

Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies

ISSN: 2687-1882 Cilt | Volume: 5 Sayı | Issue: 1 Haziran | June 2023

Ghuluww and the Belief in Supernatural Abilities for Human: An Investigation into the Concept of Ghuluww in the Qur'an

Gulüv ve İnsanın Doğüstü Yeteneklerine Olan İnanç: Kur'an'da Gulüv Kavramı Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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Makale Bilgisi | Article Information

Makale Türü | Article Type: Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Geliş Tarihi | Date Received: 02.02.2023

Kabul Tarihi | Date Accepted: 28.06.2023

Yayın Tarihi | Date Published: 30.06.2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48203/siader.1246481>

Atıf/Citetion: Sadiq, Meisam, "Ghuluww and the Belief in Supernatural Abilities for Human: An Investigation into the Concept of Ghuluww in the Qur'an". *Turkish Journal of Shiite Studies* 5/1 (Haziran 2023): 6-27. doi: 10.48203/siader.1246481

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Abstract

Ghuluww is one of the Qur'anic concepts that holds a special place in Islamic theology. Despite its significance, however, there still remains some ambiguity around this concept. Specifically, while the Qur'an strictly forbids *ghuluww*, it also attributes supernatural qualities or abilities to certain individuals. This gives rise to the question as to what exactly the Qur'anic concept of *ghuluww* is, and what distinguishes it from non-*ghuluww*. The present article is an attempt to elucidate the concept of *ghuluww* through the verses of the Qur'an as the only indisputable source among all Muslims. The article classifies the relevant Qur'anic verses into two categories: verses prohibiting *ghuluww*, and those approving of seemingly exaggerated attributes for certain individuals. By exploring these verses through the lens of tafsir works and considering their collective connotations, the author concludes that *ghuluww*, as per the Qur'an, is to attribute any form of divinity to any individual besides God, or to ascribe to them any superhuman qualities independently of God. As such, to affirm superhuman qualities or abilities for a certain individual, if verifiably established, would not be *ghuluww* as long as they are regarded dependent on God.

Keywords: Qur'an, *ghuluww*, exaggeration, supernatural abilities, deification.

Öz

Gulüv, İslam teolojisinde özel bir yere sahip olan Kur'an kavramlarından biridir. Bununla birlikte, önemine rağmen, bu kavram etrafında hala bazı belirsizlikler bulunmaktadır. Özellikle, Kur'an hulumü kesin olarak yasaklarken, aynı zamanda bazı bireylere doğaüstü nitelikler veya yetenekler atfetmektedir. Bu durum, Kur'an'daki gulüv kavramının tam olarak ne olduğu ve onu gulüv olmayanlardan ayıran şeyin ne olduğu sorusunu ortaya çıkarmaktadır. Bu makale, gulüv kavramını tüm Müslümanlar arasında tartışılmaz tek kaynak olan Kur'an ayetleri aracılığıyla aydınlatmaya yönelik bir girişimdir. Makale, ilgili Kur'an ayetlerini iki kategoriye ayırmaktadır: gulüvü yasaklayan ayetler ve belirli kişiler için görünüşte abartılı nitelikleri onaylayan ayetler. Bu ayetleri tefsir eserlerinin merceğinden inceleyerek ve kolektif çağrışımını göz önünde bulundurarak yazar, Kur'an'a göre gulüvün, Allah'tan başka herhangi bir bireye herhangi bir ilahlık biçimi atfetmek veya onlara Allah'tan bağımsız olarak insanüstü nitelikler atfetmek olduğu sonucuna varmaktadır. Bu nedenle, belirli bir birey için insanüstü nitelikleri veya yetenekleri onaylamak, eğer doğrulanabilirse, Allah'a bağlı olarak kabul edildikleri sürece gulüv olmayacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kur'an, gulüv, abartı, doğaüstü yetenekler, tanrılaştırma.

Introduction

Ghuluww is not a phenomenon related to a particular time period or religion. Human history has witnessed various instances of *ghuluww* about certain objects and people. Celestial bodies like the sun, moon, and stars, as well as specific trees, animals, idols, etc. taken as deities are all examples of *ghuluww* about objects. Equally, the deification of Pharaoh is a vivid instance of exaggeration about a human being. Islamic history also shows us instances of *ghuluww* about certain historical figures in the form of extreme beliefs, a conspicuous example being the deification of Ali ibn Abū Ṭālib by a group of Muslims—*i.e.*, the *ghulāt*.¹

The Qur'an has repeatedly addressed the issue of *ghuluww*, directly and indirectly, to show its considerable significance. On two occasions, the Qur'an directly condemns *ghuluww* in religion, and in several other verses, it deters believers from engaging in excessive beliefs and practices. As such, the prohibition of *ghuluww* and excess in religion is a clear and undeniable fact in the Qur'an. However, what remains unclear is the precise boundaries of *ghuluww* and excess. One of the factors that cause this ambiguity is the attribution of superhuman qualities or abilities to certain individuals in some Qur'anic verses. For instance, one may ask: is it *ghuluww* or not to believe that the prophet Jesus Christ had the supernatural power of giving life to the dead—which is, by the way, a divine quality exclusively for God? If the answer is affirmative, then, it would imply that the Qur'anic verses contradict one another in the topic of *ghuluww*. But if the answer is negative, which is the case, then, where is the line between *ghuluww* and non-*ghuluww*?

Despite the existence of a relatively significant body of literature on the subject of *ghuluww*, it appears that none of these works have specifically addressed the task of defining the term precisely or delineating the boundary between *ghuluww* and non-*ghuluww*. Most of the works in this regard concentrate on the historical, heresiographical, or political dimensions of *ghuluww*. For instance, Said Amir Arjomand's article "Religious Extremism (Ghuluw), Sufism, and Sunnism in Safavid Iran" discusses the religious extremism, however, his focus is on the sociological analysis of the Safavid Shi'ites in Iran, and he provides no conceptual

¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal* (Qum: Al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, 1364Sh.), vol. 1, p. 203.

analysis of *ghuluww*.² Amir-Moezzi's *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam* is more relevant to a conceptual analysis, however, he concentrates on the analysis of the divinity of the Imam based on some ḥadīths cited as evidence for that.³ Therefore, there is a need for a conceptual analysis of this concept that precisely delineates its boundaries.

The ambiguity surrounding the concept of *ghuluww* has not only resulted in misunderstandings and disagreements among the scholars, but has also led to confusion among the rank and file Muslims regarding acceptable religious beliefs and practices. By conducting a detailed study of the concept of *ghuluww* in the Qur'an, it may be possible to develop a clearer understanding of its meaning and boundaries. This, in turn, could help to resolve misunderstandings and promote greater harmony among Muslims. This article is, therefore, an attempt to clarify the concept of *ghuluww* in such a way that its limits become clear and the distinction between *ghuluww* and non-*ghuluww* becomes more transparent.

To do this, I will initially conduct a linguistic analysis of the word *ghuluww* by consulting a range of first-hand Arabic dictionaries. Subsequently, I will refer to the Qur'an as the primary, most reliable, and indisputable source among all branches of Muslims. However, to come to a more precise understanding of the relevant Qur'anic verses, I will use the tafsir books, regardless of their denominational orientation. By taking all of the verses into account and considering their collective connotations, it will be possible to deduce what they suggest as the definition of the concept of *ghuluww*. Therefore, I will try in this article to explore the basic elements of the concept of *ghuluww* as inferable from the verses of the Qur'an.

1. Literal Meaning of *Ghuluww*

The word *ghalā* is a past tense verb with two distinct forms in the present tense: *yaghlū* and *yaghlī*. The former form comes from the root letters *gh-l-w*, while the latter is a derivative of the root letters *gh-l-y*. The verbal nouns of the former are *ghalāʾ*, *ghalw*, and *ghuluww*, and of the latter, *ghaly* and *ghalayān*. Lexicographers vary, however, in how to classify these two roots; some have classified both into

² Said Amir Arjomad, *Sociology of Shi'ite Islam: Collected Essays* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2016), chap. 15, p. 330.

³ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B.Tauris and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2011), 103.

one entry entitled variously as *gh-l-w/gh-l-y*,⁴ *gh-l-ā*,⁵ or *gh-l-w-y*,⁶ others have rendered *gh-l-y* under the *gh-l-w* entry,⁷ and still others have separated the two, classifying them as two distinct entries.⁸ Considering the difference between the two sets of words in one of the root letters, and more importantly, in meaning, it seems more reasonable to separate them, as has done the last group. Even a lexicographer such as the author of *Al-Taḥqīq*, who holds that the relationship between the two roots is of the type of *al-ishtiqāq al-akbar*,⁹ has classified them as two distinct entities.¹⁰ Therefore, since this article examines *ghuluww*, the other root word, *i.e.*, *gh-l-y*, would be apparently off the topic.

As for its meaning, the basic literal meaning of *ghuluww*, the Arabic dictionaries unanimously suggest, is to exceed limits. Al-Jawharī, among other lexicographers, affirms in his *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*—a leading first-hand Arabic dictionary—that to practice *ghuluww* in a matter is to exceed its limits.¹¹ The usages of the word *ghuluww* and its derivatives in the Arabic dictionaries confirm this meaning; to mention only two: *ghalā al-sī'r* is used when the price has soared unreasonably high, or *ghalā bi al-sahm*, when one has thrown an arrow beyond the usual distance.¹² The primary concept of ‘exceeding limits’ is evidently present in all usages of *ghuluww* in the dictionaries.

There are other words whose meanings are proximate to that of *ghuluww* but are used in different contexts; or, though used in similar contexts as *ghuluww*, are not prevalent as technical terms with special connotations as *ghuluww*. The word *mubālaghah*, for instance, is used in the Arabic Rhetoric to mean exaggeration, or, more precisely, to refer to the claim that a certain quality has reached a far-fetched or impossible extreme in severity or weakness.¹³ *Mubālaghah* itself has been

⁴ Khalil ibn Aḥmad Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb Al-ʿAyn*, ed. Mahdi Makhzumi and Ibrahim Samarraei, 2nd ed. (Qum: Hijrat Publications, 1410AH), vol. 4, p. 446.

⁵ Ismail ibn Ḥammād Al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, ed. Aḥmad ibn. ʿAbd al-Ghafūr ʿAṭṭār, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-al-Malayeen, 1410AH), vol. 6, p. 2448; Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414AH), vol. 15, p. 134.

⁶ Ibn Fāris, *Muʿjam Maqāyīs Al-Lughah*, 1st ed. (Qum: Maktab al-ʿIlm al-Islāmī, 1404AH), vol. 4, p. 387.

⁷ Ṣāḥib ibn ʿUbbād, *Al-Muḥīṭ Fī al-Lughah*, 1st ed. (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kitāb Publications, 1414AH), vol. 5, p. 129.

⁸ Ḥasan Muṣṭafawī, *Al-Taḥqīq Fī Kalimāt al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* (Tehran: Markaz al-Kitāb li-al-tarjumah wa l-nashr, 1402AH), vol. 7, pp. 261, 263.

⁹ *Al-ishtiqāq al-akbar* refers to the view that some lexicographers hold, according to which if two words share two root letters, they will be akin in meaning, too.

¹⁰ Muṣṭafawī, *Al-Taḥqīq Fī Kalimāt al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, vol. 7, p. 264.

¹¹ Al-Jawharī, *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, vol. 6, p. 2448.

¹² Al-Jawharī, vol. 6, p. 2448.

¹³ ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ḥabannakah Al-Maydānī, *Al-Balāghah al-ʿArabiyyah*, 1st ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1996), vol. 2, p. 450.

divided into three types: 1- *Tablīgh*, when the exaggerated quality is probable both rationally and practically, 2- *Ighrāq*, when it is rationally probable, but not practically, and 3- *Ghuluww*, when it is absolutely improbable, both rationally and practically.¹⁴ Other words, such as *taṭarruf*, *ta‘aṣṣub*, *tanattu‘*, *tazammūt*, and *tashaddud* are also used as synonyms for *ghuluww*;¹⁵ however, they are either slightly different in meaning, or they represent modern equivalents for the term *ghuluww*, thus not connoting its technical meaning.

Having explored the literal meaning of *ghuluww*, we can now infer that an indispensable parameter of the concept of *ghuluww* is ‘limits’; that is, whenever the word *ghuluww* is used, it is presupposed that there are limits that have been crossed. Therefore, *ghuluww* about a limitless entity or attribute is self-contradictory, for it suggests crossing the limits of something limitless. By way of illustration, no *ghuluww* can be assumed about God’s knowledge or power, because His knowledge and power are infinite, thus having no limits to be crossed. As a result, identifying the limits of the exaggerated object or person is an essential factor in deciding where to draw the lines of *ghuluww*.

Another connotation of the literal definition of *ghuluww* is that it encompasses all scenarios where limits are crossed, whether slightly or extremely, or whether one exceeds one’s own limits or those of others; it similarly includes crossing the limits in any matter, whether good or bad. Accordingly, in using such English equivalents for *ghuluww* as “exaggeration”, “overstatement”, and “extremism”, these factors must be taken into account.

As regards the meaning of *ghuluww* in theology, Muslim theologians have suggested definitions variegating in length and details. The core theme in all of these definitions, however, is to exceed limits “in one’s beliefs”. To illustrate the meaning, they have made mention of examples such as believing that the Imams are far beyond the creatures, being lords or parallel to God, or that Allah has delivered to them the task of creation and sustenance, or that they have absolute knowledge of the unseen independently of God.¹⁶ These exaggerated beliefs have been considered inconsistent with the Muslim orthodoxy, thus heretical; therefore, a *ghālī*—though nominally a Muslim—is placed out of the realm of Islam.¹⁷

¹⁴ ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Atīq, *‘Ilm Al-Badī‘* (Beirut: Dār al-nahḍah al-‘Arabiyyah, n.d.), 100.

¹⁵ *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2000) s.v. “Taṭarruf.”

¹⁶ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *Taṣḥīḥ I‘tiqādāt al-Imāmiyyah* (Qum: al-Mu‘tamar al-‘Ālamī li-alfiyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413AH), 131; Ja‘far Subḥānī, *Rasā’il wa Maqālāt* (Mu‘assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq (a.s.), 1425AH), vol. 5, p. 234; ‘Abd al-Raslūl al-ghaffār, *Shubhat al-Ghuluww ‘ind al-Shī‘ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Maḥajjah al-Bayḍā’, 1415AH), 29.

¹⁷ Colin Turner, “The ‘Tradition of Mufaḍḍal’ and the Doctrine of the Raj‘a: Evidence of ‘Ghuluww’ in the Eschatology of Twelver Shi‘ism?” *Iran* 44 (2006): 175–95.

2. Exploring the Qur'anic Verses Related to Ghuluww

Indisputably authentic and agreed upon among all Muslims, the Holy Qur'an must be the primary reference in the clarification of the concept of *ghuluww*. The verses of the Qur'an pertaining to *ghuluww* can fall into two categories: 1- those prohibiting *ghuluww* and excess, and 2- those approving of seemingly exaggerated attributes for certain individuals, which may seem to be *ghuluww*. In the following, we will examine both categories, trying to learn what elements the Qur'an suggests for the concept of *ghuluww* and where it draws the lines.

2.1. Verses Prohibiting Ghuluww and Excess

On two occasions, the Qur'an declares the prohibition of extremism in religion in a direct manner by using a derivative of *ghuluww*. The two verses are as follows:

O People of the Book! Do not exceed the bounds in your religion,¹⁸ and do not attribute anything to Allah except the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only an apostle of Allah, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him. So have faith in Allah and His apostles, and do not say, "[God is] a trinity." Relinquish [such a creed]! That is better for you. Allah is but the One God. He is far too immaculate to have any son. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, and Allah suffices as trustee. (4:171)

Say, "O People of the Book! Do not unduly exceed the bounds in your religion and do not follow the fancies of a people who went astray in the past, and led many astray, and [themselves] strayed from the right path." (5:77)

Ghuluww in these two verses, though collocated with religion, has been used in its literal sense, *i.e.*, exceeding limits.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the context of the verses in which it has appeared, as well as that of the surrounding verses, helps in understanding the elements of this concept as meant by the Holy Qur'an. To gain a more precise understanding of *ghuluww* in these two verses, we need to analyze the two verses as well as the pertinent surrounding ones.

The two verses are similar in that both address the People of the Book, *i.e.*, Jews and Christians, forbidding them from exceeding limits in their religion. It is a matter of dispute, however, whether Jews and Christians are both included in 'the People of the Book' in these verses, or—taking into account the example of Jesus Christ that is mentioned in relation to them—only Christians are intended. Most of the exegetes, nevertheless, have taken it inclusive of both, adducing that both

¹⁸ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ

¹⁹ Muḥammad 'Alī Ayāzī, ed., *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-Majīd al-Mustakhrāj Min Turāth al-Shaykh al-Mufīd*, 1st ed. (Qum: Maktab al-I'lām al-Islāmī, 1424AH), vol. 1, pp. 166, 167.

have exaggerated about the Christ; the former by denouncing him to the extent of accusing him of being an illegitimate child, and the latter by elevating him to the level of divinity.²⁰

The verses are also similar in their contexts, as both refute the notion of Jesus' divinity as a clear example of *ghuluww*. The first verse, just after forbidding the People of the Book from *ghuluww* and from attributing to Allah but the truth, sets forth proofs as to why such a belief is *ghuluww*. The proofs include the following:

- Jesus is the son of Mary. The Qur'an—though a concise book having no room for any redundant words—on 16 occasions mentions the name of the prophet Jesus alongside that of his mother, Mary (*inter alia*: 5:110, 112, 114, 116; 19:34; 33:7). Considering the belief in Jesus' divinity among Christians, this repetition is an explicit rejection of this notion, indicating Christ's human nature.²¹
- Jesus is but a messenger of God, thus not God.²²
- Jesus is the word of God, which connotes his createdness, just as the words of any person are created by them. The Qur'an uses the term *kalimah* (word) for all creatures of God (18:109 and 31:29) to imply their createdness, as they all come into being by the divine word "Be!" However, it uses it for the prophet Jesus specifically to point out that, having no father, Jesus was created immediately by the divine word, thus stressing that he is a human, despite his miraculous birth.²³
- Christ is a spirit from God. Commentators have mentioned several various possibilities in the meaning of the phrase *rūḥun minhu*—i.e., a spirit from Him, all connoting the createdness of Jesus Christ. One famous view is that this spirit is the same spirit referred to in the verses pertaining to the creation of

²⁰ See: Al-Zamakhsharī 1407AH, 593; Al-Ṭabarī 1412AH; Fayḍ al-Kāshānī 1415AH, vol. 1, p. 523

²¹ Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lamī li-al-Maṭbū'āt, 1390AH), vol. 5, p. 150; Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 594; Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' Al-Bayān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Muḥammad Jawād Balāghī, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Nāṣir Khusraw, 1372Sh), vol. 3, p. 223; Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, 1st ed. (Tehran: Nāṣir Khusraw Publications, 1364SH), vol. 6, p. 21; Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī Al-Bursawī, *Tafṣīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 328.

²² Al-Bursawī, *Tafṣīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, vol. 2, p. 328; al-Sayyid ibn Quṭb ibn Ibrāhīm Al-shādhilī, *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur'ān*, 17th ed. (Beirut-Cairo: Dār al-shurūq, 1412AH), vol. 2, pp. 816–17; Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' Al-Bayān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 223; Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, ed. Aḥmad Qaṣīr Al-Āmilī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 400; Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl*, vol. 1, p. 594.

²³ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 150; Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' Al-Bayān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. 3, p. 223; Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar Al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghayb*, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1420AH), vol. 11, p. 271; Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' Li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6, p. 22; Al-Bursawī, *Tafṣīr Rūḥ Al-Bayān*, vol. 2, p. 328; Al-shādhilī, *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 2, p. 817; 'Abd al-A'lā Mūsawī Sabzawārī, *Mawāhib Al-Raḥmān Fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasah-i Ahl-i Bayt (a), 1409AH), vol. 10, p. 189; Muḥammad Jawād Mughniyyah, *Tafṣīr Al-Kāshif*, 1st ed. (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1424AH), vol. 2, pp. 500–501.

Adam; God told the angels before the creation of Adam, “When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.” (15:29 and 38:72) So, this is the spirit that God breathes into all human beings, but the reason why Jesus is mentioned separately is his miraculous birth, as he was born without a father, and therefore, a spirit from God was breathed into his mother immediately; the Qur’an 21:91 states, “And [Mary, mother of Christ,] the one who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our spirit and made her and her son a sign for all the nations.” Thus, as Adam is not God, neither is Jesus.²⁴

And eventually, after setting forth the proofs, Allah the Almighty commands, “Do not say ‘three,’” forbidding a further form of excess in religion. Entailing the belief in Jesus’ divinity, the idea of the trinity is another form of exaggeration in religion that Allah forbids in this verse.

A further point in the verse at hand, which helps in clarifying the concept of *ghuluww*, is that after forbidding the People of the Book from *ghuluww* in religion, it deters them from attributing to Allah except the truth. This part of the verse is in effect an explanation of the first part—*i.e.*, ‘do not exceed the bounds in your religion’—, implying that *ghuluww*, in reality, is ‘attributing to Allah except the truth’.²⁵ One piece of evidence supporting this inference is a saying from Imam Ali regarding the *ghulāt* (exaggerators), in which he declares, “Two categories [of people] will perish with regard to me: an excessive lover whose love takes him to non-truth, and an excessive hater whose hatred takes him to non-truth.”²⁶ The words by which the Imam defines the excessive lover and hater demonstrate the relationship between *ghuluww* and deviation from the truth, as suggests the verse at hand.

As for the second verse, the Qur’an 5/77, it is located among a set of verses that again stress the proofs signifying the human nature of Jesus, thus helping to clarify the concept of *ghuluww*. The Qur’an 5/72 starts with a straightforward declaration of the heresy of those who believed that the Messiah, the son of Mary, was God. The following verse uses the same language to refute the notion of the trinity, rendering those who believe in it as heretics. The verses from 72 through 77 are as follows:

They are certainly faithless who say, “Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.” But the Messiah had said, “O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Indeed,

²⁴ Mughniyyah, *Tafsir Al-Kāshif*, vol. 2, p. 501; Al-shādhilī, *Fī Zīlāl Al-Qur’ān*, vol. 2, p. 817.

²⁵ Mūsawī Sabzawārī, *Mawāhib Al-Rahmān Fī Tafsir al-Qur’ān*, vol. 10, p. 188; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *Tafsir Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Cairo: Mu’assasat al-Ḥalabi, 1969), vol. 1, p. 424; Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb Allāh Sabzawārī Najafī, *Al-Jadid Fī Tafsir al-Qur’ān al-Majīd* (Beirut: Dār al-ta’āruf li-al-maṭbū‘āt, 1406AH), vol. 2, p. 405.

²⁶ Al-Sayyid al-Raḍī, *Nahj Al-Balāghah*, ed. Şubḥī Al-Şālīḥ (Beirut, n.d.) sermon 127.

whoever ascribes partners to Allah, Allah shall forbid him [entry into] paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire, and the wrongdoers will not have any helpers.” (72) They are certainly faithless who say, “Allah is the third [person] of a trinity,” while there is no god except the One God. If they do not relinquish what they say, there shall befall the faithless among them a painful punishment. (73) Will they not repent to Allah and plead to Him for forgiveness? Yet Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful. (74) The Messiah, son of Mary, is but an apostle. Certainly [other] apostles have passed before him, and his mother was a truthful one. Both of them would eat food. Look how We clarify the signs for them, and yet, look, how they go astray! (75) Say, “Do you worship, besides Allah, what has no power to bring you any benefit or harm, while Allah He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing?!” (67) Say, “O People of the Book! Do not unduly exceed the bounds in your religion and do not follow the fancies of a people who went astray in the past, and led many astray, and [themselves] strayed from the right path.” (77)

These verses set forth several proofs for our judgment, some of which are listed below:

- Jesus himself invited his people to worship God, Whom he described as *Rabbī wa Rabbakum* (my Lord and yours).
- The Messiah is the son of Mary.
- Jesus is only an apostle of God, just like any apostle who came before him.
- Jesus and his mother used to eat food, which is strong evidence of their human nature, for God is All-sufficient, not in need of anything whatsoever, most certainly of food!

All of the proofs above have come to constitute the reason underlying the rejection of Jesus’ divinity. In other words, the verses have come to remind people of the limits of the prophet Jesus that they had crossed. Therefore, the Qur’an proclaims that to believe that Jesus Christ is God or that he is a person of the trinity—which entails divinity—is *ghuluww* due to its violation of his limits as a human being.

In addition to this apparent indication of the verses, it is also inferable that the prophet Jesus Christ, mentioned in both verses, is only an example of a person about whom people exaggerated, and not the only example; therefore, to hold the same beliefs about any person other than Jesus will also be *ghuluww*, hence denounced by the Qur’an.

Other than the above-examined two verses which directly prohibit *ghuluww*, many other verses of the Qur’an reject exaggeration without referring to it as *ghuluww*. We will explore some of these verses in the following.

In three verses of chapter 5, Allah the Exalted explicitly ascribes heresy to those who believe in Jesus Christ’s divinity. The verses are the following:

The Qur’an 5/17:

They are certainly faithless who say, ‘Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.’ Say, ‘Who can avail anything against Allah should He wish to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother,

and everyone upon the earth?’ To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever is between them. He creates whatever He wishes, and Allah has power over all things.

The Qur’an 5/72:

They are certainly faithless who say, “Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.” But the Messiah had said, “O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Indeed, whoever ascribes partners to Allah, Allah shall forbid him [entry into] paradise, and his refuge shall be the Fire, and the wrongdoers will not have any helpers.”

The Qur’an 5/73:

They are certainly faithless who say, “Allah is the third [person] of a trinity,” while there is no god except the One God. If they do not relinquish what they say, there shall befall the faithless among them a painful punishment.

In spite of dealing with Christians, none of these three verses has ascribed disbelief to “Christians”; instead, the first two have identically ascribed it to “those who say, ‘Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary,’” and the third to “those who say, ‘Allah is the third person of a trinity.’” This way of referring to the Christians demonstrates that the reason why disbelief is ascribed to them is not their being Christians—as Christianity is in effect a divine faith—, but rather, it is their heretical, exaggerated beliefs about their prophet, deeming him God or the third person of a trinity. So, it is inferable from these verses that *ghuluww* about the Messiah—via believing that he is God or the third person of a trinity—is the cause underlying the disbelief ascribed to the Christians.²⁷ This fact further entails that a Christian who would reject the notion of Jesus’ divinity would be out of the sphere of this judgment, just as a non-Christian who may, hypothetically, believe in Jesus’ divinity or the divinity of any other deity but Allah is included in this judgment.

In another verse, the Holy Qur’an mentions another example of *ghuluww*, along with that of the Christians, and that is the Jews’ exaggeration about the status of Ezra, deeming him the son of God. Verse 30 of chapter 9 reads:

The Jews said, “Ezra is the son of Allah,” and the Christians said, “Christ is the son of Allah.” That is an opinion that they mouth, imitating the opinions of the faithless of former times. May Allah assail them, where do they stray?

Commentators of the Qur’an vary as to whether the Jews gave the title *ibn Allāh* (son of God) to Ezra in an actual sense, or—since they held him in such high regard for all the favors he had done the Jewish faith—they gave it to him as an honorary title, thus not expressing the actual sonship.²⁸ Commentators also

²⁷ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 6, p. 69.

²⁸ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, vol. 9, pp. 243, 244.

disagree whether the verse includes all Jews²⁹—as the word *al-yahūd* occurring within an absolute statement may connote—, or it refers only to some groups among them,³⁰ or exclusively those Jews contemporary with the prophet of Islam.³¹

Regardless of whether it refers to all Jews or only to some of them, the language that the verse uses to condemn the ascription of sons to God is one that supports the view of the actual sonship of Ezra to God. After announcing the belief of the Jews and Christians about Ezra and Jesus, the verse deems it similar to the opinion of the *faithless* before them, following it with a curse against them all: “May Allah assail them.” Casting such a curse on the Jews would be disproportionate if they would give the title ‘son of God’ to Ezra only as an honorary title, not in the actual sense. Therefore, the verse must mean the actual sense of sonship, which is a clear instance of *ghuluww*.³²

Other verses related to *ghuluww* are those referring to the exaggeration of Pharaoh about himself. The Qur’an, on several occasions, orders the prophet Moses to go to Pharaoh and invite him to the worship of Allah because he had rebelled. The term used in the verses is *ṭaghā*, denoting to exceed limits. So, the reason why the prophet Moses was sent to Pharaoh was his violation of limits,³³ but as to what limits he had exceeded, the Qur’an quotes Pharaoh himself explaining that: “then he said, ‘I am your exalted lord!’” (79:24) Another verse, 28:38, quotes him as saying: “O [members of the] elite! I do not know of any god that you may have other than me.” Pharaoh is also quoted in 26:29 as threatening the prophet Moses if he did not believe in him as God: “He said, ‘If you take up any god other than me, I will surely make you a prisoner!’” As offered in the verses, he had transgressed his own human limits claiming absolute divinity for himself.

Other verses may also be cited from the Qur’an setting forth examples of *ghuluww*, but the theme is the same as that of the verses mentioned above.

Having explored these verses, we may draw the following results: firstly, *ghuluww* in religion is to exceed its limits and say about Allah but the truth. Secondly, to claim divinity—as Pharaoh did—or attribute it to a human being—as some Christians did about the prophet Jesus—, or to deem a person son of God—as some Christians did about the prophet Jesus, preceded by some Jews who did the same about Ezra—are all clear instances of exceeding limits in religion and saying about Allah except the truth.

²⁹ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, vol. 2, p. 167.

³⁰ Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr Al-Ṣāfi*, vol. 2, p. 335; Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām Al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣādiq Qamḥāwī (Beirut: Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘Arabī, 1405AH), vol. 4, p. 299.

³¹ Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ Al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 5, p. 37.

³² Muḥammad Karamī Ḥuwayzī, *Al-Tafsīr Li-Kitāb Allāh al-Munīr* (Qum: Ilmiyyah Publications, 1402AH), vol. 4, p. 80; Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn Qāsimī, *Maḥāsīn Al-Ta’wīl*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyyah, 1418AH), vol. 5, p. 391.

³³ Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ Al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 10, p. 656.

But the question remains whether *ghuluww* revolves only around the belief in someone's divinity or sonship to God—as the aforementioned verses may indicate—or it can appear in other forms, too. What about ascribing divine attributes to a human being without deeming them God? Is it *ghuluww* to believe that a human being can possess the knowledge of the unseen or the ability to do supernatural things? To address these questions, we need to investigate other verses of the Qur'an, which takes us to the second category of the verses.

2.2. Verses Ascribing Divine or Supernatural Qualities or Abilities to Humans

In spite of the strict deterrence of *ghuluww* in the Holy Qur'an, several verses have attributed divine or superhuman qualities or abilities to specific individuals. In the following, we will examine these verses in two categories: verses related to prostration before other than God; and verses that relate the prophetic miracles.

2.2.1. Verses Related to Prostration before Other than God

Prostration constitutes the most quintessential symbol of worship. According to the Islamic narrations, the most proximate state of a servant to his Lord is when he falls prostrate before Him.³⁴ Moreover, prostration is so manifest a symbol of worship that some scholars have considered it to be an act of worship by essence; that is, it cannot be performed for any other purpose than the worship of God.³⁵ On the other hand, Muslim scholars believe unanimously that one category of the unity of God is unity in worship; that is, any act of worship in any form is impermissible but toward God. Based on these two premises, some have deemed prostration before other than God prohibited in an absolute sense; hence, to prostrate to anything other than God would be *ghuluww* and thus disbelief.

The Qur'an, nevertheless, on a number of occasions approves of prostration before other than God. One of these occasions is the story of the prophet Joseph. When Joseph became the vizier of Egypt, his father, along with the whole family, went to Egypt, where, as the Qur'an narrates, they all fell in prostration before him on seeing him. Chapter 12, verse 100 narrates:

And he seated his parents high upon the throne, and they fell down prostrate before him. He said, 'Father! This is the fulfillment of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true.

³⁴ Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb Al-Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, ed. 'Alī Akbar Ghaffārī and Muḥammad Ākhūndī (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1407H), vol. 3, p. 323.

³⁵ Mirzā Muḥammad Taqī al-Āmulī, *Miṣbāḥ Al-Hudā Fi Sharḥ al-'Urwat al-Wuthqā*, 1st ed. (Tehran, 1380AH), vol. 5, p. 49.

Some commentators, albeit, hold that the pronoun “him” in this verse refers to God not to Joseph, therefore, their prostration was not for Joseph, but for God in gratitude for reuniting them with Joseph.³⁶ This opinion roots in their postulate that prostration is impermissible but before Allah. The context of the verse, nevertheless, does not support this view, as there is no prior mention of “Allah” in the verse, to which the pronoun could refer—which is grammatically necessary. Additionally, the flow of the story is more compatible with the first view, as Joseph tells his father right after the prostration, “Father! This is the fulfillment of my dream of long ago, which my Lord has made come true;” and in that dream, he had said that the prostration had been performed before *him*. Verse 4 of chapter 12 narrates:

When Joseph said to his father, ‘Father! I saw eleven planets, and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrating themselves before me,’

Therefore, prostration before Joseph took place in reality as it had been shown to him in his dream.

As for the connotations of the latter verse, one may not contend, on account of the attribution of the word prostration to objects—*i.e.*, eleven planets and the sun and the moon—not to human beings, that prostration has been used in a metaphorical sense; because, taking the former verse into account, it is evident that the eleven planets represent his eleven brothers, and the sun and the moon, his parents.³⁷ Additionally, the pronoun “*hum*” in *ra’aytuhum*—*i.e.*, I saw them—indicates that those planets and the sun and the moon were not the ones in the sky; rather, they were people, as this pronoun is used in the Arabic language to refer to people, not to things.

It may not be argued either that this verse cannot be cited as an instance of prostration before other than God, due to relating only a dream, not a reality; because the rest of the story testifies that this dream was not an illusion or an ordinary dream; it was rather a divine, prophetic dream that later came true, as confirmed in the former verse.

That said, we can infer that prostration is not by essence an act of worship—as some have postulated—; it can rather be performed with different intentions, such as respect and admiration.³⁸ Had prostration been an act of worship by essence, the prophet Jacob who was among the prostrators should not have done it, and the prophet Joseph also should have stopped his brothers and parents from doing it; moreover, God Himself must have denounced it in the Qur’an; but none of these have taken place. Therefore, it can be deduced that prostration is not inherently an act of worship, thus not exclusive to God and not *ghuluww* if done

³⁶ See: Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Tibyān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 6, p. 197.

³⁷ See: Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma’ Al-Bayān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 5, p. 321.

³⁸ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Balkhī, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, vol. 2, p. 351.

before other than God. This conclusion is vigorously confirmed by al-‘Allāmah al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī in *al-Mizān*, when commenting on the verse 34 of chapter 2,³⁹ which takes us to the second set of verses regarding prostration.

Another piece of evidence for the fact that prostration is not by essence an act of worship is the verses relating the story of the creation of the prophet Adam. The Qur’an on seven occasions reiterates the story of the angels prostrating before Adam. For instance, verse 34 of chapter 2 reads:

And when We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate before Adam,’ they prostrated, but not Iblis: he refused and acted arrogantly, and he was one of the faithless.

Exhibiting the high status of His new creature—whom He has appointed as His viceroy on the earth—, the Almighty God orders the fully submissive angels to perform before Adam that which is the utmost sign of respect and the most manifest symbol of worship, greater than which there is not. As mentioned previously, some scholars have postulated that prostration is an act of worship by essence. On this basis, angels’ prostration before Adam should be considered *ghuluww*, and so should be God’s commanding them to do so. However, no scholar has ever suggested that.

God’s command to the angels—who are the most submissive of His creatures, being in a constant state of worship—to prostrate before Adam indicates that even if prostration may be impermissible before other than God in the ordinary cases, but it is absolutely permissible, or even obligatory, in certain cases such as the case at hand in which not only the angels’ prostration was not *ghuluww*, but refusing to do it was a transgression against God’s command—as Satan did. Considering the whole set of verses in this regard, it is also inferable that a certain act may have a diametrically reverse ruling when circumstances change. The preparatory statements that Allah makes before He issues this command neatly justify its issuance: God informs the angels, “Indeed I am going to set a viceroy on the earth;” (2:30) in the next verse the Qur’an relates that “He taught Adam the Names, all of them,” Names which even the angels did not know; and eventually, God orders them, “When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My spirit, then fall down in prostration before him.” (15:29 and 38:72) Given all these privileges, Adam was worthy of being prostrated before even by the constantly worshipping servants of God—the angels.

Thus, if the prostration of the angels of God before a human being is not *ghuluww*, attributing less important qualities to a human being will definitely not be *ghuluww*, when justified. And the fact that ordinary people render such an act as *ghuluww* erupts from comparing those privileged servants of God to themselves,

³⁹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān Fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, pp. 122–23.

while there is a huge difference between them in their status, which makes those special servants worthy of being prostrated before by God's angels.

2.2.2. Verses Relating Prophetic Miracles

Another category of verses in the Qur'an which attribute divine or supernatural qualities or abilities to human beings is those referring to the miracles of God's prophets, some of which we will explore in what follows.

The prophet Jesus, who was the center of attention in the verses deterring *ghuluww*, is interestingly characterized by superhuman qualities in other verses—qualities that are definitely *ghuluww* if taken out of their Qur'anic context. The Holy Qur'an on two occasions ascribes supernatural abilities to the prophet Jesus: once quoting Jesus himself talking about them, and another time quoting Allah conversing with him in this regard. The verses are the following:

1- Chapter 3, verse 49:

And [he will be] an apostle to the Children of Israel, [and he will declare,] "I have certainly brought you a sign from your Lord: I will create for you out of clay the form of a bird, then I will breathe into it, and it will become a bird by Allah's leave. And I heal the blind and the leper and I revive the dead by Allah's leave. And I will tell you what you have eaten and what you have stored in your houses. There is indeed a sign in that for you, should you be faithful.

2- Chapter 5, verse 110:

When Allah will say, "O Jesus son of Mary, remember My blessing upon you and upon your mother, when I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit, so you would speak to the people in the cradle and in adulthood, and when I taught you the Book and wisdom, the Torah and the Evangel, and when you would create from clay the form of a bird, with My leave, and you would breathe into it and it would become a bird, with My leave; and you would heal the blind and the leper, with My leave, and you would raise the dead, with My leave; and when I held off [the evil of] the Children of Israel from you when you brought them manifest proofs, whereat the faithless among them said, 'This is nothing but plain magic.'"

The two verses are explicit in attesting that the prophet Jesus was possessed of the following superhuman abilities: the ability to create a real bird out of clay; the ability to heal the blind; the ability to heal the leper; the ability to revive the dead; and the knowledge of the unseen, possessing the ability to tell people what they eat and store in their houses. (The first verse only)

If we take these abilities out of their context and ascribe them—or even one of them—to any person, we will be rightly accused of *ghuluww* for ascribing divine abilities to a human, as typically a human being never possesses these abilities. So, why are they ascribed to Jesus Christ? Is it a sign that he is God and not a human? Or is it not *ghuluww* to ascribe divine abilities to a human?

To answer these questions, we need to take a more meticulous look at the verses at hand. The Qur'an resolves the problem by simply adding the phrase "*bi-idhn-i-llāh*", i.e., by Allah's leave, or "*bi-idhnī*", i.e., by My leave. The phrase is reiterated twice in the first verse and four times in the second to eradicate any possible misperception of the nature of Christ.⁴⁰ Two points may be inferred from this phrase:

1- Jesus Christ is not God; he is only a messenger of God, possessing divine, miraculous abilities 'by Allah's leave.' So, one should not assume, on account of these abilities, that he is God, for he possesses them all by Allah's permission. In other words, had he been God, he would not have needed God's permission to perform those miracles. This implication is totally concordant with the two verses mentioned earlier, denoting that to believe in Jesus' divinity is an example of *ghuluww*.

2- It is not *ghuluww* to ascribe these supernatural abilities to the prophet Jesus if he is believed to possess them by Allah's leave.

These inferences, however, are not solely true for the prophet Jesus; anyone can, by Allah's permission, possess supernatural abilities. Miracles of God's prophets fall neatly into this type of ability. The Qur'an on two occasions—verses 38 of chapter 13 and 78 of 40—affirms, "And an apostle may not bring a sign except by Allah's leave." Although this verse—according to most, if not all, commentators—is a response to the people's requests for miracles from the apostles, it may itself raise a further question: what is special about the apostles' signs that Allah mentions them separately, while, according to the Qur'an itself, no one—or even no cause whatsoever—may bring anything except by Allah's leave? (6:59 and 11:56) The answer to this question lies in the word "sign". "Sign" refers to the miracles that God's apostles bring to people to convince them of their prophethood; thus, they need to be supernatural phenomena, which is in turn likely to drive the believers toward exaggeration about the apostles. This potential exaggeration might be the reason why the Qur'an mentions God's apostles distinctly as not being able to bring any sign except by Allah's leave. Therefore, the phrase "*bi-idhn-i-llāh*" implies that ascribing supernatural abilities to a person—if proven—is only *ghuluww* when the person is believed to possess them independently of God and not otherwise.

A few other examples of the supernatural abilities that the Qur'an ascribes to certain prophets are the following:

- The prophet Salih brought a she-camel out of the mountain:
There has certainly come to you a manifest proof from your Lord. This she-camel of Allah is a sign for you. (7:73)

⁴⁰ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, vol. 3, pp. 199, 200.

- The prophet Moses possessed several miracles, such as the following:

a. He turned his staff into a python:

Thereat he threw down his staff, and behold, it became a manifest python. (7:107 and 26:32)

b. His hand would illuminate like the sun's rays:

Then he drew out his hand, and behold, it was white to the onlookers. (26:33)

c. 12 fountains gushed from a rock with a strike of his staff:

And when Moses prayed for water for his people, We said, 'Strike the rock with your staff.' Thereat twelve fountains gushed forth from it. (2:60)

d. He split apart Nile River with his staff:

Thereupon We revealed to Moses: "Strike the sea with your staff!" Whereupon it parted, and each part was as if it were a great mountain. (26:63)

- The prophet David knew the birds' speech:

Certainly We gave David our grace: 'O mountains and birds, chime in with him!' (34:10)

- The prophet Solomon:

a. knew the birds' speech:

Solomon inherited from David, and he said, "O people! We have been taught the speech of the birds, and we have been given out of everything. Indeed this is a manifest advantage." (27:16)

b. had control over the wind:

And for Solomon [We disposed] the tempestuous wind which blew by his command toward the land which We have blessed, and We have knowledge of all things. (21:81)

c. had control over some of the jinns:

[A]nd there were Jinns that worked in front of him, by the leave of his Lord, and if any of them turned aside from Our command, We made him taste of the Chastisement of the Blazing Fire. (34:12)

d. had control over some of the devils:

Among the devils were some who dived for him and performed tasks other than that, and We were watchful over them. (21:82)

The Qur'an, furthermore, ascribes supernatural abilities to individuals other than God's apostles. In the story of the prophet Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the prophet Solomon invites her to his palace, but before she arrives, he asks his elites if any of them could bring her thrown prior to her arrival. In response, an afreet from among the jinn first says that he can bring it before the prophet Solomon would rise from his place. Thereafter, one among the elites, having the knowledge of the Book, says, "I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye," which he actually does. (27: 38-40) Credited with the role of Solomon's vizier and successor, that man was, as most commentators maintain, Asif ibn Barkhiyā. Although not a prophet, Asif had the supernatural power to bring the thrown of

Bilqīs in such a short time from Ma'rib to the Levant; a distance of a two-month journey back then.⁴¹

These are only a few instances of the supernatural acts ascribed to certain servants of Allah in the Qur'an. Ascribing these abilities to a human being out of the Qur'anic context and independently of God is undoubtedly *ghuluww*; but, as mentioned above, prophets had these abilities by Allah's leave, which justifies the attribution of these divine abilities to them.

Conclusion

The purpose of the current study has been to explore the concept of *ghuluww* as inferable from the Holy Qur'an and to delineate the boundaries between *ghuluww* and non-*ghuluww*. Investigating the relevant verses, we found that two of them forbid, in an explicit language, exaggeration in religion and ascribing to Allah but the truth. Additionally, several verses set forth examples of exaggeration, the examination of which examples guides us to the fact that exaggeration can come in two forms:

1. Ascribing divinity to a human being;
2. Ascribing divine attributes or abilities to a human being.

The first type is concretely refuted in the Qur'an as a manifest instance of *ghuluww*, and those who practice *ghuluww* in this sense are Qur'anically heretics. As for the second type, however, we observed that the Holy Qur'an has two approaches to it: condemning it in some circumstances on account of deeming it *ghuluww*, and approving of it in others. Moreover, the Qur'an itself, on many occasions, ascribes supernatural or divine qualities or abilities to human beings, showing great concern, nevertheless, over the way how to do it. Two scenarios are possible in ascribing supernatural or divine qualities or abilities to a human being:

1. To consider those qualities or abilities dependent on Allah, without Whose permission the person would possess nothing or those qualities or abilities, or more precisely nothing whatsoever;
2. To ascribe them to the person, believing that he possesses them independently of God.

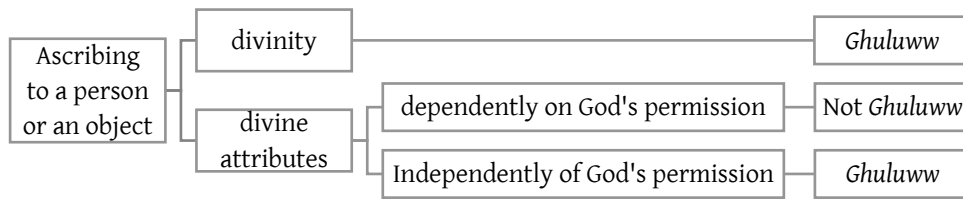
The first scenario is the one of which the Qur'an approves, for it entails no violation of any limits; on the side of the human being, although they cannot possess such qualities or abilities on their own due to their limits, they may acquire them by Allah's permission; and on the side of Allah the Omnipotent, there are no limits basically to be violated. Therefore, the first scenario is not *ghuluww*, and that

⁴¹ Maḥmūd ibn 'Abd Allāh Al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ Al-Ma'ānī Fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1415), vol. 10, p. 200.

is how the Qur'an ascribes the knowledge of the unseen, the power to influence nature, the knowledge of birds' speech, etc. to human beings, including prophets and individuals other than prophets.

The second scenario, however, is vigorously rejected by the Qur'an, for it entails a violation of limits; no human being—or no contingent being, to be precise—has any power independently of God. Therefore, to ascribe supernatural abilities to an individual independently of God is in effect to exceed his limits, thus *ghuluww*.

The graph below shows a summary of the conclusion of this article.



In light of this, we may define *ghuluww*—from a Qur'anic perspective—as: “exaggeration about a human being by deeming them God or son of God, or by ascribing to them divine abilities or qualities independently of God”.

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