



## Adudüddin el-Îcî'ye Göre İlahi Ahlakın ve Güç Yetirilemeyen İlähî Teklifin Argümanı

Dr. Mohammad Makdod | [orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-861X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-861X) | [m.makdod1@gmail.com](mailto:m.makdod1@gmail.com)

Bağımsız Araştırmacı, İstanbul, Türkiye

### Öz

Güç yetirilemeyen ilâhî teklif görüşü, diğer İslâm kelâm ekollerinden farklı bir duruş sergileyen Eş'arîlerin temel görüşlerinden biridir. Adudüddin el-Îcî (ö. 756/1355), geç dönem bir Eş'arî âlimi olarak bu meseleye ilişkin sağlam deliller sunmakta ve Eş'arî ekolünün son dönemini oluşturmaktadır. Bu makale, Îcî'nin güç yetirilemeyen teklife ilişkin argümanı sunup tartışmakta ve Eş'arîlerin yaklaşımlarını gerekçeleriyle ortaya koymaktadır. Mevzu hakkında sunulan güçlü ve sağlam delillerin anlaşılması için iki önemli hususa işaret edilmesi gerekir: Biri, Eş'arîlerin ilahi ahlak anlayışlarının net bir şekilde ortaya konulması gerekir. Diğeri de Eş'arîlerin insan kudreti hakkındaki görüşlerinin çok iyi kavranması önemlidir. Bu nedenle makalede, Îcî'nin Allah'ın sıfatları anlayışı özetlenmiş ve ardından ilahi fiillerin değeri hem fiili hem de imkanı oranında tartışılmıştır. Îcî'nin argümanına geçmeden önce insan kudretinin mahiyeti ve etkinliği yeterince açıklanmaktadır. Ayrıca araştırmada diğer Eş'arîler gibi, Îcî'nin Mu'tezile'nin argümanlarını eleştirmesi ve itirazlarına cevap verdiği ortaya konmuştur. Bu nedenle makalede, Kâdî Abdülcebbar ve İbnü'l-Melâhimî el-Hârizmî gibi Basra'nın geç dönem Mu'tezile ulemasının bu argümana karşı bakış açılarını ve itirazlarını içeren bir bölüm ayrılmıştır. Îcî, güç yetirilemeyen ilâhî teklifi düşük, orta ve yüksek olmak üzere üç seviyeye ayırmıştır. O, her bir aşamada imkân ve fiili durumu tartışmakta ve Eş'arî görüşünü ortaya koymaya ve savunmaya çalışmaktadır. Îcî'nin Eş'arî karakteri güç yetirilemeyen ilâhî teklifin delillendirilmesinde, net bir şekilde ortaya çıkmaktadır. Makale, Îcî'nin argümanlarını açıklamak ve zenginleştirmek için diğer Eş'arîlerin katkılarını da içermektedir. Sonuç olarak makale, Eş'arîlerin ilahî ahlâk anlayışı ışığında Îcî'nin güç yetirilemeyen ilâhî teklif argümanını ele alan üç aşamaya dair kapsamlı bir açıklama sunmakta ve Eş'arîlerin konu hakkındaki gerçekliği inandırıcı belgeki görüşü ile ilahî ahlâk anlayışı arasındaki bağlantıyı vurgulamaktadır.

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# Divine Ethics and Obligation Beyond Capacity According to Aḍuḍ al-Dīn al-Ījī

Dr. Mohammad Makdod | orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-861X | m.makdod1@gmail.com

Independent Researcher, Istanbul, Türkiye

## Abstract

The argument of obligation beyond capacity was one of the main arguments of the Ash'arites that promoted a different stance from other Islamic theological schools. Aḍuḍ al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), as a late Ash'arite scholar, provides sophisticated arguments and marks the final link of the Ash'arite school. This paper presents and discusses al-Ījī's argument of obligation beyond capacity and delineates the Ash'arite reasoning behind their stance. There are two requisites for understanding the argument: the first one is constructing a clear image of the Ash'arite conceptions of divine ethics and the second one is explaining their position about the contingent power. Therefore, the paper starts by summarizing al-Ījī's conception of God and His attributes and then discusses the value judgement of divine actions on both actual and possible levels. The nature and efficacy of human power is sufficiently clarified before delving into al-Ījī's argument. Because the Mu'tazilites are the main opponents in Al-Ījī's and other Ash'arites' arguments, we dedicate some parts to explain their arguments and objections. The Mu'tazilites that we are focusing on are the late Mu'tazilites of the Basra school, such as al-Qāḍī Abdul Jabbār and Ibn al-Malāḥimī. Al-Ījī, unlike other ash'arites, divided obligation beyond capacity into three levels: low, middle, and high. In each level, he discusses first the rational possibility and then affirms or denies the existence of such an obligation. In the discussion of these three levels of obligation beyond capacity, al-Ījī's Ash'arite character is clearly emphasized. The paper also includes other Ash'arites' contributions in order to explicate and enrich al-Ījī's arguments. As a result, the paper gives a comprehensive account of al-Ījī's three levels of obligation beyond capacity in light of the Ash'arite understanding of divine ethics and highlights the interconnection between the Ash'arite position on this argument and their understanding of divine ethics.

## Keywords

Kalam, Obligation, Power, Divine Ethics, Contingency, Necessity

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## Introduction

Theological arguments that are related to ethical questions form the backbone of the Ash‘arite-Mu‘tazilite debate. These arguments stem from the main theological argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ*,<sup>1</sup> which starts from discussing the nature and the source of the ethical value and then extends to include several arguments that inquire into the ethical value of human and divine actions. The argument of obligation beyond capacity (*Taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*) is, without doubt, one of the most disputed arguments between the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites. It deals with the question of whether God can possibly ask humans to perform actions that are beyond their power and capacity. Both the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites have distinct positions on the argument due to their ethical understanding of divine ethics and human power. The Mu‘tazilites vigorously deny the possibility of obligation beyond capacity and maintain that it is rationally bad. According to them, God does not commit what is rationally bad and His actions must fit in what we call ethically good. Al-Ījī and other Ash‘arites reject the Mu‘tazilite rational judgement and affirm that the divinity of God entails the goodness of whatever He does, including obligating humans with actions that are beyond their capacity.

Aḥḍ al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355)<sup>2</sup> is a late Ash‘arite scholar whose arguments present the mature version of the school of Ash‘arism. Therefore, through his works we can have a good understanding of the main positions of the Ash‘arites and their understanding of divine ethics. In his book, *al-Mawāqif fi ‘ilm al-kalām* (the stations in the discipline of kalām), al-Ījī discusses various theological arguments and tries to refute the Mu‘tazilite position in most of them. In this paper, we discuss his argument of obligation beyond capacity and its ethical foundations. However, Understanding divine ethics or the ethical value of divine actions along with the nature of human power are essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the argument of obligation beyond capacity. Therefore, before delving into the forementioned argument, the paper gives a sufficient account of both the conception of divine ethics and human power. Furthermore, the Mu‘tazilite position is presented through al-Qaḍī Abdul Jabbār (d. 415/1025) and Rukn al-Dīn ibn al-Malāḥimī (d.536/1141) who are part of the final stage of the Mu‘tazilite school of Basra. This enables us to draw a comparison between the two main Islamic schools of theology on one important question pertaining to divine ethics.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ḥusn* and *qubḥ* could be rendered in English as “good and bad.” It is the main ethical argument in Kalām literature that discuss the nature of the ethical value and its application in human and divine actions. For more details on the argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ* see, Mohammad Makdod. “Al-Ījī’s Arguments against the Mu‘tazilite Ethical Realism”. *Kader* 20/3 (December 2022), 922-937. <https://doi.org/10.18317/kaderdergi.1213577>

<sup>2</sup> 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).

## 1. The Conception of Divine Ethics

Al-İjî emphasized the concept of necessary being and tried to associate many divine attributes with it. In general, this concept is the mainstay of the theologians' arguments to prove the existence of God. The universe consists of substances and accidents, and both of them are interdependent and dependent on an external cause for their existence. This cause must be uncaused, absolutely independent and must have a different nature from the universe. In other words, the cause cannot be a contingent being like the universe therefore, it must be a necessary being.<sup>3</sup> According to al-İjî, proving that God is a necessary being saves us from further arguments to prove that He is pre-eternal (*azalî*) and post-eternal (*abadî*) because these two attributes are intuitively understood from the same concept of the necessary being. Furthermore, al-İjî argues from the concept of necessary being to prove the oneness of God and other seven divine characteristics, such as being non-spatial, atemporal, and non-corporeal.<sup>4</sup> The second type of divine attributes that Al-İjî affirms are the qualified attributes (*şifat thubūtīyah*). He summarizes them as follows, "He [God] is knowing all the objects of knowledge, powerful over all the contingent (beings), willing all the creatures (*ka'inat*), speaking, living, hearing, and seeing."<sup>5</sup> The most important attributes for our enquiry are the attributes of power and will because they constitute the agency of God, and thus we can apply ethical judgements to His actions.

Divine power, according to al-İjî and other Ash'arites, is the only efficient (*mu'thir*) power in the existence. His power encompasses everything and prevents other powers from having any efficacy, and thus al-İjî and other Ah'arites maintain that human power is not responsible for bringing our actions into existence: it is God who creates our actions, whether they are good or bad.<sup>6</sup> This position of divine power led the Ash'arites' opponents to accuse them of compulsion (*jabr*) and of ascribing the creation of bad actions to God, the Exalted.<sup>7</sup> Discussing the first part of the accusation is beyond the

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<sup>3</sup> Aḍuḍ al-Dīn Al-İjî, *Al-mawāqif fi ilmi al-Kalām* (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kitab, 1999), 266. For more information the argument of the existence of God, see Al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Beirut: Darul Kutub, 1998), 8/6-20.

<sup>4</sup> al-İjî, *Al-Mawāqif*, 270-278.

<sup>5</sup> Ḥassan bin Shihāb al-Kaylānī, *Sharḥ al-'Aqāid al-Aḍuddiya* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 2011), 17.

<sup>6</sup> The Mu'tazilites do not agree with the Ash'arites that God creates our actions and insist that human power is efficient and responsible for creating our actions, and thus God is not ethically responsible for the bad actions that we do. See Al-Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsā* (Cairo: Wahbā publication, 1996), 89-90. The Ash'arites built their theory of acquisition (*kasb*) of human actions on the non-efficacy of human power and the all-encompassing characteristic of divine power. For more details about the Ash'arite theory of acquisition, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The philosophy of Kalām* (London: Harvard University Press, 1970), 671.

<sup>7</sup> These accusations are generally found in the Mu'tazilite books who tried to maintain the ethical responsibility of humans by maintaining the efficacy of their power. See Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Al-Faiḳ fi Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub, 2010), 185. Although the Ash'arites preclude the efficacy of human power, they maintain that humans have freewill, and thus they are responsible for their actions. See Muhammed Ibn al-Wazīr, *Ithār al-Ḥaqq 'alā al-Khalq fi Rad al-Khilāfat*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-

interest of our paper, so we will focus on the second part to see whether al-Ījī ascribes the creation of bad actions to God or not. Al-Ījī asserted the position of all Ash‘arites succinctly by saying, “According to the Ash‘arites, nothing bad (*qabīḥ*) comes out of Him (God), and nothing incumbent is (*wājib*) on Him.”<sup>8</sup> Al-Ījī’s statement that ‘nothing bad comes out of God’ does not only negate the actual badness, but also the potential one. Al-Jurjānī expounded on this statement by saying that the concepts of badness and obligation are not conceived in respect to God.<sup>9</sup> Logically speaking, the proposition that ascribes badness or obligation to God is always false because these two concepts cannot be conceived when we talk about God and His actions.<sup>10</sup> To spell al-Ījī’s position clearly, we say that the concept of badness is not conceived in respect to God because God is a necessary being and that entails His perfection and being free from defects and needs. The second reason is that God is the absolute king who is the creator and the owner of everything, so whatever He does is good and right. Al-Ash‘arī states this conception of God eloquently by saying, “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.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, we understand why al-Ījī and other Ash‘arites preclude the concept of badness in terms of divine actions. According to al-Ījī, the concept of obligation is only conceived within the context of religion, so we can only say that creatures have obligations, not vice versa. Al-Abharī elaborated on al-Ījī’s position as follows, “There is no obligation [on God] because the obligation is a ruling, and rulings are taken from the religious law, [in short] there is no one who can set rules on the Legislator (*Sharī‘*).”<sup>12</sup> So far, we have demonstrated that al-Ījī maintains the absolute goodness of divine actions and precludes the conceivability of badness and obligations.

Understanding divine wisdom and justice is essential to have a complete conception of divine ethics. Al-Ījī does not give us sufficient detail about these two divine characteristics, yet he mentions that justice is a negating attribute. It means that whatever God does is not bad.<sup>13</sup> However, if we go to the early Ash‘arites, we see that their definition of divine justice is similar to al-Ījī’s assertion. Al-Baqillānī and al-Juwaynī affirm that justice is whatever God does.<sup>14</sup> Al-Juwaynī said when we attribute justice to God, we mean that He is the just (*al-‘ādil*), and the just means, “the one who does the things that he has the right to do.”<sup>15</sup> What ‘God has the right to do’ should not be understood as if there are

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Ilmiya, 1987), 282.

<sup>8</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 328.

<sup>9</sup> al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/216.

<sup>10</sup> Shams al-Dīn al-Kiramanī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Hussain Paşa, 317), 355b.

<sup>11</sup> al-Ash‘arī, *Al-Luma‘* (Cairo: The Egyptian Press, 1955), 117.

<sup>12</sup> Sayf al-Dīn al-Abharī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Istanbul, Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, Lalali, 2372), 241a.

<sup>13</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 335.

<sup>14</sup> Abū Bakr al-Baqillānī, *al-Insāf*, 2ed ed. (Cairo: al-Azhariā, 2000), 185.

<sup>15</sup> Abū al-Ma‘ali Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Irshād ilā Qawaṭi‘ al-Adillah fi Usūl al-‘Itiqād* (Cairo: al-Khaniji Publication,

things that God does not have the right to do, but He has the right to do whatever He wants as al-Ash'arî and al-İjî confirmed.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding wisdom, the Ash'arites argue that wisdom pursues divine actions, not vice versa; namely, the attribute of wisdom is conceived in divine actions after conceiving that the action is divine. Put it simply, God's actions do not pursue specific wisdom outside, but wisdom is found in whatever God does. Al-İjî does not give us a specific definition of wisdom, but he seems to be following<sup>17</sup> the authentic Ash'arites' understanding of wisdom, which might be considered a reductionist approach by the opponent.<sup>18</sup> Wisdom, according to the Ash'arites, could be explained by both divine knowledge and power. When it is explained by divine knowledge, it means the theoretical inclusive knowledge of the orders of things in their minute and grand features, and the determination on how they should be for achieving the functions required of them. On the other hand, when it is explained by divine power, it means the execution of these orders and making them perfect and excellent.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, wisdom has two meanings: the first one is a type of knowledge, which is perfect and comprehensive, and the second one is a characteristic of power, which brings things into existence with excellence, i.e., as exact as the theoretical knowledge intended them to be. Al-Ghazālî distinguishes between these theoretical and practical types of wisdom in regard to divine names. He says that God can be called wise (*hakīm*) in two different meanings. The first meaning is derived from wisdom (*hikma*), which is the type of knowledge. The second meaning of wise (*hakīm*) is derived from accuracy/precision (*iḥkām*), which is a type of action.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, we saw that al-İjî's conception of divine ethics is mainly based on the conception of God and His attributes. God's actions are always good because His essence entails all perfections. He is the creator and the owner of everything, and thus the concepts of badness and obligations are not applicable to God. Divine justice and wisdom are interpreted by eternal divine qualities; therefore, God is always just and wise in everything He does.

## 2. Obligation Beyond Capacity (*Taklīf mā lā-yuṭāq*)

Obligation beyond capacity refers to the question of whether God can actually or possibly ask us to perform actions that are beyond our power and capacity or not. The

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1950), 170.

<sup>16</sup> Al-İjî, *Al-Mawāqif*, 335.

<sup>17</sup> This is seen in the comments of his students: Al-Jurjānī, when he elaborates on divine wisdom, affirms the authentic Ash'arites' understanding. See al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/238.

<sup>18</sup> The Mu'tazilites and Ibn Taymiyyah always accuse the Ash'arites of negating or reducing the meaning of divine wisdom to divine power. See Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmu' al-Fatawī* (Al-Medina, King Fahid Publication, 1995), 8/37.

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iktisād fī al-'Itiqād* (Beirut: Darul Minhaj, 2016), 225.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.



dispute over this question between the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites is related to the concept of divine ethics, on one hand, and to the efficacy of human power, on the other hand. We have given a sufficient detail about al-Ījī’s conception of divine ethics and now need briefly to do the same thing in regard to human action.

The attribute of human power was discussed in theological arguments as *qudrah*, *quwah* or *istiṭā‘a*; all these words have the same meaning and could be rendered as “power” in English.<sup>21</sup> Al-Ījī, defines power in general, without distinguishing between eternal and contingent power, by saying: “It [the power] is an attribute that causes effect (*tuathir*) according to the will.”<sup>22</sup> With this short definition of power, al-Ījī tries to exclude other attributes that have different functions, such as the attribute of knowledge that does not cause effect or the power of nature that its effect is not based on the will.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, when al-Ījī comes to explain human power, he denies its efficacy and claims that the originated power, according to the Ash‘arites, is an attribute that is attached to human actions, but it is not responsible for causing any effect. In other words, power, in general, is an attribute that causes effect according to the will, but human power, though it is associated with the will, does not have efficacy. Al-Jurjānī highlights al-Ījī’s position by saying, “*The contingent power, according to our opinion [the Ash‘arites], does not have an effect on any action at all.*”<sup>24</sup> According to al-Ījī and most of the Ash‘arites, human power has an existential nature; namely, it is not merely the soundness of human body, but it is an accident that has its own existence.<sup>25</sup> Being an accident entails other points of dispute, such as not enduring in time and only existing at the time of the action, neither before nor after. However, what is important for our argument is to know that this conception of human power was a significant part of the dispute over obligation beyond capacity between the Ash‘arites and the Mu‘tazilites.

Al-Ījī starts his argument by affirming the possibility of obligation beyond capacity, i.e., it is possible that God obligates (*yukalif*) man with things that are beyond his power. He initiates his argument as follows, “*Obligation beyond capacity is possible according to us [the Ash‘arites] based on what we previously provided that there is no obligation on God and no qabīḥ is perceived from Him. He does what He wills and judges what He wants..., and the*

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<sup>21</sup> *Qudrah* and *Quwah* are mainly translated as power; while *istiṭā‘a*, which has the same meaning, could be translated as capability. However, the affirmation that the Ash‘arites use these words to mean the same thing is found in Muḥammad bin al-Ḥassan bin Furak, *Makalāt Abū al-Ḥassan al-Ash‘arī* (Cairo: Darul Al-Thaqafa al-Dīniya, 2005), 109.

<sup>22</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 150.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* What al-Ījī means by the power of nature is the power of the different elements in nature, such as fire that has the nature to cause effect, but this effect is not ruled by a will, i.e., its effect co-exists with its substance, unlike the human power. The non-efficacy of human power is due the all-encompassing characteristic of divine power as we have mentioned in the previous part.

<sup>24</sup> Al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 6/86.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6/91

*Mu'tazilites deem it impossible because it is rationally qabih.*"<sup>26</sup> Since the Mu'tazilites are the opponent that al-İjî argues against in this argument, it would be salutary to our purpose to give a brief explanation of their position in order to have a better understanding of the argument.

### 2.1. The Mu'tazilites' Position

Ibn al-Malāḥīmī asserted al-İjî's words about the Mu'tazilites's position by saying, "our masters [the Mu'tazilites] maintained that God does not obligate the servant beyond his capacity, and every obligation beyond capacity is qabih [because] God is far above (munazah) doing qabih."<sup>27</sup> We see here that both the possibility and impossibility of this question are based on the conception of divine ethics. However, Ibn al-Malāḥīmī said that our opponents in this argument are the Jahmiyyah<sup>28</sup> and the Ash'arites and then ended up reducing the Ash'arites position to the Jahmiyyah. Of course, the reason for this reduction is the non-efficacy of the contingent power that the Ash'arites maintained. Therefore, according to Ibn al-Malāḥīmī, obligating human beings and then depriving their power of its efficacy and creating their actions is an obligation beyond capacity. He stated the Ash'arites' position as follows, "The Ash'arites and the Najariyyah<sup>29</sup> maintained that God obligated His servants beyond their capacity because He is the creator of their actions.... Even if they say that the servant acquires it [his actions]."<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥīmī tried to be just to the Ash'arites by saying that this obligation beyond capacity is based on their definition of human power as a power that exists at the time of the action and cannot be related to the two opposites at the same time, i.e., performing and omission. In other words, Ibn al-Malāḥīmī tried to show that the Ash'arites and the Jahmiyyah are not quite identical in terms of obligation beyond capacity.

Negating the efficacy of the contingent power leads to compulsion according to the Mu'tazilites, but does not lead to the negation of free will according to al-İjî and most of the Ash'arites. However, the Mu'tazilites insist on stigmatizing the Ash'arites with compulsion and thus ascribing to them the position of obligation beyond capacity. The reason for this accusation is that the Mu'tazilites reduced the argument of obligation beyond capacity to the non-efficacy of human power. Al-Qāḍī Abdul Jabbār affirmed this understanding by saying, "obligation beyond capacity would be entailed from saying that it [the

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<sup>26</sup> al-İjî, *Al-Mawāqif*, 330-331.

<sup>27</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥīmī, *Al-Faiḳ fi Usūl al-Dīn*, 279.

<sup>28</sup> The Jahmiyyah are the followers of Jahm bin Safwān (d.128/745) who claimed that man does not have any power over his action. For more details about Jahmiyyah, see Ali Sami al-Nashār, *The Foundation of Islamic Philosophy* (Egypt: Dar al-Salaam, 2008), 1/330-332.

<sup>29</sup> They are the followers of Muhammad bin Hussain al-Najjar (d. 220/835) and they maintained a similar position of al-Ash'arī in regard to human actions; nevertheless, they held a few Mu'tazilites' doctrines as well. Al-Shahrsatānī said that most of the Mu'tazilites in al-Ray follow the teachings of al-Najjar; see Muhammad bin Abdulkarim al-Sharastānī, *al-Milal wa Al-Nihāl*, 2.ed., (Beirut: Darul Kutub, 1992),1/75.

<sup>30</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥīmī, *Al-Faiḳ fi Usūl al-Dīn*, 279.

*contingent power*] is associated with the object of power [i.e., it did not exist before it]. It [obligation beyond capacity] is *qabīḥ*, and divine justice precludes performing *qabīḥ*.<sup>31</sup> To explain this association, we say that God commanded humans to perform an action, but at the time of the command, humans did not have any power, and despite that, the divine speech was directed to them, i.e., the obligation happened despite the absence of human power. The Ash‘arites do not shrink from admitting this obligation, whether it is called beyond or within human power. Nevertheless, the argument of obligation beyond capacity, according to al-Ījī, does not stop at the concept of human power, but it includes different types of possible and actual obligations, which are going to be discussed in the following section.

### 3. Types of Obligation beyond Capacity

Based on the difficulty of the obligation, al-Ījī divided obligation beyond capacity into three degrees: high, middle and low. He elaborated on each one of them in terms of the possibility and the actuality.<sup>32</sup> We will start explaining them from the lowest to the highest because the lowest degree shares the same meaning as the Mu‘tazilites’ criticism of the Ash‘arites’ conception of human power.

#### 3.1. The Lowest Degree of Obligation beyond Capacity

Al-Ījī stated that the lowest degree or level of obligation beyond capacity is when a human action is deemed impossible due to three reasons, which are divine knowledge, will or report. These three reasons could be explained as follows:

- God knew that the action will not happen, then the existence of that action is impossible.
- God did not will the action to happen, then the existence of the action is impossible as well.
- God reported that the action will not happen, and then it is impossible to happen.<sup>33</sup>

This type of obligation, namely, God obligating the servant with something, although He had known, willed, or reported the non-existence of that thing, is unanimously actual and possible, as al-Ījī stated. He says, “*obligation with this [type] is possible and actual (waqī‘) by consensus; otherwise, the disobedient, despite his disbelief and lewdness (fisq), will not be religiously incumbent (mukālaf)*.”<sup>34</sup> To prove the actuality and the possibility of this obligation, al-Ījī used a conditional syllogism that could be spelt as follows: if this

<sup>31</sup> al-Qāḍī Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (Cairo: Wahba Publication, 1996), 390.

<sup>32</sup> Every actual is possible in itself, but not vice versa. The possible could be divided into physical and logical; however, every physical is logical, but not vice versa.

<sup>33</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 331; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/222.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

obligation is not possible, then the disobedient, whether he is a non-believer or a disobedient believer, is not religiously incumbent. But the disobedient is religiously incumbent; therefore, this type of obligation is possible. To explain the implication between the antecedent and the consequent, we say that God knew from eternity that man x will not believe although He obligated/asked him to believe. Therefore, man x was obligated beyond his capacity because nothing contrary to God's knowledge can exist. To simplify the implication and connect it to human power, we say that, according to al-İjî, the creation of human power happens simultaneously at the time of the action, and this power is only valid for that specific action, not for its opposite. Therefore, when the servant, for example, is indulged in doing something and the religious obligation is asking him not to do that thing, the servant is obligated beyond his power because his power, at that moment, is occupied with performing a different action and as long as he is engaged in that action, the power is not valid to perform the opposite. The currently engaged action is an object of divine knowledge, i.e., it must happen, and in spite of that, the obligation is asking the servant to do the contrary. Al-İjî affirmed this as follows, "*Such an action [that God knew, willed or reported its none-existence] cannot be an object of the contingent power; hence, the power [exists] simultaneously with the action and cannot be related to the two opposite [sides of the action].*"<sup>35</sup>

Al-İjî presented this type of obligation in a way that looks like God is obligating the servant to do the impossible because he presented divine foreknowledge as a necessitating factor of human actions. He started this type of obligation by saying, "*the [servant's] action would be deemed impossible due to God's knowledge, will or report of the non-existence [of the action].*"<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, we do not think that al-İjî maintains that divine knowledge is an efficient (*muathirah*) attribute because mainly the Ash'arites hold that knowledge is a revealing (*kashifah*) attribute that does not affect its object, and it is in accordance with its object, not vice versa. In other words, had the action been different, the knowledge would have been different as well. Al-Ghazālî affirms this Ash'arî understanding of divine knowledge as follows, "*the knowledge follows the object of knowledge (ma'lûm), and it is attached to it as it is [as the ma'lûm is], and [thus] it [the knowledge] does not affect or change it [the ma'lûm].*"<sup>37</sup> Al-Rāzî affirmed the same understanding of divine knowledge by saying that knowledge attaches (*ta'alaq*) itself to the object of knowledge (*ma'lûm*) as it is without

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> al-Ghazālî, *al-Iktisad fi al-Itiqad*, 168. I could not find an explicit statement about the efficacy of divine knowledge in al-İjî's books. In modern philosophy of religion, there is ongoing debates about divine foreknowledge and human freedom led mainly by William Lane Craig. For more information on the modern debate about divine foreknowledge, see William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism: Omniscience* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

changing its reality, and he provided several arguments to prove that it is impossible for knowledge to have an affecting factor (*tathīr*).<sup>38</sup>

The impossibility of action because of divine will or report is different from the impossibility because of the nature of the contingent power, i.e., the power being not related to the two opposite sides of the actions. Al-Saīlkūṭī (d.1067/1657) objected to al-Ījī's opinion by saying that the contingent power is not attached to the opposite because the power exists simultaneously with the action, and this case is different from the preclusion of the action because of divine knowledge, will, or report. The difference between these two impediments of the action is that maintaining that the action is precluded because of the nature of the contingent power would mean that every obligation is an obligation beyond capacity according to the Ash'arites. Al-Saīlkūṭī explains this as follows, “it would entail that every required command (*mukalaf bihi*) is beyond the servant's capacity, regardless of whether God knew its existence or non-existence because obligation (*taklif*) is necessary before the action and the contingent power is simultaneous with it [the action].”<sup>39</sup>

Therefore, we can say that al-Ījī's first type of obligation beyond capacity contains two parts. The first one is when the action is prevented because of God's knowledge, will or report. Nevertheless, we clarified that God's knowledge is not an efficient cause, namely, it does not necessitate or prevent human actions.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, we only have God's will and report that would make the action impossible if He willed or reported its non-existence. The former, i.e., God's will, is only disclosed to us through divine reports; therefore, the actual argument is only restricted to divine reports. God reveals that a certain action, from the actions that He obligated his servants to do, will not exist. For this reason, the existence of the action is impossible, and the servants are still obligated to perform that action. The most famous example of this case is the belief of Abū Lahab. God reported in the Quran that he will end up in hellfire and, at the same time, he was ordered/obligated to believe. Al-Rāzī explains this theological conundrum as follows, “God obligated Abū Lahab to believe, and the belief entails believing in everything that God said. From the things that [God] said is that he [Abū Lahab] will not believe. Therefore, he [Abū Lahab] became obligated to believe that he will not believe.”<sup>41</sup> This is the only actual case of obligation beyond capacity because of God's report. However, theologians, in general, tried to give a plausible answer or justification for this type of obligation. Al-Jurjānī, for example, said that the general

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<sup>38</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib al-'Alīya* (Beirut: Darul Kutub al-Arabia, 1987), 9/49. Al-Rāzī brings up ten arguments to prove that divine knowledge does not change the reality of things.

<sup>39</sup> al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/222.

<sup>40</sup> Maybe al-Ījī wants to say that the divine knowledge that was revealed to us about the non-existence of certain actions prevents those actions from coming into existence. In this case, we can say that the action is prevented due to the knowledge, but in reality, the knowledge only gave us the factual future reality of those actions, i.e., it did not cause their non-existence.

<sup>41</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib*, 9/267.

belief in terms of Abū Lahab is not impossible, while the particular one is impossible,<sup>42</sup> but only in case of his knowledge of that particular obligation.<sup>43</sup>

The second part of al-İjī's first type of obligation is related to the nature of the contingent power, namely, the power is an accident that does not stand for two instances of time; therefore, it exists simultaneously with the action, i.e., it does not exist at the moment of the obligation and cannot be valid for the action and its opposite at the same time. This is an authentic Ash'arite understanding of power, but it does not entail the impossibility of obligation and the *qubḥ* of divine action because the servant still has the faculty of choice at the time of obligation. However, we say that the true obligation beyond capacity would be directed to al-Rāzī's argument who said that God creates compelling motives in the servant's heart. He affirms this type of obligation by saying, "Because He [God] creates the motives (*dawā'ir*) to disbelieve for the disbeliever [the one who will disbelieve], and then He commands him to believe. This is quite exactly the obligation beyond capacity."<sup>44</sup> This obligation is truly an obligation beyond capacity, but the one that al-İjī and his master al-Ash'arī are talking about would only be called an obligation beyond capacity according to the opponents' understanding of compulsion and human power. Nevertheless, according to the Ash'arites who do not deny the freedom of choice, this obligation is a normal obligation that does not entail any impossibility, although they might accept calling it an obligation beyond capacity in order to show that humans do not have an efficient capacity: it is God who creates their actions.

In order to prove the previous contention, we need to explore al-Ash'arī's understanding of this obligation beyond capacity because he is the one who established the conception of human power for the rest of the Ash'arites. Al-Ash'arī narrates the opponent's objection about obligating/asking the disbeliever to believe, and whether the disbeliever has the power to believe or not. Al-Ash'arī responds to this objection as follows,

If he [the disbeliever] had the capacity, he would have believed [i.e., he has the power to believe]. Then if he [the opponent] said: 'has He [God] obligated him with things that he cannot do?' We respond to him as follows: this question has two [different] things: if you mean by 'he cannot believe because of his disability (*'ajz*), then we say No [i.e., God does not obligate him with things beyond his capacity], but if you say that he [the disbeliever] cannot do it [the belief] because he left it [the belief] and got

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<sup>42</sup> It is important to note the impossibility here is not a rational impossibility, i.e., the thing is not impossible in itself, but it is impossible because of an external reason. In this case, it is impossible because of the truthfulness of divine speech. For more details about these two types of impossibilities, see Shihab al-Dīn al-Qarāfī, *Nafa'is al-Usūl fī Sharḥ al-Maḥsul* (Mecca: Nizar Mustafa Al-Baz, 1995), 4/1549.

<sup>43</sup> al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/175.

<sup>44</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib*, 9/269.

engaged in [performing] its opposite, then the answer is Yes [i.e., God obligated him to do what is beyond his capacity].<sup>45</sup>

This manifest explanation of al-Ash‘arī helps us to have a complete understanding of the relationship between obligation beyond capacity and contingent power. The servant is not disabled (‘ajiz), i.e., he has the potential capacity to believe, and in this regard, there is no obligation beyond capacity because the servant has the potential capacity, which would turn to be an actual one as soon as he directs his free choice to do the opposite. Nevertheless, at the moment when the servant is engaged in disbelief, he cannot believe, and thus asking him to believe at that moment is an obligation beyond capacity.<sup>46</sup> In other words, asking the servant to use the same power of disbelief to believe, at that moment, is an obligation beyond capacity. We argue that Al-Ash‘arī conceded to call this case an obligation beyond capacity because of the definition of the contingent power that he maintained. Ibn al-Talmasānī (d. 644/1246)<sup>47</sup> emphasized the need to concede the doctrine of obligation beyond capacity by saying, “*The principles (qawā‘id) of the Ash‘arism cannot be affirmed except by conceding it [obligation beyond capacity] because the servant’s power exists simultaneously with the object of power (maqdur).*”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Ibn al-Talmasānī divided obligation beyond capacity into several types, and when he elaborated on this type, he gave another justification and affirmed the freedom of choice as well. He said,

The fourth [type of obligation beyond capacity] exists according to the opinion of al-shaykh [al-Ash‘arī], but he does not consider it an impossible obligation because this [obligation] is conditioned by the action being from such actions that are possible for the physically sound body (buniya), and it must be from the genus of actions that the power is created for when [the servant] has a determinant will (‘azim) to do it.<sup>49</sup>

For this obligation not to be impossible, two conditions must exist: the first one is the soundness of the physical body, i.e., the absence of physical disability. The second condition is that obligation should be from the actions that humans normally can perform when they choose to do so. For example, asking a sound human to walk is from this type of obligation, but asking him to fly to the sky is not. Finally, we have demonstrated that the lowest degree of obligation beyond capacity is actually two parts: the first one is when

<sup>45</sup> al-Ash‘arī, *Al-Luma‘*, 100. Al-Maturidī enriches this position by saying that the servant is the one who is wasting his power in disobedience, and thus the obligation is not *qabīḥ*; see Abū Mansūr al-Maturidī, *Al-Tawḥīd* (Alexandria: Dar al-Jamī‘at al-Maṣriya, 1970), 266.

<sup>46</sup> Asking the disbeliever to believe is not one command, but there are two commands. The first one is asking him to stop disbelieving, and then the second one is asking him to believe.

<sup>47</sup> Sharaf al-Dīn Ibn al-Talmasānī is the famous commentator on al-Rāzī’s books. In his comments on *Ma‘alim Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Ibn al-Talmasānī tried to argue against al-Rāzī’s in some points in order to highlight al-Ash‘arī’s true positions. See Khaīr al-Dīn al-Zirkily, *al-A‘lām*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm lalmalayn, 2002), 4/125.

<sup>48</sup> Sharaf Al-Dīn al-Talmasānī, *Sharḥ ma‘alim Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Amman: Dar al-Fatīḥ, 2010), 465.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 468.

the action becomes impossible because of an external reason, such as God's report. The second part is because of the nature of the contingent power: all obligations are from this type of obligation. According to al-İjî, both parts are actual<sup>50</sup> obligations, i.e., they really occurred.

### 3.2. The Middle Degree of Obligation beyond Capacity

The middle degree of obligation beyond capacity is also a matter of ethical dispute between the Mu'tazilites and al-İjî. The Mu'tazilites preclude its possibility on account of its rational *qubh*, while al-İjî does not acknowledge their ethical rationality and insists on considering it possible. This middle degree of obligation beyond capacity is related to the actions that are normally beyond human power. It bears no relation with the Ash'arites' understanding of human power because it is more related to the limitation of our power in general.

Al-İjî elaborates on this type of obligation beyond capacity by saying that human power is not linked to this type of action, i.e., the actions are not within our scope of power. He says that there are two reasons for the prevention of this type of action: the first one refers to actions that are not linked to our power because the nature of those actions cannot be possibly related to human power, namely, they are the actions that can only be performed by God, such as creating bodies.<sup>51</sup> Al-Jurjānî commented on this position by saying, "*the contingent power absolutely cannot cause the existence of a substance (jawhar).*"<sup>52</sup> Creating a substance belongs to the genus (*jins*) of divine actions; therefore, performing this type of action is impossible for the contingent power.

The second reason is the type of actions which are still from the same genus of human actions, but they exceed the limitation of our power. In other words, these actions in themselves are not impossible, but the limitation of our physical structure and power make their existence precluded. The examples that al-İjî gives for these actions are carrying mountains and flying to the sky.<sup>53</sup> Carrying and moving upwards belong to the same genus of our actions, which is the movement; therefore, the mind can still conceive their possibility.

Obligation with these types of actions, whether they are from the same genus of our actions or not, is possible according to Al-İjî, but it is not an actual obligation, i.e., it did

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<sup>50</sup> Affirming their actuality means that they are possible as well because actuality entails possibility and not vice versa.

<sup>51</sup> al-İjî, *Al-Mawāqif*, 331.

<sup>52</sup> al-Jurjānî, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, 8/223. Saying that human power cannot create substances is not a matter of dispute between the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites. The Mu'tazilites agree that creating substances is from the genus of actions that does not belong to our power. Al-Qāḍî Abdul Jabbār states that there are thirteen types of actions that are not within the scope of human power. See Al-Qāḍî Abdul Jabbār, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 90.

<sup>53</sup> al-İjî, *Al-Mawāqif*, 331.



not exist. Al-Ījī affirmed this position as follows, “*This [type of obligation] we deem it possible, although it did not exist; [we know this] by the inductive method (istiqrā), and [also we know it] from His saying, the Most High: {God burdens not anyone beyond his capacity}.<sup>54</sup>* Al-Kirmānī bolstered his teacher’s position by further scriptural proofs. He says that God asked us in the Quran to supplicate to Him not to burden us with actions that are beyond our capacity when The Exalted said {Lord, do not burden us with more than our capacity} (2:286). Therefore, God Himself affirms the possibility of this obligation; otherwise, there would be no reason for this supplication.<sup>55</sup>

The possibility of the existence of this type of obligation is precluded only after knowing the divine reports, but if it was left to reason alone, it would assert its possibility. In other words, the obligation to perform<sup>56</sup> supernatural actions is rationally possible and actually or physically impossible. The reason for this rational possibility is that the mind can conceive (*yataṣawar*) the command, and thus it judges its possibility. Performing the action or having the potential power to perform it is not a condition for the obligation according to Al-Ījī and other Ash‘arites who deem this type of obligation possible. The only condition that they stipulate for the possibility of the obligation is understanding the command. Al-Ījī states this condition as follows, “*The understanding of the legally incumbent (mukalaf) of the obligation is a condition for the validity (siḥa) of obligation according to the erudite scholars (muḥaqqiqīn).*”<sup>57</sup> In other words, it is possible that God obligates/commands certain actions that are beyond the scope of human power. This possibility stems from the ethical understanding of divine actions; God does whatever He wants and whatever He does is not *qabīḥ*.<sup>58</sup> Al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) affirms that the only condition for an obligation is the understanding of the legally incumbent (*Mukalaf*). Furthermore, he stated that this middle degree of obligation beyond capacity, that is the obligation to perform supernatural acts, is the focus of dispute<sup>59</sup> between the theologians. In other words, this obligation beyond capacity is the one that is really related to the argument of *ḥusn* and *qubḥ*. This type of obligation does not finish at the incumbent’s understanding, but it also requires from him to perform the supernatural action. Al-Taftāzānī states this requirement as follows, “*It means [this obligation] requiring the existence of the action and*

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> al-Kirmānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Hussain Paşa, 317), 360.

<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting that according to most theologians, obligation is only related to actions, i.e., God obligates or requires from his servants to perform or to abstain from certain actions. The reason for this argument is that the opponents consider abstaining as the absence of action, while Al-Ījī and the majority of theologians consider abstaining as a type of action. See Al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, (Beirut: Darul Kutub, 2004), 2/245.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. 2/259.

<sup>58</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 330.

<sup>59</sup> al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 1998), 4/298. We already stated that the Mu‘tazilites’ argument was focused on the first degree of obligation beyond capacity: the one that is related to the Ash‘arites’ definition of human power.

performing it, [and thus] deserving punishment in case of not performing it. [i.e., this type of obligation] is not intending to show the disability [of the incumbent].”<sup>60</sup> Although the obligated action is beyond the incumbent’s scope of power, he is still required to perform the action, and he will be deserving punishment in case of not performing it. This is the controversial ethical question that the Mu‘tazilites deem impossible due to divine justice and the purpose of obligation. According to them, the purpose of obligation is exposing (*ta‘rîd*) the incumbent to divine reward, not punishing him as the case is in the obligation to perform supernatural actions. Ibn al-Malāḥimī affirms the real purpose of obligation by saying, “The real purpose of the Most Wise is to expose [his servant] to the reward.”<sup>61</sup> However, al-Taftāzānī emphatically highlights that intention behind this obligation is to require the action, not demonstrate the disability of the incumbent as it is the case in asking them to bring a similar Quran. He says that this demand, i.e., imitating the Quran, is intended without a doubt to display the servants’ disability.<sup>62</sup> Al-Rāzī in his Tafsīr highlights the difference between this middle degree of obligation beyond capacity and the divine demand in order to demonstrate the disability of the servants. He says that some people maintained that the divine demand from the angels to tell the names of things is a proof of obligation beyond capacity, and this is, al-Rāzī says, an untenable position.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3. The Highest Degree of Obligation beyond Capacity

We have so far elaborated on two degrees of obligation beyond capacity: the lowest and the highest. Both of them are possible with respect to God, but only the first one has an actual existence. The final type is the highest degree of obligation beyond capacity. It is the obligation to perform an action that is logically impossible. Al-Ījī states this type of obligation as follows, “The highest degree [of obligation]: is when [the action] is precluded (*yamtani‘*) merely because of its concept (*mafḥūmihi*), such as causing the co-existence of two contraries or altering the [logical] realities.”<sup>64</sup> The existence of such obligation is unanimously precluded, but the argument is about whether it is possible for God to obligate His servants to perform these logically impossible actions or not. Al-Ījī in *al-Mawāqif* does not express his own opinion about the possibility of this type of obligation, but he only affirms that some Ash‘arites considered it possible and others impossible. The reason for this dispute among the Ash‘arites goes back to the possibility of conceiving (*taṣaww*) the

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Al-Faiḳ fi Usūl al-Dīn*, 469.

<sup>62</sup> al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqaṣid*, 4/298.

<sup>63</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā’ al-Turath, 1999), 2/398.

<sup>64</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 331. Altering the logical realities means changing the existent mode of something, i.e., making the contingent being necessary or the impossible contingent and so on. See Muḥammad bin Abdullah al-Jarashī, *Al-Far‘id al-Saniya fi Sharḥ al-Muqadima al-Sanusiya* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, 2015), 229.

impossible.<sup>65</sup> The possibility that is discussed by al-Ījī is quite vague and philosophical, so I will try to depend on the commentators in order to summarize the argument.

Those who maintain the impossibility of this obligation argue that conceiving (*taṣaww*) the impossible is precluded in itself, and thus affirming the possibility of such an obligation is impossible. What cannot be conceived cannot be demanded. They argued that conceiving the impossible means conceiving it as substantiated in reality, and the impossible in itself has no existence in itself (*fi nafs al-amr*). Thus, the one who claims that he is conceiving the number four not as an even (*zawj*) number, he is in reality conceiving something else, not the number four. In other words, conceiving the number four as an odd number is logically impossible, and the one who claims that he is able to conceive it so, is in reality conceiving another number. Thus, conceiving the impossible means conceiving it as an existed being, and this is unanimously impossible; therefore, the obligation is impossible as well.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, those who hold the possibility of this obligation argue that there are two valid methods to conceive the impossible. The first method is the method of negation, which means conceiving that there is nothing, whether real or imagined, such as the co-existence of the two contraries (*ijtmā' al-ḍidāin*). The second method is the method of resemblance (*tashbīh*), which is conceiving the co-existence of two different things (*al-mutakhlifīn*), such as black and sweetness, which is possible to conceive them existing together, and then judging that such a co-existence or combination cannot happen between the two contraries.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, the mind can somehow conceive an image about the impossible, though this image is not the exact reality of it because the impossible does not have a reality in itself.

Knowing al-Ījī's real position about this obligation is quite difficult because he does not affirm or negate the possibility of it in any of his books. Furthermore, we have two contrary pieces of evidence about his position. The first one is that in some of his arguments in *al-Mukhtaṣar*, he tries to prove the falsity of some cases based on the fact that they might lead to obligation with the impossible.<sup>68</sup> The opposite piece of evidence is given to us by his immediate student, al-Kirmānī, who commented on the second position by saying, "as a result, we do not claim that the impossible cannot be conceived unconditionally, but [we maintain] the negation of conceiving it as existed (*waqī'an*), and thus we maintain the possibility of this [type of] obligation; hence, negating the specific (*al-akhaṣ*) does not entail negating the general."<sup>69</sup> The specific here is conceiving the occurrence of the impossible, which is precluded, but the general, which is conceiving it somehow through the methods

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<sup>65</sup> al-Ījī, *Al-Mawāqif*, 331.

<sup>66</sup> al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, 8/222-223; Al-Kirmānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Hussain Paṣa, 317), 358a.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> al-Ījī, *Sharḥ al-Mukhtaṣar*, 2/101, 204.

<sup>69</sup> al-Kirmānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* (Hussain Paṣa, 317), 359a.

of negation or likening, is still possible according to al-Kirmānī who stated this possibility by the plural pronoun *we*. We cannot assertively ascribe none of these two positions to al-İjī because we do not know whether al-Kirmānī is referring to al-İjī with that pronoun or not. Nevertheless, we are more inclined to say that al-İjī acknowledges the possibility of this obligation because we see al-Juwaynī affirming the possibility of this obligation as well. Al-Juwaynī affirms this possibility by saying, “*from the examples of the obligation beyond capacity is the demand to combine between the two contraries and perform [actions] that are beyond the scope of our objects of power. The right [position] according to us [the Ash‘arites] is that [type of obligation] is rationally possible.*”<sup>70</sup> Al-Juwaynī does not distinguish between the second and third degrees of obligation beyond capacity; both of them are rationally possible. His argument is that the existence of the required action is not necessarily wanted by the commandant (*al-a‘mir*).<sup>71</sup> Put it differently, God might ask the servant to perform an action, but in reality, He does not want the existence of that action.

## Conclusion

We explained al-İjī’s conception of divine ethics, which forms the foundation for many of his theological arguments that are related to ethical questions. Shortly, God’s actions are always good because He is God. The concept of badness and obligation are not even conceived in respect to God. According to al-İjī, divine justice and wisdom are related to eternal divine qualities and attributes, i.e., God is necessarily just and wise in everything He does. Divine power is the only efficient power in existence that is responsible for creating everything, while human power is an ephemeral accident that does not have any efficacy.

Understanding al-İjī’s argument of obligation beyond capacity is conditioned by understanding the conception of divine ethics and human power. Al-İjī divided the argument into three levels based on the difficulty of obligation: low, middle, and high. The low one is an actual obligation, namely, God already obligated humans with this type of obligation. To prove the existence of this type of obligation, al-İjī used the example of Abū lahab and the Ash‘arite position on the non-efficacy of human power. The middle level is related to supernatural actions where al-İjī maintained that it is possible and morally right for God to ask humans to perform actions that are beyond the limitations of their power and then punish them for not performing those actions. Al-İjī only maintained the rational possibility of this type of obligation and precluded the existence of it based on the inductive method and scriptural proofs. The highest level of obligation beyond capacity is a matter of dispute among the Ash‘arites themselves, as al-İjī stated. The reason for that dispute is the argument of the conceivability (*taṣaww*) of the impossible. Those who maintained that the impossible cannot be conceived in any form,

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<sup>70</sup> al-Juwaynī, *Al-İrshād ilā Qawaṭi‘ al-Adillah fi Usūl al-‘Itiqād*, 226.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

maintained that this type of obligation is not possible, while those who hold that the impossible can be conceived in certain ways, affirmed the possibility of this obligation. Although Ījī's position on this type was not clear, we demonstrated some pieces of evidence that show that he maintains the possibility of this type of obligation as well. We found out that al-Ījī in the first type of obligation beyond capacity did not distinguish between the obligation despite the non-efficacy of human power and the obligation despite divine knowledge or command. We pointed out the difference between these two types of obligation and cleared out the ambiguity in his argument.

Al-Ījī and other Ash'arites affirmed that the only condition for an obligation to be possible is to be understood by the addressee (*mukhtab*). In other words, God can possibly obligate His creatures with whatever He wants as long as they can understand His command. Therefore, al-Ījī entertained the possibility of any conceived obligation and precluded all ethical limitations on God. This position is not restricted to Al-Ījī alone, but it is the main position of all Ash'arites. Their conception of divine ethics does not leave space for any imaged limitations on God's actions or commands. In short, God is the absolute owner who has the right to do whatever He wants with His creatures.

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