

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The mu'tazila's arguments against divine command theory

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Abstract

The Mu'tazilī theologians, particularly the later Imāmī ones, developed numerous interesting arguments against divine command theory. The arguments, however, have not received the attention they deserve. Some of the arguments have been discussed in passing, and some have not been discussed at all. In this article, I aim to present and analyse the arguments. To that end, I first distinguish between different semantic, ontological, epistemological, and theological theses that were often conflated in the debate, and examine the logical relation among them. Then I go over the Mu'tazila's arguments determining, among other things, which of the theses was targeted by each argument. In presenting the arguments, I focus mainly on the late *kalām* period, the period falling roughly between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries of the common era, as the arguments were at their most sophisticated level by this time.

Keywords: Morality; God; Divine Command Theory; Reason; *Sharia*; The Mu'tazila; The Ashā'ira; The Imāmī; The Late *Kalām* Period

Introduction

The relation between morality and God was a constant subject of debate in Islamic *kalām* theology. Although any general classification of the wide range of positions adopted by *mutakallimūn* (*kalām* theologians) on the relation between morality and God inevitably distorts and oversimplifies a complicated and rich history, the positions can be divided into two broad groups. On the one side, the Ashā'ira held that morality is dependent upon God. On the other side, the Mu'tazila maintained that morality is independent of Him.¹ Both sides of the debate developed numerous interesting arguments for their views. However, their arguments have not received the attention they deserve. Some of the arguments have been discussed in passing, and some have not been discussed at all. This is unfortunate, particularly considering the recent resurgence of interest in Islamic ethics. The resurgence is evidenced, for instance, by the launch of the relatively new *Journal of Islamic Ethics*, which is dedicated to publishing works in this area, and by the increasing publication of academic monographs and anthologies that study Islamic ethics, such as Afsaruddin (2011, 2013), Ali (2010, 2016), al-Attar (2010), El Fadl et al. (2019), Emon (2010, 2012), Emon et al. (2012), Farahat (2019), Ghaly (2010, 2016, 2019), and Ramadan (2008, 2018), to name just a few. The present article is an attempt to partially fill this

lacuna in the modern scholarship by presenting and analysing the Mu‘tazila’s arguments against the dependence of morality upon God.²

To do so, the discussion proceeds in the first section by distinguishing between the different senses that *mutakallimūn* attributed to ‘good’, and identifying the sense that corresponds to the contemporary notion of moral goodness. The next section disentangles different dependence relations – such as semantic, ontological, epistemic, etc. – that might be claimed to hold between morality and God that were often conflated in the debate. The subsequent section examines the logical relationships among these dependence relations. The final section explores the Mu‘tazila’s arguments against the dependence of morality upon God determining, among other things, which of the dependence relations is targeted by which argument. It also reviews some of the Ashā‘ira’s responses to these arguments and indicates how these responses might be rebutted.

Before proceeding to the first section, some methodological and historical remarks are in order. I will focus mainly on the late *kalām* period, the period falling roughly between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries of the common era, because the Mu‘tazila’s arguments against the Ashā‘ira’s views, as well as the Ashā‘ira’s responses to the Mu‘tazila’s arguments, were at their most sophisticated level by this time. More specifically, I will focus on Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 653/1274), Najm al-Dīn Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥillī (better known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī) (676/1277), and Ḥasan ibn Yūsuf ibn Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī (known as al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī) (d. 726/1325) on the Mu‘tazila side; and I will focus on ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (also known as al-Sayyid al-Sharīf) (d. 816/1413), and Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390) on the Ashā‘ira side.

The Ashā‘ira–Mu‘tazila division was originally a division within Sunnī Islam. By the late period, however, things had changed: while most Sunnī scholars of the late period were of the Ash‘arī inclination, it was mostly Twelver Shī‘ī, or Imāmī, *mutakallimūn* who advocated for Mu‘tazilī rationalist ideas.³ In fact, all the representatives of Mu‘tazila thought discussed in this article were Twelver Shi‘a. So the debate in the late period was mostly between the Sunnī Ashā‘ira and the Twelver Shī‘ī *mutakallimūn*.⁴

My approach here will be more philosophical than historical. That is, I will be more concerned with analysing claims and assessing arguments than tracing the historical development of claims and arguments. That is not to say that the historical approach is not important. Quite the contrary, I believe that philosophical and historical approaches should supplement one another.

Finally, I will draw at various points on recent advances in analytic philosophy. I believe that analytic philosophy and Islamic theology/philosophy can mutually serve each other. Recent logical and philosophical advances in the analytic tradition provide us with useful conceptual tools to better analyse the claims of Muslim theologians/philosophers and better assess their arguments. On the other hand, Muslim theological/philosophical ideas can serve as sources of inspiration for developing new solutions to contemporary philosophical or theological problems.

Different senses of ‘good’ (*ḥasan*) and ‘bad’ (*qabīḥ*)

Mutakallimūn of the late period distinguished between three senses of ‘good’ and ‘bad’: (1) perfection vs imperfection, (2) useful vs useless for one’s ends, and (3) praiseworthy vs blameworthy.⁵ Used in the first sense, good and bad are properties of properties. Knowledge, for instance, is a perfection, and so it is good; ignorance is an imperfection, and so it is bad. Used in the latter two senses, good and bad are properties of actions. An action is good in the second sense if and only if it contributes to the realization of one’s ends. This instrumental sense was later called ‘hypothetical imperative’ in Kant’s moral

philosophy. Used in the third sense of the words, an action is good/bad if and only if it is praiseworthy/blameworthy.

Which of these three is the moral notion? Note that *mutakallimūn* did not use (the Arabic equivalent of) ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ in their discussions. There are, however, good reasons to believe that the third notion best captures our notion of moral goodness and badness. First, *mutakallimūn* took the third notion to be at stake in discussions that we deem to be about morality. For instance, they used ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in the third sense when they discussed the relation between religion and morality. Second, and relatedly, proffered paradigm cases of good/bad in the third sense are likewise paradigm cases of moral good/bad. Thus, justice and unharmful truth-telling are given as paradigms of good actions, while oppression and unnecessary lying are given as paradigms of bad actions. Third, there is a tight connection between moral goodness and badness on the one hand, and praiseworthiness and blameworthiness on the other hand: if an action is morally good/bad, then it is praiseworthy/blameworthy. One might even argue that this conditional is an analytic truth, that is, true solely in virtue of the meaning of its terms.⁶ Thus, it is plausible to say that the third sense of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is the closest to the moral sense of the words. That said, the first sense (perfection vs imperfection) seems to be moral, too. So, one wonders why *mutakallimūn* did not talk about this notion when discussing the relationship between religion and morality.⁷

Which dependence relation?⁸

The fourteenth-century Imāmī *mutakallim* al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī characterizes the dispute between the Mu‘tazila and the Ashā‘ira as follows:

The Mu‘tazila have agreed that [moral] goodness and badness are rational matters. However, the Ashā‘ira have adopted the view that [moral] goodness and badness are acquired from *Sharia* [i.e. divine revealed law]. Thus, whatever the Lawmaker commands is good, and whatever He prohibits is bad; if there were no *Sharia*, there would not be any goodness or badness; and if God commands what He previously prohibited, the bad would be turned into good ... the Ashā‘ira adopted the view that it is [morally] permitted for God to do the bad and not to do the good.⁹

As indicated by the quoted passage, the debate between the Ashā‘ira and the Mu‘tazila often conflated different semantic, ontological, epistemological, and theological theses.¹⁰ Covered under one name, the theses that the Ashā‘ira upheld were collectively called ‘the theory of revealed goodness and badness’ (*al-ḥusn wa-l-qubḥ al-shar‘ī*). And the negations of the theses were collectively called ‘the theory of rational goodness and badness’ (*al-ḥusn wa-l-qubḥ al-‘aqlī*). To get a better grasp of the debate, we need to disentangle the theses:

(1) Semantic Thesis. At least some of the Ashā‘ira held that moral terms such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ have theological senses.¹¹ More specifically, they believed that their meaning is defined in terms of some divine action. Different divine acts have been proposed as figuring in the sense of moral terms. Here are some of the proposals:

- Definition I. ‘Act A is morally good’ means ‘God has commanded us to perform A’, and ‘Act A is morally bad’ means ‘God has prohibited us from performing A’.¹²
- Definition II. ‘Act A is morally good’ means ‘God praises whoever performs A’, and ‘A is morally bad’ means ‘God blames whoever performs A’.¹³
- Definition III. ‘Act A is morally good’ means ‘God has commanded us to praise whoever performs A’, and ‘Act A is morally bad’ means ‘God has commanded us to blame whoever performs A’.¹⁴

- Definition IV. ‘Act A is morally good’ means ‘God rewards in the hereafter whoever performs A’, and ‘Act A is morally bad’ means ‘God punishes in the hereafter whoever performs A’.¹⁵

In contrast, the Mu‘tazila argued that moral terms are conceptually distinct from God’s acts.

(2) Ontological Thesis. The Ashā‘ira held that moral facts reduce to certain facts about God’s actions. More specifically, they believed that the property of moral goodness is nothing over and above the property of *being commanded by God* (or some property in the vicinity) and the property of moral badness is nothing over and above the property of *being prohibited by God* (or some property in the vicinity).¹⁶ Thus, for the Ashā‘ira, moral properties are extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, properties of actions. That is, moral properties are not properties that actions have per se; rather, actions are good or bad insofar as they are, say, commanded or prohibited by God. Thus, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī say: ‘The goodness and badness of actions do not turn on something real in the actions prior to *Sharia* ... Rather, it is *Sharia* that establishes them.’¹⁷

Parallel to their different proposed definitions of moral terms above, the Ashā‘ira would identify the property of moral goodness with (I) the property of *being commanded by God*, or (II) the property of *being praised by God*, or (III) the property of *being divinely commanded to praise*, or (IV) the property of *being rewarded by God in the hereafter*. And *mutatis mutandis* for the property of moral badness.

In contrast, the Mu‘tazila argued that moral properties are independent of God’s actions. Some early Mu‘tazilīs, such as Abu al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 227/841), held that moral properties are intrinsic properties of actions. Some later Mu‘tazilīs, such as ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) held (at least on one interpretation)¹⁸ that moral properties of actions are determined by the consequences and the circumstances of actions.

Exploiting Gottlob Frege’s sense–reference distinction, we may explicate the distinction between the Semantic Thesis and the Ontological Thesis as follows. While the Semantic Thesis says that ‘good’ and ‘what God has commanded’ have one and the same Fregean sense, the Ontological Thesis says that the two terms have one and the same reference. Any two terms with the same Fregean sense refer to the same thing, but not every two co-referential terms have the same Fregean sense. ‘Water’ and ‘H₂O’, for instance, are co-referential, but they do not have the same Fregean sense. Therefore, the Semantic Thesis entails the Ontological Thesis, but not vice versa.¹⁹

Mutakallimūn conflated the Semantic Thesis with the Ontological Thesis perhaps because they didn’t distinguish between the Fregean sense and the reference of property terms such as ‘good’. They didn’t make the latter distinction perhaps because they were thinking in the Avicennian framework, according to which there is no epistemic gap between a quiddity and its concept in the mind. In the framework, one and the same quiddity exists both in the extra-mental and in the mental worlds.²⁰ Assuming that goodness is a quiddity, this line of thought leads one to hold that there is no gap between the Fregean sense and the reference of ‘good’.

(3) Epistemological Thesis. The Ashā‘ira held that we can gain moral knowledge solely through *Sharia*. Therefore, we cannot find out the moral status of acts by our independent reason. In contrast, the Mu‘tazila argued that we have epistemic access to the moral status of at least some actions through rational reflection. Hence, they are sometimes called ‘moral rationalists’.²¹ The Mu‘tazila did not, of course, claim that the moral status of *all* actions is rationally discernible. Rather, they divided actions into (1) actions whose goodness/badness is known in a self-evident way, such as the goodness of beneficial truth-telling (*al-sīdaq al-nāfi‘*) and the badness of harmful lying (*al-kidhb al-dārr*), (2) actions whose goodness/badness is known by rational argumentation, such as the goodness of

harmful truth-telling (*al-ṣidq al-dārr*) and the badness of beneficial lying (*al-kidhb al-nāfiʿ*), and (3) actions whose goodness/badness cannot be known by independent reason, but need to be learned from *Sharia*, such as the goodness of fasting during Ramaḍān and the badness of fasting on the first day of Shawwāl. Even concerning the first two types of actions, the Muʿtazila didn't reject the usefulness of *Sharia* in helping (*muʿāḍada*) the independent reason discern the moral goodness/badness.²²

(4) Weak Theological Thesis. The Ashāʿira held that God is not constrained, either in what He does or in what He commands others to do, by morality. For morality is determined by God, not vice versa. Thus, He can lie, and command others to lie, as lying has no moral property prior to God's command.²³ In contrast, the Muʿtazila argued that God does not do anything immoral. They argued that we can make sense of divine justice (an important Islamic doctrine) and other divine moral attributes only if God abides by predetermined moral principles. Hence, they are sometimes called 'people of justice' (*ahl al-ʿdl* or *al-ʿadliyya*).²⁴

In fact, both the Ashāʿira and the Muʿtazila agreed that God does not command (prohibit) others to do what is morally wrong (right). But they held the view for different reasons. For the Ashāʿira, God does not command (prohibit) others to do what is morally wrong (right) because moral wrongness (rightness) is determined by what God commands (prohibits) others to do, and so it is trivially true that He does not command (prohibit) others to do what is morally wrong (right). For the Muʿtazila, God does not command (prohibit) others to do what is morally wrong (right) because God is a perfectly moral being.²⁵

(5) Strong Theological Thesis. A stronger thesis about God's freedom is suggested in some Ashʿarites texts. The stronger thesis says that God's freedom is constrained neither by moral reasons nor by non-moral reasons. For instance, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī say that the best evidence we have for the belief that God does not lie is scriptural.²⁶ This remark suggests that there is no reason, neither moral nor non-moral, why God will not lie. However, other Ashāʿira held that even though God is not morally obliged not to lie, lying is a (non-moral?) imperfection, and so, being a perfect being, God would not lie.²⁷ In contrast, the Muʿtazila held that 'God – Exalted He is – acts for some end, and He does not do anything without a benefit'.²⁸

It is worth emphasizing that the distinction between the foregoing theses is important, not only for a proper understanding of the historical debate between the Ashāʿira and the Muʿtazila, but also to avoid fallacious reasoning in our contemporary discussions over the relation between morality and God. For example, without sharply distinguishing between the Semantic Thesis and the Ontological Thesis, one might fallaciously argue that since the concept of goodness is not equivalent to that of what accords with divine will, morality is ontologically independent of God. The reasoning is fallacious because, as will be discussed in the next section, the falsity of the Semantic Thesis is logically compatible with the truth of the Ontological Thesis.²⁹ Or, without clearly distinguishing between the Weak Theological Thesis and the Strong Theological Thesis, one might fallaciously argue that since God always acts for some reason, His actions are guided by moral reasons. This argument, too, is fallacious because, as will be shown in the next section, the falsity of Strong Theological Thesis is logically compatible with the truth of the Weak Theological Thesis.

The logical relations among the theses

Before proceeding to the arguments that the Muʿtazila raised against Ashāʿira's view, it will be instructive to consider the logical relations among the foregoing theses.

The Ontological Thesis is entailed by the Semantic Thesis: as a matter of logic, if 'good' just means 'what God has commanded', then the property of goodness is just the property

of *being commanded by God*. However, the entailment relation does not hold in the reverse direction: one can consistently hold that the property of goodness is identical with the property of *being commanded by God* and deny that the concept of God is contained in the concept of good. There are, in fact, abundant cases where two terms refer to the same property but are different in sense, such as 'hot' and 'having molecular motion', 'black' and 'absorbing every wavelength of light', 'being made of gold' and 'being made of atomic number seventy-nine', etc.

The Ontological Thesis suggests the Epistemological Thesis: once one takes the property of goodness to be identical with the property of *being commanded by God*, one is naturally led to believe that to know what acts are good/bad one must refer to God's own words. However, the Ontological Thesis does not entail the Epistemological Thesis. For one can coherently believe that the property of goodness is just the property of *being commanded by God*, but also believe that God might reveal His commands to man through other media, such as moral intuitions. So, although the Epistemological Thesis is strongly suggested by the Ontological Thesis, the former is not entailed by the latter. Also, note that the Epistemological Thesis does not entail the Ontological Thesis. For instance, one can coherently believe that moral properties are independent of God's commands, but still believe that it does not fall within the purview of reason to discover the moral status of acts, and that reason needs the guidance of revelation to learn about morality.

The Weak Theological Thesis is entailed by the Ontological Thesis: if the property of goodness is just the property of *being commanded by God*, then there is no morality prior to God's commands to constrain what God can do or can command. The entailment relation does not, however, hold in the reverse direction: it is logically consistent with the ontological independence of morality from God that He is unbounded by morality, as morality might not apply to God in the first place. For the entailment relation to hold, we need to rule out the latter possibility: if God is not constrained by morality (Weak Theological Thesis) and morality applies to God (negation of divine amorality), then morality is determined by God.

The Weak Theological Thesis is also entailed by the Strong Theological Thesis: as a matter of logic, if God is not constrained by any laws whatsoever, He is not constrained by moral laws. Obviously, the entailment relation does not hold in the reverse direction: God might be constrained by laws that are not moral in nature.

The Strong Theological Thesis is not entailed by any of the other theses. Even if morality is dependent in all the foregoing ways on God, His actions and commands might still be constrained by certain non-moral reasons. For instance, being Wise (*al-ḥakīm*) His actions might be constrained by rational considerations.

The conjunction of the Strong Theological Thesis and the Ontological Thesis entails the absolute arbitrariness of morality, for on the Ontological Thesis, morality is determined by God's commands. Furthermore, on the Strong Theological Thesis, God's commands are not constrained, or guided, by any consideration whatsoever. Thus, the conjunction makes morality absolutely arbitrary. Indeed, some of the Ashā'ira have embraced the arbitrariness of morality.³⁰

The Mu'tazila's arguments against divine command theory

The Mu'tazila, who rejected the dependence of morality on God, launched a series of objections against the Ashā'ira's view. And, as mentioned earlier, neither the Ashā'ira nor the Mu'tazila clearly distinguished among semantic, ontological, and epistemic dependence, and so it was not always clear which of the foregoing theses each of the Mu'tazila's objections targeted. In this section, I present and analyse the Mu'tazila's arguments against the Ashā'ira's view determining, among other things, which of the

foregoing theses each of Mu'tazila's arguments aims to refute. I also review some of the Ashā'ira's responses to the Mu'tazila's arguments, indicating how the responses might be rebutted.

The argument from divine goodness

From their early times, the Mu'tazila's main motivation for their view was to make sense of divine moral attributes, particularly divine justice (*al-ʿadl al-ilāhī*). Throughout the Quran, God is presented as just (*al-ʿādil*),³¹ kind (*al-raʿūf*),³² benign (*al-barr*),³³ gracious (*al-raḥmān*),³⁴ merciful (*al-raḥīm*),³⁵ the most generous (*al-akram*),³⁶ forgiver (*al-ghafūr*),³⁷ appreciative (*al-shākir*),³⁸ truthful (*al-ṣādiq*),³⁹ etc.⁴⁰ Many regard God as worthy of worship precisely because of these moral attributes. These attributions, however, lose their substantive content if morality is determined by God. For instance, if justice is defined by how God treats others, then to say that God is just is to say that God treats others as He does. Due to their emphasis on divine justice, the Mu'tazila and their Imāmī allies are sometimes called 'people of justice'. But there is no reason for restricting the argument to divine justice, and not generalizing it to other divine moral attributes. This reasoning maintained its force into the late period, even though the Imāmī *mutakallimūn* of the late period did not explicitly articulate it in the form of a distinct argument.⁴¹

So the Mu'tazila's main motivation for making morality independent of God was to secure divine goodness. On the Ashā'ira side, the main motivation for rejecting the independence of morality from God was to secure divine absolute power. On their view, God is not genuinely omnipotent unless He is not constrained by morality (or non-moral laws, for that matter).⁴² Perhaps this conception of divine omnipotence was itself motivated by Quranic verses stating that God does whatever He wills, without constraint.⁴³ Thus, the debate between the Ashā'ira and the Mu'tazila can be viewed as a debate between two conceptions of divinity. On the Ash'arī conception, God is Absolute Power (so is not subject to any law whatsoever); whereas, on the Mu'tazilī conception, God is Perfectly Good (in a substantial sense of the word).

The argument from divine goodness, if sound, refutes both the Ontological Thesis and the Weak Theological Thesis. Given that a refutation of the Weak Theological Thesis is thereby a refutation of the Strong Theological Thesis, the argument, if sound, refutes the latter, too. And given that the Semantic Thesis cannot be true unless the Ontological Thesis is true, the argument, if sound, refutes the Semantic Thesis as well. Since the Epistemological Thesis is logically compatible with the falsity of the foregoing theses, the argument leaves the latter thesis intact. (For the logical relations among the theses, see the previous section.)

The argument from common moral knowledge

Most atheists appreciate the moral goodness/badness of at least some actions. For example, they, as well as any other rational person, know that helping the poor is morally good, and killing a child for no good reason is morally bad. Therefore, the Mu'tazila argued, morality is independent of religion:

Verily, we know with certainty that some things are [morally] good and some things are [morally] bad, [and we know this] without considering revelation. Thus, every sane person firmly believes that charity is good, and they praise the charitable, and [firmly believes] that injustice is [morally] bad, and they blame the unjust. These [moral beliefs] are necessary judgments, and not subject to any doubt; and they are not acquired from *Sharia*, as the Brahmins and atheists, who do not believe in any *Sharia*, also make the [moral] judgments.⁴⁴

This argument is, in fact, ambiguous between rather two different ones:⁴⁵

A semantic argument

1. If (as the Semantic Thesis says) the concept of divine command/prohibition is contained in the concept of moral goodness/badness, then one cannot believe that a given act is good/bad without believing that God commands/prohibits the act.
2. One can believe that a given act is good/bad without believing that God commands/prohibits the act.
3. Therefore, the concept of divine command/prohibition is not contained in the concept of moral goodness/badness.

and

An epistemological argument

1. If (as the Epistemological Thesis says) moral knowledge is gained only through revelation, then people who do not believe in any revelation will not have moral knowledge.
2. People who do not believe in any revelation have moral knowledge.
3. Therefore, moral knowledge can be gained through media other than revelation.

Obviously, the semantic argument aims at refuting the Semantic Thesis, and the epistemic argument aims at refuting the Epistemological Thesis. But since the falsity of either thesis is logically compatible with the truth of the other theses, both arguments leave the latter theses intact. Particularly, the arguments do not show that the Ontological Thesis is false. That is, they do not show that moral properties are not determined by God.

Some earlier Ashā'ira tried to undermine the epistemic argument by denying any pre-revelation knowledge of goodness or badness. Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), for instance, argued that those who, like the atheists, deny revelation altogether, do not have any knowledge (*ilm*) of goodness or badness, but only belief (*i'tiqād*).⁴⁶ In a similar manner, al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1158) argued that a person who is fully competent to understand and reason, but who has received no moral education, would recognize at once the truth of the proposition that two is larger than one, but would suspend judgement on the proposition that lying is bad.⁴⁷

The Ashā'ira of the late period, however, granted that all rational persons appreciate the goodness/badness of at least some actions. But they tried to undermine the epistemic (as well as the semantic) argument by denying that the concept of goodness/badness at stake here is the moral one. According to them, 'good' and 'bad' are used here, not in the sense of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, but in the instrumental sense. (For different senses of 'good' and 'bad', see the section 'Different senses of "good" (*ḥasan*) and "bad" (*qabīḥ*)' above.)⁴⁸

To debunk the latter Ash'arite response, one might appeal to cases where no clear end is served by an appreciably good action. For instance, suppose whether you tell the truth or lie, you will achieve your desired end. In such a situation, neither telling the truth nor lying would benefit or harm you. However, it is still appreciably good to tell the truth, and it is still appreciably bad to lie. Or, suppose that a child is drowning, that saving the child will not benefit you, and that it may even be a hardship for you. In such a scenario, it is still appreciably good to save the child, even though no benefits are gained from the action.⁴⁹

The Ashā'ira of the late period tried to explain away such cases by showing that even in such scenarios instrumental, rather than moral, goodness/badness is involved. In the case where truth-telling or lying would bring no benefit or harm to you, al-Ījī and al-Jurjānī

argued that we still judge truth-telling to be good and lying to be bad 'because it has been established in the souls that truth-telling is in agreement with the well-being of all people, and lying is in disagreement with it'.⁵⁰ As for the case where saving a drowning child does not benefit you, they argued that one judges the action to be good because one puts oneself in the child's shoes, and 'imagines that the same happens to oneself'.⁵¹ Thus, even in such cases, the Ashā'ira of the late period argued, it is not the moral notion of goodness/badness that is at stake, and so such cases do not provide evidence against the Ash'arite view.

The argument from moral non-arbitrariness

If, as the Ashā'ira say, the goodness/badness of actions is determined by God's will (the Ontological Thesis), and God's will is not governed by any law (the Strong Theological Thesis), then morality would be arbitrary. However, this consequence is counter-intuitive, and so implausible:

If [moral] goodness and badness are determined by *Sharia*, then it would be fine for God to command disbelief, denying the prophets, glorifying the idols, observing adultery and theft ... as the actions would not be evil per se ... and thanking the benefactor, returning the deposit, and truth-telling would not be good per se; if God were to prohibit them they would become evil. But since it happened, without any objective or reason, that God commanded them, they became good. Likewise, it happened that God prohibited those [former] actions, and so they became evil. Before He commanded [the latter actions] and prohibited [the former actions] there was no difference between the actions. Anyone whose reason leads him to follow someone whose conviction is this is the most ignorant of the ignorant, and the most foolish of the foolish.⁵²

This argument, if sound, shows that at least one of the two theses – that is, the Ontological Thesis or the Strong Theological Thesis – is false. The argument as formulated above seems to be one of the strongest of the Mu'tazila's arguments against divine command theory. The Ashā'ira (at least the ones I am focusing on in this article) have not responded, to the best of my knowledge, to this formulation of the argument.

In the quoted passage, the argument is formulated as an argument from the non-arbitrariness of morality. However, in his reconstruction of the argument, the fourteenth-century Ashā'irī Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348) presents the argument as an argument from the absoluteness of morality. On this reading, the argument is something along the following line. If morality is determined by God's will, then, given that God might will different things for different communities, morality would turn out to be relative. Thus, one and the same action would be good for one community and bad for another community. However, morality is not relative. Therefore, morality is not determined by God's will.⁵³ Having reconstructed the argument along the foregoing line, al-Iṣfahānī goes on to respond to the argument by suggesting that perhaps God wills the same thing for all communities.⁵⁴

The argument from the possibility of prophecy verification

One traditional way to verify the veracity of a prophetic claim is by miracles. In response to the request for a proof of prophecy, prophets performed various miracles. But performing miracles will not provide us with a proof of prophecy unless we know that God is not deceptive. Otherwise what would stop God from putting a miracle in the hands of a fake

prophet? Furthermore, we cannot know that God is not deceptive unless (i) we know that God abides by moral principles, and (ii) we have epistemic access to morality independent of the prophet's religion. Thus, making God morally irresponsible (Weak Theological Thesis) or making our moral knowledge dependent on revelation (Epistemological Thesis) would make it impossible to verify a prophecy claim:

Knowledge of [the veracity of] prophecy is based on miracle. So, if it were not wrong to reveal miracle on the hand of a liar, the truthfulness of the prophet would not be knowable. Therefore, making that [moral piece of] knowledge dependent on *Sharia* is objectionable.⁵⁵

This argument aims at refuting both the Weak Theological Thesis and the Epistemological Thesis. Given that a refutation of the Weak Theological Thesis is thereby a refutation of the Strong Theological Thesis, the argument, if sound, refutes the latter too. Furthermore, given that both the Ontological and the Semantic Theses imply the Weak Theological Thesis, the argument indirectly aims at refuting the former two theses as well. Thus, this argument is one of the most comprehensive arguments of the Mu'tazila because it targets, directly or indirectly, all the theses endorsed by the Ashā'ira.

Several responses were given to this argument. It goes beyond the scope of this article to review all of them. So I confine myself to the responses that were adopted by the Ashā'ira of the late period.⁵⁶ According to the first response, which can be traced back to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,⁵⁷ the reason that God does not put miracles in the hand of a liar is not that doing so is morally wrong, and that God abides by morality. Rather, our justification for the belief is based on inductive reasoning. As with other regularities (*al-ādīyyāt*) in the world, we know from experience that God will not deceive people by miracles.⁵⁸

One might find the response wanting for two reasons. First, the inductive reasoning is not supported by sufficient observations. How many true prophets with miracles have we observed? Is that number great enough to justify the conclusion? Second, how do we know that the past observed miracle-performing, purported prophets were true prophets? Our reason cannot be based on an induction from previous cases. To see why, take a miracle-performing, purported prophet at a time T_n . According to the Ashā'ira, we know that the miracle-performing, purported prophet was a true prophet because the miracle-performing, purported prophets before T_n , including the one immediately prior to him at T_{n-1} , were true prophets. But how do we know that the miracle-performing, purported prophet at T_{n-1} was a true prophet? The Ashā'ira would presumably reply by appealing to the miracle-performing, purported prophets before T_{n-1} , including the one immediately prior to him at time T_{n-2} . But the same question applies to the latter purported prophet, and the Ashā'ira would presumably reply by appealing to the miracle-performing, purported prophets before him. This procedure cannot continue for long. For the more we go in the past, the weaker the induction becomes, and more importantly, the veracity of the first miracle-performing, purported prophet could not be established in this way. Therefore, to verify the veracity of at least one miracle-performing, purported prophet, we need to rely on the argument from morality.⁵⁹

The second response to the argument, which can be traced back to al-Juwaynī,⁶⁰ relies on a conception of miracle, according to which a miracle works, not as an indication, but as an appointment of prophethood. The idea is that God does not put a miracle in the hands of His prophet to indicate that he is a genuine prophet, but rather to appoint him as such. Thus construed, God's creating a miracle is like saying 'I hereby appoint you as my representative'. Such an utterance does not *describe* some state of affairs, but rather *brings about* one – that is, someone's being a representative. In *kalām's* technical

terminology, the utterance is an *inshā'* (performative utterance) rather than an *ikhbār* (assertive utterance). Similarly, a miracle does not signify prophecy, but rather introduces it. Thus, a miracle is not the sort of thing for which the question of truth and falsity arises, just as it does not for the utterance 'I hereby appoint you as my representative'. Therefore, the Ashā'ira concluded, the problem of divine deception is resolved.⁶¹

However, one might argue that construing miracle as an act of appointment will not resolve the problem of divine deception because it does not eliminate the possibility that God performs the act of appointment *insincerely*, namely, without a genuine intention to appoint the purported prophet as His prophet. As with any other performative speech act, sincerity is a necessary condition for the divine appointment to take place successfully.⁶² So although the question of truth and falsity does not arise for a miracle thus construed, the question of sincerity and insincerity does arise for it. And we cannot know that God does not act insincerely unless (1) we can know independently of *Sharia* that an insincere act is morally wrong, and (2) God does not commit what is morally wrong.

A third response to the argument is suggested by some Ashā'ira of the late period. In their discussion on prophecy, they enumerated three different ways of verifying a prophecy claim, only one of which involves miracles. So one might argue that by using the other two ways of prophecy verification, one can avoid the conclusion that morality is independent of religion. One of the two ways is to appeal to previous prophets' testimony.⁶³ Thus, Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 702/1303) and Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490), among others, quoted several passages from the Old and New Testaments, which purportedly anticipate the coming of the prophet of Islam by giving descriptions of him that were met by Muḥammad ibn 'Abdullāh.⁶⁴ The other way to verify a prophecy claim is to appeal to the prophet's moral character. Thus, one tells a true prophet from a fake one by checking the moral deeds and doctrines of the prophet against one's moral intuitions. Here is how 'Abdallāh al-Bayḍāwī (d. between 699/1299 and 705/1306) articulates the argument from moral character:

Also [among the reasons for Muḥammad's prophecy is that] the bundle of his characteristics and attributes, which have been frequently reported, such as constant company of truthfulness, abandonment of worldly matters throughout his life, utmost generosity, courage to the extent that he did not flee anyone [in battle] even if the terror was mighty like the day of Uḥud, eloquence which surpassed that of the most eloquent among Arabs, perseverance in his mission despite troubles and hardship, belittling the rich, and humbleness towards the poor, is only for [genuine] prophets.⁶⁵

However, neither of the two foregoing ways of prophecy verification – that is, the argument from previous prophets' testimony and the argument from moral character – can help one avoid the view that morality is independent of religion. Regarding the argument from moral character, a purported prophet's moral character cannot be used as evidence for the truth of his prophecy claim unless one has moral knowledge independent of the prophet's religion. Thus, for this argument to work, at least the Epistemic Thesis must be rejected. The argument from previous prophets' testimony also requires the independence of morality from religion. To see why, take the prophet of Islam. According to this argument, we may verify his genuine prophecy by referring to Jesus' descriptions of him. But how do we verify Jesus' prophecy? Presumably by appeal to the testimony of the prophet before him. This process of verifying the prophecy cannot continue *ad infinitum*. For we will finally get to the first prophet before whom no prophet anticipated the next prophet. At this point, we must appeal either to a miracle or to the moral character

of the prophet to verify the prophecy. And, as shown earlier, both ways require the falsity of at least one of the Ashā'ira's theses.

The argument from the circularity of the Ashā'ira's view

According to the Ashā'ira, we acquire knowledge of the good/bad by referring to *Sharia*. But we cannot infer the goodness/badness of things from *Sharia* unless we know that God does not lie in His *Sharia*. This latter piece of knowledge cannot, on pain of circularity, be itself based on what *Sharia* says. Rather, we can know that God does not lie in His *Sharia* only if (1) we can know independently of *Sharia* that lying is morally wrong, and (2) God abides by morality. Therefore, the Ashā'ira's position is not tenable:

If goodness and badness are to be established by *Sharia*, they can be established neither by *Sharia* nor by Reason. The consequent is false by consensus. So is the antecedent. Here is the justification for the conditional: If we don't rationally know the goodness or badness of things, we don't judge that lying is bad. So, it would be permissible for God to lie, exalted be He in high exaltation above that!⁶⁶ Thus, when we are informed by *Sharia* that something is bad, we cannot be sure that it is bad, and when we are informed by *Sharia* that something is good, we cannot be sure that it is good.⁶⁷

This argument, if sound, shows that the very validity of *Sharia* rests on the falsity of the Epistemological and the Weak Theological Theses. Given that the Weak Theological Thesis is entailed by each of the Semantic, Ontological, and Strong Theological Theses, the argument indirectly targets the latter theses as well. Thus, as with the previous argument, this argument is one of the most comprehensive arguments of the Mu'tazila.

As with the previous argument, this argument was countered by numerous responses from the Ashā'ira. I content myself with two responses that were popular with the Ashā'ira of the late period.⁶⁸ The first response, which can be traced back to al-Ghazālī,⁶⁹ exploited a distinction between what the Ashā'ira called 'divine lettered speech' (*al-kalām al-lafẓī*) and 'divine unlettered speech' (*al-kalām al-naḥsī*). Divine lettered speech is the historical Quran, namely, a bunch of inks and sounds that originated at the time of the Prophet, whereas divine unlettered speech is the meaning of the historical Quran, which resides in God. Thus, although divine lettered speech (i.e. the historical Quran) came into existence at some point in the past, divine unlettered speech (i.e. the meaning of the historical Quran) existed in God from eternity.⁷⁰

The first response to the above argument was that the question of lying simply does not arise with respect to divine unlettered speech. For divine unlettered speech is, so to speak, God's inner speech that corresponds to His knowledge. And being omniscient, falsity is inconceivable in the case of God's inner speech.⁷¹

The problem with this response is that it only shows that the divine unlettered speech, if there is such a thing at all, is true. But it does not show that His created, lettered speech, namely, the concrete Quran, is true. And, in this discussion, '*Sharia*' means something like 'from the concrete Quran'.⁷²

The second response, advocated by al-Taftāzānī and later by al-Qūshchī (d. 879/1474), is as follows. We do not *infer* the goodness of an action from its being commanded in *Sharia*; rather, the goodness of an action is simply its being commanded in *Sharia*. And to find out whether an action has been commanded in *Sharia*, we just need to look at *Sharia*'s statements. Thus, by equating being good with being commanded in *Sharia*, and being bad with being prohibited in *Sharia*, some Ashā'ira tried to bypass the objection:

We do not take the [*Sharia's*] command and prohibition as an indication of goodness and badness so that your objection applies. Rather, we take the goodness of an action to consist in the action's being the object of the [*Sharia's*] command and praise, and the badness of an action to consist in the action's being the object of the [*Sharia's*] prohibition and blame.⁷³

The contemporary Imāmī scholar Jafar Subhani has found this response wanting. According to him, we must distinguish between serious, honest statements and frivolous, dishonest ones. According to Subhani, for any version of divine command theory to be tenable, the goodness/badness of actions must depend on serious, honest statements. And we can know that statements of *Sharia* are serious, rather than frivolous, only if (1) we can know independently of *Sharia* that being frivolous is morally wrong, and (2) God does not commit what is morally wrong. So Subhani reconstructs the original argument in terms of frivolousness.⁷⁴

The argument from the obligation to consider the prophet's call

Suppose a prophet comes along, offers to perform miracles as proof of prophecy, and invites people to listen to his words. Perhaps this is how all prophets started their missions. Why should one consider the prophet's invitation in the first place? The Mu'tazila argued that if the obligation to consider a purported prophet's words (*wujūb al-naẓar*) are not knowable prior to religion, there would be no reason for people even to listen to the prophet's claims.⁷⁵

This argument applies not only to people who were present at the time of the prophet but also to people, like us, who weren't. Making knowledge of all moral obligations, including the obligation to consider a religion, dependent on religion would undermine any moral ground for searching for the true religion.

This argument targets the Epistemological Thesis. Can it also refute the Ontological Thesis? It depends on what the property of goodness (badness) is claimed to reduce to. If goodness (badness) is claimed to reduce to the property of being commanded (prohibited) by *Sharia* – where *Sharia* is understood as something which comes into existence after the prophet's invitation is answered – then the argument also refutes the Ontological Thesis, as there is no *Sharia* prior to the establishment of the prophet's religion. And, since the Sematic Thesis entails the Ontological Thesis, this argument would refute the Semantic Thesis as well. If, on the other hand, goodness (badness) is claimed to reduce to a property that pre-exists the *Sharia*, such as the property of *being eternally willed by God*, then the argument would not refute the Ontological Thesis. In either case, the argument leaves the other theses (except the Semantic Thesis) intact.

Al-Ghazālī responded to this argument by saying that the obligation involved here is a self-interest, pragmatic obligation, rather than a moral one.⁷⁶ As Hourani has pointed out, al-Ghazālī's account of our obligation to consider the prophet's invitation is analogous to Pascal's prudential account of religious belief.⁷⁷ However, the Ash'arī of the late period al-Taftāzānī granted the strength of the argument, reporting that 'due to the strength of these two objections, some Sunnī theologians, and they are Ḥanafī, have gone to the view that the goodness and badness of some actions are among what is discerned by [independent] reason'.⁷⁸ He is alluding here to the argument from the obligation to consider the prophet's words and the argument from common moral knowledge.⁷⁹

Conclusion and a look ahead

In this article, I studied the Mu'tazila's arguments against divine command theory. I first distinguished between different theses that were often conflated in the debate, and examined the logical relation among the theses. Then I presented and analysed the arguments

raised by the Muʿtazila against the theses. Notice the picture of *Sharia* that emerges from their view. On their view, *Sharia* is based entirely on morality: every action commanded by *Sharia* is commanded because it is morally good, and every action prohibited by *Sharia* is prohibited because it is morally bad. In this picture, the whole point of *Sharia* is to guide people to morality: ‘the *Sharia* obligations are divine guides (*alṭāf*) to rational [i.e. moral] obligations’.⁸⁰

Divine command theory has been a subject of debate in Christian and Jewish worlds as well. And it continues to be a live topic in contemporary moral philosophy and philosophy of religion. Some contemporary (mostly Christian) philosophers have developed modified versions of the view to avoid objections raised against it.⁸¹ It will be an interesting topic of research to examine whether the Muʿtazila’s arguments can be reconstructed against the modern versions of the theory.

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Notes

1. For some nuances in Islamic ethical theories, see McGinnis (2018) Rizvi (2018), and Shihadeh (2016).
2. As mentioned above, the Ashʿāʿira have also developed numerous interesting arguments for their view, which deserve more attention than they have received in modern scholarship. It lies beyond the scope of this article to discuss their arguments. I hope to undertake this task in a separate article.
3. This has continued to be the case until recently. It is only within the last century that some Sunnī intellectuals have called for a return to the Muʿtazilite rationalist project. For a discussion of modern neo-Muʿtazilism, see Martin et al. (1997), parts II & III.
4. For the historical interactions between the Twelver Shīʿī *mutakallimūn* and the Sunnī Muʿtazila, see Ansari & Schmidtke (2016), Jafarian (1372HS/1993), and Madelung (1979).
I don’t mean to suggest that no Sunnī or non-Twelver Shīʿa scholar of the late period was critical of the Ashʿārī thoughts. On the contrary, some Ashʿārī positions were criticized by the Māturīdīs and some Zaydī Shīʿa scholars, among others.
5. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 182–183; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 282.
6. Cf. Robert Adams (2002), 20–21, where he expresses a similar, though not exactly the same, view.
7. Unlike *mutakallimūn*, Muslim philosophers, or *falāsifa*, did talk about the relationship between good, in the sense of perfection, and God. They argued that perfection and existence are identical. Furthermore, God is pure existence as well as the source of existence for all other beings. Therefore, God is pure good (*al-khayr al-mahḍ*) and the ultimate source of all goods (see, for instance, Avicenna (2005), IIX.6). However, neither *mutakallimūn* nor *falāsifa* connected the two senses of ‘good – praiseworthiness and perfection – to give a comprehensive, uniform account of morality and its relation to God. I am grateful to Sajjad Rizvi for pressing the point.
8. In developing this and next sections, I profited a great deal from insightful discussions with Mahmoud Morvarid. Also, many parts of the two sections heavily rely on Morvarid and Hemmati Moghaddam (1398HS/2010), ch. 4.
9. al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (1979), 280. For a similar characterization, see al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 181–182. All translations in the article are mine.
10. The contemporary western literature on the Ashʿāʿira/Muʿtazila debate has also left the distinctions largely unmade. For instance, although Hourani (1985, 23) has made a distinction between the ontological and the epistemological theses, he has conflated the ontological with the semantic theses. Two works in non-western languages, which have clearly made the distinctions are Fanaei (2006), chs 3–4 and Morvarid & Hemmati Moghaddam (1389HS/2010), sect. 4.2. More on this below.
11. See, for instance, al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 282.
12. al-Juwaynī (1369/1950), 261; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 293; al-Ṭūfī (1426/2005), 80 & 84.

13. al-Juwaynī (1369/1950), 258; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 292–293; al-Ghazālī (1419/1998), 63; al-Ghazālī (1417/1996), 45; al-Ṭūfī (1426/2005), 80.
14. Āmidī (1423/2002), 121.
15. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 183; cf. al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 283; cf. al-Ṭūsī (1405/1985), 339.
16. There are in fact two possible versions of the ontological thesis. On one version, spelled out above, the property of moral goodness is identical to the property of *being commanded by God*. On the second possible version, the property of moral goodness and the property of *being commanded by God* are two distinct properties, but the former is caused or determined by the latter. Nothing I will say hinges on this distinction. Thus, for the sake of simplicity, I will focus on the former version.
17. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 181–182. For a historical discussion of al-Ījī and his legacy in later Ash‘arī school, see Pourjavady (2020).
18. al-Attar (2016), 317; al-Attar (2010), 123–135.
19. For Frege’s sense–reference distinction, see Frege (1892/1980).
20. For the Avicennian framework, see McGinnis (2007).
21. For a discussion of some aspects of the Mu‘tazila rationalism, see Vasalou (2008), 15–26.
22. al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 82; al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 184–185; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 282–283; al-Bayḍāwī & al-Ḥafḥānī (2008), 195–196.
23. al- Bāqillānī (1957), 341, 344.
24. In fact, the idea that God abides by predetermined moral principles is one of the cornerstones of later Imāmī *mutakallimūn*’s whole theological system, as they deduced many theological doctrines from this idea. They based their theory of prophecy, Īmāmat, and the hereafter on this idea, to mention just a few examples.
25. Cf. al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 283.
26. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 102.
27. al-Samarqandī (1985), 467–470; cf. al-Urmawī (2009), 188; al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 101; al-Sanūsī (2006), 396.
28. al-Ṭūsī & al-Ḥillī (1979), 284.
29. In fact, it was the distinction between the Semantic Thesis and the Ontological Thesis that allowed the contemporary proponents of divine command theory, such as Adams (1979), to offer a modified, ontological version of the view that gets around some of the difficulties facing the former, semantic version.
30. See, for instance, al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 182; cf. al-Āmidī (1423/2002), 141.
31. 6:115.
32. 57:9.
33. 52:28.
34. 1:1.
35. 1:1.
36. 96:3.
37. 2:235.
38. 2:158.
39. 6:146.
40. For a survey of such verses, and their implication for divine command theory, see Hourani (1980).
41. For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār (1962), 107–108.
42. al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 288.
43. For example, 14:27; 2:284; 2:253; 42:49; 47:31; 3:179; 28:68; 2:213; 5:17; 5:64.
44. al-Ṭūsī & al-Ḥillī (1979), 281. Cf. al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 83.
- For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār (1962), 18, 106, and 109; (1965), 152.
45. I owe this analysis to insightful conversations with Mahmoud Morvarid. See also Morvarid and Hemmati Moghaddam (1389HS/2010), ch. 4.
46. al-Juwaynī (1369/1950), 151; cf. Shihadeh (2016), 15–20; Hourani (1985), 127–129; Fakhry (1991), 49.
47. al-Shahrastānī (1425/2004), 209; cf. Fakhry (1991), 50.
48. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 192–193; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 290–292; al-Bayḍāwī & al-Ḥafḥānī (2008), 195–196; al-Samarqandī (1985), 466; al-Urmawī (2009), 175.
49. al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 83.
50. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 193.
51. al-Ījī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 193.
52. al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 84. Cf. al-Ṭūsī & al-Ḥillī (1979), 281.
- For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ‘Abd al-Jabbār (1962), 104.
53. al-Ḥafḥānī (1433/2012), 966.
- Perhaps al-Ḥafḥānī was led to this relativist reading of the argument by both al-Ṭūsī’s terse and ambiguous statement of the argument and al-‘Allāma al-Ḥillī’s commentary on al-Ṭūsī’s statement. In his *Tajrīd al-‘itqād*, al-Ṭūsī

says that if morality were determined by *Sharia*, then 'the reversion [of morality] would be possible' (*la jāza l-ta'ākus*) (*Kashf al-murād*, 281). Al-Ḥillī explains the statement as follows:

what comes to my mind regarding the meaning of this statement is that if goodness and badness were not rational [i.e. independent of *Sharia*], then ... there would possibly be large communities who take offensive behaviour as praiseworthy and kind behaviour as blameworthy, which is the reverse of what we believe. Since every sane person knows the implausibility of this consequence, we affirm that moral judgments stem from reason rather than *Sharia's* commands and prohibitions. (*Kashf al-murād*, 281)

54. al-İşfahānī (1433/2012), 967.
55. al-Muḥaqqiq al-Ḥillī (1414/1994), 87. For a similar formulation, see al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 84. For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1965), 151.
56. For a discussion of the responses given by earlier Ashāʿira, see El-Rouayheb (2015).
57. See El-Rouayheb (2015), 417–420.
58. al-İjī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 193; al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 290–293.
59. Cf. Muḥammad Ḥasan al-Muẓaffar (1423/2002), 429.
60. See El-Rouayheb (2015), 413–415.
61. al-Urmawī (2009), 188; cf. al-Bayḍāwī & al-İşfahānī (2008), 206; al-Sanūsī (2006), 394–398.
62. For performative speech acts and their felicity conditions, see Austin (1962), Lecture II.
63. Bayḍāwī & al-İşfahānī (2008), 207.
64. al-Samarqandī (1985), 423–428; al-Sanūsī (2006), 422–432. Cf. al-Bayḍāwī & al-İşfahānī (2008), 207.
65. al-Bayḍāwī & al-İşfahānī (2008), 204. For a similar reasoning, see al-Samarqandī (1985), 423; al-Urmawī (2009), 216–219; al-Sanūsī (2006), 420–422.
66. This expression alludes to the Quranic verse 'Glory be to Him and exalted be He in high exaltation above what they say' (17:43).
67. al-Ṭūsī & al-Ḥillī (1979), 281. For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1965), 151.
68. For a discussion of other responses given by earlier Ashāʿira, see El-Rouayheb (2015).
69. See El-Rouayheb (2015), 415–417.
70. For a discussion of different views on divine unlettered speech and its relation to divine lettered speech, see al-Samarqandī (1985), 351–359; cf. al-Urmawī (2009), 134–141.
71. al-İjī & al-Jurjānī (1325/1907), 193; al-Urmawī (2009), 188.
72. Cf. El-Rouayheb (2015), 416–417, 422.
73. al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 292. For a similar response, see al-Qūshchī (2003), 110.
74. Subhani (1368HS/1989), 91–92; cf. Subhani (1420/1999), 53–54.
75. al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī (1982), 84. For an articulation of the argument in earlier *kalām* periods, see ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1965), 151–152.
76. al-Ghazālī (1962), 191–195.
77. Hourani (1985), 159–160.
78. al-Taftāzānī (1419/1989), 293.
79. For a discussion of *wujūb al-nazar* in later Ashʿarī school, see Spevack (2020), sect. 2.2.1.
80. al-Ṭūsī & al-Ḥillī (1979), 325.
81. See, for instance, Adams (1987), Alston (1990), and Clark & Poortenga (2003).

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