the same kind as those angels and authorities who gave this advice to humankind: “Do not do evil deeds and sin!”⁶²
- 11.131 For they wish to reject the will and command of God.

Why does God allow physicians to heal the sick when He could simply not create sickness?⁶³

- 11.132 This too: since both evil deeds as well as good deeds are the will [of God], it is not manifest that He is pleased with the good deeds of the do-gooders more than the evil deeds of the evil-doers.⁶⁴
- 11.133 This too: those physicians, who on account of hope for the soul medicate the sick
- 11.134 And expel and leave their pain and sickness
- 11.135 So that the good deed is appropriated by their action
- 11.136 But they are made ready for the punishment of hell

62 Pāz. *bažaa gunāh ma kunāš*/Pahl. *bazag wināh ma kunēd*: not a Qur’anic quotation per se, but perhaps an allusion to the doctrine of *al-amr bi-’l-ma’rūf wa-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, “commanding the right and forbidding the wrong” (cf. Q. 3.104), that is, the believer’s obligation to uphold the proscriptions of the divine law and to stop violations thereof. It came to be considered one of the five pillars of Mu’tazilī thought. But, then again, this may just be a generic statement. See de Menasce, 161; with background on the Mu’tazilīs in Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 195–226.

63 Mardānfarrox likens God to a physician (*bažāšk/bizešk*) elsewhere in the treatise (cf. *ŠGW* 4.61, 4.102) and employs medical metaphors elsewhere the Islamic sections (*ŠGW* 11.310, 11.314). *Dēnkard* 3.157 (cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 158–68) contains a lengthy discussion of the medical arts.

This was an apt image for God given that Zoroastrians believed in a close relationship between health and virtue, on the one hand, and illness and sin, on the other. The physician was thought to treat both the soul and the body. See Gignoux, “Dēnkard,” *Elr*; Cantera, “Ethics,” 329–30.

64 Mardānfarrox is here giving a caricatured view of what monotheists believe—based on their conviction that God lacks an antagonist and is sovereign over both good and evil. Although it is probably nothing more than a caricature, it does to some extent mirror the beliefs of theological voluntarists such as the Ash’arīs, who, as we have seen, opposed the Mu’tazilīs by arguing that God transcended moral categories of good and evil. The Ash’arīs believed that God’s actions could not be construed as good and evil in any human sense of the terms; good and evil merely correspond to what God permits and prohibits. For this reason, the Ash’arīs are sometimes described as “ethical subjectivists.” See Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nīsābūr,” esp. 226–27.

140 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.137 They are the ones who on account of love for the soul give something to the poor, needy, and tormented humans
11.138 And they remove and leave their need and poverty
11.139 So that the good deed is accomplished by their action.
11.140 Except it is certain theirs will be a grave sin.
11.141 If they say: those physicians, the medicine they bring, and also those who give something to the poor and tormented are all acting according to the will of God⁶⁵
11.142 Then since God is unassailed and unopposed, it would be easier, more reasonable, and more suitable for His being God not to create sickness and poverty⁶⁶
11.143 Than to Himself make them sick and poor and to command humankind, [saying], “Make them healthy and free from want.”
11.144 If they say His will is this, that He makes something good for those physicians and givers as a reward for it
11.145 And He guides them to paradise and eternal goodness
11.146 Then let him consider how unjustly and impotently He acts when, out of a desire for something good and prosperity for someone, He imposes suffering upon many sinless, unhappy, poor, needy, and sick people.

Why is suffering in this world the cost of obtaining reward in paradise?⁶⁷

- 11.147 This too: if He is not able to produce goodness or prosperity for anyone except by violence, pain, and harm to another

65 On medical imagery elsewhere in the text, cf. *ŠGW* 11.310.

66 ‘Abd al-Jabbār (*Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 251) seems to mirror this argument when he quotes Zoroastrians as saying, “Sufferings such as blindness, chronic pains, illnesses, and unexpected plagues which harm material things cannot have a wise and good creator.” Zoroastrians simply attributed them to Ahrimen, while monotheists (including Muslims) had a harder time explaining where they came from.

67 The following section reads as a critique of the Mu‘tazilī idea that God imposes suffering in order to make humankind worthy of paradise (cf. the theodicy of divine test, per n. 55 in this section). As ‘Abd al-Jabbār wrote, “[...] When a man is sick, he is much more likely to be mindful of disobedience, fearing the hellfire, and to act obediently desiring paradise.” ‘Abd al-Jabbār argued that it was ethically wrong not to reward a man after these trials, for that would be equivalent to “hir[ing] somebody and work[ing] him to exhaustion without paying him his wage.” See Martin et al., *Defenders of Reason*, 100–01; cf. Mānkḏm Shāshdīw

- 11.148 Then it is not fitting for Him to act powerfully, to do as He wishes, and to be free from opposition.
- 11.149 If they say that He will lead those sick and poor people to paradise and eternal goodness as their reward⁶⁸ in the other world
- 11.150 Then if He is not able to give this reward in the other world except by suffering in this one, He cannot be perfect.
- 11.151 This too: His committing violence in this world is doubtless, unexpected, and without reason.
- 11.152 His giving reward in the other world is doubtful, unbelievable, and [only comes] after committing violence.
- 11.153 Since the violence before is without reason and the reward after is also without reason and foolish.
- 11.154 This too: no prosperity after matches the level of the violence before in [terms of] senselessness.

Is God's will good or bad, or does He simply have an opponent?⁶⁹

- 11.155 Furthermore, this: of the following three kinds, only one is inevitably [true].

(d. 425/1034), the Zaydī Mu'tazilī commentator on 'Abd al-Jabbār in Vasalou, *Mu'tazilite Ethics*, 5.

The test case for this theory was the suffering of children and animals. Al-Nazzām justified their suffering on the grounds that any illness or poverty they may experience is more beneficial than the health or riches they might otherwise possess. Children who die before they reach the age at which they can undergo a test will enter paradise, regardless of whether their parents are Muslims. Some Mu'tazilīs held different views; some saw it as anticipatory punishment for the sins children would commit as adults; others saw it as evidentiary: that is, a way of forcing adults to turn away from worldly comforts. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 440–42; Winter, "Islam and the Problem of Evil," 236–38; cf. de Menasce, 162.

68 Pāz. *pādadahišni*/Pahl. *pāddāšn*: for discussion of the term see Skjærvø, "Gifts, Debts, and Counter-Gifts"; for the Qur'anic concept of reward (Ar. *ajr*; cf. *ta'wīd*, "recompense") see Raven, "Reward and Punishment," *EQ*, iv, 451–61.

69 Through a series of logical deductions, the following section aims to explain the intellectual shortcomings of monotheism. For the first time in the Islamic sections of the *ŠGW*, Mardānfarrokh shows how these shortcomings can be dealt with only by accepting that God has an adversary who works against His will. It thus makes an explicit case for dualism in a way that has only been implicit until this point. As Rezanian puts it ("Iran and Islam," 320), "[...] The explicit theological formulation of cosmogonic dualism occurs in Zoroastrianism for the first time in the Early Islamic period," and the *ŠGW* is a leading example of this shift.

142 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.156 First, does everything in this world exist by His will, has it
[always], and will it [always], or not?⁷⁰
- 11.157 Or is there some by His will and some which is not?
- 11.158 For nothing at all is found which is neither good nor bad nor a
mixture of both.⁷¹
- 11.159 If they say that all is His will,⁷² then good and bad are both His
will.
- 11.160 If His will is both good and bad, then His will is imperfect.⁷³

70 Pāz. *hast būg bahōl*/Pahl. *ast būd bawēd*: on this idiom see above, n. 47.

71 Pāz. *hamōxtaa i əz har du*/Pahl. *āmēxtag ī az harw dō*: this recalls the concept of the *gumēzišn*, “state of mixture”: that is, the present state of creation in which elements deriving from Ohrmazd are co-mingled with those from Ahrimen. This leaves good and evil to exist side-by-side for a period of 6,000 years before Ohrmazd institutes the Restoration (Fraškerd) and evil is finally vanquished. The *Bundahišn*, the Zoroastrian creation myth, contains the most detailed account of the *gumēzišn*. See Mackenzie, “Gumēzišn,” *Elr*; and now Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, *passim*.

Among the Mu’tazilīs, al-Nazzām argued that the just order of the world depended on the mixture of opposing elements (Ar. *mudākhala*, *mulābasa*, *kumūn* [i.e., one substance being “hidden” in another], though rarely *mizāj*, per van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 364–71). In this, the Mu’tazilīs developed language and categories that had long been used by dualists, but they used these categories to make anti-dualist arguments. Rather than seeing the mixture as evidence of cosmogonic (Zoroastrians) or ontological dualism (Manichaeans), al-Nazzām saw it as evidence for the existence of a single principle—God—who combined these elements in a non-antagonistic mixture. The great Mu’tazilī writer al-Jāhiz (d. 255/868–69) made similar points, per Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 223–24; van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 368–69.

72 Pāz. *agar gōēnd kuš hamā kām*/Pahl. *agar gōwēnd kū-š hamāg kām*: one of the numerous “If they say” passages (see above, chapter 3, section VI) in which Mardānfarrox sometimes (but not always) appears to paraphrase the beliefs of his opponents. In this case, there may be an echo of the Qur’anic statement that God “exercises power over everything” (*‘alā kulli shay’ in qadīr*, e.g., Q. 2.106, 3.189, 5.17, etc.). The famous Mu’tazilī thinker Abū ’l-Hudhayl (d. ca. 227/842) used these words when speaking about God’s omnipotence, arguing that God could divest Himself of His own power and thereby give humans the freedom to act. This is how evil enters the world, not through God but through humans. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 298–302.

73 Pāz. *anaspurī*/Pahl. *an-espurrīg*, “imperfect” (thus, *spurrī/spurrīg*, “perfect”), per *ŠGW* 11.150, 11.161–62, 11.189, 11.350 (the term is almost always used in connection with God’s will). There is a related word, *buṇdaa/bowandag*, “complete,” and *abuṇdaa/a-bowandag*, “incomplete,” per *ŠGW* 11.15, 11.120, 11.314–17 (though the term is not applied to God’s will, but to His knowledge, goodness, and power). Compare with *Dēnkard* 3.131 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 134–35), which discusses the necessary qualities for his being perfect (*spurr-gyānīh*).

If this is indeed an allusion to a Mu’tazilī doctrine, it may be that of *al-aṣḥāh*, the idea that God always acts in a manner that is “the most beneficial” (but not necessarily good).

- 11.161 He is not perfect in even one [respect, i.e., good or bad].
 11.162 And He who has an imperfect will must have an imperfect selfness
 11.163 As shown above.⁷⁴
 11.164 If He does not will anything
 11.165 On account of not having a will for anything, then He has no will.
 11.166 And He who has no will acts by nature.⁷⁵
 11.167 And He who acts by nature has been made as if He had been given a nature.⁷⁶
 11.168 If there is some [part of his behavior] which is His will and some which is not His will
 11.169 In the world, nothing at all is found which is neither good nor bad.⁷⁷
 11.170 So if God wills what is good, then His not-willing-bad is obvious.
 11.171 And that which is bad is not by his will.
 11.172 If He wills what is bad, then His not-willing-good is inevitable.
 11.173 That which is good is not by his will.

Critics argued that, under the banner of *al-aṣṣlah*, Muʿtazilīs justified God’s role in all sorts of suffering, seeing this as the “most beneficial” of a range of poor options (indeed, some Muʿtazilīs seemed to accept this critique, staking out extreme positions; al-Nazzām, for example, believed that “God cannot enrich a pauper or restore a sick man to health, for He knows that sickness and poverty are most salutary for them”; see Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, 221–22). Seen in this light, God’s will could indeed be portrayed as “imperfect.”

74 Cf. *ŠGW* 8.103–16 (de Menasce, 98–101, 162).

75 Pāz. *ciharī*/Pahl. *čīhrīg*: elsewhere (*ŠGW* 7.8–10, per de Menasce, 86–87), Mardānfarroḡ states: “An action can proceed from the agent in two ways: by means of the will, that is to say, by the many ways in which one wishes; or by means of nature, that is to say, by the single manner which is determined by nature.” Another way to translate *ciharī*/*čīhrīg* is “instinct.”

76 This echoes a *kalām*-style argument Mardānfarroḡ makes earlier in the treatise (*ŠGW* 5.48–56, per de Menasce, 66–69), where he explains that elements such as fire, water, air, and earth operate “by a natural disposition” (*pa xvāš ciharī kār/pad xwēš-čīhrīg kār*) endowed by a creator who “grants nature, constitution, and specialization” to his creation. On this count, Zoroastrians and Muslims agreed that if an element such as fire has an inherent nature to burn, it is because it has been given this nature by someone else (i.e., God), contrary to the views of contemporary materialists, who saw the elements as uncreated. See Crone, “Excursus II.”

77 Cf. *ŠGW* 8.100, 11.245 (de Menasce, 98–99, 144–45, 162).

144 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.174 If that which is good is the will of God, it is obvious that that which is bad came from the will of another.
- 11.175 If that which is bad is His will, it is inevitable that that which is good came from the will of another.
- 11.176 Inevitably it has become manifest that there is an opponent of God's will.

Who is the source of evil in the world: God or humankind?⁷⁸

- 11.177 If He says that evil arises with humankind⁷⁹
- 11.178 Then since humankind does not have an eternal selfness, it is inevitable either that evil existed before humankind or after
- 11.179 Or it was with humankind.
- 11.180 If they say that it existed before humankind
- 11.181 Since apart from God, there was no other maker or creator.
- 11.182 Either God created evil, His selfness created it, or it was itself eternal.
- 11.183 If they say that it existed after humankind
- 11.184 Then if the essence⁸⁰ of being a human is also the creation of God

78 The passage reflects Islamic debates about whether God wills evil. The Mu'tazilīs held that God wills only belief (*īmān*) and obedience (*tā'a*); He does not know how to will unbelief (*kuf'r*) and disobedience (*ma'siyā*), which exist solely as a result of humankind's free will. In contrast, various Sunnī groups who emerged later (e.g., the Kullābīs, Ash'arīs, Ḥanafī-Māturīdīs, etc.) held that God wills all that exists, whether it is good or evil. This is reflected in the famous phrase of al-Ash'arī, "There is not any good or evil in the world except for what God wills." Of course, the Mu'tazilīs still had to reckon with the existence of evil, which God may not have created, but which He allowed to exist by giving humans free will. Recognizing this, some Mu'tazilīs (e.g., al-Murdār, d. 226/840–41 and Ja'far ibn Ḥarb, d. 236/850) acknowledged that God might will evil under certain circumstances (*bi-wajhin min al-wujūh*). See Gimaret, "Un problème de théologie musulmane," 6–14. These are ideas to which Mardānfarrox may be reacting here.

Dēnkard 3.174 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 183–84), from a chapter on free will, makes a similar point. It criticizes anonymous sectarians (*kēšdārān*)—almost certainly Muslims—who say, in effect, that God has given humans free will not for their advantage but for their ruin.

79 A view echoed in the Qur'an, e.g., Q. 4.79: "Anything good that happens to you comes from God; anything bad that happens to you comes from yourself" (Asha, "*Šak-ud-gumānīh-vizār*," 127).

80 Pāz. *gōhar*/Pahl. *gōhr*: a fairly common word and the basis of Ar. and NP. *jawhar* (the common translation of Gk. *ousia*), per van den Bergh, "Djawhar," *EF*.

- 11.185 And God did not place humankind's being evil in his essence
- 11.186 How did it emerge from Him by His action?
- 11.187 If they do evil by their action apart from the will of God
- 11.188 And God possessed knowledge of what He was doing by it
- 11.189 Then God was imperfect in His own will.
- 11.190 And humankind—by rejecting the will and command of God and doing evil in opposition to the will of God—is valorous and triumphant.
- 11.191 And it is manifest that God is impotent over His own will and the power of His own servants.
- 11.192 If they say that after He leads them to hell and fearsome punishment⁸¹
- 11.193 Then if God is a powerful agent, it would be more beneficial⁸² not to allow [humankind] to do evil deeds than to take it from their thought and more fitting than to allow them to act for the beneficence of God.
- 11.194 Inevitably He would be satisfied by this.
- 11.195 After He would punish His own creatures with satisfaction.
- 11.196 By this one act that I am considering, either His impotence, little knowledge, or little-goodness has become manifest by it.

81 Another possible allusion to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of “promise and threat” (*al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'id*), per above. As de Menasce observed (162), the question is whether the punishment God inflicts on the wicked in hell is a sign of His justice or of His wickedness.

82 Pāz. *sūṭtar*/Pahl. *sūdtar*: possibly a calque on Ar. *aṣṣaḥ*, “most beneficial” (see discussion above). This was a core concept of Mu'tazilī theology, closely associated with the thought of Abū 'l-Hudhayl and al-Nazzām. They claimed that God always pursues the “most beneficial” course vis-à-vis His own creation, given that God always wills what is beneficial (Ar. *ṣalāḥ*). The term “benefit” (*sūd*, as well as *sūdih*, *sūdōmand*) appears throughout the treatise, though Mardānfarrokh uses the comparatives *sūṭtar/sūdtar* and *sūṭmandtar/sūdōmandtar* (cf. Ar. *aṣṣaḥ*?) only twice (here and ŚGW 11.367).

On the subject of “benefit,” Mardānfarrokh seems to reflect a Mu'tazilī conception of God elsewhere in the text when he states, “As the wise, all-aware, all-powerful creator, completely perfect in Himself, He wishes for that which has no need and [wishes only] a benefit (*sūdē/sūd-ēw*) and increase for beings other than Him” (ŚGW 8.49; de Menasce, 94–95). Al-Nazzām said that, whereas humans act justly to gain benefit, God cannot gain, and therefore He acts justly for its own sake. In other words, God's justice redounds to the benefit of His creation, not Himself. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 437–38; with a note on the varied terminology for “benefit, profit” (also *naf'*) in Arabic in Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 35–36.

Does God create evil as an occasion for humankind to do good?⁸³

- 11.197 If they say that God created and made evil for that reason, only
so that humankind would recognize the value of goodness
- 11.198 Then let him consider this: if, for the sake of recognizing
goodness, evil is necessary and beneficial,⁸⁴ then evil is His
willing the good.
- 11.199 If evil is His willing goodness and it is necessary and beneficial,
it is contrary to those who say that He does not will evil.
- 11.200 This too they say: for that reason He created death, pain, and
poverty,⁸⁵ so that humans would recognize more the value of
being alive, being healthy, and being powerful
- 11.201 [And] they would be more grateful to God.
- 11.202 Let him consider this: how unreasonable it would be to act in
the manner of someone who gives poison to humans in order to
increase the estimation of the antidote's worth⁸⁶
- 11.203 So that the antidote would be sold for a costlier and higher
value.

83 This is an extension of the argument Mardānfarrox made in *ŠGW* 11.113–24, in which he deliberated over whether God permits evil in the world as a way of testing His creatures, and thus prompts them to choose the good. The question here is a related one: does God permit evil as a way of drawing a contrast between it and the good? Some Mu'tazilīs (e.g., Ja'far ibn Ḥarb) made a similar point, arguing that God might be seen as willing unbelief because He willed it to be opposed to belief (i.e., “belief” can only exist in relation to “unbelief”), just as He willed evil to be opposed to good (i.e., “good” can only exist in relation to “evil”) (“He willed that unbelief be opposed to belief, and evil be different to good”). See Gimaret, “Un problème de théologie musulmane,” 11.

84 Here and below (*ŠGW* 11.199), Pāz. *sūtmaṇd*/Pahl. *sūdōmand*.

85 A semi-formulaic list of wicked things that God creates, with parallels elsewhere in the Islamic sections of the treatise (e.g., *ŠGW* 11.125, 11.147, 11.309, etc.).

86 Poisons (*zahar/zahr*) and antidotes (*pādazahar/pādzahr*, cf. *anōš/anōš*, “antidote, elixir,” per *ŠGW* 5.7, 9.16) appear throughout the text. The closest parallel is *ŠGW* 15.84–88 (de Menasce, 216–17), where Mardānfarrox discusses whether poisonous plants—which do evil by their very nature—are endowed with this nature by God. What does it mean if their poisons can heal as well as harm? If they are endowed with the capacity to heal, then why did God create sickness? The passage is slightly confusing, but it seems to highlight the same contradiction discussed here: can God be both arsonist and fire-fighter, so to speak? As far as I am aware, contemporary Muslim theologians did not discuss poisons in the context of theodicy, but de Menasce (162) identified interesting parallels between this and Augustine's *Contra Faustum*.

- 11.204 What act of intercession is it when, in order to recognize the value of goodness in one He allows pain, death, and suffering upon another who is without sin?

Can a man screw his own donkey simply because he owns it?

- 11.205 Furthermore: those who belong to a group of them say that God has authority over every creature and creation.⁸⁷
- 11.206 For His creations all belong to Him.
- 11.207 However it behooves Him and whatever behooves Him He does to them; [but] He is not an agent of violence.⁸⁸
- 11.208 For violence is what they do to something which does not belong to them.
- 11.209 Then He to whom all things belong, doing to them whatever behooves Him, He is not an agent of violence.
- 11.210 Then let Him know that if, on account of being the ruler,⁸⁹ He who does violence must also not be called an agent of violence
- 11.211 Then also, He who is the ruler [and] speaks lies must be speaking the truth.
- 11.212 Also He who, on account of being the ruler, commits evil, sin, and robbery, He should not be called a sinner
- 11.213 Just as the blessed Rōšn son of Ādurfarnbag said as an analogy:⁹⁰

87 The argument that follows reads like a caricatured portrayal of extreme theological voluntarists: that is, adherents of the idea that “God’s will and acts are free and never subject to ethical considerations” (Shihadeh, “Theories of Ethical Value,” 385). This view was found among early anti-Qadarīs and even some Mu’tazilīs, but it found its classical expression among the Ash’arīs. For discussion of this passage see above, chapter 3, section VI.

88 Pāz. *mustagar*/Pahl. *mustgar*: a fairly uncommon word that appears exclusively in the sections on Islam (along with this passage, see *ŠGW* 11.152, 11.224, 11.226, 11.233, 12.13, 12.15). It also appears several times in *Dēnkard* 3 (e.g., 3.224, 3.226, 3.400, 3.400, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 236, 238, 358–59) in connection with the beliefs of the anonymous “sectarians” (*kēšdārān*), who are recognizable as Muslims. In each passage, these “sectarians” are denounced for believing that God is an “agent of violence” who works against His own creation.

89 Pāz. *pādišāhī*/Pahl. *pādišāyīh*: the main section in which God’s “rulership” is discussed is immediately below, *ŠGW* 11.222–38. This contains cognates of terms for rulership and lordship that we have already encountered, e.g., *xvadāi/xwadāyīh* (and *xvadāe/xwadāy*, “ruler”) and *šahariiārī/šahriyārīh* (and *šahariiār/šahriyār*, “lord”), per *ŠGW* 11.17–18 and above, n. 14 in this section.

90 Mardānfarrōx mentions this Rōšn earlier in the text (*ŠGW* 10.53–54, per de Menasce, 116–17) in connection with two other Zoroastrian sages, Ādurfarnbag son of Farrōxzād and

148 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.214 “They saw a man who was screwing a donkey.
 11.215 When they asked him, ‘Why are you doing this abominable
 deed?’
 11.216 He gave as an excuse, ‘It’s a donkey belonging to me!’”⁹¹

Is God a friend or enemy of His creatures?

- 11.217 Then let him ask them this:
 11.218 Is God a friend⁹² or enemy to these creatures and creations
 which He made?

Ādur son of Pādyāwand (likely a misreading of Ādurbad son of Ēmēd, per Rezania, “*Dēnkard* Againsts its Islamic Discourse,” 347 n. 31), the famous compilers of the *Dēnkard*, who were alive in the ninth and early tenth centuries. Mardānfarrox tells us that he read their works, which helped guide him out of error. The anecdote is significant because Mardānfarrox is describing his return to Zoroastrianism after a period of unbelief (see the discussion above, chapter 2, section I). He represents his conversion as an intellectual change of heart mediated by important scholastic works, including what he calls *rōšan niβš/rōšn-nibēg*, “Rōšn’s book” (as well as the *Dēnkard*). On Mardānfarrox’s textual conversion see Thrope, “Contradictions and Vile Utterances,” 162–66, 185–86.

On this Rōšn, who was probably the son of Ādurfarnbag son of Farrozzād, see above, chapter 2, section I. Along with Rōšn, Ādurfarnbag had another son named Zartošt who also served as the *hudēnān pēšōbāy*. This son, however, underwent a mysterious calamity that led to the scattering of his father’s work (per *Dēnkard* 3.420, cf. de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 380). Scholars have speculated that this may refer to Zartošt’s conversion to Islam at the hands of the caliph al-Mutawakkil, an event also mentioned in Islamic sources (see de Blois, “Persian Calendar,” 45–46; Sahner, “A Zoroastrian Dispute,” 69). For a family tree see now König, “Pahlavi Literature,” 12–13.

De Menasce (“Zoroastrian Literature after the Muslim Conquest,” 560–61) claims that Rōšn is mentioned in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995), the famous Baghdad bookseller, but I have been unable find him there. De Menasce may be thinking instead of Rōšn’s brother Zartošt, who is not mentioned by name in the *Fihrist*, but is clearly the one Ibn al-Nadīm had in mind when speaking about a chief mowbed (Ar. *mawbadhān mawbadh*) whom al-Mutawakkil brought from Persia to Iraq, who had a role in translating *Kalīla wa-Dimna* (Ibn al-Nadīm, *Fihrist*, ii, 717).

91 Proof that Rōšn (and Mardānfarrox) had a sense of humor (and that insults were permissible to some extent in the debate culture of the day)! The donkey plays an important role in Zoroastrian lore, especially the three-legged ass who was believed to purify the waters of creation (see Kiperwasser and Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica I,” esp. 109–11; generally, M. Omidisalar and T.P. Omidisalar, “Donkey i,” *Elr*). Despite this, I see no special significance to the donkey here; it is simply a coarse image designed to illustrate the arbitrary and evil way in which God rules over His creation.

92 Pāz. *dōst*/Pahl. *dōst*: de Menasce (162–63) sees a parallel between Pahl. *dōstīh* (“friendship, love”) and Ar. *maḥabba*, per the usage of contemporary Muslim theologians,

- 11.219 If He is a friend of creatures, then it is not fitting for Him to desire to establish evil and suffering for His creatures.
- 11.220 Was He never satisfied by the destruction and suffering of His own creations?
- 11.221 If He is the enemy of His creatures, then it is not fitting for Him, by his own power and knowledge, to create and establish that thing which is disagreeable to the enemy and which struggles against His will.

Is God always well-knowing, well-ruling, and an agent of prosperity, or is He sometimes not?

- 11.222 Let him ask this, too:
- 11.223 Is God always well-knowing, well-ruling, and an agent of prosperity?
- 11.224 Or is He evil-knowing, evil-ruling, and an agent of violence?
- 11.225 Or are there times when He is well-knowing, well-ruling, and an agent of prosperity?
- 11.226 And are there times when He is evil-knowing, evil-ruling, and an agent of violence?⁹³

who debated whether God's love was synonymous with His will. See Gimaret, "Un problème de théologie musulmane," 17–22.

93 The section begins with a basic question (*ŠGW* 11.223–27): does God's nature change? A related passage in *Dēnkard* 3.396 (see de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 353) condemns anonymous sectarians (*kēšdārān*) who believe that the will of God changes. Certain Mu'tazilī theologians thought this was true. Al-Nazzām, for instance, believed that the will of God changes depending on its sphere of application, prompting him to develop a theory of five separate senses of "willing" (see van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iii, 435–37). Despite the similarity, this passage is more concerned with changes to God's nature (i.e., His attributes) than His will. I am not aware of a precise parallel on the Islamic side to which Mardānfarrox may be reacting, other than the general sense in which belief in a single God entails belief in a God who does both good and evil.

The idea that God's attributes are temporary may find a loose parallel in the Mu'tazilīs' distinction between "attributes of action" (Ar. *ṣifāt al-fi'l*) and "attributes of essence" (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*). The former refers to acts that God accomplishes in time to bring things into existence (e.g., descriptions of God as *khāliq*, "the creator," or *rāziq*, "the one who nourishes"); the latter refers to entitative attributes of God's essence that are coeternal with Him. For this reason, the Mu'tazilīs were suspicious of attributes of essence; they seemed to compromise His unicity and imply that He contained a plurality of eternals. For more see Gimaret, "Mu'tazila," *EF*.

150 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.227 If He is always well-knowing, well-ruling, and an agent of prosperity
 11.228 Then there would not be force, violence, or complaint about how He ruled His realm
 11.229 And His friendship with His creatures and His creatures with Him would be pure.
 11.230 For the same reason, He would be forgiving to His own creatures.
 11.231 And His creatures [would give] Him gratitude, praise, and pure friendship.
 11.232 And the name of being God would be deservedly His.
 11.233 If He is evil-knowing, evil-ruling, and an agent of violence
 11.234 Then He Himself is the pure enemy of creatures, and in the same manner His creatures are to Him.
 11.235 For the same reason, He is someone who corrupts, destroys, and leads creatures astray.
 11.236 And the creatures complain about Him, struggle against Him, and are pure enemies.
 11.237 And He is likewise undeserving of the name of being God.
 11.238 And also, on account of His being eternal, creatures possess no hope in limitless time⁹⁴ of being without fear of violence and suffering.

God possesses a mixed character, neither good nor evil⁹⁵

- 11.239 If there are times when He is well-ruling, well-knowing, and an agent of prosperity, and times when He turns away from these

94 Pāz. *akanāraa-jamqnihā*/Pahl. *a-kanārag-zamānīhā*: in Zoroastrianism, two kinds of time were believed to exist: unlimited (*a-kanāragōmand*, as here) and limited (*kanāragōmand*). The former has existed since before the act of creation and cannot be divided or measured. The latter is the 12,000-year period created by Ohrmazd during which combat between him and Ahrimen takes place. For an overview see Rezania, “Limitless Time or Timeless Time?”; Panaino, “The ‘Other’ *gumēzišn*.” The concept is mentioned elsewhere in the *ŠGW* (see esp. chapter 16 on the Manichaeans, per de Menasce, 226–61) and also appears in an Arabic treatise on Zoroastrianism ascribed to al-Jayhānī (fl. 4th/10th c.) which discusses creation “in unlimited time,” Ar. *fī zamān ghayr mutanāhī*, per de Menasce, “Témoignage de Jayhānī,” 51–52.

95 On the concept of mixture in Zoroastrian and Islamic thought see above, this section, n. 71. This may be an anti-Muʿtazilī polemic: to claim that God has a “mixed” (Pāz. *gumēzaal*/Pahl. *gumēzag*) character ran against the central tenet of the Muʿtazilīs, namely that God possesses pure and undiluted “oneness” (Ar. *tawhīd*).

- 11.240 Then His friendship with creatures is mixed.
 11.241 Because of His mixed friendship, His action is mixed
 11.242 Because of His having mixed action, it has become manifest
 that His selfness is also mixed.
 11.243 And His creatures are also mixed friends to Him.
 11.244 Among partners, if there no friend who is not His enemy, no
 one who is grateful who does not complain about Him, and also
 no one who praises who is not deserving of His scorn, in this
 way, the nature of all creatures is manifest.

Should Ahrimen be blamed for the evil he causes, or should God?

- 11.245 Furthermore, this: since everything which is in the world is not
 outside these two names [i.e., categories], good and bad⁹⁶
 11.246 Then if it is said that goodness and evil are both from God and
 by the will of God⁹⁷
 11.247 Then violent Ahrimen was not and will not be defamed without
 reason; [he was not and will not be] sinless and with the power
 to originate; [he was not and will not be] evil and rebellious⁹⁸
 11.248 That which it says in the book⁹⁹ is meaningless: “Ahrimen was
 rebellious and had them driven from paradise.”¹⁰⁰

96 Cf. *ŠGW* 8.12–14 (de Menasce, 92–93, plus 163).

97 Another passage in which Mardānfarrox seems to be giving a caricatured view of what monotheists believe. By the same token, the passage also seems to mirror the doctrines of Muslims (esp. theological voluntarists) who believed that God was not bound by moral categories of good and evil and could do both (contra the Muʿtazilīs, who believed that God could only do good) (cf. *ŠGW* 11.132 and n. 64 above).

98 Pāz. *aβāž-sār*/Pahl. *abāz-sār* (cf. 11.248–49): a term which also appears in early Judeo-Persian, per MacKenzie, “An Early Jewish–Persian Argument,” 251 (I thank Prods Oktor Skjærvø for this reference).

99 Pāz. *niβā*/Pahl. *nibēg*: a generic word for a book or writing, but in this context probably meaning “scripture” (as in Ar. *kitāb*, e.g., the Qurʾān). The term is used in reference to the Qurʾān twice in the Islamic sections (*ŠGW* 11.264, 11.268), but throughout the treatise it is applied mostly to Zoroastrian books (especially the *Dēnkard*, e.g., *ŠGW* 4.106–07, 5.92, 5.94, 9.1, 10.51–57, 12.1). Mardānfarrox also uses it for the Hebrew Bible (*naxustīn niβā*/*naxustīn nibēg*, “the first scripture,” per *ŠGW* 13.1, cf. 13.5, 14.1, and 14.81, with extensive discussion in Thrope, “Contradictions and Vile Utterances”) and the New Testament (*ŠGW* 15.71).

In his *Sharḥ*, the Muʿtazilī theologian and jurist ʿAbd al-Jabbār states that dualists do not have the right to quote from the Qurʾān because they do not accept God’s oneness and justice (Ar. *tawḥīd* and ʿ*adl*); see Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 271.

100 Cf. *ŠGW* 11.52–78, with discussion of the relevant Qurʾānic passages above at nn. 28–40.

152 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.249 For that rebellion and disobedience are also by the will of God.
 11.250 Also, if it is said that evil is from God and by the will of God, while evil is from humankind,¹⁰¹ then Ahrimen is without the power to originate and without sin, and it is without reason to curse and blame him.
 11.251 If all this suffering and evil come not from a separate essence and from selfness, [but from] the same essence of God Himself
 11.252 Then God is an enemy and adversary toward Himself.¹⁰²

God is more evil than evil¹⁰³

- 11.253 This, too: It would be very misleading to say that evil deeds arise only from an evil essence.¹⁰⁴
 11.254 Since it is misleading to think that evil deeds arise from a good essence, it is even more misleading to think that that Ahrimen, who is the origin and principle of all evil deeds, arises from the setting in place and creation of God
 11.255 To summarize this: firstly, if something is not in the will of God, and if everything is by the will of God, then no one is an agent of sin.
 11.256 It is also without reason to fashion the messengers and the *dēn*.¹⁰⁵

101 Cf. Q. 4.78–79, “When anything good happens to them, they say, ‘This is from God.’ But when anything bad happens to them, they say, ‘This is from you [O Prophet].’ Therefore, say, ‘Both of them come from God.’ ... Indeed, anything good that happens to you is from God, while anything bad that happens to you is from yourself” (cf. de Menasce, 163; Asha, “*Šak-ud-gumānīh-vizār*,” 133).

102 The final part of the sentence reads: Pāz. *ō xvāš ruṇ*/Pahl. *ō xwēš rōn* (= *ruwān*), literally, “to his own soul,” whereas one would expect *ō xwēš tan*, literally “to his own body.” De Menasce (163) sees this as a possible Arabism, a translation of the phrase *li-nafsihi* (“to himself,” literally, “to his own soul”). The phrase *ō xwēš rōn* is uncommon and could reflect Mardānfarrox’s familiarity with Arabic idioms. On Mardānfarrox’s possible knowledge of Arabic see above, chapter 2, section III.

103 Continuing a theme addressed above, e.g., *ŠGW* 11.125–31, 11.177–96, etc.

104 Pāz. *gōhar i bažaa*/Pahl. *gōhr ī bazag*: on the term “essence,” see above, this section, n. 80.

105 Pāz. *pādqbarica u dīn*/Pahl. *paygāmbār-iz ud dēn*: on “messengers” see above, this section, n. 42. The term *dēn*, often translated as “religion,” is an expansive concept, here referring to the cumulative wisdom of Ohrmazd and humankind; see Shaki, “Dēn,” *Elr*; Vevaina, “Theologies and Hermeneutics,” esp. 213–14.

- 11.257 If it is fitting to condemn someone for being an agent of sin,
then it is even more fitting to condemn him who is the origin,
maker, possessor, and creator of all evil and evil deeds.
- 11.258 Also, if it is said that evil and evil deeds are from Ahrimen or
humankind, then since they are also [from] the creator and the
one who sets in place, who is God, then the original source is
also He who is the original cause of evil.
- 11.259 He is more evil than evil.¹⁰⁶

**The rival religions agree: Do good deeds and stay away from
evil deeds¹⁰⁷**

- 11.260 Let him consider this too: on the basis of their own authorities,
all the sects¹⁰⁸ say this when they spoke to and advised their
own flocks: “Do good deeds and stay away from evil deeds!”¹⁰⁹
- 11.261 On account of being led astray, they do not think this, that
the evil deeds which He commanded, “Do not do them, [for]

106 For similar phrasing, cf. *Dēnkard* 3.138 (de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 144).

107 In argument and vocabulary, similar to *ŠGW* 11.129–31 (de Menasce, 163).

108 Pāz. *hamōin kās̄q aē xvāš dastūr*/Pahl. *hāmōyēn kēšān az xwēš dastwar*: the key term here is *kēš* (from the Avestan *tkaēša-*), literally meaning “teaching, doctrine,” but used in the pejorative sense as in “[false] faith, [false] doctrine.” For recent discussion see Timuš, “*Pōryōtkēšān* Versus *Kēšdārān*.”

Mardānfarrox uses *kēš* (or the related term *kēšdārān*, “adherents of a [false] doctrine, sectarians”) several times in the *ŠGW*, for instance, when he speaks about his encounters with rival religions (*ŠGW* 1.35, 10.38, per de Menasce, 26–27, 116–17). He also uses it in connection with specific religions, such as Manichaeism (*kāš jādūt/kēš jādūgīh*, “the sect of sorcery,” per *ŠGW* 10.60; de Menasce, 116–17) and Christianity (*kāš i tarsāl/kēš ī tarsāgīh*, “sect of Christianity,” per *ŠGW* 15.4; de Menasce, 210–11).

The terms *kēš* and *kēšdārān* are also found in *Dēnkard* 3, where they are used in connection with anonymous monotheists whose beliefs often closely align with those of Muslims (see discussion above, chapter 3, section IV; cf. de Menasce, “Zoroastrian Literature after the Muslim Conquest,” 556; Camponiano, “Zoroastrians, Islam, and the Holy Qur’ān,” 91; König, “Training in Thinking,” 66–68). *Dēnkard* 3 occasionally uses these terms in connection with named religions too, e.g., “the sect of Jesus from Rome, that of Moses from the land of the Khazars, and that of Mani from Turkestan” (*Dk.* 3.29, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 47), “sectarians who hold that the one Creator is Father and Son” (*Dk.* 3.40, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 53), and Jews (*Dk.* 3.291, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 287).

109 Pāz. *kərbaa kunēf aē bažaa paharēžēf*/Pahl. *kerbag kunēd az bazag pahrēžēd*: another possible allusion to the doctrine of *al-amr bi-’l-ma’rūf wa-’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*, “commanding the right and forbidding the wrong” (cf. Q. 3.104), per above, n. 62 (but also found throughout the Avestan corpus).

- whoever does I shall cast into eternal hell,”¹¹⁰ where does that come from and which origin can it be?
- 11.262 If [evil deeds] are also from God, then it would have been easier not to institute them than, after instituting them, to make them manifest and to order [humankind] to stay away from them.
- 11.263 Thus, also: I do not know any benefit or reason for instituting and creating evil.

Contradictions in the book of the rival religions

- 11.264 Then in their books, [God] speaks about good deeds and evil deeds in a contradictory manner:¹¹¹
- 11.265 [Saying], “Good deeds and evil deeds are both from me.”¹¹²
- 11.266 Neither demons nor sorcerers are capable of causing harm to anyone.¹¹³
- 11.267 No one has received the *dēn* and done good deeds, and no one has wandered in the evil *dēn*¹¹⁴ and done evil deeds except by my will.”
- 11.268 In the same book, He threatens abundantly and performs curses on His creatures.
- 11.269 [Saying], “Why does humankind will and do those evil deeds which I will for them?”
- 11.270 It concerns a will and action of His own hand, and He terrifies them with punishments upon body and soul.

110 Cf. Q. 4.93, etc., another allusion to the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of *al-wa‘d wa-’l-wa‘d*, per above, n. 19.

111 Mardānfarrokh here returns to themes addressed earlier, including the contradictions of the Muslims (n. 1) and the errant views of their scriptures. Despite the apparent quotations, none of the following lines seem to have parallels in the Qur‘ān.

112 Cf. *ŠGW* 11.5, 11.132.

113 Not a Qur‘ānic quotation per se, though Q. 2.102 does state that devils were responsible for teaching sorcery (*sihr*) to humankind. The related term *jāduī/jādūgīh*, “sorcery,” appears one other time in the *ŠGW* (10.60), where it is used in reference to Manichaeism (see above, n. 108 in this section).

114 Pāz. *agdīnī*/Pahl. *agdēnīh*: the only time this or any related word (e.g., *agdēn*, “adherent of an evil *dēn*, infidel”) appears in the *ŠGW* (though cf. 11.364, 11.370, *adīnī/adēnīh*, “having no *dēn*”). As mentioned above (n. 2), Zoroastrians did not have a developed vocabulary for speaking about Islam as distinct from a wide array of other infidel faiths, most of which they simply called *agdēnān* or *agdēnīh*. See Macuch, “Legal Constructions of Identity,” esp. 199–208; Mokhtarian, “Boundaries of an Infidel”; Sahner, “Zoroastrian Law.”

- 11.271 And in another place He says, “I myself am one who leads humankind astray, for if it were my will, then I would have shown them the straight path, except it is my will that they go to hell.”¹¹⁵
- 11.272 In another place He says, “Humankind themselves are agents of evil deeds.”¹¹⁶

Is God Ahrimen? Or does God lead His creatures astray? Or is God partners with Ahrimen?

- 11.273 In these three ways, God gives differing testimony to His own creatures.
- 11.274 One is that He Himself is Ahrimen.
- 11.275 One is that He Himself is the one who leads creatures astray.
- 11.276 In another manner, He makes Himself a partner¹¹⁷ with Ahrimen in leading creatures astray, [saying], “Sometimes it is I who act, sometimes it is Ahrimen.”¹¹⁸
- 11.277 By saying that humankind itself does evil deeds, then He has made Himself a partner with Ahrimen in being far away from evil deeds.
- 11.278 For if humankind does evil deeds because of their essence and their tendency to lead astray, then God, with Ahrimen, is far away from doing evil deeds.

115 The notion that God both guides humans and leads them astray is well attested in the Qur’an (e.g., Q. 6.125, 7.178, 14.4, etc., per Asha, “*Šak-ud-gumānīh-vizār*,” 134), though not in the manner described here; cf. *ŠGW* 11.359–60 below.

116 Cf. Q. 4.79 and above, *ŠGW* 11.177, 11.250, etc.

117 Pāz. *hambāe*/Pahl. *hambāy*: an uncommon word in Pahlavi, though attested three times in the *ŠGW* (4.6, 11.244, and immediately below, 11.277). One is tempted to read this as a calque on Ar. *sharīk*, “companion, partner,” as in the formula “There is no god but God, [God] alone, he has no companion (*lā sharīk lahu*)” (Q. 6.163 etc.). For Muslims, the opposite of monotheism was *shirk*, “associationism, partnership”: that is, associating God with other divinities and/or created things. If *hambāy* is indeed a calque on *shirk*, Mardānfarrox’s point is doubly inflammatory: not only does God have a partner, but that partner is Ahrimen. For more see Gimaret, “Shirk,” *EF*.

118 The Qur’an contains several anti-dualist verses that would seem to refute the belief that God and Ahrimen are partners, though, interestingly, Muslim scholars did not quote these verses to critique dualism specifically but *shirk* generally (see Monnot, “Thanawiyya,” *EF*). The most obvious is Q. 16.51: “God said, ‘Do not take for yourselves two gods (*ilāhayn ithnayn*), for He is a lone god; to me, therefore, show fear!’”

- 11.279 For since [evil deeds] are not from God, they are also not from Ahrimen.

Questions for the Mu'tazilīs

Does God will all humankind to refrain from evil deeds through free will?

- 11.280 Then let him ask those who are called Mu'tazilīs:¹¹⁹
 11.281 Does God will all humankind to refrain from evil deeds through free will, [does He will] to save them from hell, and to lead them to paradise, or not?¹²⁰
 11.282 If they say, "No"
 11.283 Then he will have made a judgment¹²¹ about how little is the goodness of God and how bad is His will.
 11.284 For the same reason, it is not fitting to praise Him as being God.
 11.285 If they say, "It is His will"
 11.286 Then he will have made a judgment about God's will being good.
 11.287 For the same reason, it is fitting to praise Him as being God.

119 Pāz. *muθzarī*/Pahl. *muθazarīg*: Mardānfarrox has been referring implicitly to the ideas of the Mu'tazilīs throughout the treatise, though this is the first time he identifies the group by name. It is not clear why he does so only now. For extensive discussion of this and the four Mu'tazilī sub-sections (ŠGW 11.280–87, 11.288–94, 11.295–302, 11.303–08) see above, chapter 3, section VI.

120 As we have already seen, the Mu'tazilīs believed that God endowed humankind with free will. Through free will humankind could choose evil over good. This seems to be the doctrine to which Mardānfarrox is referring here. The latter half of the sentence may refer to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'īd*, "punishment and threat" (see above, this section, n. 19). Mardānfarrox seems to fixate on this idea because it implies that God wills eternal punishment for His creatures; this, in turn, implies that God has an evil nature (whereas the Mu'tazilīs merely saw it as evidence of God's justice, for He only punishes those who deserve it).

De Menasce (163) and Asha ("Šak-ud-gumānīh-vizār," 135) see this passage as referring to the Mu'tazilī concept of *al-aṣṣlah*, though I do not see how this can be.

121 Pāz. *vazirini*/Pahl. *wizrēnīd*: a term that appears frequently in the Mu'tazilī sections of the ŠGW. It is an aspect of Mardānfarrox's *kalām*-style argumentation designed to expose the contradictions of his opponents' views (see below, ŠGW 11.286, 11.290, 11.293, 11.300, 11.305, 11.308).

Questions for the Muʿtazilīs

If God has the will to act, does He also possess the power to do so?

- 11.288 This, too: if He has the will to act, does He have the power [to do so] or not?
- 11.289 If they say that He does not
- 11.290 Then they will have made a judgment about the impotence of God with regard to what is His will.
- 11.291 For the same reason, it is not fitting to praise Him as being an all-powerful God.¹²²
- 11.292 If they say that He has the power to enact His will
- 11.293 Then they will have made a judgment about the power of what is His will.
- 11.294 For the same reason, it is fitting to praise Him as being an all-powerful God.

Questions for the Muʿtazilīs

If God has the power to act, does He choose to enact His will?

- 11.295 Furthermore, this: if He has the power to enact His will, does He do it or not?
- 11.296 If they say that He does [enact His will]
- 11.297 Then it would have been made manifest that all humankind should refrain from sin, be saved from hell, and to be led to paradise.

122 These lines seem to mirror an intra-Muʿtazilī debate: al-Nazzām believed that God not only does not wish to do evil but is incapable of it. Others, such as al-Murdār, disagreed, saying that God never does evil, for this would contradict His perfect nature, despite the fact that He remained capable of it; to suggest otherwise would limit God’s omnipotence. See van Ess, “Wrongdoing and Divine Omnipotence,” 54.

Recognizing this contradiction, Zoroastrian theologians generally concluded that God was not omnipotent but was omniscient and omnibenevolent. As Mardānfarrokh puts it, if God is omnipotent, it is in the limited sense whereby He is omnipotent over all that is possible: that is, all that He can think and nothing more. See Vevaina, “Theologies and Hermeneutics,” 224–25 (citing *ŠGW* 3.2, 3.4–6, per de Menasce, 38–39).

158 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.298 But that being of His is not manifest and is misleading towards His own *dēn*.
11.299 If they say that He has the power to enact His will but does not do so
11.300 Then they will have made a judgment about God's being unforgiving,¹²³ His enmity towards humankind, and the fact that His will does not prevail.
11.301 For if He enacts [His will], then there is no harm for Himself, there is benefit for man, and His will prevails¹²⁴
11.302 If He does not enact [His will], then there is no benefit for Himself, there is harm for humankind, and His will does not prevail

Questions for the Mu'tazilīs

Does God not have a will, or is He just unwilling?

- 11.303 Furthermore, this: does He not act with a will or is He unwilling?¹²⁵
11.304 If they say that He does not act with a will
11.305 Then they will have made a judgment that God has a good will yet does not will doing good.
11.306 It is absurd to think this on account of this contradiction.
11.307 If they say that He is unwilling and therefore does not act
11.308 Then they will have made a judgment for the weakness of God in His selfness or for the existence of one who destroys His will.

123 Pāz. *anaβaxšašnigarū*/Pahl. *an-aboxšāyīšngarīh*: cf. *ŠGW* 11.4 (with n. 3 on forgiveness as one of the divine attributes), 11.37–44 (extended discussion of God's forgiveness).

124 The contrast between harm (*zyān*) and benefit (*sūd*) is attested elsewhere in the *ŠGW* (11.302, 11.332–37, 15.89, per de Menasce, 148–51, 216–17) and elsewhere in Pahlavi literature (e.g., *Dk.* 6.2 in Shaked, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 6–7; *Dk.* 9.15.2 in Vevaina, “Studies in Zoroastrian Exegesis and Hermeneutics,” 274, 276).

125 Pāz. *pa kām nē kunəṭ aiiāp akām*/Pahl. *pad kām nē kunēd ayāb a-kām*: the same critique is found in *Dēnkard* 3, which refers to anonymous sectarians (*kēšdārān*) who deny that God has a will. At one point (*Dk.* 3.138, per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 144; cf. 3.147.4, de Menasce, 150), the text criticizes them for denying the existence of God's will but at the same time for refusing to accept the obvious conclusion that God must therefore be stupid (*stardīh*).

Summing up

- 11.309 To summarize this:¹²⁶ if the one who governs this world were unopposed, unrivalled, and full of knowledge, goodness, and power, then there would not be all this unbefitting action, violence, suffering, pain, and sorrow for most humans and other creatures.
- 11.310 For if the one who governs is unopposed and full of knowledge, He knows the solution so that evil does not come into being and also the medicine for removing evil.¹²⁷
- 11.311 If He is full of goodness and forgiving, then it is not His will for evil to come into being in the first place, and His will is for it not to exist.
- 11.312 If He is full of power, then He has the power for evil not to come into being at all.
- 11.313 Now, since in this world in which God is the governor, the presence of evil is clearly visible, then it is not so different than this: either the governor has an opponent or he is unopposed.¹²⁸
- 11.314 If He does not know the solution so that evil does not come into being and [does not know] the medicine for removing evil, it is made manifest by this that God's knowledge is incomplete.¹²⁹
- 11.315 Or [because] His good will is [actually] evil, it has become manifest that the goodness of His will is incomplete.
- 11.316 Or [because] He does not have the power for evil not to come into being and to remove it, it has become manifest that the power of God is incomplete.
- 11.317 And if He is not complete in knowledge or goodness or power, then it is also not fitting to praise and serve Him as being an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God.

126 That is, with reference to the foregoing questions for the Mu'tazilīs, *ŠGW* 11.280–308.

127 On medical imagery elsewhere in the text cf. *ŠGW* 11.141.

128 In many ways, this line represents the crux of Mardānfarrox's argument: the presence of evil in the world tells us either that God is all-powerful (i.e., without a rival) but not all good, or not all-powerful (i.e., with a rival) but all good.

129 On God's being complete/incomplete, as well as perfect/imperfect, see above, n. 73 in this section.

God's being is defined by His attributes, and His attributes are a mixture of good and evil

- 11.318 Let him also know this: since no existing being or thing endowed with will is capable [of acting] except by how it is
- 11.319 If the creator's fundamental being is being God, and his quality is being light, beautiful, fragrant, pure, good, and knowledgeable, then things like being dark, ugly, stinking, filthy, evil, and ignorant, which are themselves demonic qualities, it is fitting [for God] to be far away from them.¹³⁰
- 11.320 If His fundamental being is something demonic, and His quality is being dark, ugly, stinking, filthy, evil, and ignorant, then the quality of being God is alien to Him.
- 11.321 If there is even one [source] from which—in His selfness, which is unavoidably mixed¹³¹—all these [qualities] originate, then because it is inseparable from Him, there is no way to keep His being good separate from His being evil.

Goodness and suffering must have different essences

- 11.322 Even now, the hope of those who possess hope has gone out.
- 11.323 For even he who goes to paradise on account of doing good deeds, there too he shall be [surrounded] by evil and suffering.¹³²
- 11.324 For there is also no separating goodness from evil.
- 11.325 If there is not any goodness which is separate from suffering, then there is also no suffering which is separate from goodness.

130 A formulaic list of binaries mentioned elsewhere in the *ŠGW*, e.g., 3.31–32, 8.4–10, 8.93, 9.16 (de Menasce, 40–41, 92–93, 98–99, 108–09) and alluded to in the *Dēnkard* as well, e.g., *Dk.* 3.28, 3.169, 3.187, 3.271, 3.314, etc. (per de Menasce, *Troisième livre*, 46, 178, 195, 272, 300). Aside from these sections, Mardānfarrox uses the word *gāndatar/gāndagtar* (“most stinking”) at one other point to describe the womb of the Virgin Mary (!), into which God could not possibly have been born because it was so foul, or so Mardānfarrox thought. See *ŠGW* 15.37, per de Menasce, 212–13.

131 On the polemic that God's nature is mixed see above, n. 71 and 95.

132 This is a strange argument. Building on the point made in the section above (*ŠGW* 11.318–21), Mardānfarrox seems to be saying that because God's good and evil natures cannot be separated, the soul is surrounded by God's evil presence even when it is in heaven. This seems to be a tart reply to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'd* (see above, n. 5, 19), namely the idea that souls deserving of punishment go to hell, while those deserving of reward go to heaven. For Mardānfarrox, this amounts to an empty promise.

- 11.326 This is obvious: the fact that goodness and suffering are
different comes from their having different essences
- 11.327 If the difference and separation of the two principles which
arises from the other's having a different essence is manifest,
the hope of those who possess hope is real.
- 11.328 And knowledge is their guide.

Different ways of causing harm¹³³

- 11.329 Let him also know this: every utterance which is not within its
own definition¹³⁴ has no form and is undesirable.
- 11.330 This, too: the definition of being God is mainly having
knowledge.
- 11.331 One definition of having knowledge is doing things that benefit.
- 11.332 Doing things that benefit is [the same thing as] not causing
harm.
- 11.333 There are three ways of causing harm:
- 11.334 One is that which does not benefit oneself but also harms
another.
- 11.335 One is that which does not benefit another but harms oneself.
- 11.336 One is that which harms oneself and also harms another.
- 11.337 And as for God who knows His work, there is no benefit for
Himself in creating Ahrimen and the demons and also harming
another.
- 11.338 From His own action, it has become manifest that His will does
not keep prevailing.

Can God's will be said to be good if wickedness always prevails?

- 11.339 This, too: if the will of God is being good
- 11.340 And His will is eternal
- 11.341 And He were able [to fulfill] what befits His will

133 This section (esp. *ŠGW* 11.331–37, cf. 8.39–56 per de Menasce, 94–95) returns to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-aṣṭaḥ*, the notion that God always acts in a manner that is “most beneficial” (cf. *sūṭ/sūd*, “benefit” and *sūṭmaṇd/sūdōmand*, “beneficial”). Mardānfarrox has discussed the concept before (see above, *passim*) and takes up the question here in order to answer whether God's actions are harmful, beneficial, or a combination of the two.

134 De Menasce (164) sees the word *vīmand/wīmand* here and below (*ŠGW* 11.329–31) as a calque on Ar. *ḥadd*, “definition, delimitation.”

162 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 11.342 So that, from the beginning to the end, all goodness and integrity of God's will would prevail in the world
11.343 But now, it is manifest that wickedness and non-integrity are always very much prevailing.

Does God change His will, or does another do it for Him?¹³⁵

- 11.344 Of these [two], one [must be correct]: either it always happens according to the will of God or without His will.
11.345 If it always happens according to the will of God, it is manifest that His will is [prone to] wickedness just as for goodness.
11.346 Or He is impotent and changing with respect to His will.
11.347 Since the will does not change except for a reason or for one who changes it
11.348 Then of these two, one [must be correct]: either it [changes] for a reason or there exists another who changes His will.

Is God's will imperfect, or does another destroy it for Him?

- 11.349 If it does not always happen according to the will of God
11.350 Then it is manifest that God is tormented in His own will and His will is not perfect.¹³⁶
11.351 Or there exists a destroyer who possesses a will [of his own].¹³⁷

Adam, the tree, and the will of God¹³⁸

- 11.352 This, too: as for those who say that God commanded Adam: "You shall not eat from this one tree which is in paradise!"
11.353 Let him ask them:
11.354 The command which God gave to Adam—"Do not eat from this tree!"—was it good or bad?
11.355 If the command was good, it is manifest that the tree was bad.

¹³⁵ For earlier discussion of changes to the will of God see n. 93.

¹³⁶ Cf. *ŠGW* 11.160–62.

¹³⁷ Cf. *ŠGW* 11.60.

¹³⁸ Mardānfarrox returns to the story of Adam in paradise (cf. *ŠGW* 11.61–78 and the accompanying notes). There is little new material here, other than Mardānfarrox's attempt to understand God's complicity in Adam's sin: was it wrong for God to issue a prohibition against eating from the tree, or was it wrong for Him to create the tree in the first place?

- 11.356 It is not fitting for God to create something bad.
 11.357 If the tree was good and the command was bad, then it is not fitting for God to give a bad command.
 11.358 If the tree was good and He gave a command not to eat [from it], then it is not compatible with God's being good and forgiving to withhold goodness from His own sinless bondsmen.

Who seeks the welfare of humankind more: God or His messengers?

- 11.359 This, too: as for those who say that God brings all those whom He wills to belief and the straight path and as a reward for that, leads them to eternal goodness¹³⁹
 11.360 Whomever He does not will He abandons in a state of having no *dēn* and not acknowledging God, and for that reason casts them into hell and eternal suffering¹⁴⁰
 11.361 Let him ask them:
 11.362 Is he better whose desire and will are in the *dēn*, belief in God, and the straight path or he whose desire and will are in having no path, having no *dēn*, and not acknowledging God?
 11.363 If they say that the better [person] is he whose desire and will are in the *dēn* of God and the straight path
 11.364 Now, the man for whom God's will is that He abandons him in a state of having no *dēn*, having no path, and not acknowledging God, [but] a messenger or some other friendly man preaches the *dēn* of God and the straight path to him
 11.365 Then is God better and more beneficial for him or that messenger [and] that man?¹⁴¹

139 Here and below: yet another passage alluding to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'id* (see above, n. 5, 19). On the "straight path" (*rāh i rāst/rāh ī rāst*) see above, n. 44. On the "reward" (*pādādahišni/pāddāšn*) see above, n. 68.

140 Cf. *ŠGW* 11.271, with comment on the Qur'anic resonances at n. 115 in this section. On "having no *dēn*" (*adīnī/adēnīh*, also 11.362, 11.364, 11.370), compare with *ŠGW* 11.267, which speaks of the existence of an "evil *dēn*." For Mardānfarrox, there seems to be a distinction between following an evil *dēn* and simply having no *dēn*. It is not clear which one was worse.

141 A curious idea: Mardānfarrox seems to be suggesting that there is a distinction between a God who wills evil for His creatures and messengers (*pādqbar/paygāmbar*, per n. 42

- 11.366 If they say that the will of God is better for him, then it amounts to saying that not acknowledging God, not receiving the *dēn*, and having no path are better. This should not be accepted or taught, for this is absurdity.
- 11.367 If they say that it is better and more beneficial to come to the correct *dēn* and to acknowledge God by it
- 11.368 Then clearly it amounts to saying that the messenger and the man are better for him than God
- 11.369 For the man who desires for [another] man to walk a straight path and to acknowledge God, his will for [such a man] is much better than that of God.
- 11.370 God—whose will for them is to walk a road backwards, to be ignorant, and to have no *dēn*—He is much worse than that man.

Is God a greater agent of sin than Ahrimen?¹⁴²

- 11.371 This, too: if the thought of evil deeds and the evil-doing of humankind are by the will of God, now [it follows that] God is the one who gave the thought of evil deeds and implanted evil deeds in [humankind's] thinking.
- 11.372 And Ahrimen alone calls and hurries [humans] to do evil deeds, and the thought of evil deeds which God [gave] and also His desire for them is more deceptive and worse than the calling of Ahrimen.

above) who will good for them. It is not clear why the will of God and the messengers would be different, assuming that the messengers were sent by God in the first place.

I do not see a specific Zoroastrian or Islamic doctrine here, though the Mu'tazilīs had a developed concept of divine favor, within which they understood the role of prophets. God wills benefit (Ar. *ṣalāḥ*, cf. *sūṭmaṇḍtar/sūdōmandtar*, "beneficial," here and below, 11.367; and commentary above, *passim*) for humans and is therefore obliged to help them do good and refrain from evil. He bestows guidance (Ar. *hudā*) on humans in the form of prophetic teachings (*irshād*) and motivation (*lutf*). Thus, for the Mu'tazilīs, the prophets are an expression of God's desire for humankind to do good. The mismatch between the will of God and the will of prophets implied here would have been nonsensical for Mu'tazilīs. Mardānfarrox, who was convinced that the Islamic God must be partly evil, may simply be mocking the Mu'tazilī position by implying that God was wicked while His messengers were good. For background see Shihadeh, "Favour (divine)," *EF*.

142 Mardānfarrox is arguing that because God gave humankind the inclination to heed Ahrimen, He is arguably more evil than Ahrimen himself—an extreme argument and a fitting point upon which to conclude this chapter.

- 11.373 Since even his listening to Ahrimen and doing evil deeds comes from the thought of evil deeds which God gave and the desire for them [which God also gave], now it is obvious that God is much worse and a greater agent of sin than Ahrimen.

Conclusion of Chapter 11: There must be two origins¹⁴³

- 11.374 Regarding these words which we have enumerated
 11.375 Of these two, only one can be:
 11.376 Either all is true or [all is] false.
 11.377 Or some is true and some is false.
 11.378 If all is true, every word which does not accord with this word is false, and something is both truth and falsehood.
 11.379 If all is false, every word which does not accord with this word is true, and something likewise is both.
 11.380 If some is true and some is false
 11.381 Then that which is true comes from the essence and origin of truth.
 11.382 And that which is false comes from the essence, origin, and principle of falsehood.
 11.383 There are two origins: one from whom is truth and one [from whom is] falsehood.

143 In these concluding remarks, Mardānfarrox makes an intellectual proposition about what has just been stated: either his argument is all true or all false or it is a mixture of both. The implication is that, if his argument is true, then Zoroastrianism must be a true religion. If his argument is false, then Islam must be a true religion. If it is somewhere in between, then true elements must exist in both religions.

What is interesting here is how Mardānfarrox ties this dualistic view of his argument back to the dualistic principles of his theology (esp. *ŠGW* 11.381–83), namely the idea that intellectual truth and falsehood ultimately arise from two cosmic principles (*bun/bun* and *bunīiašt/bunīšt*) (cf. *ŠGW* 11.3 and n. 2 in this section, as well as 11.254, 11.257–58, 11.261, 11.327, 12.33): that is, God and Ahrimen.

Introduction, Chapter 12

The contradictions of what they say about God

- 12.1 Another [chapter] regarding the contradiction of what they say and a few utterances from the book of the *Dēnkard*¹⁴⁴
- 12.2 As for what they say: God is around everything and nothing is inside Him.¹⁴⁵
- 12.3 And He is inside everything, and nothing is around Him.
- 12.4 He is above everything, and nothing is below Him.¹⁴⁶

144 The *Dēnkard*, sometimes described as an “encyclopedia” of Zoroastrian religious knowledge (Gignoux, “Dēnkard,” *Elr*), is the single longest work in the medieval Zoroastrian tradition, consisting of ca. 169,000 words spread across nine books (of which seven survive). It is not a systematic work but a miscellany of theology, polemics, exegesis, and biography. As discussed above (chapter 2, section I), its first compiler was the *hudēnān pēšōbāy* Ādurfarnbag son of Farroxzād, who was active at the beginning of the ninth century, and its second compiler (to whom we owe the surviving recension) was Ādurbād son of Ēmēd, who was active at the end of the ninth/beginning of the tenth. Mardānfarrox describes both of these men and their writings as having been instrumental in his conversion back to Zoroastrianism after a period of unbelief.

Mardānfarrox refers to the *Dēnkard* several times elsewhere in the *ŠGW* (4.107, 5.92, 9.1, 9.4, 10.57, per de Menasce, 58–59, 70–71, 108–09, 116–17), making him the only known medieval receptor of the work (Rezania, “*Dēnkard* Against its Islamic Discourse,” 342). Despite this, it is not clear which passages of the *Dēnkard* Mardānfarrox is quoting here and elsewhere (see Rezania, “*Dēnkard* Against its Islamic Discourse,” 347–48, 356); this may be because Mardānfarrox is quoting the recension of Ādurfarnbag, which no longer exists, as opposed to the recension of Ādurbād, which does. Throughout my notes, I have identified similarities between passages in the *ŠGW* and *Dēnkard* 3, the chapter most focused on interreligious polemics. In my view, these do not amount to direct quotations of any version of the *Dēnkard* that we know today, but there is clearly a significant overlap between the two works (see discussion in chapter 2, section I; chapter 3, sections II, IV).

Other scholars before have explored parallels between the *ŠGW* and the *Dēnkard*, notably Taillieu (“Zoroastrian Polemic against Manichaeism” on the Manichaean material), Thrope (“Contradictions and Vile Utterances” on the Jewish material), and Timuş (“Polémique mazdéenne anti-christologique” on the Christian material), but there is not much written on parallels with the Islamic material.

145 The following lines (*ŠGW* 12.2–9) reflect a major debate among Muslim theologians: did God have a physical presence? The section provides some of the clearest evidence for Mardānfarrox’s knowledge of contemporary Islamic debates (if only for the purposes of mocking them). For discussion of this passage see above, chapter 3, section VI.

146 The surrounding lines in which Mardānfarrox questions God’s location recall debates among Muslim theologians about God’s physical relationship to His throne. Some saw God as touching the throne, others as floating above it. Some wondered whether God is smaller

- 12.5 And He is below everything, and nothing is above Him.
 12.6 He sits upon a throne, yet has no place.¹⁴⁷
 12.7 And He is inside the sky, yet has no whereabouts.
 12.8 And He does not exist in any place, yet He exists.¹⁴⁸
 12.9 He exists in every place, yet has no place.
 12.10 And everything is by His own will in the usual way.
 12.11 He is the principle¹⁴⁹ of both malice and goodness.
 12.12 And He is eternally merciless, yet generous.
 12.13 And He arranges violence, yet is not an agent of violence.¹⁵⁰
 12.14 And He commanded the one who did not have the power to perform the command that comes from God [or the power] to reject it.
 12.15 And He made those who are sinless bound for hell,¹⁵¹ yet He is not an agent of violence.
 12.16 He was aware that humankind was wicked and bound for hell, yet that was His will for them.
 12.17 And was what is good His will—or was that not His will?
 12.18 He gave them the remedy and He Himself was no harm.¹⁵²
 12.19 Or did He not give any remedy except a non-remedy, yet He has no opponent?
 12.20 He needed to test [them], yet He is all-aware.¹⁵³

than the throne, given that the throne surrounds Him. Still others questioned whether God is confined beneath where He sits but expands infinitely in all other directions. See van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iv, 218, 252, 456–57.

147 Pāz. *aḅar taxt nišīnəḡ nē jāmaṇd*/Pahl. *abar taxt nišīnēd nē gyāgōmand*. The throne of God is also mentioned several times in the Jewish sections of the *ŠGW* (14.34, 14.64–65, 14.68, 14.74, de Menasce, 196–201), drawing on various verses in the Hebrew Bible. For discussion see Thrope, “Contradictions and Vile Utterances,” 89–115.

148 Recalling the belief ascribed to the Jahmīs that God is “neither within the world nor beyond it” (per Ibn Kullāb, d. ca. 241/855), cf. van Ess, *Theology and Society*, iv, 218, with further citations.

149 Pāz. *bunīiaštaa*/Pahl. *bunīštaḡ*: for comment see above, chapter 3, n. 36.

150 Pāz. *mustagar*/Pahl. *mustgar* (cf. *ŠGW* 12.15 just below): for comment see above, this section, n. 88.

151 Pāz. *dōžaxī*/Pahl. *dōšoxīg* (cf. *ŠGW* 12.16 just below): for comment see above, this section, n. 5, 19; a reflection of Mardānfarrox’s fixation on the Mu’tazilī concept of *al-wa’d wa-’l-wa’id*.

152 Pāz. *cārī*/Pahl. *čārīh* (cf. *ŠGW* 12.19 just below): on the concept of “remedy” and medical imagery elsewhere in the text see *ŠGW* 11.14, 11.310, 11.314.

153 On the theodicy of test (*xužmāišni/uzmāyišn*) see above, *ŠGW* 11.47, 11.113–24.

168 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 12.21 Those who reject His command [act according to] His own will.
 12.22 And he who rejects [His command] is the servant whom He makes the good ruler.
 12.23 And His command always prevails.
 12.24 And [yet] those who reject His command may be found.
 12.25 And sometimes His will does not prevail.
 12.26 And the one who rejects His will is not the destroyer of His will.
 12.27 And He commanded that which is not His will.
 12.28 [Of the following two statements]—His command does not contradict His will and His command contradicts His will—both are correct.
 12.29 And what is good is His will, not the [other] will which does not prevail.
 12.30 And what is bad is His will, and as for the one who does something bad, He is merely acting according to what is just.

More contradictions of the rival religions

- 12.31 Another thing, too: there are many contradictions in what the sects say.¹⁵⁴
 12.32 Unavoidably, if the *dēn* is balanced,¹⁵⁵ it cannot arise from these many varied and contradictory things they say.
 12.33 Otherwise, those who say they believe in two principles¹⁵⁶ call the work of God weak and impotent.
 12.34 They speak in a manner not fitting God's greatness.
 12.35 Regarding this subject, too: there is something I shall state clearly. Let him know [the following]:

154 Pāz. *vas aṇḇasānī i aṇḇar gaḇāšni i kēšq*/Pahl. *was hambasānīh ī andar gōwišn ī kēšān*: on the theme of “contradiction,” so central to the *ŠGW*, see above, n. 1 in this section. On the terminology of “sects” (*kēšān*, used only one other time in the sections on Islam, 11.260) see above, n. 108.

155 Pāz. *paemqñī dīn*/Pahl. *paymānīg dēn*: on *paymān* (“right measure”) in Zoroastrian thought and its Islamic parallels (Ar. *wuṣṭa*, *qaṣḍ*) see Shaked, “Paymān.” Mardānfarroḡ uses the term once elsewhere in connection with the *dēn* (*ŠGW* 1.13, per de Menasce, 24–25), in which he likens the *dēn* to a tree and its stem to *paymān*.

156 Pāz. *du-buniiaštaa-aṇḡārḡ*/Pahl. *dō-buništaḡ-hangārān*: that is, “dualists,” a self-designation, but one that may reflect how Muslims referred to Zoroastrians and other groups: that is, as *al-thanawīyya* (“those who believe in two gods, two principles”). For discussion of this and related vocabulary for dualism in the text see above, chapter 3, n. 36.

- 12.36 He makes the matter of being God weaker and more impotent
 12.37 Than the one who says that His own creatures which He created
 were all disobedient and deaf to advice.
 12.38 Such that even the most despised creature struggles against His
 will.

Prophets, friends of God, and the door of mercy

- 12.39 Thus, too: those many prophets and messengers whom He
 fashioned were killed and crucified.¹⁵⁷
 12.40 And there are some [prophets and messengers] He has made
 despised, belittled, and dishonorable.
 12.41 This, too: not only did He not defend His own realm from the
 evil ones whom He Himself created, but He Himself even
 opposed His own rulers.¹⁵⁸
 12.42 And He Himself inevitably destroys what He Himself has
 done.
 12.43 And He Himself makes His own creation powerless.
 12.44 He Himself strikes His own sinless servants for His own
 sinfulness.
 12.45 He Himself made His own obedient friends weak, needy, agents
 of sin, and [made them] lose their way.
 12.46 And out of wrath towards a single sinless servant like
 Ahrimen,¹⁵⁹ He destroys and leads astray countless of His own
 creatures.

157 Mardānfarrox is reviving a subject discussed earlier in the text, namely the suffering of God's prophets and messengers (ŠGW 11.79–87 with comment at n. 42–45 in this section). The detail about crucifixion (*pa dār kard/pad dār kerd*, literally, “to make [someone hang] on a tree”) is new and is clearly a reference to the death of Jesus. Mardānfarrox uses a similar phrase (*dār-kardī/dār-kerdīh*) to describe the crucifixion of Jesus in the section on Christianity: ŠGW 15.34, 15.40, and 15.59, per de Menasce, 212–15. It is curious to include in the Islamic sections, since Muslims did not believe that Jesus was actually crucified, but merely appeared to be so (cf. Q. 4.157).

158 Cf. ŠGW 11.17–19.

159 Pāz. *xašm i payak baṇdaa i agunāh i cuṇ āharman/Pahl. xešm ī pad ēk bandag ī a-wināh ī čiyōn ahrimen*: a curious turn of phrase; Mardānfarrox seems to be so intent on blaming the monotheistic God for all evil in the world that he completely absolves Ahrimen of responsibility for it. This is an extreme position reflecting the vitriolic nature of Mardānfarrox's critique of Islam.

170 THE DEFINITIVE ZOROASTRIAN CRITIQUE OF ISLAM

- 12.47 Because of the limited sin caused by His own action, He imposes another limitless punishment upon those who are sinless.¹⁶⁰
- 12.48 He once and for all closes the door of mercy.
- 12.49 And He is not sated by the pain, harm, and suffering [done to] His own creatures.
- 12.50 And He holds them eternally in this action and arrangement.
- 12.51 And in the beginning, middle, and end, it is not possible to stand by the commands which He gives.

The nature of God for a Zoroastrian

- 12.52 Or he who says that He is an eternally ruling, all-knowing, all-powerful God¹⁶¹
- 12.53 Whose rulership, knowledge, and power are eternal and of limitless time¹⁶²
- 12.54 And from whom beauty and goodness arise
- 12.55 And whose action is reasonable and whose command is beneficial.¹⁶³
- 12.56 To His own servants He is generous and forgiving.
- 12.57 And He fully rewards the victorious servant.
- 12.58 He has mercy upon the sinner who, on account of his own sinfulness, is captive to the enemy, so that he can resolve his sinfulness and wash away his evil-doing and filth.¹⁶⁴
- 12.59 Finally, He does not abandon any good creatures who are in the captivity of the enemy.

160 Another allusion to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-wa'd wa-'l-wa'id*; Mardānfarrox is asking why God should banish humans to eternal hell for sins they committed only in compliance with God's will. It may also be a critique of contemporary determinist theologies that claimed that God wills humankind's evil deeds.

161 Cf. *ŠGW* 11.51, 11.317, etc.

162 Pāz. *akanāraa jamqñi*/Pahl. *a-kanārag-zamānīg*: see above, n. 94 in this section.

163 Pāz. *suṭmaṇḍihā*/Pahl. *sūdōmandīhā*: another possible allusion to the Mu'tazilī doctrine of *al-aṣṣlah*: that is, God always behaves in a manner that is "most beneficial"; Mardānfarrox has contested this idea throughout the Islamic sections, and here concludes by arguing implicitly that the actions of the Muslim God are not "beneficial" at all but those of His Zoroastrian counterpart certainly are.

164 This in obvious contrast to the bleak fate awaiting the sinner in Islam; see above *ŠGW* 12.47, etc.

- 12.60 And He defends, holds, and nurtures them in body and soul in battle and in the struggle against the enemy.
- 12.61 And He fully protects His own dominion from an opponent of a different essence.¹⁶⁵
- 12.62 And His troops and army are victorious in the struggle and in battle.¹⁶⁶
- 12.63 In the final victory, He bears His own creatures away from all evil-doing.

The victory of good over evil

- 12.64 If one considers light, knowledge, sight, life, health, and other creations of God, [one will see that] they prevail over darkness, ignorance, blindness, death, sickness, and other qualities of demons, [that] they are fully powerful, [and that] they cause increase¹⁶⁷
- 12.65 For the following is obvious, that light rejects all darkness
- 12.66 And knowledge is victorious over ignorance
- 12.67 And life is more powerful than death and causes increase.
- 12.68 For on account of life's being powerful and causing increase, the innumerable propagation of creatures arises from two people.¹⁶⁸
- 12.69 This is what is generally believed.
- 12.70 Thus, it is manifest how much sight and health are victorious and powerful over blindness and sickness.

165 Cf. *ŠGW* 11.17–19.

166 Pāz. *gund u spāh*/Pahl. *gund ud spāh*: the armies of God and/or His agents figure prominently in Zoroastrian accounts of the end of the world: for example, Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg*, i, 174–77, 184–85; ii, 79, 81, 85. On these events see also above, n. 71 in this section.

167 Muslim authors seem to have been aware of this line of argument. The Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār, for example, explained that Zoroastrians believed pains such as blindness, chronic ailment, disease, and unexpected plague could not have an author who was at the same time wise and good: Monnot, *Penseurs musulmans et religions iraniennes*, 251.

168 Both Muslims and Zoroastrians believed in the existence of a primordial first human couple. For Muslims, this was Adam and Eve, and for Zoroastrians, this was Mašyā and Mašyānē; see Cereti, "Myths, Legends, Eschatologies," 261–62.

The army of Ohrmazd

- 12.71 This too it is fitting to consider: the opponent and the Lie, what does he desire? The army of God, for what do they struggle?¹⁶⁹
- 12.72 The opponent desires this: “I shall destroy this earth, sky, and the luminous creatures
- 12.73 Or I shall bring them into my possession and turn them from their own essence¹⁷⁰
- 12.74 Lest God be able to perform the Resurrection and the Renovation¹⁷¹ and to rearrange His own creatures.”
- 12.75 The army of God struggles for this, so that the opponent may not obtain his desire and wish.
- 12.76 This, too: the army of Ohrmazd,¹⁷² ever since the original establishment [of creation], has been valorous in the struggle and victorious in [His] will.

Conclusion of Chapter 12

- 12.77 By this it is manifest that there was a time when He fashioned this earth and the sky
- 12.78 When He could have destroyed all creatures and creation, except He could not destroy even one of the most despised of God’s creatures.
- 12.79 For even if the body is separated from the soul by cause of death, [this means] neither a destruction nor a turning of essence from selfness, but a change of quality and a shift from one place to another and from one work to another.

169 Cf. *ŠGW* 12.62.

170 This line and the one above are repeated almost verbatim at *ŠGW* 4.82 (de Menasce, 56–57).

171 Pāz. *ristāxēž u frašōkard*/Pahl. *ristāxēz ud fraškerd*: a reference to the major events of Zoroastrian eschatology. For an overview see Shaked, “Eschatology i. In Zoroastrianism and Zoroastrian Influence,” *EIr*, and above, this section, n. 71. Mardānfarrox also uses the term *ristāxēž/ristāxēz* (“resurrection”) in connection with Jesus in the Christian sections of the text; see *ŠGW* 15.40–42 (de Menasce, 212–13); Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation*, 32–34.

172 Here at the end of the Islamic sections, Mardānfarrox briefly resumes referring to God as “Ohrmazd”: that is, by his Zoroastrian proper name. This may be because the penultimate paragraph deals with specifically Zoroastrian beliefs, including the Renovation, not polemics against Islam per se

- 12.80 Otherwise, how is it manifest that the essence of the body and the soul, each one returns by its own essence to another duty?
- 12.81 And it is manifest that these creatures and creation will be full of movement and always working as long as their existence is necessary and beneficial.
- 12.82 Up to here, [what we have said] regarding this subject seems complete.

BERSERKER

BOOKS

