



## Critical Analysis of the Function of Reason as a Source in the Interpretation of the Qur’ān According to Ibn ‘Āshūr\*

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### Abstract

Although reason is acknowledged by all Muslims as a valid source, there are various views regarding its limits and functionalities. Some Shī‘ī and Sunnī schools are known for their rationalist tendencies, while others are known for their anti-rationalist approaches. Numerous studies have examined the “function of reason in interpreting the Qur’ān,” yet none has explored this topic from the perspective of Muḥammad Ṭāhīr Ibn ‘Āshūr (1879–1973). In his interpretation of the verses of the Qur’ān, he emphasizes the importance of reason as an epistemic source and employs various rational sciences—such as philosophy, theology, and other intellectual disciplines—in his exegetical analysis. Although some of his rational arguments in interpretation have been subject to criticism, he consistently upholds the criteria of rational goodness and badness when approaching Qur’ānic verses, and he avoids literal readings of scriptural descriptions such as the “hand of Allah” (*yadullāh*) or God’s “rising over the throne” (*‘arsh*), opting instead for literary

and figurative interpretations that align with rationalist perspectives. This study employs descriptive, analytical, and critical methods to examine the concept of reason both lexically and terminologically. It clarifies the distinction between instrumental and source reason and elucidates the notion of rational beauty and ugliness (*al-husn wa'l-qubh al-aqlī*), which lies at the center of the debate. As there is no fundamental disagreement regarding the use of instrumental reason, the study focuses on the application of source reason in Qur'ānic interpretation. Accordingly, special attention is given to the challenging issue of the divine attributes—one of the most significant points of tension between reason and ḥadīth. Ibn 'Āshūr's position is identified, compared, and critically evaluated alongside the views of the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites.

**Keywords:** The Function of Reason, Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa'l-Tanwīr*.

### **İbn 'Āshūr'a göre Kur'an Tefsirinde Aklın Bir Kaynak Olarak İşlevine Dair Eleştirel Bir Analiz**

#### **Öz**

Akl, İslam düşüncesinde geçerli bir kaynak olarak kabul edilmekle birlikte, kapsamı ve işlevi konusunda farklı yaklaşımlar mevcuttur. Şi'i ve Sünni bazı ekoller rasyonalist eğilimleriyle öne çıkarken, diğer bazıları anti-rasyonalist yaklaşımlarıyla bilinir. Kur'an'ın akıl ile tefsiri meselesi üzerine pek çok görüş ve çalışma bulunsa da, şimdiye kadar Muhammed Tâhir İbn 'Āshūr'un (1879-1973) bu konudaki yaklaşımını merkeze alan müstakil bir araştırma yapılmamıştır. İbn 'Āshūr, tefsirinde aklı önemli bir kaynak olarak konumlandırmış; felsefe, kelim ve diğer akli disiplinlerden yararlanarak Kur'an'ı yorumlamıştır. Her ne kadar bazı akli yorumları eleştiriye açık olsa da, genel olarak akli iyilik ve kötülük ilkesine bağlı kalmış ve özellikle *yedullāh* ve *'arṣa istivā* gibi teşbihî sıfatlara dair ayetlerde lafzi değil, edebî ve akla uygun yorumları tercih etmiştir. Bu çalışmada betimleyici, çözümleyici ve eleştirel yöntemlerle; akıl kavramının lugavi ve ıstilaî yönleri ile "araçsal akıl" ve "kaynak akıl" ayrımı ele alınmış, tartışmanın merkezinde yer alan akli iyilik ve kötülük anlayışı açıklığa kavuşturulmuştur. Araçsal akıl kullanımında genel bir görüş birliği bulunduğundan, çalışma ağırlıklı olarak kaynak aklın tefsirdeki rolüne odaklanmıştır. Bu bağlamda, akıl ve hadis arasındaki en temel ihtilaf alanlarından biri olan ilahî sıfatlar konusu ele alınmış; İbn 'Āshūr'un bu konudaki görüşleri ortaya konmuş ve Eş'arilik ile Mu'tezile'nin yaklaşımlarıyla karşılaştırılarak eleştirel bir değerlendirmeye tabi tutulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Aklın İşlevi, İbn 'Āshūr, *et-Taḥrīr ve'l-Tenwīr*.

### **Introduction**

The role of reason in interpretation is significant, and many studies have been conducted on this subject. Among Sunnis, the Mu'tazilites are known for their rationalism, while a group that believes in the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān (Appearanceists) and Ash'arites tend to be anti-rationalism. They claim that the only way to understand the Qur'ān is to consider it's apparent and do not support the idea of source reason in interpretation. Within Shī'ism, some rely only on Hadiths for interpretation, while others believe in ijtihād. Some scholars consider reason as one of the sources of interpretation, to the point that they use it to prove the authority of the Qur'ān. Additionally,

the Shī'ī *Uṣūlīyūn* (principalists) have a separate chapter dedicated to reason and consider it an independent source alongside the Qur'ān and Hadith. From a rationalist perspective, the authority of reason is inherent, and the validity of reason does not depend on any rational justification, because understanding something is impossible only by relying on one's ego and is not based on the Qur'ān or Hadiths. Because their authority comes from reason, in cases of conflict, reason will take precedence over and be binding on tradition.

Since there is no dispute about the instrumental use of reason in interpretation, the subject of discussion is only source reason. Therefore, it is necessary to know whether Ibn 'Āshūr considers source reason as an authority and how he deals with cases in which reason comes into conflict with tradition.

Some of the major studies on the function of reason in Qur'ānic interpretation include: *Rationalism and Literalism in Shī'ism* by 'Abd al-Majīd Ḥakīm Ilāhī; the application and scope of interpretive reason by 'Imrān Uwaisī and Sayyid Riḍā Mu'addab; an examination of the doubts raised by a group known as the "Appearanceists," who hold to the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān, by 'Alī As'adī; the function of reason in deriving meanings from mystical and ethical verses and traditions by Muṣṭafā Hamidānī; a study of rational interpretation in *Tafsīr Tasnīm* by Muḥammad 'Alī Dawlat; the role of reason in interpreting revelation according to both the Shī'a and Sunnī traditions (*Fariqayn*) by Faṭḥullāh Najjārzādīgān; the status and function of reason in Qur'ānic interpretation from the perspective of the Conceptualists; fourteen arguments for the permissibility and necessity of employing reason in interpreting the Qur'ān by Ḥamīd Ārīyān; the independence of understanding the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān from the rational sciences by Farajullāh Mīr'arab; and the role of reason and tradition in the interpretation of *'Uqūd al-Marjān* by Sayyid Aḥmad Imāmzādeh and Sayyid Sajjād Ghulāmī. Among the books that address the function of reason in interpretation are *An Analysis of Interpretive Trends* by Muḥammad As'adī et al., and *A Study of Interpretive Schools and Methods* by Alī Akbar Bābā'ī.

In any case, Ibn 'Āshūr advocates for rationality in such a way that he has considered the fundamental beliefs of Islam to be based on reason and even views legislation in a manner that the intellect understands its benefits and

purposes.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, he believes that obedience to a ruler is contingent on reason, otherwise considering, people partner with the ruler in sin and disobedience.<sup>2</sup> On this basis, he is advocating jurisprudence of objectives, which is considered a rational approach, and asserts that all Islamic laws are based on benefits for humanity.<sup>3</sup> He states that the jurist must understand the objectives of the Sharī'a.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, it becomes necessary to determine whether this rational orientation is consistently reflected in his interpretation of the Qur'ānic verses.

On the other hand, as Ibn 'Āshūr's commentary is one of the few interpretations that uses the term "reason" in its title, some have labeled him a "new Mu'tazilite," whereas groups committed to the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān (Appearanceists) have shown little interest in his views, despite his being considered Ash'arī. Therefore, it is necessary to examine his perspective on the function of reason as a source of interpretation. This article employs a descriptive, analytical, and critical method to assess his views, the evidences he presents, and his innovations regarding the use of reason in the interpretation found in *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*.

### 1. The Concept of Reason

Lexicographers have considered three meanings for the term "reason":

- 1) A faculty that serves as the basis for accepting knowledge.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) The knowledge whose product is the aforementioned faculty.<sup>6</sup>
- 3) Ibn Fāris defines reason as something that prevents a person from being shamed due to their words or actions.<sup>7</sup> This definition encompasses both of the above definitions.

Regarding reason in terminology, three general meanings have been mentioned that resemble its literal meanings:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Tahqīqāt wa anẓār fī al-Qur'ān wa al-Sunnah*, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Nazar al-faṣīḥ 'inda maḍā'iq al-anẓār fī al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 148-149.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*, 3:37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Maqāṣid al-sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*, 3:41.

<sup>5</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*, 577-578.

<sup>6</sup> Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*, 577-578; Ḥusayn Yūsuf Mūsawī, and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ṣa'īdī, *al-Ifṣāḥ fī Fiqh al-Lughah*, 139.

<sup>7</sup> Aḥmad Ibn Fāris, *Mu'jam Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, 70-71.

- 1) An immaterial entity external to the human self,<sup>8</sup> or the first emanation from Allah.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) A cognitive power through which objective realities -such as the existence of God, and soul, and ethical principles relevant to human life (e.g., justice, goodness, and the ugliness of injustice)- are understood.<sup>10</sup>
- 3) Some also regard reason as the perception and complete understanding of objects<sup>11</sup> and recognize the necessary truths, such as knowing the impossibility of impossibilities.<sup>12</sup>

The first and second definitions fall outside the scope of the present discussion and are therefore not relevant here. The third definition, however, constitutes the focus of our inquiry, as it concerns the validity of rational perceptions and their classifications—such as instrumental and source reason in interpretation—which are connected to this third meaning.

Although Ibn ‘Āshūr does not present a comprehensive or obstructive definition of reason, sometimes he considers it as the movement of the self in rational matters to recognize the truth,<sup>13</sup> while at other times, he considers insight as synonymous with reason, through which truths become apparent.<sup>14</sup> He identifies contemplation as the movement of reason towards using correct knowledge,<sup>15</sup> which belongs to the third division and is a topic we'll discuss.

Reason, with the meaning of understanding, can be divided into two types: the source and instrumental.<sup>16</sup> Some scholars use the terms *illuminating reason* and *source reason* for these two types to explain how reason interprets the Qur’ān by using internal and external evidence. In this case, we refer to it as illuminating or instrumental reason, which follows the narrative interpretation (*ma’thūr*). On the other hand, when we interpret the Qur’ān by using rational deductions based on theoretical and confirmation

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<sup>8</sup> Alidüstī, *Fiqh Wa Aql*, 70–71.

<sup>9</sup> al-Tahanawī, *Al-Mawsu‘ah Kashshāf*, 195.

<sup>10</sup> Muḥammad As‘adī and Sa‘īdī Rushan, *Pathology of Interpretative Currents*, 2:88; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 1:405 and 15:122.

<sup>11</sup> Ṭabāṭabā‘ī, *al-Mizān*, 1:122.

<sup>12</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 7:154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 7:418.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 7:244.

<sup>16</sup> Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, 1:169–170.

principles, which are intrinsic sources of reasoning and conventional sciences, reason plays the role of the source and is called "Source Reason."<sup>17</sup>

However, as will be discussed later, disagreements over the interpretation of *khavarī* attribution in the realm of theoretical reason constitute a source of dispute. Therefore, theoretical reason is also a source of conflict.

Since the origin authority of reason and the application of instrumental reason are not in dispute, we will not focus on them. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether Ibn ʿĀshūr considers source reason an independent authority, and how he deals with conflicts between reason and tradition.

Accordingly, the credibility of source reason in the domain of practical reason rests upon the doctrine of inherent and rational goodness and badness. This is a topic that has sparked debates between Ashʿaris with Muʿtazilites and Shiʿa. Therefore, it is necessary to examine Ibn ʿĀshūr's perspective on this matter, especially since he considers himself an Ashʿari while also being known for his intellectualism and "neo-Muʿtazilism." Afterward, the discussions related to the source theoretical reason and the conflict between reason and narrative will be addressed.

We know that goodness and badness are opposite to each other. They both refer to the concepts of elegance and beauty.<sup>18</sup> There are three definitions of goodness and badness:

- 1) possession of perfection or imperfection,
- 2) compatibility or incompatibility with nature, and
- 3) deserving praise or blame.

The third definition is the subject of dispute among the Ashʿaris, the Muʿtazilites, and the Shiʿa, and it is the one intended here.<sup>19</sup> Ibn ʿĀshūr did not interpret goodness and badness, but he defined the terms *maʿrūf* and *munkar*, which are similar to goodness and badness. He states that *maʿrūf* is something known and commonly used due to human familiarity and the consequent acclimatization to it. However, popularity alone does not suffice as a criterion; acceptance among the wise and in accordance with the laws is necessary for a thing to be just and beneficial.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, *munkar*

<sup>17</sup> Asʿadī, Saʿīdī Rushan, et al, *Pathology of Interpretative Currents*, 1:94–95; Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, 1:58–59.

<sup>18</sup> Mūsawī, and Saʿīdī., *Al-Ifṣāḥ Fī Fiqh al-Lughah*, 1:104 and 1:125

<sup>19</sup> Lāhijī, *Guhar Murād*, 345; al-Tahānawī, *Al-Mawsuʿah Kashshāf*, 1:666–667; Muḥammad Riḍā Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2:217–220.

<sup>20</sup> Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 4:40.

refers to an unknown thing because denial is ignorance, and it is typically used in the sense of abomination because humans have an aversion to what is unfamiliar. Therefore, what is foreign to humans is termed *munkar*. However, the meaning of *munkar* denotes falsehood and corruption because, if there are no adverse effects, humans dislike it.<sup>21</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr has emphasized two points in this definition: first, he has referred to the transformative impact of *ma‘rūf* and *munkar*, and second, he has stated that the criterion should be the wise and the laws rather than mere popularity, as sometimes popularity may be due to the prevalence of sins.

## 2. The Usage of Source Reason in *al-Taḥrīr wa’l-Tanwīr*

### 2.1. The Acceptance of Source Reason in the Interpretation of *al-Taḥrīr wa’l-Tanwīr*

To begin, it is useful to examine the broader trajectory of rationalism among Muslims in order to situate Ibn ‘Āshūr within this historical development. Translating of Greek works and introducing philosophy and logic into Islamic society from the second to fourth centuries caused a conflict between Muslim philosophers and theologians, ultimately leading to a fundamental transformation in theology. In this process, the Mu‘tazilite was overly influenced by philosophy, resulting in the division of the Ash‘aris from the Mu‘tazilites.<sup>22</sup> Within Sunnī Islam, *kalām* gradually moved closer to philosophy from the era of al-Juwaynī and especially al-Ghazālī onward. By the time of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī -particularly in *al-Muḥaṣṣal-* and Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī in *Abkār al-Afkār*, philosophical methods had become deeply integrated into theological discourse. This synthesis provoked criticism from scholars such as al-Dhahabī and Ibn Ḥajar. Ultimately, with Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī’s *al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, theology had become thoroughly philosophical in structure and method. Shī‘ī *kalām* likewise underwent a similar philosophical transformation with the contributions of Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.<sup>23</sup>

As Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī—who was initially affiliated with the Mu‘tazilites—interpreted the *khavarī* attributes after separating from them, he eventually came to accept these attributes in their literal, non-metaphorical sense.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the Ash‘ari movement transformed- while

<sup>21</sup> Muzaḥḥar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 4:40.

<sup>22</sup> Abū al-Faḍl Khurāsānī, “The Relationship of Islamic Discourse with Philosophy,” 71–72.

<sup>23</sup> Khurāsānī, “The Relationship of Islamic Discourse with Philosophy,” 77.

<sup>24</sup> Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Wāḥid Shujā’ and Ṣādiq ‘Abduḥ Sayf Ḥasan al-Sufyānī, *al-Furūq fī al-‘aqidah bayn Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Ash‘irah*, 93.

they initially received the *khbarī* attributes as literal- later scholars resorted to interpreting these attributes metaphorically.<sup>25</sup> This shift towards interpretation and rationalism is evident in the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Ghazālī, and others. We must now examine Ibn ‘Āshūr’s perspective on the role of reason as a source of knowledge. Upon studying his interpretations in *al-Taḥrīr wa’l-Tanwīr*, it becomes clear that unlike some Ash‘aris, Ibn ‘Āshūr accepts the validity of reason as a source of knowledge. For instance, he has no objection to philosophical discussions and logic as the foundations of source reason, and he frequently references them.<sup>26</sup> While many Ash‘arite theologians did not accept philosophy and some even issued rulings of excommunication or called for punitive action against its practitioners.<sup>27</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr maintains that all sciences, including philosophy and related disciplines, may legitimately be used in Qur’ānic interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

For example, Ibn ‘Āshūr explains why some things are pleasant and others are hateful to humans. He then cites the opinions of philosophers who failed to explain the root of affinity and antipathy toward the self. Finally, he expresses his own view that these emotions have various sources, including nervous influence, habit, hope for goodness, and seeking perfection, all of which cause either attraction or repulsion. He adds that some responses occur without any rational basis, such as perceiving beauty as goodness and frightening objects as badness, reactions that even children exhibit instinctively upon first exposure.<sup>29</sup>

From Ibn ‘Āshūr’s perspective, it may be said that the Qur’ān itself employs arguments based on reason as a source. According to the verse, "For I have lived among you for a lifetime before it. Will you deny your reason?"<sup>30</sup> he explains that the Qur’ān argues that the Prophet (PBUH) lived among the people for many years. Everyone witnessed that he neither read from the divine book nor was associated with poets, but rather engaged in worship in a corner. So how is it possible that he could suddenly speak such wise and eloquent words unless he had been granted worldly knowledge<sup>31</sup>? The very

<sup>25</sup> Shujā‘ and al-Sufyānī, *al-Furūq fī al-‘aqidah*, 164.

<sup>26</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr Wa al-Tanwīr*, 25:54, 27:140, 21:90-91, 3:61-65, 3:227, 25:175-186, 30:254, 14:331, 9:257, 3:225-227.

<sup>27</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, 1:307.

<sup>28</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, 1:44.

<sup>29</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, 3:225-227.

<sup>30</sup> 10/Yūnus:16.

<sup>31</sup> al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*, 1:123.



structure of this Qur'ānic argument presupposes the authority of reason, as the interpretations of other commentators below this verse demonstrate.<sup>32</sup>

These arguments from the Qur'ān are of the rational source type. However, the explanations offered by commentators in their discussion of such arguments are presented from the perspective of textual interpretation and thus fall under *instrumental reason*. Yet, because the arguments themselves are purely rational in nature, they are classified as *source reason*. In other words, the distinction between source and instrumental reason sometimes depends on the specific interpretive situation.

Ibn 'Āshūr not only considers the source reason to be valid, but also mentions conformity with them as one of the aspects of the Qur'ān's miracle. According to the verse "You cannot make the dead hear, nor can you make the deaf listen to your call when they turn their backs,"<sup>33</sup> he states that the Qur'ān has two characteristics.

1. The content of the Qur'ān conforms to sound reason in such a way that reason accepts it; this is the rational characteristic of the Qur'ān.
2. It has order and rhetoric that surpass the ability of Arabs and is a miracle of the Qur'ān. For this reason, the Qur'ān refers to those who fail to reflect on these two aspects as "the dead" and "the deaf."<sup>34</sup>

Ibn 'Āshūr's use of the term *sound reason* here is essentially synonymous with *source reason*, for what is intended is the conformity of the Qur'ānic content to reason itself, not interpretations derived through reasoning. Indeed, such attention to source reason based on an interpretation of the verse is at least rare.

In some cases, Ibn 'Āshūr limits the source reason. He refers to the verse, "Has He preferred daughters to sons? Do you have a manifest authority? Then produce your scripture, should you be truthful."<sup>35</sup> and asks whether the angels are the daughters of Allah and whether they are female or male. Reason cannot determine these two issues, and only hadith can provide knowledge. Although the word "sulṭān" in the verse contains both rational and narrative evidence, in the following verse, the rational evidence is

<sup>32</sup> Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, 11:262; Muḥammad Ḥusayn Fadlullāh, *Min Wahy Al-Qurān*, 11:284; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 10:29; Jawādī Āmulī, ' *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, 36:255; Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ Al-Ghayb*, 17:226.

<sup>33</sup> 27/al-Naml:80.

<sup>34</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 20:35.

<sup>35</sup> 37/al-Ṣāffāt:153-157.

excluded with the phrase "*fa'tū bi-kitābikum*"<sup>36</sup> therefore, reason is limited here.

But, this viewpoint is questionable because there are rational reasons to reject these two claims. Furthermore, we can say that the meaning of "*sulṭān*" in the verse is proof, not limitation. Therefore, not only is the claim of the polytheists not provable by reason or sense, but reason also rejects it. Thus, the only way for the polytheists is transmission, which does not exist. Based on this, the verse states, "*fa'tū bi kitābikum (bring forth your book).*"

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī provides a rational argument for the invalidity of the polytheists' claim, stating that God is the most perfect being, and an inferior being such as a female, is not deserving of worship.<sup>37</sup> Some argue that since angels are immaterial beings, they do not have gender.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, others have not recognized the limitation of source reason in this regard, and Ibn 'Āshūr likely lacks sufficient familiarity with rational sciences. The limitation of source reason in understanding religious rulings is another matter that Ibn 'Āshūr discusses under the verse "We said, 'Get down from it, all together! Yet, should any guidance come to you from Me, those who follow My guidance shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.'"<sup>39</sup> He states that the Mu'tazilites claim that the *Bi'that* (prophethood) of the Prophet is not necessary because reason guides humanity. Ibn 'Āshūr quotes this statement from al-Zamakhsharī and attributes it to the Mu'tazilites, and then responds that "... however, guidance is not only related to faith in God, where our intellect serves as a guide. Rather, guidance in religious obligations is also important, which can only be achieved through Prophet. The intellect cannot comprehend many of these obligations."<sup>40</sup> it is noteworthy that al-Zamakhsharī's position does not necessarily represent the view of all Mu'tazilites.

Ibn 'Āshūr does not specify whether the intended guidance mentioned in the verse is intellectual or legal. However, al-Rāzī considers guidance to encompass both intellectual and legal dimensions.<sup>41</sup>

The truth is that source reason has limitations in perceiving the details of religious commandments. For instance, it cannot determine why the Morning

<sup>36</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 23:184.

<sup>37</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 26:359.

<sup>38</sup> Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*, 26:417.

<sup>39</sup> 2/al-Baqarah:38.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 1:443; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:129.

<sup>41</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 2:472.

Prayer consists of two *rak'ats*.<sup>42</sup> However, even though reason may not always grasp the objectives behind these rulings, it recognizes that the legislator desires our well-being. Therefore, reason provides general rulings based on this principle. Consequently, the general rule is that whatever is deemed valid according to *Sharī'ah* is also deemed valid according to reason.<sup>43</sup>

From the Shī'ī perspective, certain reasons (not conjectural reasons such as *qiyās* and *istihsān*) serve as independent sources alongside the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.<sup>44</sup> This is because the *shar'ī* commandments are grounded in actual benefits and harms, which reason can comprehend. Accordingly, whatever reason perceives and determines to be beneficial is likewise affirmed by the *Sharī'ah*.<sup>45</sup>

There are also matters that source reason cannot fully comprehend, yet Ibn 'Āshūr has overlooked them, such as understanding the reality of Allah's essence and attributes<sup>46</sup> as well as the intricacies of the Resurrection and the details of the stories in the Qur'ān.<sup>47</sup>

## 2.2. Ibn 'Āshūr's View on the Rational Goodness and Badness

Since accepting rational goodness and badness depends on accepting the authority of reason as a source, it is necessary to clarify Ibn 'Āshūr's perspective on this matter before discussing the point of contention.

Contrary to Mu'tazilites, Shī'a believe that there is no criterion other than God's judgment for determining the goodness and badness of existing actions. Therefore, in ethical matters, there is no measure apart from the will of God. Anything considered good or bad by humans is only good if it aligns with the will of God.<sup>48</sup>

However, when it comes to intellectual goodness and badness, three conceivable meanings exist:

- 1) It can refer to perfection or imperfection. In this regard, the Ash'ari school of thought agrees with Mu'tazilites and Shī'a and acknowledges that goodness and badness in this sense are intellectual and included in certain judgments.

<sup>42</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 3:84; Jawādī Āmulī, *The Dignity of Reason*, 59.

<sup>43</sup> Alīdūstī, *Fiqh wa Aql*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 2:186; al-Anṣārī, *al-Mawsū'ah al-Fiqhiyah*, 2:405.

<sup>45</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 4:270; Alīdūstī, *Fiqh wa Aql*, 117-118.

<sup>46</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 8:57.

<sup>47</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān*, 3:84.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Bāqilānī, *Tamhīd al-Awā'il fī Talkhīṣ al-Dalā'il*, 1:341; Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 1:216.

- 2) Goodness and badness can also refer to the compatibility or aversion of the self, meaning the pleasure or pain experienced by the self. There is no disagreement concerning this meaning, and Ash'aris also accepts intellectual goodness and badness in this sense.
- 3) Goodness and badness can indicate praise and blame, meaning that reason determines whether a specific action is appropriate or deserves abandonment. Ash'aris reject this idea and consider religious law (*sharī'ah*) as the only worthy basis for such judgments. They believe that reason alone cannot perceive or make judgments, in contrast to the Shī'a and Mu'tazila, who maintain that reason, can independently make judgments.<sup>49</sup>

In contrast to the Ash'aris, Ibn 'Āshūr accepts intellectual goodness and badness. From his perspective, these are matters that sound reason and human nature affirm, and denying their opposites would be erroneous.<sup>50</sup> As God knows the goodness and badness of actions, as well as their benefits and harms, His wisdom necessitates creating human beings with the capacity to receive instruction and correction, and with an intellect capable of discerning the purposes behind morally good and bad actions.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Ibn 'Āshūr accepts goodness and badness in the sense of praise and blame, referencing it in certain cases. For instance, in verse 55 of Sūrat al-Naḥl, he states that ingratitude is condemned by all rational individuals.<sup>52</sup>

He explicitly states, in his commentary on the verse, "When they commit an indecency, they say, 'We found our fathers practicing it, and Allah has enjoined it upon us.' Say, 'Indeed, Allah does not enjoin indecencies. Do you attribute to Allah what you do not know?'"<sup>53</sup> that indecency is an act possessing an intense degree of moral badness—so severe that it repels sound human nature, is detested by the wise, and causes the perpetrator to feel shame and attempt to conceal the act. Therefore, even before the advent of religious law, such indecency was regarded as reprehensible according to sound reason and innate human disposition.<sup>54</sup>

From Ibn 'Āshūr's perspective, God has established vice and virtue within the realm of human intellect. Without reason, it would not be possible for

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<sup>49</sup> Muẓaffar, *Uṣūl al-fiqh*, 4:216–220.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 7:134–135.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 6:36.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 14:179.

<sup>53</sup> 7/al-A'rāf:28.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 8:82.

prophets to comprehend vice, virtue, reward, and punishment, and effectively communicate them to humans.<sup>55</sup>

With respect to instances of rational goodness and badness understood in terms of praise and blame, these correlates are directly tied to divine reward and punishment. Under such an understanding, the notion of punishment without the resurrection becomes theoretically conceivable. The Ash'ari school refers to the verse, "Whoever is guided is guided only for [the good of] his own soul, and whoever goes astray, and goes astray only to its detriment. No bearer shall bear another's burden. We do not punish [any community] until We have sent [it] an apostle."<sup>56</sup> to refute the concept of rational goodness and badness. Conversely, the Mu'tazilites interpret the verse, considering the Messenger to represent reason, aiming to prove that reason, without the necessity of a messenger, can guide humans to God and monotheism. However, Ibn 'Āshūr, defending the Ash'ari commentary, maintains that punishment does not occur until a messenger is sent. He rejects the Mu'tazilite interpretation on the grounds that the term "reason" cannot be substituted for "Messenger," and because the verb *ba'atha* ("to send forth") is never semantically equivalent to *ja'ala* ("to make" or "to render").<sup>57</sup>

To examine Ibn 'Āshūr's perspective, it is instructive to consider the views of other exegetes. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī maintains that the suspension of worldly punishment—out of divine mercy—is contingent upon the sending of a messenger, and that this principle applies only to secondary matters of religion (*furū' al-dīn*). On this basis, the validity of reason is not negated. Moreover, rational recognition is sufficient for accountability in the Hereafter, for the verse's wording of negation implies continuity of negation in the past. Thus, the verse expresses a divine practice (*sunnat Allāh*) rather than establishing or invalidating reason as a legal authority. Accordingly, the verse could have used the term "Prophet," yet it did not, because prophethood is a special divine rank associated with particular rulings—whether worldly punishment or worldly blessing—whereas reason, though a divine authority, does not entail such rulings. In other words, the divine practice is that although both the prophet and reason function as divine authorities within society, worldly punishment does not descend without the sending of a messenger, and this is out of divine mercy. Therefore, the verse

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<sup>55</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 30:370.

<sup>56</sup> 17/al-Isrā':15.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-tanwīr*, 15:52.

is not negating the validity of reason as an independent judge, so as not to undermine its epistemic legitimacy as a legal authority.<sup>58</sup> On this basis, Ibn ‘Āshūr’s interpretation does not reflect alignment with the Ash‘arīs on the issue of rational goodness and badness. His disagreement lies not with the Ash‘arī doctrine itself but with their interpretation of the verse—especially since Ibn ‘Āshūr explicitly affirms rational goodness and badness in several other places.

Regarding the validity of reason prior to resurrection, Ibn ‘Āshūr refers to the verse "Apostles, as bearers of good news and warners, so that mankind may not have any argument against Allah, after the [sending of the] apostles; and Allah is all-mighty, all-wise."<sup>59</sup> and he says that the phrase "*li'allā yakūna li'l-nās*" is not cause for the verb "*awḥaynā*" in the previous verse, but rather a reason for the bringers of goodness tidings and warners, and the verse is in the position of expressing one of the wisdoms of the mission of the prophets. *Hujjat* (proof) is something that implies the claimant's correctness and protects them from accountability. And since the sending of messengers is for cutting off excuses for humanity, it becomes clear that humanity, before the sending of messengers, has a *hujjat* (regarding certain actions) to say: "And lest—if an affliction were to befall them because of what their hands have sent ahead — they should say, 'Our Lord! Why did You not send us an apostle so that we might have followed Your signs and been among the faithful?'"<sup>60</sup>

As the ultimate goal is to warn and preach, it becomes necessary to remove every form of proof that people might invoke as an excuse. Therefore, when God sends messengers to eliminate argumentation (leaving no excuse for people), we understand that people have committed actions for which God intends to hold them accountable. However, it is divine mercy, rather than justice, that necessitates the sending of messengers, guidance, and warning, so that all excuses are cut off. On this basis, the verse implies that certain actions—when they contradict reason—even prior to the mission of the messengers, provoke divine displeasure; otherwise, the completion of the argument would have no meaning.

Furthermore, warning and preaching only express the consequences of actions, not the inherent goodness or badness of the actions themselves, because people already know them without a prophet. Thus, instructing

<sup>58</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 13:58-59.

<sup>59</sup> 4/al-Nisā':165.

<sup>60</sup> 28/al-Qaṣaṣ:47.

humanity in goodness and badness is not mentioned as the ultimate purpose of the prophetic mission. Accordingly, the verse indicates that holding individuals accountable for sins—whether in matters of belief, conduct, or negligence in recognizing God—constitutes the underlying rationale for sending the messengers, for through them the grounds for excuse are removed.

Another crucial point is that the sending of messengers completes the justice of God. If He had not sent a prophet, He could have punished people, because the creator can do it: “He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned.”<sup>61</sup> This sense of justice pertains to reward and punishment.<sup>62</sup> The Ash‘aris claim that none of the obligations, including God knowing and being held accountable for actions, can be proven without the verse (al-Isrā’, 15) except through the mission.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, the Mu‘tazilites argue that the mission represents mercy, not justice, since reason independently discerns goodness and badness. Accordingly, even in the absence of prophetic mission, holding individuals accountable would still be inherently just. Thus, the mission of the prophets both completes the argument against sinners and provides an opportunity for those seeking higher spiritual ranks to declare that, had they been guided, they would have attained the station of the truthful.<sup>64</sup> Taken together, these considerations reveal that Ibn ‘Āshūr aligns with the Mu‘tazilite position on this issue.

Ibn ‘Āshūr presents the Mu‘tazilite criticism of the Ash‘aris as follows: if God’s obligation to be known were based solely on revealed law, then the prophetic mission would be rendered futile. From a rational standpoint, reflection upon the words of the prophets would not be necessary; yet without such reflection, legal obligations cannot be established, for law is not a self-evident requirement of reason but a theoretical matter that demands contemplation. Ibn ‘Āshūr, however, does not find it adequate merely to defend himself against the Ash‘aris; rather, he defends them by arguing that even if listening to the Prophet were not a rational obligation, it remains a religious obligation, for we know that numerous divine legislations have summoned humanity to God. Hence, listening to the words of the Prophet is

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<sup>61</sup> 21/al-Anbiyā’:23.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 6:39-40.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 6:40 and 6:169-170.

<sup>64</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 6:40-41

an urgent religious requirement. Moreover, due to natural human curiosity, people are already inclined to pay attention to the words of the Messenger.<sup>65</sup>

However, Ibn ‘Āshūr does not clarify the basis from which the obligation to listen to the call of the first prophet arises. What if people—due to reasons such as excessive distractions—failed to attend to their innate curiosity? What, then, would be their responsibility? Even if we assume that evidence can be found showing that various past legislations have invited humanity to God, can anything other than rational proof indicate that one ought to investigate and listen to a claimant to prophethood?

Although Ibn ‘Āshūr has made an effort to justify the position of the Ash‘aris, he does not fully accept their viewpoint because, contrary to their opinion, he explicitly affirms that reason can identify the ugliness of certain actions, and he even holds that in the absence of prophethood, individuals who disregard the judgment of reason deserve divine punishment. Accordingly, like the Mu‘tazilites and the Shī‘a, he treats rational judgment—understood in terms of praise and blame—as possessing legal force, meaning that he accepts a correlation between the rulings of reason and those of the law. At the same time, he mentions the Ash‘arī perspective only in the capacity of reporting their view. These examples indicate a rejection of the Ash‘arī position, despite his identifying himself as an Ash‘arī and referring to them as “our companions.”<sup>66</sup> Based on this, he accepts the viewpoint of the, Mu‘tazilites and Shi‘a, “Whatever reason commands, the law commands,” and even defends the reverse, “whatever the law commands, reason commands,” and he regards the law as either consistent with reason or consistent with the welfare of the obligated, as long as it is not opposed to reason.<sup>67</sup>

Several aspects of Ibn ‘Āshūr’s position invite careful consideration:

- Ibn ‘Āshūr addresses the principle, held by the Mu‘tazilites and the Shī‘a, that “whatever the law commands, reason also commands.” Some argue that the Shari‘ah does not always issue rulings based on benefit and harm, but Ibn ‘Āshūr considers such a claim unfounded and maintains that there are rational grounds against it.<sup>68</sup> Thus, on one of the most significant points of disagreement between the Ash‘aris on the one hand and the Mu‘tazilites and the Shī‘a on the other, Ibn ‘Āshūr clearly aligns

<sup>65</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 6:41-42

<sup>66</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 8:148; 16:187.

<sup>67</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 21:91

<sup>68</sup> Alīdüstī, *Fiqh Wa Aql*, 115–117.



himself with the Mu‘tazilite–Shī‘ī position—and even goes beyond it. In other matters as well, like Mu‘tazilites and Shi‘a, he not only accepts the rational assessment of goodness and badness (as it involves talk of punishment) but also claims that there is a correlation between the ruling of reason and the law; because in the period of *fatrat*, he sees acting based on reason as a means of salvation from punishment. It is natural that if a ruling of reason does not have a legal burden; it will not have any significance as punishment. Taken together, this approach showcases Ibn ‘Āshūr’s intellectual openness in this domain.

- He holds that the purpose of sending prophets is to warn and convey the divine message, an act rooted in divine mercy rather than justice. People, with the help of reason, can discern the goodness and badness of certain actions. This statement is based on the Ash‘ari definition of *‘adl* (general justice). Otherwise, according to Ibn ‘Āshūr’s confirmation, reason does not discern all actions in terms of goodness and badness. Therefore, the mission of the prophets is based on specific justice and is necessary for teaching the assessment of goodness and badness in certain actions.
- Ibn ‘Āshūr falls into a contradiction when, on one hand, he states that the purpose of prophethood is to establish the proof (*hujjat*), and without it, the evidence of reason is sufficient for the descent of punishment. On the other hand, he maintains that in the absence of prophethood, punishment would be an instance of “general justice,” which would imply that God can commit injustice. Yet if rational judgment is sufficient for punishment to be justly imposed, then such punishment would not constitute injustice; rather, it would fall under “specific justice.” Furthermore, the notion of general justice is tied to denying the rational assessment of goodness and badness, while Ibn ‘Āshūr explicitly affirms such rational assessment—and even extends it by affirming its correlation with legal judgment.

### **2.3. Ibn ‘Āshūr’s View on the Conflict Between Reason and Revelation, and the Rational Interpretation of *Khabarī* Attributes**

Interpretation in this context refers to the precedence of certain reasoning over the apparent meaning of the Qur’ān or hadith, which is a source of contention among different schools of thought and reaches its peak in discussing the *khabarī* attributes.

The term *khavarī* attributes refers to those divine attributes whose proof relies on tradition, and reason does not have a means of proving them, unlike essential attributes that reason can prove.<sup>69</sup>

Regarding these attributes, there are various viewpoints. The *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* do not accept reason as an independent source for understanding religious teachings; they consider it only a tool for the proper interpretation of revelation. They are prone to allegorical interpretations when explaining ambiguous (*Mutashābih*) verses. On the other hand, the Mu'tazilite falls into arbitrary interpretations.<sup>70</sup>

However, the Ash'aris, with a more moderate position than the *Ahl al-Ḥadīth*, use the concept of "interpretation without asking how" for the *khavarī* attributes. They also reject allegorical interpretations<sup>71</sup> and interpret the attributes based on their apparent human meaning.<sup>72</sup> Some Ash'aris adopt a position of suspension (*tawqīf*), refraining from interpreting the *khavarī* attributes and leaving their true reality to God.<sup>73</sup> Some, like Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, believe that God possesses *khavarī* attributes, but these attributes are incomprehensible and dissimilar to creation.<sup>74</sup> However, the Ash'ari viewpoint faced some changes during a period where rational arguments and mystical approaches gained strength among them.<sup>75</sup>

But the correct approach among the majority of Imāmī interpreters is that the *khavarī* attributes are metaphorical expressions that utilizes the rhetorical devices, the language style, and conventions of the Arabic language to convey their intended meanings. Now, we need to see which of these approaches Ibn 'Āshūr adopts with respect to the *khavarī* attributes.

The Ash'arī position regarding the concept of *istawā* (ascending) and the '*arsh* (Throne) is that if God were not above the '*arsh*, all Muslims would not raise their hands towards the sky in prayer.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, he adopts a literal interpretation and does not resort to metaphorical interpretation. He mentions that God is settled on the '*arsh* in a manner befitting Him, as God Himself has stated, "He directs the command from the heavens to the earth;

<sup>69</sup> Subḥānī, *Buḥūthun fī al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 2:101.

<sup>70</sup> Subḥānī, *Buḥūthun fī al-Milal wa al-niḥal* 2:34.

<sup>71</sup> Subḥānī, *Buḥūthun fī al-Milal wa al-niḥal* 2:96.

<sup>72</sup> Subḥānī, *Buḥūthun fī al-Milal wa al-niḥal* 2:101.

<sup>73</sup> al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa-l-niḥal*, 1:92-93.

<sup>74</sup> al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-diyānah*, 22-23.

<sup>75</sup> Najafī and Biḥeshtī, "The Development of the Ash'arī Theory," 79.

<sup>76</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīyanah*, 101.

then it ascends toward Him in a day whose span is a thousand years by your reckoning. ...".<sup>77</sup>

However, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār holds that *istawā* implies domination and supremacy, and this usage is prevalent in the Arabic language. He refers to Arab poetry as evidence and states that the reason why *Istīlā* is specifically used concerning the 'arsh while God dominates the whole world is that the 'arsh is the greatest creation of God, thus deserving special attention.<sup>78</sup>

In this context, Ibn 'Āshūr, similar to the Mu'tazilites, interprets the verse metaphorically. Regarding the verse "the All-beneficent, settled on the Throne."<sup>79</sup> he says that he does not believe in the physicality or directionality of God and considers the verse as a metaphor highlighting the greatness of God by likening His dominion to earthly rulers, which the Arabs observed in Iran and Rome. The sitting of those rulers was a metaphorical expression used by the Arabs for exemplification. Therefore, the verse is among the ambiguous ones, but its interpretation is clear, and the Arabs frequently used such metaphors. We must adhere to the principle that nothing resembles God: "*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*", as stated in the Qur'ān.<sup>80</sup>

This position stands in contrast to the Ash'arī view—particularly that of the earlier generations—who refrained from interpreting the *khbarī* attributes. However, an allegorical interpretation of a verse does not occur regarding the conflict between its apparent meaning and reason, but rather due to a conflict between hadith and hadith (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*).

With regard to the concept of *Wajhullāh* the Ash'arīs hold that Allah has a *Wajh* (face) due to the verse, "Yet lasting is the majestic and munificent Face of your Lord,"<sup>81</sup> and he refrains from allegorical interpretations. By contrast, the Mu'tazilites maintain that the term *wajh* in the verse "Everything will perish except His Face"<sup>82</sup> refers to the essence of the Creator and is a commonly used term in the Arabic language, and the verse means that everything Allah possesses will perish except His essence, while Allah is far superior to such notions.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>77</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīyanah*, 101; 32/as-Sacdah:5.

<sup>78</sup> Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:150-151.

<sup>79</sup> 20/Tāhā:5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 16:148.

<sup>81</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīyanah*, 124-125; 55/al-Raḥmān:27.

<sup>82</sup> 28/al-Qaṣaṣ:88.

<sup>83</sup> Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:152.

*Ibn 'Āshūr* has moved in the direction of the Mu'tazilites and, in various cases, considered *Wajh* to mean essence.<sup>84</sup>

In the concept of *Yadullāh* and His Supremacy, Ash'ari, without resorting to allegorical interpretation, believes that Allah has a hand but without describing how, based on the verse "The hand of Allah is above their hands."<sup>85</sup> and similar verses.<sup>86</sup>

The Mu'tazilites believe that hand (*Yad*) in the verse "*Lamā Khalaqta Bi Yadi*"<sup>87</sup> means power, and in some verses, it means blessings, and this metaphor is commonly used in the Arabic language, as in the verse "*Bal Yadāhu Mabsūtātān*" No, His hands are wide open<sup>88</sup> carrying the same meanings.<sup>89</sup>

*Ibn 'Āshūr*, like the Mu'tazilites, also interpretes these verses metaphorically. From his perspective, "*Yadullāh Fawqa Aydihim*" in the verse "Indeed those who swear allegiance to you, swear allegiance only to Allah: the hand of Allah is above their hands"<sup>90</sup> emphasizes the preceding sentence "*Innalladhīna Yubāyī'ūnallāh...*", meaning that they have actually pledged allegiance to Allah, and it is an imagined form as if Allah has a hand higher than the hands of people. The addition of "*Yad*" to Allah indicates the superiority of Allah's hand over the hands of others.

However, the description of supremacy serves to enhance this imagination because, in a pledge of allegiance, the hands of both parties are placed upon one another. Therefore, the concept of supremacy here is a metaphor and an exaggeration in imagination.<sup>91</sup>

*Ibn 'Āshūr* does not address any conflict between reason, transmitted reports, and the apparent meanings of scripture in these cases; rather, he simply selects a meaning grounded in Arabic literary usage and free from anthropomorphism. He also does not discuss the different viewpoints of the Ash'aris, Mu'tazilites, and others. In general, he avoids delving into rational discussions as much as possible, which can be observed throughout his interpretations. On the other hand, al-Qāsimī al-Ash'ari interprets the verse in accordance with Ash'ari principles, stating that God's "hand," during their

<sup>84</sup> *Ibn 'Āshūr, Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 30:392; 20:197.

<sup>85</sup> 48/al-Faṭḥ:10.

<sup>86</sup> al-Ash'arī, *Al-Ibānah 'an Uṣūl al-Dīyanah*, 125.

<sup>87</sup> 38/Ṣād:75.

<sup>88</sup> 5/al-Mā'idah:64.

<sup>89</sup> Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:152.

<sup>90</sup> 48/al-Faṭḥ:10.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibn 'Āshūr, al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 26:157.

pledge of allegiance with the Prophet, is higher than their hands—meaning that by pledging allegiance to the Prophet, they are in fact pledging allegiance to God—without explicitly negating the divine “hand.” Although he cites al-Qāshānī’s view that “hand” signifies Allah’s power, he refrains from endorsing it himself so as not to contradict Ash‘arī theological foundations.<sup>92</sup>

According to Imāmī exegesis, this verse does not imply any corporeality on the part of God. Some interpreters take the term “hand” as a symbol of God’s power, while others understand it as denoting His favor upon the Prophet. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, while rejecting corporeality, regarded “hand” as a divine attribute rather than an aspect of the essence (*dhāt*) and held that one must affirm it without inquiring into its modality. He maintains that it is impermissible to ask about its “how,” and that narrations containing explicit comparisons should not be relied upon. By contrast, Fakhr al-Rāzī adopts an interpretation closer to that of the Mu‘tazilites and the Shī‘a, taking “hand” to mean God’s generosity toward the Prophet.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, some Ash‘arīs hold that interpreting “hand” with respect to God necessitates a figurative reading.<sup>94</sup>

The Ash‘arīs maintain, with regard to *‘Aynullāh*, that God possesses an “eye,” although its modality cannot be known.<sup>95</sup> However, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār understands the term as denoting divine knowledge, noting that the word carries this meaning in Arabic usage—for example, the expression “*jarā hādhā bi-‘aynī*” (“this occurred under my knowledge and supervision”).<sup>96</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr also follows the path of the Mu‘tazilites and provides an interpretation in line with them for the noble verse, “And that you might be reared under My [watchful] eyes,”<sup>97</sup> understanding (*‘Alā*) to mean companionship, similar to (*Bā’*) in the verse, “For indeed you fare before Our eyes.”<sup>98</sup> He also interprets (*‘Ayn*) in a metaphoric sense, meaning observation, just like when Allah says, “Build the ark before Our eyes and by Our revelation.”<sup>99</sup> To support his viewpoint, Ibn ‘Āshūr cites pre-Islamic poetry.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>92</sup> al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsīn al-Ta’wīl*, 8:487.

<sup>93</sup> Shāhīn and Khāzin, *Tafsīr al-Khāzan*, 2:60.

<sup>94</sup> Safarzadeh et al. “Investigations of the Narrative Attributes of God,” 31:7-39.

<sup>95</sup> al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibānah ‘an Uṣūl al-dīyānah*, 120-121.

<sup>96</sup> Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:151.

<sup>97</sup> 20/Ṭāhā:39.

<sup>98</sup> 52/al-Ṭūr:48.

<sup>99</sup> 11/Hūd:37.

<sup>100</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 16:218-219.

Thus, Ibn 'Āshūr engages in interpretation without falling into either allegory or anthropomorphism, as seen in his treatment of the verse, "Now await in patience the command of thy Lord: for verily thou art in Our eyes"<sup>101</sup>, where he interprets it accordingly and believes that the interpretation of (*bi A'yuninā*) is to have patience because you are under our attention and we are aware of your difficulties.<sup>102</sup>

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, a Mu'tazilite theologian, understanding the expression *al-sāq*, holds that the phrase "*yukshafu 'an sāq*" in the verse "The day when the catastrophe occurs"<sup>103</sup> refers to the intensity of terror in the Day of Judgment and is a common expression in Arabic.<sup>104</sup> Fakhr al-Rāzī also adopts the same interpretation.<sup>105</sup> No specific Ash'arī material beyond this point has been identified on the matter.

Ibn 'Āshūr interprets the expression "*yukshafu 'an saq*" as a metaphor used by the Arabs to signify severe distress, holding that the purpose of the verse is to describe the overwhelming terror that the disbelievers will experience on the Day of Judgment. He refers to the narration of Ibn 'Abbās and Arabic poetry to support his view.<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, on this particular issue, no substantive difference is observed between the views of the Ash'arīs, the Mu'tazilites, and Ibn 'Āshūr.

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, interprets the phrase *janb Allāh* by appealing to its linguistic meaning of "obedience" in the verse "Lest anyone should say, 'Alas for my negligence in the vicinage of Allah ...'".<sup>107</sup> Fakhr al-Rāzī rejects the view of those who attribute bodily limbs to God and offers an interpretation in which *janb* denotes God's rights, command, and obedience. He likewise cites Arabic poetry to support this meaning.<sup>108</sup> No specific Ash'arī material on this issue has been identified.

Ibn 'Āshūr defines "*janb*" in its literal sense as being near or in a certain direction. However, in the verse "*Janb allāh*," he considers it either a metaphor for servitude and the rights of Allah, or a simile where the sinful person is likened to a servant entrusted with sheep by his master, but due to his negligence, he causes the flock to perish. Due to his negligence, the

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<sup>101</sup> 52/al-Ṭūr:48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 27:83

<sup>103</sup> 68/al-Qalam:42.

<sup>104</sup> Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:153

<sup>105</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 30:614.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn 'Āshūr, *Al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 29:97-98.

<sup>107</sup> Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, 1:152; 39/al-Zumar:56.

<sup>108</sup> al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 27:466.

servant allows the flock to perish, and in such a situation he laments: “*Yā ḥasratā ‘alā mā farrattu fī janbi sayyidi.*”<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, no substantive difference is observed between the views of the Ash‘arīs, the Mu‘tazilites, and Ibn ‘Āshūr regarding this verse.

### Conclusion

The central question of this study was whether the rationalist orientation that characterizes Ibn ‘Āshūr’s jurisprudential thought is likewise reflected in his interpretation of the verses of the Qur’ān. In this regard, we have found that Ibn ‘Āshūr does not have a deep understanding of rational sciences and the various types of intellect. However, he has used source and instrumental reason in his interpretation, considering both authentic and textual evidence. He mentions some limitations for the source reason, which are not correct, but he acknowledges the important manifestations of the source reason, such as philosophy and logic. He explicitly states that they can be used for interpretation. Moreover, Ibn ‘Āshūr repeatedly relies on rational proofs as an independent source and explicitly adopts the foundational principle of intellectual goodness and badness. In doing so, he supports a theory of praise- and blame-based reason that diverges sharply from the classical Ash‘arī position. Indeed, he endorses both major propositions upheld by the Mu‘tazilites and the Shi‘a: namely, that “whatever reason commands, the Sharī‘ah commands, and whatever the Sharī‘ah commands, reason commands.” In several respects, his commitment to this correlation extends even beyond the arguments of some Mu‘tazilite and Shi‘ī theologians. In instances where apparent conflicts arise between reason and hadith, he interprets the hadith. This is particularly evident in his treatment of the *khbarī* attributes, where he departs in practice from the doctrine of *bilā kayf* traditionally associated with Abū’l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, despite not rejecting it explicitly. Instead, he employs literary, linguistic, and rhetorical analysis to avoid anthropomorphism. In his interpretation, he pays less attention to rational discussions. For example, while there are significant differences in the application of various types of intellect, he appears to be neglectful of them. He does not provide a clear explanation of the various types of intellect and does not elaborate on different perspectives and areas of conflict.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, 24:46; 39/al-Zumar:56.

In conclusion, it should be noted that further research may be undertaken on the status of reason in Ibn ‘Āshūr’s theory of *maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah*. Additionally, comparative studies could be conducted between Ibn ‘Āshūr’s rationalist tendencies and those of other exegetical schools—particularly literalist and traditionalist approaches—in order to assess their differing methodologies in the interpretation of the Qur’ān.

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