



Al-Ījī's Arguments against the Mu'tazilite Ethical Realism

Mu'tezile'nin Ahlâkî Realizmine Karşı Īcî'nin Argümanları

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Abstract

Al-Ījī presents the final stage of Ash'arism, and his arguments reflect the traditional and philosophical approaches in the school. This paper presents the main arguments that al-Ījī deployed to refute the Mu'tazilites' ethical realism. Its aim is to present the exact form of al-Ījī's arguments, explain them, discuss the objections, and then evaluate their strengths. The paper's aim is to explain the Mu'tazilites' arguments; nevertheless, it gives some clarifications when it is needed to understand al-Ījī's arguments in a better way. In the beginning, the paper draws a distinct line between the Ash'arites' and the Mu'tazilite ethical understandings. It defines the focus of the controversy and prepares the groundwork for theological arguments. Al-Ījī's arguments are divided into three categories. In the first one, we present al-Ījī's general argument, which is a polemic argument whereby al-Ījī tries to negate the freedom of human choice in order to cast doubt on the Mu'tazilite ethical foundations. We discuss its critique, and then reveal al-Ījī's real position on human power and freedom of choice. The second category contains three arguments against the intrinsic ethical value: two of the arguments were adopted by al-Ījī and the third was attributed to other Ash'arites in a general way. The first two arguments deal with the intrinsic ethical values of lying and truth-telling, while the third one is based on the Ash'arite famous assertion: 'an accident cannot subsist on another accident.' The final category is dedicated to discussing al-Ījī's argument against the Mu'tazilite theory of ethical aspects. A sufficient account of the theory and its partisans is provided before discussing al-Ījī's argument. Moreover, a brief introduction of Al-Ījī's and the Mu'tazilites' conception of divine ethics is discussed in the folds of the argument. Some divine qualities, such as justice and wisdom, are defined from the Ash'arites' and the Mu'tazilites' perspectives. As a result, the paper gives a clear account of al-Ījī's arguments against the Mu'tazilites' ethical realism; it presents and evaluates the objections and defines the strengths and the defects in the arguments. Finally, it proposes a better way to understand the Ash'arites' ethical arguments in their right context.

Keywords: Ethical values, Ḥusn and Qubh, Value Judgement, Ethical realism, Divine power.

Öz

Eş'arîliğin son aşamasını temsil eden İcî'nin argümanları, ekoldeki geleneksel ve felsefî yaklaşımları yansıtmaktadır. Bu makale İcî'nin Mu'tezile'nin ahlâkî realizmine karşı kullandığı temel argümanlarını sunmaktadır. Çalışmanın amacı İcî'nin argümanlarını değiştirmeden sağlam bir şekilde sunmak, açıklamak, itirazları tartışmak ve sonunda güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini değerlendirmektir. Makalenin amacı Mu'tezile'nin argümanlarını açıklamak değildir; yine de İcî'nin argümanlarını daha net anlamak için bazı açıklamalar yapmaktadır. Makalenin ilk kısmında Eş'arîler ile Mu'tezile'nin ahlâk anlayışları arasında belirgin bir çizgi çizmektedir. Tartışma noktasını belirtip kelâmî argümanlar için zemin hazırlamaktadır. İcî'nin argümanları üç kısma ayrılmıştır. Birinci kısımda İcî'nin Mu'tezile'nin ahlâkî temellerine şüphe düşürmek için insanın seçme özgürlüğünü ortadan kaldırmak için polemik argümanını sunmaktayız. Argümana karşı eleştirileri tartıştıktan sonra İcî'nin insanın gücü ve seçme özgürlüğü konusundaki gerçek görüşünü ortaya koyuyoruz. İkinci kısım, intrinsik değerler görüşüne karşı üç argüman ihtiva etmektedir. İlk iki argüman İcî tarafından benimsenmiş, üçüncüsü ise genel bir şekilde diğer Eş'arîlere atfetmiştir. Bu iki argüman yalanı ve doğruyu söylemenin intrinsik etik değerleriyle ilgilenmektedir, üçüncüsü ise Eş'arîlerin meşhur: "Bir araz başka bir araz üzerinde konamaz" deyişine dayanmaktadır. Makalenin son kısmı, İcî'nin Mu'tezile'nin ahlâkî vecihler teorisine karşı argümanını tartışmaya ayrılmıştır. İcî'nin argümanını tartışmadan önce teori ve taraftarları hakkında yeterli bir açıklama yapılmıştır. Ayrıca İcî'nin ve Mu'tezile'nin ilâhî ahlâk anlayışına dair kısa bir giriş, argümanın içinde tartışılmaktadır. Adalet ve hikmet gibi bazı ilahî nitelikler Eş'arî ve Mu'tezile'nin bakış açılarından ele alınmaktadır. Sonuç olarak makale, İcî'nin Mu'tezile'nin ahlâkî realizmine karşı argümanlarını açık ve net bir şekilde ortaya koymakta, itirazları sunup değerlendirmekte ve argümanların güçlü ve zayıf yönlerini göstermektedir. Son olarak, Eş'arîlerin Mu'tezile'ye karşı ahlâkî argümanlarını daha etkili bir şekilde anlamak için bir çözüm önermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Etik değerler, Ḥüsni ve Kubh, Değer yargısı, Ahlâkî realizm, ilâhî kudret.

Introduction

The Ash‘arites’ debate with the Mu‘tazilites about the ethical value presents the most polemic part in the history of Kalām. The debate revolves around the theological argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* and extends to more than thirteen theological arguments that discuss the value judgement of human and divine actions. However, refuting the argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* not only disproves the ethical theory of the school of Mu‘tazila, but also challenges many of their theological foundations. Aḍḍ al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355)¹ is a prominent late Ash‘arite scholar who dedicated a significant part of his writings to the refutation of the Mu‘tazilites’ doctrines in general and their ethical theory in particular. The Mu‘tazilites maintain that ethical values are either intrinsic properties or necessary aspects that entail the value judgements of human and divine actions. They argue that since ethical values are real properties, human reason is not completely dependent on the revelation to discern the ethical realities of some actions. The Ash‘arites, on the other hand, argue that the contingency of the world and the Omnipotence of God who has absolute free will leave us entirely dependent on God to know the ethical values of actions. In other words, the Ash‘arites reject the Mu‘tazilites’ claim that actions in themselves have real ethical properties —or what is called ethical realism— and maintain that divine injunctions are the only granter of our ethical values.

There are a few classical and contemporary works that investigated the ethical arguments in theology, but most of them focused on presenting the Mu‘tazilite arguments and gave less importance to the arguments of the Ash‘arites.² In this paper, we are dealing with al-Ījī’s arguments because his works and the commentaries on his works present the last significant link in Ash‘arism. His book *al-Mawāqif fi ‘ilm al-kalām* (The stations in the discipline of *kalām*) contains a rich collection of Ash‘arite arguments. The book was initially the focus of many prominent students of al-Ījī, such as Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/ 1413), Shams al-Dīn al-Karmānī (d. 786/1384), and Sayf al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 800/1397) who enriched the content of the book with their sophisticated commentaries, and later on the book with its commentaries became the main Kalām textbook in the traditional Islamic schools (*madrasa*) for many centuries until our modern time.

Our aim in this paper is to present al-Ījī’s arguments against the Mu‘tazilite ethical realism. We try to convey al-Ījī’s exact arguments, and then explain, discuss the objections, and define the strengths and weakness of the arguments. We prepare the groundwork for al-Ījī’s argument by giving a sufficient account of the argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ*. Al-Ījī’s arguments will be classified into three parts: in the first part, we deal with al-Ījī’s polemic argument that threatens the freedom of human choice and attacks the ethical foundations of all the Mu‘tazilites. The second

¹ For a complete biography of al-Ījī see Tāj al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Wahab b. ‘Alī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi‘īa al-kubrā* (Cairo: Hajar Publication, 1992), 10/42; Khair al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A‘lām* (Beirut: Dār al-‘ilm li-al-malāyīn, 2002) 3/295.

² Majid Fakhry and George Hourani gave more attention to the Mu‘tazilite ethical theory and present the Ash‘arites’ argument inadequately. See Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Ayman Shihadeh did a good service in presenting al-Rāzī’s ethical position, but he never dealt with al-Ījī’s arguments. I follow Ayman Shihadeh in calling the Mu‘tazilite ethical theory as ‘ethical realism’ instead of ‘ethical rationalism.’ I think the word ‘realism’ presents their theory more accurately. See Ayman Shihadeh, “Psychology and Ethical Epistemology: An Ash‘arī Debate with Mu‘tazili Ethical Realism, 11th-12th C.”, *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 21 (2021), 81-102.

part will be dedicated to discussing al-Ījī's arguments against the early Mu'tazilites who maintain that actions have intrinsic ethical qualities. In the final part, we present al-Ījī's argument against the Mu'tazilite theory of ethical aspects.

1. The Argument of *Ḥusn* and *Qubḥ*

The Arabic words of "*ḥusn*" and "*qubḥ*" can be used in ordinary language to describe both esthetic and ethical values alike. Esthetically speaking, the attributive words of them serve to describe the beauty and the ugliness of things, while in the ethical field, they are used to mean good and bad or right and wrong.³ In theology, the argument is restricted to the ethical values of actions, whether the actions are good or bad because of their inherent nature, real properties or because God commanded or prohibited them. The Ash'arites excluded the first two options and maintained the last one, and thus they affirmed that the human intellect cannot know the ethical values of actions before the advent of religious law.⁴

Al-Ījī's definition of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* is more sophisticated than the one of the early Ash'arites.⁵ He said that humans can call something good or bad based on three perspectives.⁶ The first one is when we call something good because its existence is perfection (*kamāl*), and its absence is imperfection (*naqs*). The second perspective is related to the individual's end (*gharad*), i.e., something is good when it serves the individual's end and bad when it impedes his end. The ethical judgements about these two perspectives can be known by human intellect independently of the religious law.⁷ The third perspective is based on the divine injunctions: good actions are praised in this world and rewarded in the hereafter, and bad ones are condemned in this world and punished in the hereafter. For al-Ījī and other Ash'arites, this is the real ethical value, and it is only known by the religious law. Al-Juwaynī (d. 478/ 1085) gives us an important clarification related to this real ethical value by saying that religious law does not point to already existing ethical values, but it establishes the ethical values of our actions from scratch. In other words,

³ For more elaboration on the linguistic meanings, see these dictionaries: Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs* (Kuwait: Dār al-Hidāya, 2009), 34/418; Aḥmad b. Fāris, *Maqāyīs al-luḡha* (Damascus: Dār al-Fīkr, 1979), 2/57. In our argument, I will use the Arabic words of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* and their English equivalents, good and bad, interchangeably.

⁴ Aḍḍ al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Rukn al-Dīn al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fī ʿilm al-kalām* (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1999), 323; ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbdullāh al-Juwaynī, *al-Ṭrshād ilā qawāʿid al-adilla fī uṣūl al-ʿitiqād* (Cairo: al-Khanijī Publication, 1950), 258; Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismaʿil al-Ashʿarī, *Risāla ilā Ahal al-Thughr* (KSA: Library of Science and Wisdom, 2002), 243.

⁵ The early Ash'arites, such as al-Imām al-Ashʿarī, negated the ethical value before the advent of the religious law and did not give any possibility for ethical judgement independent of revelation. This should not be understood as if they negated any possibility, but they only kept their argument concise and to the controversial point. See al-Ashʿarī, *Risāla ilā Ahal al-Thughr*, 242-243.

⁶ The first one who divided *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* into these three categories is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and al-Ījī followed him using the same division. Other Ash'arites, such as al-Juwaynī and al-Ghazālī came up with slightly different divisions. See Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Khaīl, 2004), 237; ʿAbd al-Malik b. ʿAbdullāh al-Juwaynī, *al-Talkhīṣ fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʿir, 2000), 1/159; Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-ʿitiqād* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 304.

⁷ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 323-324; ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1998), 8/202. *Ḥusn* and *qubḥ* in the first perspective are more related to the characteristics than actions. Knowledge, for example, is a characteristic of perfection, i.e., it adds perfection to the one who is attributed with it. The second perspective is relative to the agent and changeable according to time and place. Killing Zayd, for example is good to his enemies and bad for his friends. For more elaboration on these two perspectives, see al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/202-203.

what God states as good becomes good and what He states as bad becomes bad.⁸ The Mu‘tazilites do not accept this Ash‘arite position and maintain that there are already ethical values of actions, and religious law must come to approve the good ones and disapprove the bad ones.⁹

To clarify the focus of controversy between the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites more accurately, we need to elaborate more on al-Ījī’s definition of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ*. He defines *ḥusn* as what deserves praise in this world and reward in the hereafter, and *qubḥ* as what deserves blame in this world and punishment in the hereafter. This definition with this order does not present the disputing point precisely because praise and blame can exist in this world and in the hereafter as well. Similarly, reward and punishment are not restricted to the hereafter, but they can be precipitated by God in this world. This clarification is provided by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285) who pinned down the focus of controversy in this argument to legal accountability, i.e., the actions that God takes into accountability.¹⁰ For al-Ījī, God holds people accountable based on the ethical values that He defined in the revelation, not based on what our reason defines as good or bad. God praises and rewards the actions He defined as *ḥusn* and blames and punishes the actions that He defined as *qubḥ*, and thus we understand what is good and what is bad based on the divine injunctions. On the other hand, the Mu‘tazilites maintain that God praises and rewards or blames and punishes based on the real ethical properties of actions.

2. Al-Ījī’s polemic Argument

With this argument, al-Ījī does not intend to refute a specific group of Mu‘tazilites. However, he intends to attack the whole Mu‘tazilite ethical foundation by negating human free will.¹¹ He repeats Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1209) argument on the compelling motive (*al-dā‘ī al-mujbir*) to prove that human actions are either compelled or arbitrary and, in both cases, they cannot have ethical values in themselves. Al-Ījī argues:

If the servant is unable to omit [the action], then he is compelled, and if he was able to omit his action without depending on a preponderating factor, i.e., [the action] comes forth from him sometimes and does not come forth at other times, then [the action] is arbitrary. However, if [the action] was depended on a preponderating factor, it [the preponderating factor] cannot be from the servant himself because that would lead to an infinite regress. Therefore, [the action] is necessary as far as the determining factor is concerned. Otherwise [if the factor does not necessitate the action] performing and omitting the action would be possible, and there will be a need for another preponderating factor [if it does not necessitate the action as well], and it will go ad infinitum. Therefore, [the action] will be necessary [as it comes to exist along with the

⁸ al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 259.

⁹ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Karmānī, *al-Kawāshif fī Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Hüseyin Paşa, 317), 348b.

¹⁰ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Abī al-‘Alā al-Qarāfī, *Nafā’is al-uṣūl fī Sharḥ al-Maḥsūl* (Cairo: al-Bāz Publication, 1995), 1/351.

¹¹ It is unanimous by the Mu‘tazilites that the compelled (*majbur*) action cannot hold any ethical value, see al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad, *al-Mughnī* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub, 1953), 6/5-9. Therefore, al-Ījī’s attempt to prove that human actions are compelled is enough to refute ethical rationalism.

determining factor]. In all cases [the action being arbitrary or necessary], the servant has no choice in his actions, and thus he will be compelled.¹²

Put it simply, deciding to perform or omit a certain action is dependent on a compelling motive that is created by God, and thus the agent is compelled to choose according to the motive that God creates in his heart. Al-Ījī argues that if preponderating one side of the action, (i.e., performance over omittance or omittance over performance) happens without a compelling motive, then the action is arbitrary, and arbitrary actions are not subject to value judgements. On the other hand, affirming the existence of a compelling motive will not save the human freewill because that motive cannot be generated from the agent's contingent will, and thus it must be related to the divine will. In other words, al-Ījī makes a distinction between two faculties of will, the divine and the human. The former cannot be the source of any final/efficient motive or will because human will is contingent, and generating a final motive requires another motive and each motive needs another one ad infinitum. The divine will, on the other hand, is an eternal and necessary attribute, and thus it can be the source of the final motive.

There are a few potential objections that al-Ījī tries to respond in this argument, but we are going only to discuss the most important objection and then reveal al-Ījī's real position about this argument. The objection affirms that the knowledge about the existence of our power and choice¹³ is a necessary knowledge, and what is necessary cannot be denied by a speculative¹⁴ argument. Al-Ījī responded to this objection succinctly by saying that the necessary knowledge is related to the existence of power and choice, not to their efficacy.¹⁵ It means that we know intuitively that we have power and choice, but we do not know in the same way about their source and efficacy. To understand al-Ījī's response clearly, we need to shed some light on his position on the efficacy of the contingent power and human choice. The contingent power and its efficacy are the core of the theory of acquisition (*kasb*) that al-Ījī and other Ash'arites maintain. Nevertheless, explaining the theory of acquisition is beyond the limited scope of this paper; we can simply say that the theory is about the creation of human actions by divine power, and man's role in this case is using his choice and his contingent power, which does not have efficacy.¹⁶ Therefore, human power, according to al-Ījī, is an accident that God creates for living beings when they choose to act, and that power does not play any role in bringing the action into existence; nevertheless, the existence of the power is required although God is the one who creates the action.¹⁷ In a nutshell, the theory of acquisition does not negate the existence of power. It only negates its efficacy. This

¹² al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 324. Cf. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Cairo: al-Kulliyāt al-Azharīya, 1986) 319.

¹³ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 324; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/206.

¹⁴ For more elaboration on intuitive and speculative knowledge, see Mehmet Bulgen, "Tanrı'nın Varlığını Kantlamannın (İsbat-ı Vacib) Kelam Bilgi Teorisindeki Yeri: Kādi Abdulcebbar Örneği [Proving God's Existence in Terms of Kalām's Theory of Knowledge: The Case of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār]", *Marifetname* 9/1 (Haziran 2022), 13-53.

¹⁵ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 325; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/207.

¹⁶ For more discussion about the theory of acquisition, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism: and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām* (London: Harvard University Press, 1970), 671.

¹⁷ al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 6/86.

explanation of human power helps us to understand half of the response that al-Ījī gave to the objection.

To understand the other half, we need to elaborate on the faculty of choice. The majority of Ash‘arites acknowledge the existence of human free choice, but they all negate the efficacy of human contingent power because it contradicts their understanding of the all-inclusive (*shāmila*) divine power. Nevertheless, they did not highlight the freedom of choice in their arguments. Ibn al-Wazīr (d. 840/1436) points this opinion out by saying, “Regarding the obvious side—which they [the Ash‘arites] did not discuss it because of its clarity—that our actions are based on our intentions, motives and choices.”¹⁸ We can say that al-Ījī follows the same position of the majority of the Ash‘arites by maintaining the freedom of will.¹⁹ Although he used the argument of the compelling motive, he does not maintain that humans necessarily need a motive to act, but on the contrary, he affirms that human will can preponderate one side of the action by its nature and does not necessarily need an external preponderating factor. He states that, “preponderating by the virtue of choice alone is possible according to us. Such action [without an external preponderating factor] is still considered voluntary.”²⁰ Another piece of evidence about al-Ījī position on human free choice is found in his elaboration on the contingent (*al-mumkin*). He said that al-Rāzī requires a motive for preponderating one side of the action, and we do not concede this position. He said that for us, the Ash‘arites, preponderating without any cause (*sabab*) is impossible but preponderating without an external motive is possible.²¹ The cause that preponderates one side of the action is the human choice, and this choice is from the man himself. Affirming that the choice is not created directly by God does not contradict the all-inclusiveness of divine power because the human choice is a mental entity (*amr i‘tibārī*) that does not have external existence. Thus, we see that al-Ījī does not adopt al-Rāzī’s argument of the compelling motive; he is only using it polemically to cast doubt on the Mu‘tazilite ethical foundation.

3. The Intrinsic Ethical Values

At the outset of the argument, al-Ījī stated in a general way that the early Mu‘tazilites believed that actions have intrinsic ethical values, and then he introduced a series of arguments to refute this position. Nevertheless, he did not define who are the early Mu‘tazilites who adopted this position. Therefore, we need to scrutinize the Mu‘tazilites’ books to find out about their early ancestors. However, before doing so, it is necessary to note that there is a paucity of information about the early Mu‘tazilite scholars, and this little information about them is either mentioned by other late Mu‘tazilites or by their Ash‘arite opponents. However, the books of al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) could help us define the source of this position. Al-Qāḍī attributed this position to the head of the Mu‘tazilite school of Bagdad, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931) by saying, “According to Abū al-Qasīm, the *qabīḥ* [act] is *qabīḥ* because of its intrinsic attribute and because

¹⁸ Muhammed b. Ibrāhīm Ibn al-Wazīr, *Ithār al-ḥaqq ‘alā al-khalq fī radd al-khilāfāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘ilmiya, 1987), 282.

¹⁹ al-Rāzī was the first Ash‘arite who implemented the argument of the compelling motive to negate the freedom of human choice. See Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf* (Cairo: al-Azhariya, 2000), 44.

²⁰ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 325.

²¹ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 71.

of itself."²² Some contemporary authors attributed this position to different Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 235/850), al-Nazzām (d. 221/836) and Abū Jaʿfar al-Iskāfi (d. 220/854).²³ It is clear that all of those Mu'tazilites belong to the Mu'tazilite school of Bagdad, except Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who is from the school of Basra. Therefore, we can say that the position of the intrinsic ethical value that al-Ījī argues against is mainly the position of the Mu'tazilite school of Bagdad. Al-Ījī deployed several arguments to refute this position, but he only adopted two of them and claimed their coherency. We will present three arguments, the two that al-Ījī adopted and another famous argument from the ones he deployed.

3.1. The Changeable Ethical Value cannot be Intrinsic

The first argument that al-Ījī adopted is simply assuming an action that is claimed to be always good or bad, and then providing an example of the same action with a different value judgement. The examples that al-Ījī used in these arguments are mainly related to the intrinsic value of lying (*kidhb*) and truth-telling (*ṣidq*). He argues, "if the *qubḥ* of lying were intrinsic because of itself (*bi-al-dhāt*) or [because of] an essential property, its [*qubḥ*] would not be conceived separated from it. Since what is essential for something cannot be separate from it, and thus the consequence is false."²⁴ If an action is essentially bad or good, it cannot be conceived at any assumed moment or place differently, i.e., it must always have the same ethical value regardless of the different circumstances. Al-Ījī argues that if lying has an inherent property of *qubḥ*, it cannot be conceived good in any imagined case. Furthermore, lying in order to save the life of a prophet is an obligation that the Mu'tazilites cannot deny according to al-Ījī, and obligatory actions must always be good according to the Mu'tazilites.²⁵ To put it logically, we can form the argument in two premises,

- Lying is always bad (p. I)
- Lying in the case of sparing a prophet's life is good (p. II)

In order not to fall into contradiction, the Mu'tazilites need to concede that (p. I) is wrong because truth-telling in this case means helping the aggressor to kill an innocent person,²⁶ which is in itself an intrinsically bad action. The Mu'tazilites might still insist that lying is categorically bad, and in this case, the obligatory or the good thing is to save the life of the prophet by other means, such as using innuendo²⁷ (*taʿrīḍ*). Thus, the intrinsic value of lying would be saved from being changed.²⁸ Al-Jurjānī summarizes the Mu'tazilites' objection and responds to them succinctly by saying that al-Ījī's argument is assumed when the questioner makes his question very precise, and then the

²² al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa* (Cairo: Wahba Publication, 1996), 309-310. This book is a commentary on al-Qāḍī's five principles, however, the attribution of the book to al-Qāḍī is quite controversial, and more likely it is written by one of his students who is Qawām al-Dīn Mankdīm (d. 425/1033).

²³ Ali Bardakoğlu, "Hüsün ve Kubh Konusunda Aklın Rolü ve İmam Maturidî", *Erciyes Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 5 (1987), 59-75.

²⁴ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 325.

²⁵ Aḍud al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Rukn al-Dīn al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 2004), 2/36.

²⁶ The prophet is always conceived innocent because infallibility is essential to prophecy according to both schools, the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite.

²⁷ The Mu'tazilites base their objection on the famous dictum: "innuendo is a means to escape from lying."

²⁸ al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/209.

questioned person cannot find a way to resort to innuendo or to any other means.²⁹ Al-Ījī does not restrict his examples to only ‘lying to save a prophet’ but he also includes other similar acts that could be conceived as good or bad in different circumstances. This argument that al-Ījī adopted is a common argument that other Ash‘arites used, such as Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), al-Juwaynī, and al-Rāzī, as Ibn al-Qayyīm al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) affirmed.³⁰ Thus, we can say that al-Ījī is not the one who came up with this argument, but he is the one presenting an authentic argument that other Ash‘arites had deployed. Nevertheless, the argument does not seem to eliminate the possibility of an intrinsic ethical value completely because saying that lying must be done in certain cases does not logically entail its goodness; it only entails that it must be done despite its badness.

3.2. Liar Paradox

Al-Ījī’s second argument is a type of a liar paradox³¹ that shows that the position of intrinsic value would lead to a contradiction. Let us first put the argument in al-Ījī’s words and then try to elaborate on it. He states:

If intrinsic value were true, it would lead to two contradictory [values] both are true together. The consequence is false [the consequence: having two contradictory [values] that are both true]. The clarification of the implication is if someone said: ‘I will lie tomorrow’ then this report cannot be devoid of truth and falsity, and in all cases, two contradictory values will be together [truth and falsity]. The truth of his report entails lying at the end [fulfilling his first statement], and thus both essential attributes, *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* would be true together, and they are contradictory [values]. On the other hand, the falsity of his [first] report entails the negation of not lying [telling-truth tomorrow], and thus the same impossibility will be implied.³²

Put it simply, the man who said ‘I will lie tomorrow’ cannot escape from having two contradictory values together, whether he lies or tells the truth the next day. In case he tells the truth on the second day, he would be lying in his first statement (I will lie tomorrow) and thus, both values of truth and falsity will be attributed to his act. By the same token, if he lies the next day, he will be telling the truth, i.e., he will be fulfilling his first statement: ‘I will lie tomorrow.’ Al-Ījī wants to show by this paradox that telling the truth is not intrinsically good, and the same, lying is not always bad.

If the values of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* were intrinsic in man’s action —which in this case is lying or telling the truth— then it must be categorically described with one of these two values, but since his action on the day after will always entail the opposite value; therefore, the action, whether it is lying or telling the truth, cannot have an intrinsic value of *ḥusn* or *qubḥ*. However, al-Ījī adopted this argument in his commentary on *al-Mukhtaṣar*, while in *al-Mawāqif*, he ascribed this argument

²⁹ al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/209.

³⁰ Ibn Qayyīm al-Jawziyya Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, *Miftāḥ dār al-sa‘āda* (Mecca: Dār al-Fawāid, 2010), 2/926.

³¹ The paradox is defined by Martin Pleitz as, “an argument that appears to be valid from premises that appear to be true to a conclusion that appears to be unacceptable” see, Martin Pleitz, *Logic, Language, and the Liar Paradox* (Münster: Mentis, 2018), 18.

³² al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/36.

to his Ash'arite colleagues in a general way. Therefore, we can say that al-Ījī is not the first one who coined this argument. Furthermore, al-Fanārī³³ (d. 886/1481) commented on this argument by saying that those who adopt the position of intrinsic values do not deem it impossible to have both the value of goodness and badness together in one action because it is possible to have two intrinsic qualities in the same action.³⁴ Al-Fanārī, in his objection to al-Ījī's argument, argues that even though *qubḥ* entails blame and *ḥusn* does not entail it, it is still possible to have both *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* attributed to one action from two different perspectives.³⁵ I think that al-Fanārī's objection does not really challenge al-Ījī's argument because the partisans of the intrinsic ethical value do not say that the ethical value can be conceived differently from different perspectives. Al-Jurjānī on his commentary on a similar argument affirmed that this type of argument is tenable against the partisans of intrinsic value, not against al-Jubbā'īya who allow the possibility of value judgement based on different aspects.³⁶ Finally, we say that this argument seems logically more coherent than the first one; nevertheless, it does not seem free of objections.

3.3. Arguing from the Accidental Nature of the Ethical Value

The third argument that al-Ījī deployed is based on the statement: 'An accident (*'araḍ*) cannot subsist on another accident,' which is a very common and multifunctional statement in the Ash'arite literature. Al-Ījī argues that the ethical values of good and bad are accidents or meanings,³⁷ and thus they cannot subsist on human actions, which are also accidents themselves. There are a few premises that al-Ījī needs to prove before coming to his conclusion. We will write all the premises in the argument and try to provide al-Ījī's argument about their validity.

- The ethical value of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* are additional to the nature of actions (p. I)
- This additional value (*ḥusn* or *qubḥ*) has an ontological existence (p. II)
- This additional existential meaning belongs to the category of accidents (p. III)
- Human actions are accidents (p. IV)
- Accidents cannot subsist on other accidents (p. V)
- *Ḥusn* and *qubḥ* cannot subsist on actions (p. VI)
- *Ḥusn* and *qubḥ* are additional, not intrinsic (conclusion).

For the first promise, al-Ījī argues that recognizing an action is different from recognizing its ethical value; therefore, they are not identical in nature, but one of them is added to the other, i.e., the ethical value of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* is additional to the essence of the action. The second promise is about the nature of the ethical value itself, whether it is existential (*wujūdi*) or non-existential (*'adami*). Al-Ījī argues that the ethical value of *ḥusn* must have an existential nature

³³ al-Fanārī here is Ḥasan al-Harawī al-Fanārī is different from the famous logician Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Fanārī (d. 835/1431). See the introduction of al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 1/7.

³⁴ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/44-45.

³⁵ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/44-45.

³⁶ al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/210. The argument against al-Jubbā'īya will be explained and discussed in the final part of this paper.

³⁷ Accidents and meanings are used as synonyms in this context. For more elaboration on the meaning of accidents see, Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Tahānawī, *Kashshāf iṣṭilāḥāt al-funūn wa-al-'ulūm* (Beirut: Nāshrūn Publication, 1996), 2/1175.

because its contrary³⁸ is *non-ḥusn*, which can only be attributed to non-existence (*‘adam*). Therefore, the property of non-existence must be non-existential as well, and thus the contrary of non-existential property must be existential, i.e., the ethical value of *ḥusn* is existential, and the same applies to the ethical value of *qubḥ*. Proving the truth of premise (I) and (II) entails the truth of premise (III) since what is existential must be either substance (*jawhar*) or accident (*‘araḍ*). Ethical values are not substances; therefore, they are accidents. The rest of the premises do not require proofs, and thus al-Ījī moved to the conclusion that the ethical values are additional to human actions and not intrinsic.³⁹

Although al-Ījī dedicated a lengthy argument to prove that an accident cannot subsist on another accident, he ended up casting doubt on the whole argument and pointing out its defect. He says, “the critique [of this argument] could happen by applying the same proof to the affirmed (*thābit*) contingency of the action, which would entail that contingency is not inherent to the action, and thus the action will not be contingent by itself.”⁴⁰ Al-Jurjānī supported this potential critique and affirmed that the impossibility of an accident subsisting on another accident had not been proven yet.⁴¹ As we said before, al-Ījī attributed this argument to his fellow Ash‘arites in a general way; however, we can say—based on the extent of our research—that the argument belongs to Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233).⁴² Al-Āmidī ardently presented this argument as a solid argument to refute the Mu‘tazilites’ ethical theory. He differentiates between contingency and ethical values. The former belongs to the category of considerations (*‘itibārāt*), while the latter belongs to the category of accidents. Furthermore, al-Āmidī argues that if the opponent conceded that the ethical values belong to the category of considerations (*‘itibārāt*), it would be enough to refute the intrinsic claim of the ethical values.⁴³ Finally, we say that al-Āmidī’s argument, despite the objections, could be a solid argument if and only if an accident cannot subsist on another accident, which has not been completely substantiated, as al-Jurjānī said.

4. The Theory of the Ethical Aspects

Al-Ījī calls the second position of the Mu‘tazilites that he attempts to refute as al-Jubbā’īya, which means the follower of Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī (d. 303/915) and his son Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī (d. 321/933). However, since we do not have the two Jubbā’ī’s books,⁴⁴ we need to explore the books of their followers and try to find a reliable representative of their ethical theory. Abū Hashim al-Jubbā’ī maintained the theological ideas of his father, except for a few arguments, and later on his ideas became the main representative of the Mu‘tazilite school of Basra. Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) studied with two prominent students of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī, who are Abū Ishāq b.

³⁸ For logicians, there is a difference between the contrary (*naqid*) and the opposite (*did*); the latter is existential, while the former is non-existential. See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ḥabanaka, *Ḍawabit al-Ma‘rifa* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1975), 51.

³⁹ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/50.

⁴⁰ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/50-51; al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 326; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/211.

⁴¹ al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/212.

⁴² Sayf al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Abī ‘Alī al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām* (Beirut: Islamic Office for Publication, 1982), 1/84.

⁴³ al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām*, 1/84.

⁴⁴ We have one book available that is attributed to Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī, *Kitāb al-Maqālāt*, but nothing mentioned about his ethical theory in it. See Abū ‘Alī al-Jubbā’ī Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahab, *al-Maqālāt* (Istanbul: Endülüs Yayınları, 2019).

‘Aīāsh (d. 386/996) and Abū ‘Abdullāh al-Baṣrī (d. 369/979). Moreover, al-Shahrastānī stated that late Mu'tazilites, such as al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār are the extension of the school of Abū Hāshīm al-Jubbā‘ī.⁴⁵ Therefore, we can say that al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār is a reliable representative of al-Jubbā‘īya and the Mu'tazilite school of Basra.

Al-Ījī stated that according to al-Jubbā‘īya, *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* are not inherent qualities in actions, but they are necessary aspects (*wujūh*) that are responsible for the ethical values.⁴⁶ Al-Ījī's statement is not enough to have a good grasp of al-Jubbā‘īya's ethical theory; therefore, it would be salutary to our purpose to elaborate more on this position before plunging into al-Ījī's arguments.

Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār maintained that actions in themselves do not have inherent ethical qualities, but they become good or bad based on the ethical aspects that are attached to them. Therefore, we cannot judge a specific action without knowing all of its ethical aspects. For example, slapping a child could be bad if it is done to torture him and good to correct his behavior.⁴⁷ The ethical aspects that al-Qāḍī is talking about are a set of extrinsic qualities that are responsible for qualifying actions with goodness or badness. For example, the aspects or qualities that are responsible for making an action injustice or *qabīḥ* are three qualities: being pure harm that does not have benefit, not leading to avoid greater harm, and not being deserved. Al-Qāḍī adds a fourth aspect, which is the certainty of the existence of the first two aspects, i.e., the uncertainty of the first two aspects is enough to negate the ethical value of *qubḥ*.⁴⁸ Knowing the ethical aspects of all actions by virtue of reason is beyond human capacity; therefore, after knowing the ethical aspects of certain actions, we judge other actions accordingly. Al-Qāḍī explains this as follows, “when we know the cause that made injustice and lying *qabīḥ*, then we can similarly judge every *qabīḥ* because of the same cause that they have.”⁴⁹ Thus, knowing the aspects that make certain actions good or bad is enough for us to do an analogy to other actions. However, al-Ījī did not use several arguments against this position because some of the arguments that he used to refute the intrinsic value are valid against this group as well. We will present and discuss one argument that seems more tenable than the rest.

4.1. Al-Ījī's Argument

Al-Ījī argues that the claim that the ethical aspects necessarily entail the value judgements of actions would lead to two absurdities: compromising the divine freedom of choice or ascribing committing bad actions to God. The Mu'tazilites do not concede any of these consequences, and thus they need to renounce their theory of ethical aspects according to al-Ījī. He states,

[In this case] actions in themselves will not be equal regarding the [divine] rulings. If one side of the action [performing or omission] is preponderated [by these ethical aspects], then to have the ruling according to the other side is rationally unacceptable, namely, it would be *qabīḥ* and inconceivable in respect to God. Therefore, ruling according to the

⁴⁵ ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Abī Bakr al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1992), 1/72.

⁴⁶ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/36; al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 324; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/218.

⁴⁷ al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 565.

⁴⁸ al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 351.

⁴⁹ al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. Aḥmad, *al-Majmu’ al-muḥiṭ bi-al-taklīf* (Cairo: al-Dār al-Masriya, 1965), 1/235.

preponderated side of the action would be necessary, and thus it negates the [divine] choice.⁵⁰

Al-Ījī argues that if the ethical aspects were responsible for determining the ethical value of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* in actions, then divine commands would have no choice but to follow the already determined ethical value. In other words, if the ethical value of actions is already determined by the ethical aspects, God will not have a choice but to command the actions that their ethical value of *ḥusn* has been already preponderated and prohibit the actions that their value of *qubḥ* has been already preponderated. Both al-Ījī and the Mu‘tazilites agree that God does not commit *qabīḥ*.⁵¹ According to al-Ījī’s argument, if the Mu‘tazilites maintain the theory of ethical aspects, they need to renounce the divine freedom of choice or concede that God commits *qabīḥ*.

It is important to note that the conception of divine ethics differs between al-Ījī and the Mu‘tazilites. For al-Ījī, God is the omnipotent absolute ruler who creates everything in existence, including human actions: the ones we call good, and the ones we call bad. Nevertheless, the concept of badness is not applicable to God because He is the absolute owner of everything, and everything He does is good, just, and wise.⁵² Justice is doing what you have the right to do, and God has the absolute right to whatever He wants with what He owns, while wisdom, according to al-Ījī and the rest of the Ash‘arites, is related to divine Omnipotence and Omniscience, i.e., it is a quality based on eternal unchangeable attributes. Simply, we can say that the Ash‘arites’ conception of divine ethics is based on al-Ash‘arī’s declaration. He says, “*whatever He [God] does, He has the right to do: He is the Almighty king who is not owned (mamlūk) and above Him there is no permissive, commander, preventer, and forbiddor.*”⁵³ This paragraph summarizes al-Ījī’s conception of divine ethics. The Mu‘tazilites, on the other hand, believe in a necessary ethical value, i.e., the concepts of goodness and badness are the same in respect to us and in respect to God. The ethical aspects necessitate the same ethical judgement for both human and divine actions.⁵⁴ Justice and wisdom are related to acting according to the ethical values of actions. Al-Qāḍī defines these divine qualities as follow, “*when we describe the Eternal [God] as just and wise, we mean that He neither commits qabīḥ nor chooses it, and He does not neglect what is necessary on Him, and all His actions are good.*”⁵⁵ Al-Qāḍī here affirms that God does not choose *qabīḥ* because of His wisdom and justice, namely, God has the power to do *qabīḥ* actions,⁵⁶ but He does not choose to do so. This will take us back to understanding al-Ījī’s argument in a better way. When he said that ruling against the preponderated side will be rationally unacceptable, it means that the act will be contrary to the

⁵⁰ al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/71.

⁵¹ al-Ījī affirms that all Muslims are unanimous in affirming that God does not commit *qabīḥ*. See al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 328.

⁵² al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 328; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/216; al-Karmānī, *al-Kawāshif fi Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Hüseyin Paşa, 317), 355b.

⁵³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Isma‘īl al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma‘ fi al-radd ‘alā ahl al-zaygh wa al-bida‘* (Cairo: The Egyptian Press, 1955), 117.

⁵⁴ al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 318.

⁵⁵ al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 301.

⁵⁶ ‘God has the power to do *qabīḥ*’ is the main position of the Mu‘tazilites, but still a small minority among them maintain that God’s power is only valid to perform *ḥusn*. Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār restricted the partisans of this position to al-Nazzām (d. 221/836), al-Jāḥiz (d. 255/869) and Abū ‘Alī al-Aswārī (d. 240/854). See al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa*, 314; al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, 6/128.

Mu'tazilites concept of divine justice and wisdom. The Mu'tazilites do not consider it rationally impossible for God to commit *qabīh*, but they only say that He does not choose it due to His justice and wisdom. Thus, they can maintain the freedom of divine choice along with their theory of ethical aspects. Finally, we see that al-Ījī's argument is tenable only and only if the Mu'tazilites have the same conception of divine ethics of the Ash'arites'. Al-Ījī needs to refute the Mu'tazilite conception of divine justice and wisdom, and then he can easily debunk their theory of ethical aspects.

Conclusion

This paper presented three different types of Ash'arite arguments against the Mu'tazilites' ethical realism. The arguments were deployed by al-Ījī, whose work presents the final stage of Ash'arism. We saw that al-Ījī denied any form of ethical realism, whether it is inherent qualities in certain actions or necessary ethical aspects. He maintained that God, through revelation, grants ethical values to our actions. Al-Ījī's first argument was a repetition of al-Rāzī's argument of the compelling motive where al-Ījī's aim was casting doubt on the autonomy of human freewill that the Mu'tazilites ardently defended and built their ethical theory on. To refute the position of the intrinsic ethical value of the early Mu'tazilites, al-Ījī adopted two arguments and ascribed a few others to his fellow Ash'arites in a general way. We found out that none of these arguments was coined initially by al-Ījī himself. We think that the most tenable argument among them is the argument of the liar paradox. The final part of the paper dealt with al-Ījī's argument against the Mu'tazilite theory of ethical aspects. The theory was maintained by the majority of the Mu'tazilites. Al-Ījī's argument was not accurate enough in defining the Mu'tazilites's position of divine ethics; therefore, we briefly elaborated on the concept of divine ethics according to the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites and saw that al-Ījī had to refute first the Mu'tazilite conception of divine justice and wisdom, and then their theory of ethical aspects.

On a final note, al-Ījī's arguments against the Mu'tazilite ethical realism do not seem to be free from objections. However, if they were associated with an Ash'arite conception of God and human actions, they could be considered a serious challenge to the Mu'tazilite ethical theories.

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