THE ALCHEMY OF DOMINATION?
SOME ASH'ARITE RESPONSES TO MU'TAZILITE ETHICS

In his provocative essay Knowledge and Politics,1 Harvard Law School professor Roberto Unger undertook what has since become a familiar critique of the contemporary social and political order. Beginning with the main postulates of Enlightenment epistemology, Unger contended that our acceptance of “liberal philosophy” has divided us, as moral beings, between the private world of value and desire and the public world of rules and reason. Since, moreover, reason functions as the medium of public (and ostensibly egalitarian) discourse, its inevitable exaltation over desire threatens, where it does not undermine, our sense of self and personality. Modern man, according to Unger, is inextricably ensconced between the irreconcilable poles of individuality and citizenship. From religious fundamentalism to Afro-centrism, from classical and radical feminism to multi-culturalism, modernity is evolving into an endless concatenation of reactions against the threat of domination2 that lurks beneath the demand to justify personal values and predilections through the impersonal language of reason, a medium over which some of us possess greater mastery than others, even if, as moderns (or perhaps post-moderns) we recognize that reason is not autonomous but can operate only in the interest of values already present.

The key element in the triumph of liberal philosophy, which according to Unger began with Hobbes in the 17th century,3 was the rejection of the classical doctrine of “intelligible essences,” according to which the world constituted an objective reality that could be apprehended as such, regardless of the judgments or predilections of the individual observer. A stone, on this understanding, was distinguishable from a plant because it was the repository of an objectively intelligible “stoneness.” Against this view, liberal philosophy insisted that there was no objectively validatable perception of the world. Rather, the most the mind could achieve would be the organization of experience in such a way that rendered it significant or serviceable to the observer. “Facts,” on this understanding, could be experienced only as reflections of the categories through which the mind ordered the world.4 In the field of ethics, this led to the conclusion that all claims of objective good and evil were unavoidably deceptive and naive. In the end, however, it would be precisely to objectivity or some

Sherman A. Jackson is Associate Professor, Department of Near East Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109, U.S.A.

semblance thereof that promoters of community standards would have to turn in order to avert the charge that they were arbitrarily privileging the subjective biases of some in the community over those of others.

Liberalism would also endorse a very particular understanding of the relationship between reason and the self, the latter of which it generally identified with will or desire. The mind, according to this view, acted as a disinterested gatherer of data, with no interest in any particular organization of facts. Ultimately, it was not reason but desire that pointed the mind in one direction or another. Desire, for its part, was not only arbitrary but in every first instance impervious to the dictates of reason. Reason might be able to tell us that if we want A we must also accept B, because A and B are inseparable, or that we cannot have both A and B, because they are inconsistent with each other. It may even teach us how to organize the satisfaction of desires over time, whereby we deprive ourselves now in order to reap more richly in the future. In the end, however, it is not reason but desire that determines who we are. But here again, when it comes to public (or even interpersonal) declarations about ourselves, reason—the putative handmaiden of objectivity—remains the only medium through which to communicate. And any failure to justify ourselves in rational terms only serves to prove the unworthiness of our desires. This represented, in sum, the Ungerian dilemma, the plight of modern man.

My initial encounter with the primary and secondary literature on Ashʿarite responses to the Muʿtazilite doctrine of al-ḥusn wa al-qubh al-ʿaqliyān called to mind a number of themes and leitmotifs reminiscent of Unger. Chief among these was the Ashʿarite rejection of what the late George Hourani had referred to as Muʿtazilite objectivism, in its most salient features the medieval Muslim rendition of the classical doctrine of intelligible essences. It was Hourani’s essays, in fact, that prompted an initial attempt to compare the Ashʿarite response to Muʿtazilite ethics with the triumph of liberal philosophy in the early modern West. This comparison, however, would ultimately prove incapable of accommodating the fact that, “[w]ith some qualification, the ontological structure of bodies, substances and accidents was held commonly among almost all speculative thinkers”—including Ashʿarites. What the Ashʿarites rejected, in other words, was not Muʿtazilite ontology or metaphysics per se (i.e., the doctrine of intelligible essences) but, rather, the latters’ attempt to include morality as a part of that metaphysics—that is, to insist that “value has a real [objective] existence in things [themselves].”

It was precisely this latter aspect of the Ashʿarite response, however, that would salvage the planned comparison. For their rejection of the Muʿtazilites’ inclusion of ethics in their ontology would ultimately force Ashʿarism into a theoretical dilemma not dissimilar to that of Unger’s modern liberals. For while the original impetus behind the Ashʿarite assault on Muʿtazilite ethics had been the preservation of divine omnipotence—that is, the idea that God is beyond all restriction, that He originates or posits value and that, even when they are the subject of revelation, human actions have no intrinsic value of their own—this move constituted the first step toward placing value per se beyond the realm of reason. From here, especially from the time of al-Ghazali’s devastating critique of the Muʿtazilite stance, “good” and “evil,” when not based directly on scripture, are invariably conceived of as objects not of reason but of desire or the appetitive self (al-ṭabīʿ), again, in a fashion similar to the de-
velopment of Western ethical thinking after the egoistic naturalism of Hobbes. In the West, this post-Hobbesian shift in moral ontology would lay the foundation for what would develop into what Unger identified as the dilemma of domination that lurked behind the imposition of ostensibly objective “community standards” in the absence of an objectively knowable morality and the now undeniable antinomy between reason and value. In Islam, meanwhile, it would lead to a similar problem. For the Ashārite triumph would ostensibly enthrone scripture as the only legitimate source of value. At the same time, the destruction of Muṭazilite ethical objectivism highlighted the role of the appetitive self (al-ṭabʿ) in determining much of what was commonly characterized as good and evil. Meanwhile, in order to pre-empt the intrusion of the appetitive self into the domain of moral judgments, Muslim jurisprudence (heavily indebted to Ashārites) sought to extend the scope of scripture to the point that it covered every moral question a Muslim might confront. With time, however, it would become increasingly difficult to conceal the role of the appetitive self in this conspicuously synthetic process. For even the most rigorously rational application of analogy (qiyās)—the main tool for expanding scripture—would reveal itself to contain an undeniably subjective element. On such recognition, it would also be recognized that in any number of instances the only difference between one preference and another was the degree to which its advocates had mastered the art of expressing themselves in scriptural terms. In other words, the threat of domination initially represented by the Muṭazilites’ “objectively knowable” morality, coupled with the insinuation that those who failed to recognize this morality were guilty of feigning moral agnosia, gives way to a new threat in the form of the obligation to express personal likes and ambitions in terms of scripture, even while it is recognized that there is no such thing as objective good and evil, and that some members of the community possess greater ability at effecting scriptural justifications than do others.

The remainder of this paper will attempt to trace the development of and response to this dilemma through a select sampling from three Ashārite thinkers: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1209), and Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi (d. 1285). Al-Ghazali represents the most articulate and devastating of the “classical” Ashārite refutations of Muṭazilite ethics. Al-Razi, on the other hand, is the chief representative of the later school (al-mutaʿakhkhiran), at whose hands previous doctrine is confirmed and the process of removing morality from the realm of reason and establishing scripture as the only legitimate source of value reaches it apogee. Finally, al-Qarafi appears to be the first Ashārite to take note of the problem of domination that results from the destruction of Muṭazilite objectivism on the one hand, and the removal of ethics from the realm of reason on the other. Interestingly, his solution ends up replicating the form (if not the substance) of a view put forth by the great Ashārite-turned-Muṭazilite theologian of the 10th to 11th centuries, the qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar (d. 1025).

I begin with al-Ghazali, in my treatment of whom I shall rely exclusively on al-Mustasfī, which in all probability represents his final say on the subject. Al-Ghazali begins with a brief summary of the Muṭazilite position, according to which the latter divided actions into two classes, laudable or good (hasan) and repugnant or evil (qabīh). Knowledge of which actions fall under these categories is attained through
three media: (1) a priori reason (darūrat al-`aql); (2) speculative reason (nazar al-`aql); (3) and revelation (al-shar'). The propriety of saving a drowning person, for example, or the goodness of telling the truth are known on a priori grounds. The goodness of telling the truth where such entails a liability, however, can be known only through speculative inquiry (nazar al-`aql). The goodness of religious observances such as ritual prayer or fasting can be known only through revelation, though here it is assumed that goodness inheres in the actions themselves, revelation simply coming to confirm its existence.14

Because the truth or falsehood of any taxonomy turns ultimately on the substance of its categories, al-Ghazali quite predictably begins his dissection of the Mu'tazilite stance with the issue of definitions. He notes that there are three commonly recognized ways of defining ḥasan and qabih. The first, which he refers to as the popular definition (al-mashhūr al-`āmmi), holds ḥasan to be that which is consistent with the goals of the actor (mā yuwāfiq qharad al-fā'īl), qabih being that which is contrary to his or her goals. That which affects the actor's goals neither positively nor negatively is referred to as “pointless” (cabath). Al-Ghazali notes that this definition is wholly subjective and tells us nothing about the inherent nature of any particular action. He points to its clear egoistic element, noting that it effectively places ethics on the same level with art appreciation in that it allows a single action to be ḥasan, or appealing, to Zayd, yet qabih, or repulsive, to ṬAmr.

According to the second definition, ḥasan and qabih refer to actions upon whose doer revelation sends praise or censure, respectively.15 Al-Ghazali readily points out the utility of this definition, noting that it renders all of God's actions in every circumstance ḥasan, whether they are consistent with the goals of any particular human observer or not. He also notes that, according to this definition, human actions that fall into the legal categories wāḥib (obligatory) and mandūb (recommended) would all be considered ḥasan, whereas neutral (mubah) acts would not.16

The third definition appears at first blush to be only slightly different from the second (though we shall see later, with al-Qarafi, that this is not quite the case17). It holds ḥasan to be any action that an actor has a legal right to perform (kullu mā li-fā'īlihi an yaf'ūalah). According to this definition, all divine actions are again rendered ḥasan. In addition, however, human acts from the neutral or mubah category, unlike the case according to the second definition, are also considered ḥasan.18

Interestingly, al-Ghazali neither commits himself to nor absolves himself from any of these definitions. In fact, he states that, ceteris paribus, all three are admissible. The reason for this is that all three are what he refers to as ʿidāfī, by which he means that they acquire meaningfulness only by virtue of some consideration external to the actions to which they are applied. As such, all of them avoid the doctrine of intelligible essences, leaving, in the absence of revelation, no basis upon which actions can be judged other than the subjective biases of the actor. Here we arrive at the main objective behind al-Ghazali's campaign—namely, to show that every moral judgment the Mu'tazilites do not base on scripture is based on subjective biases and human predilections.19

From here, al-Ghazali turns to a number of objections by his would-be interlocutor. In the first of these, the interlocutor concedes the admissibility of al-Ghazali's definitions but insists that there are some things, such as justice and ingratitude, in
which good and evil exist as inherent qualities (*wasf dhāti*) that are apprehended through a priori reason. This is attested to by the fact that all reasonable people agree on the moral status of these things.20

Al-Ghazali responds that this objection contains three fallacies: (1) the claim of intelligible moral essences; (2) the claim of a priori knowledge; and (3) the claim regarding the nature and value of consensual knowledge.

As for the claim of intelligible moral essences, al-Ghazali states that it is simply arbitrary. Killing, for example, has only one essence; yet the Mu'tazilites concede that execution as a recompense for certain crimes is not evil. Similarly, lying has only one essence; yet a man who lies to a group of unbelievers on their way to kill a prophet would not be deemed to have committed an evil act. In short, the mere fact that these actions enjoy one status under one set of circumstances and another under another undermines the claim that their moral status is based on some inherent, unchanging, intelligible essence.21

As for the claim of a priori knowledge, al-Ghazali marvels at how such a claim could be made regarding matters over which there is so much disagreement among people who are universally recognized as being intelligent. He cites the objection of a would-be opponent to the effect that virtually everyone finds himself or herself compelled to certain convictions, such as the evil of theft or lying, and while many people, including the Ash'arites, might mistakenly assume the basis of such knowledge to be revelation—because revelation prohibits these things—in point of fact it is merely reason that provides the basis of such knowledge. Al-Ghazali retorts that his dispute with the Mu'tazilites is not over the basis (*mustanad*) upon which such moral convictions are founded, but over the actual convictions themselves. The issue, in other words, is not how one establishes or proves the validity of what one claims to be moral convictions but, rather, how these moral convictions are arrived at as psychological events—that is, how, as a matter of fact, one is moved to moral assent or repulsion. Al-Ghazali's point is that if what moved one to assent or repulsion were the a priori status of some essential quality inherent in the actions in question, such issues would admit of no difference of opinion among intelligent people. Yet, while the Mu'tazilites claim to know on a priori grounds that it would be inappropriate for God to allow the slaughter of animals in the absence of desert or recompense, many intelligent people are found to deem this *hasan*. The difference with the Mu'tazilites is not, in other words, simply a matter of mistaking revelation for a priori knowledge, for here the content of what the Mu'tazilites claim to be known on a priori grounds is clearly shown to be a point of disagreement.22

As for the claim that consensus (here with a small c [lit., *ittifāq l-*uqulā*]) provides the basis for moral convictions, al-Ghazali objects that while large numbers of intelligent people might agree on a moral position, it cannot be assumed that their agreement was reached on the basis of some universal a priori insight. Rather, some of the parties to this agreement may base their conviction on revelation, while others may simply go along with the majority by way of *taqlīd*. Still others may be led to such convictions via faulty reasoning or the indulgence of false evidence.23 To be sure, al-Ghazali accepts Consensus (i.e., *ijmāʿ*) as a valid and infallible source of knowledge when the subject is the religious law. This is based, however, on the fact that revelation itself affirms the impossibility of the Muslim community unanimously
agreeing on error. His point in the present context is not that consensual agreement provides absolutely no basis for knowledge, but that the unanimous agreement of any community—including the Muslims—cannot be taken as proof that the object of their consensus exists as an objective reality, with the implication that this is why they agreed.24

All of al-Ghazali’s arguments in these exchanges end up at the same place: the rejection of the Mu’tazilites’ inclusion of morality in their ontological scheme. From here, al-Ghazali declares that there are only two bases for moral action: (1) religious devotion (al-tadāyyūn bi al-sharā‘ī) and (2) self-interest (al-aghrād). He goes on to address an objection to the effect that intelligent people are commonly known to prefer telling the truth to lying, or saving a drowning person to abandoning him, even in cases where they are under no religious obligation to do so or where doing so bears taxing liabilities and confers no benefit upon the doer. Al-Ghazali insists that his interlocutor has simply been misled by the fact that personal interest is often an ulterior rather than an apparent motive and, as such, is often hidden not only from outside observers but even from the doer himself or herself. The implication here is that such acts of apparent altruism confer upon their doers palpable visceral benefit that is no less motivating for all the ease with which it may be obscured. From here, al-Ghazali goes on to give a list of common causes for the misapprehension of personal interest, all of which involve the projection of subjective preferences onto entities such that the latter “acquire” inherent qualities.25 He ends his discussion by noting that where no such personal interest can be found on the part of ostensibly moral agents, their activities are not considered by intelligent people to be ḥasan but, rather, stupid (tustahmaq).26

Al-Ghazali’s critique includes one final element of relevance to the present discussion. This was his position on the nature and role of human reason. Having refuted the notion that moral values existed as ontological realities, he also rejected the Mu’tazilite view that reason could either discover value or move men to moral action. In words strikingly similar to those later uttered by Hobbes,27 he insists, against the claim of his would-be Mu’tazilite opponent, that reason cannot discover values but can operate only in the interest of values already present:

You have erred in stating that reason (al-‘aql) is a motivator (dā‘in). Nay, reason is only a guide (ḥādin), while impulses and motives (al-bawd‘īth wa al-dawd‘ī) issue from the self (an-nafs), based on information provided by reason.28

Al-Ghazali was far from being innovative in attacking Mu’tazilite ethics in order to create a space into which could be forced the concession that “value” had no meaning in the absence of revelation or some other positive fiat. This tendency was clearly present in the writings of earlier Ashʿarites—for example, his teacher Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (d. 1085).29 In fact, A. Kevin Reinhart has traced the provenance of the “no-value-in-the-absence-of-revelation” tradition as far back as the eponymous al-Ashʿari himself, who died around 937.30 Where al-Ghazali appears to make his seminal contribution is in the manner in which he redirects—seemingly on a permanent basis—ethical discourse away from ontology toward psychology, such that in the writings of post-Ghazalian Ashʿarites, such as al-Razi and al-Qarafi, ‘aql,
as the instrument of moral judgment, is displaced by al-ṭabī‘, or the appetitive self, which becomes the central focus of extra-scriptural ethical discourse.

Let us turn now to Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. Al-Razi frames his opening discussion around the notion that actions occur either out of necessity (‘alā sabīl al-idṭirār) or by happenstance (‘alā sabīl al-ittifāq). On either assumption, the doctrine of objective good and evil is rendered false. The proof of this is that the doer of a purportedly good or evil deed either is or is not capable of avoiding it. If he is not capable of avoiding it, he must be assumed to have been compelled. If he is capable of avoiding it, then the actual occurrence of the act must either recline upon some preponderant (murajjih) or it does not. If it does, then such a preponderant must originate either with the doer or with someone or something else, or neither with the doer nor with someone or something else. If it originates with the doer, this leads to an unending chain of preponderants, as the occurrence of each preponderant must be preceded by another preponderant. If it originates outside the doer, then this preponderant is either efficient or it is not. If it is efficient, then the doer must be said to have been compelled to commit the act. If it is not efficient, then this suspected preponderant cannot be said to be complete (tāmm), because, despite its existence, the act will be found to occur at some times but not at others. This preponderant, in other words, would rely on some other (efficient) preponderant, which alone would be responsible for bringing the act into existence. Once again, however, this latter preponderant will either originate with the doer or with someone or something else, which introduces the aforementioned chain of contingencies all over again.

The upshot of al-Razi’s theory is that in the absence of free will, which both al-idṭirār and al-ittifāq contradict, an individual cannot be said to have engaged in what might be described as objective good or evil. In this context, al-Razi appears to be responding to certain aspects of the doctrine of ʿAbd al-Jabbar, in whose al-Mughnī there is language suggesting that free will is the sina qua non of moral responsibility. At one point, for example, ʿAbd al-Jabbar states that he, along with his Muʿtazilite shaykhs, considers the action of the heedless (al-sāḥī) and the sleeping (al-nāʿīm) to be neither good nor evil. One notices in al-Razi’s presentation, meanwhile, the conspicuous absence of al-ikhtiyār, or choice, from the range of possible grounds for human action. By so denying free will, al-Razi is able to send two messages with a single click: on the one hand, he is able to deny good and evil as attributes intrinsic to actions themselves, since the presence or absence of free will affects the status of acts; on the other hand, the denial of free will effectively negates moral responsibility for human actions. In the end, al-Razi seems to conclude that while we as humans are legally responsible in that our actions entail shariʿī consequences in the form of reward or punishment, we are not morally responsible, because we are not really the authors of our acts. Although he does not mention it by name, al-Razi appears to rely on the Ashʿarite doctrine of kasb, or acquisition, which his theory seems to reflect in its purest, and perhaps most unattractive, form.

In all of this, however, one gets the impression that this was little more than al-Razi’s way of displaying his prowess as a theoretician, of proving that he too could contribute something unique and functional to the Ashʿarite arsenal. Upon achieving
this aim, he reverts to the psychological approach of al-Ghazali, in the context of which he defines hasan and qabih as that which the appetitive self finds appealing or repulsive (mā yušāʾīm al-ṭabʿ wa yunaffiruh). The moral objectivism of the Muʿtazilites having been sufficiently discredited, al-Razi sees no need to go beyond a perfunctory refutation of it. The remainder of his presentation parallels in many ways the approach of al-Ghazali, including a number of phrases and sentences repeated verbatim. He does cite, however, at least three objections not found in al-Ghazali, all of which are particularly interesting and relevant to the present discussion.

In the first of these, the point is argued that if hasan and qabih are defined as that which the appetitive self finds appealing or repulsive, then injustice (al-zulm), for example, must be considered hasan, because it obviously appeals to the perpetrator thereof—that is, the zālim. Al-Razi’s response is that injustice does not appeal to the zālim, for if it did, such a person would not be able to oppose it when another person perpetrated it against him. To the question of how such a person is himself able to engage in this action, al-Razi responds that the zālim has merely been moved to his action (raghiba fih) by some non-essential predicative of injustice, in his words, “raghiba fih li-ʾaʿridin yakhtassu bih”—for example, the taking of money. It is not injustice, in other words, but merely the taking of money that appeals to the zālim. Al-Razi senses, of course, that this is not quite a satisfactory answer. For as a constituent of injustice, the appeal of taking money must entail the appeal of injustice. As the logicians would say, the specific (or species) always entails the general (or genus), even if the general does not always entail the specific: al-akhass yastalzim al-aʿamm wa-in lam yastalzim al-aʿamm al-akhass. Every banana, to put it in more concrete terms, is a fruit, even if every fruit is not a banana. As such, one cannot enjoy bananas without enjoying fruit, even if one can enjoy fruit without enjoying bananas. In an attempt to extricate himself from this dilemma, al-Razi introduces the notion that moral judgments are predicated on the belief that the actions in question appeal to or repulse not the individual but the community as a whole. He gives no explanation of this statement, though his locution clearly implies that, in his mind, moral thinking, even if utilitarian, is distinct from sheer pragmatism and as such includes a degree of abstraction whereby the assumed subject is not the individual but some broader collective with whom the individual identifies. In the present example, this would imply that wrongfully appropriating another’s money, even if it appealed to the zālim, could not be considered hasan, because the latter knows that such an act would never appeal to the community as a whole. This does little, of course, to solve al-Razi’s technical problem, because it cannot do away with the logical entailment between wrongfully taking another’s money and injustice. It does show, however, how much more willing al-Razi was than al-Ghazali to admit a certain teleological element into his thinking. In the end, al-Razi’s failure to provide a satisfactory answer here vividly demonstrates why even today, although Utilitarianism may have become the dominant school of ethics, it has proved impossible to reduce the Deontologists to complete silence.

In the second objection, the point is made that reason must be able to identify good and evil prior to revelation. For if prior to revelation we did not know what good and evil were, it would be impossible for us to know this upon receiving revelation, because, in such a case, revelation would be addressing us in terms we did not under-
stand. Since, however, we know that we are able to conceive of and understand the moral imperatives in revelation, our ability to conceptualize right and wrong must be seen to have existed prior to and independent of revelation.38

Al-Razi’s response here is bold and remarkable in the degree to which it reflects his willingness to push the voluntarist position to its logical extreme. Bluntly and unequivocally, he states that we are not at all dependent on revelation for our ability to conceptualize good and evil (al-mawqūf ḍalā al-sharā’ laysa huwa taṣawwur al-husn wa al-qubh).39 Revelation tells us nothing about what is ḥasan and what is qabīḥ in terms of the essence of things. What revelation imparts is simply a knowledge of which human actions will be met in the Hereafter with reward and which with punishment. It is this capacity—to conceive of reward and punishment as possible consequences for our actions—that we possess prior to revelation. In other words, the real reason that we conform to the moral dictates of scripture is our recognition of the truth of its soteriological claims. It is in this sense, and in this sense only, that scripture can be said to be the repository of moral value, inasmuch as it provides the incentive to perform or eschew certain acts. This is altogether different, al-Razi insists, from revelation being the determiner of the actual substance of good and evil as ontological realities.40

In the third objection, al-Razi is presented with a question about a moving qaṣiṣdah recited in a beautiful, heart-wrenching voice (bi sawtin ṭayyibin ḥazin), while its content curses the prophets and angels. The significance of this objection emerges against the backdrop of al-Razi's charge that what the Muʿtazilites took to be rational judgments were actually subjective predilections whose place of origin was the appetitive self, though the Muʿtazilites had surreptitiously disguised these and projected them onto the world as objective realities. In the case of this qaṣiṣdah, however, it is clear that it is not the appetitive self but reason that judges this ode to be evil; for the ode itself, in its beautiful, heart-wrenching voice, clearly appeals to the appetitive self. On the one hand, this example would appear to bolster the Ashʿarite (or perhaps Ghazalian) position to the effect that reason is distinct from appetite, because it gives a clear demonstration of how al-ʿaql and al-ṭabʿ can differ in their respective judgments. On the other hand, it would appear to support the Muʿʿtazilite position by showing that reason is in fact capable of making moral judgments, especially since this particular judgment (the repulsiveness of the ode) has such obvious force and, in a Muslim society, such universal recognition. Although this would have been the perfect place for al-Razi to offer a definitive statement on the relationship between reason and the appetitive self and the epistemological capabilities of each, he is disappointingly brief and superficial in his response to this problem, disposing of the entire objection in a single sentence: “As for the qaṣiṣdah that includes cursing (the prophets), it is considered repulsive simply because it leads to the virtuous (arbāb al-faḍāʿīl) being greeted with defilement and levity (bi al-shatmi wa al-istikhfāf), and this is the opposite of what would be in the best interest of the world (wa huwa ḍalā muṭaddat maṣlaḥat al-ʿalām).”41 From here al-Razi scurries to the conclusion that the basis of all of the judgments in the examples adduced is the fact of appealing to or repulsing the appetitive self: fa ḏahara anna ‘l-marjī ḍī hādhihi al-asḥyā’ ilā mulāʾamat al-ṭabʿ wa munāfaraith.42 Once again, al-Razi appears unable to extricate himself from difficulty. I suppose that one might offer in his defense that what he is
really saying is that although we know by way of reason that the qaṣīdah includes cursing the prophets and angels, it is only the appetitive self, in the final analysis, that passes judgment on this as an evil act. This, of course, leaves open the question of whether “we” here refers to us as individuals or as a collective. These problems aside, it is clear that al-Razi, like al-Ghazali, held the appetitive self and not reason to be the true repository of moral judgments.

We come now, finally, to Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi, who was, incidentally, very much influenced by al-Razi and who in fact wrote one of the most important commentaries on the latter’s al-Mahṣūl, titled Nafāʾīs al-uṣūl fî ʿilm al-uṣūl, reportedly some 1,800 folios in manuscript.43 For the present discussion, I shall rely on his commentary on his abridgement of al-Razi’s al-Mahṣūl, a published work on uṣūl al-fiqh entitled Sharḥ tanqīḥ al-fuṣūl.

Al-Qarafi writes against the same thematic backdrop observed in al-Ghazali and al-Razi. He begins by asserting that the terms ḥasan and qabīḥ can be properly applied to any of three things: (1) that which appeals to or repulses the appetitive self (mā yūlūʾ in al-ṭabʿ aw yunāḍiruḥ), such as saving a drowning person or falsely accusing an innocent man; (2) that which we consider to be a virtue or a flaw, such as knowledge and ignorance, respectively; (3) that for the commission of which we earn praise or blame in the Hereafter.44 There is, according to al-Qarafi, no disagreement over the validity of the last of these definitions, excluding, of course, the question of whether scripture actually establishes or merely confirms the dessert of reward or punishment. Regarding the first two definitions, al-Qarafi notes that the Muʿtazilites held such actions as acquiring knowledge and saving a drowning person not only to be ḥasan, in the sense of laudable, but to impose upon God the obligation to reward the doers thereof, presumably on the view that it is only just that God reward people for good deeds. In al-Qarafi’s view, the Muʿtazilites had erred in that they exaggerated the role and the power of human reason. Human actions, according to him, must be viewed from two vantage points: (1) their status among persons of “sound disposition” (al-ṭibāʿ al-salimah); and (2) whether God is bound to reward the doers thereof. It is only the first of these, al-Qarafi insists, that can be known independent of revelation; the second can be known only on the basis of scripture.45

One gets the impression, however, that all of this was little more than al-Qarafi’s way of signaling homage to the Ashʿarite tradition, a tactical gesture, or so it seems, designed to purchase enough recognition to be able to introduce change. Immediately following this synopsis, he introduces his own definitions of ḥasan and qabīḥ, definitions that not only diverge from the standard Ashʿarite thesis but appear on the surface to owe a conspicuous debt to Basran Muʿtazilism.46 Closer examination, however, reveals that al-Qarafi departs fundamentally from the Basran Muʿtazilites. For with al-Qarafi, it is human predilection in and of itself that legitimizes human action, not through correspondence with any would-be ontological index, but by virtue of its own existence and the fact that it is in harmony with the dictates of scripture. His, in other words, amounts to a form of moral subjectivism, in contradistinction to the moral objectivism of the Basran Muʿtazilites.47 This difference becomes crucial to the effectiveness of al-Qarafi’s thesis in serving as a counter to the subtly felt threat
of domination born of the hegemonic burgeoning of a certain type of over-inclusive scripturalism adopted in the aftermath of the Mu'tazilite defeat.

Against the Mu'tazilites, the Ash'arites, not unlike Unger's modern liberals, had argued that values lie essentially beyond the pale of reason. If this is true, however, it must also be true that reason cannot render one's values any more fitting than those of one's neighbors. Yet the fact that some of us possess greater mastery over the use of reason enables us to make more compelling arguments in support of our wants and values. It is essentially the revolt against the tendency to devalue certain sentiments in the name of reason, along with the growing resignation to the idea that some values cannot be transferred across cultural, ideological, or civilizational boundaries, that explains the proliferation in modern times of ideologies as diverse as Molefi Asante's Afro-centrism to Samuel P. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations."48

It is precisely here that one begins to see the utility of al-Qarafi's theorizing efforts. Even in writers such as al-Ghazali and al-Razi who toyed with several definitions of hasan and qabih in order to undermine certain aspects of their opponents' doctrines, one could easily discern a clear preference for one definition. Traditionally, the definition most favored among Ash'arites had been that hasan coincided with the commandments of God, while qabih referred to what God forbade. This served quite effectively the twin interests of undermining the Mu'tazilites' moral objectivism and protecting God's omnipotence, because it rendered revelation the only repository of moral value. The Ash'arites, however, would go on to impute to this doctrine a meaning of significantly broader implications. They would turn the position that revelation was the only source of moral value into the dictum that every question human beings might pose in moral terms could also be addressed as such on the basis of scripture. To be sure, this was a conscious choice on the part of Ash'arism, a fact most vividly obviated by the availability of other equally if not more plausible constructions of their ethical grundnorm. To say that all of God's injunctions are binding, or even that only God's injunctions are binding, is not necessarily the same as saying that every question humans come to pose in moral terms can be resolved by direct reference to scripture.49 The question, for example, "Should one wear one's wrist-watch on one's right wrist or on one's left wrist?" is not necessarily a question in which scripture is at all interested, even if some people insist on seeing it in moral-scriptural terms.50 This, incidentally, was precisely the point of the early Zahirites, whose claim to fame was their very rejection of analogical reasoning (qiyâs) as the primary instrument of scriptural expansion. According to the Zahirites, "Revelation's writ ran to what is explicitly addressed and no more."51 Revelation, in their view, "applie[d] strictly, but it applie[d] [in relative terms] to very little."52 Ash'arism, meanwhile, took up the position first articulated by the 9th–10th-century Shafi'i jurist Ibn Surayj (d. 918), himself a direct opponent of Zahirism's founder, Da'ud ibn Khalaf (d. 883). According to Ibn Surayj, "Revelation spoke to all human activity" and was "infinitely extensible."53 Revelation, according to this view, was indifferent to nothing, and even acts that were of no moral value at all (i.e., mubah) remained within the awareness of scripture. Such acts, in other words, were understood to be medial—that is, falling halfway between the two poles of harâm (forbidden) and wâjib (obligatory), but in no way marginal (i.e., outside the boundaries of Revelation's
concern).\textsuperscript{54} This opened the way to what I referred to earlier as a type of over-inclusive scripturalism, which turned on the idea that appropriate goals and actions could only be known and could always be known by revelation or some rational extension thereof.\textsuperscript{55} This, as we shall see, would feed directly into the problem of domination and provide the incentive behind al-Qarafi’s attempt to modify this aspect of Ash’arite thought.

Unger had described the problem of domination as residing in the demand to express subjective sentiments through the ostensibly objective medium of reason.\textsuperscript{56} Al-Qarafi, meanwhile, was confronted with the reified and inflated notion that the only legitimate goals were those directly articulated by religious law. On the one hand, this would tend to habituate people to expressing their personal wants and ambitions in terms of religion and to banish from the pale of what came to be accepted as a properly constituted “Islamic life” those subjective goals and preferences that could not be directly pegged to scripture.\textsuperscript{57} Even more troublesome, however, was the manner by which this contributed to the tendency on the part of the fuqahā\textsuperscript{2} to claim religious authority for views that were not the genetic offspring of scripture but more a reflection of their own personal biases and judgments. This had the effect—especially given the privileged position of the fuqahā\textsuperscript{2} as the authoritative interpreters of the law—of validating certain preferences while invalidating others, when in point of fact all might be equal before God. Add to this al-Qarafi’s status as a Maliki living in Shafi‘i-dominated Cairo,\textsuperscript{58} and his concern about the problem of domination is thrown into relief. Little wonder it is that his jurisprudence would include a very clear demarcation between what was legal and what was not, not in the sense of what was ḥalāl and what was ḥarām but in the sense of what could legitimately claim the backing of scripture and what could not, of what was subject to legal contemplation and what was not.\textsuperscript{59}

Al-Qarafi’s notion of the limits of law is suggestively consistent with his definitions of ḥasan and qabīḥ. According to al-Qarafi, ḥasan refers not to “that which God commanded,” but to “that which God has not forbidden.” Qabīḥ, meanwhile, refers to “that which God forbade.”\textsuperscript{60} Now, this renders actions from every legal category except the ḥarām (forbidden) ḥasan, including, according to al-Qarafi, those of the heedless (al-ghāfīl), the forgetful (as-sāḥī), and even animals (al-bahā‘im).\textsuperscript{61} According to his definition, everything the law does not expressly prohibit, which includes those matters on which the law is silent, enjoys the status of ḥasan.\textsuperscript{62} On the one hand, al-Qarafi’s definition clearly affords greater accommodation of personal wants and profane predilections by protecting these from being tarnished with the stigma of disapproval. At the same time, however, the fact that “ḥasan” is not a legal category (like, e.g., makrūḥ) underscores its usefulness as a means of circumventing the authority of strictly legal descriptions of acts. In other words, the threat of “legal domination” is attenuated by the access afforded to an alternative act-assessment index.

It should be noted, however, that the advantages al-Qarafi is seeking through his definition are primarily secular.\textsuperscript{63} This is clearly indicated by his explicit denial that all acts that are ḥasan are rewarded in the Hereafter. In other words, his conferring the psychologically powerful attribute of ḥasan upon mundane, “non-religious” acts is strictly for the purpose of providing these acts with an added measure of protection
in the here and now, not to endow them with any salvific value for the Hereafter. In the end, al-Qarafi appears to have succeeded at bringing about a measure of balance between utilitarianism and scripturalism by checking the tendency on the part of the fuqahā' to “legalize” essentially non-legal (not to be confused with illegal) views, while at the same time rendering superfluous the tendency among the laity to inflate the religious value of essentially secular, mundane activities. This is all held in place by al-Qarafi’s final coup de grace: if, according to him, one wants to ensure that one’s actions are rewarded in the Hereafter, one must move beyond works that are simply ḥasan to those that are what he refers to as aḥsan—that is, “better.” Here, in a manner uncharacteristic of his predecessors, al-Qarafi turns to the Qur’an for support. He cites the verse, “that God may reward them according to the best of their deeds (li yajziyahumū ’llāhu aḥsana mā ’camilū),” as proof that God rewards not the ḥasan but only the aḥsan.4 This would include, one assumes, only those actions whose value can be traced to some clear scriptural dictate.

In their response to the Mu’tazilite doctrine of al-ḥusn wa al-qubh al-Caqliyyān, the Ashʿarites set out first and foremost to destroy the doctrine of intelligible moral essences, in whose absence scripture would reign as the sole source of moral authority. The destruction of Mu’tazilite objectivism, however, would bring a number of significant byproducts in its train, among the most important of which being the removal of ethics from the realm of reason and the endorsement of the unreflexive view of the self, according to which reason was propelled in every first instance by desire. Meanwhile, the establishment of scripture as the only legitimate source of value necessitated the adoption of the view that the scope of revelation was infinitely expandable. It is here, in this synergism of scripturalism and the unreflexive self, that the groundwork for a new form of domination is laid. If Mu’tazilite objectivism carried the threat of domination in the form of binding the community to an “objectively knowable” morality (with the parallel insinuation that those who failed to apprehend reality as such suffered from false consciousness and deserved to be treated as such), the approach of the Ashʿarites would ultimately prove no less threatening. For the enterprise of expanding the scope of scripture would not be able to sever or disguise its reliance on the subjective dictates of the appetitive self (al-tab‘). In such a context, the true meaning of privileging some biases over others could not go long undetected. Shihab al-Din al-Qarafi’s subjectivist (re-)defining of good and evil speaks directly to this fact.

NOTES

Author’s note: A version of this paper was presented at the 1995 annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, D.C. I thank Professor A. Kevin Reinhart for his valuable comments on an earlier draft. I also thank the anonymous readers for IJMES for their careful scrutiny and constructive criticisms.


2By domination I do not mean every instance where the community imposes upon groups or individuals laws with which the latter disagree. Domination obtains, rather, where in addition to this claim of
legal authority (i.e., the right to impose limits on behavior) there is an attempt to impose the belief that these laws or limits are in conformity with some “natural” or “objective” order that is obvious to all save the stupid or morally depraved. When a Shafi‘i judge, for example, annuls a Maliki marriage contracted in the absence of witnesses, this is not necessarily an instance of domination. Indeed, few rules in any legal system are the object of unanimous consensus. But when in addition to having this marriage overturned, Malikis are condemned as heretics and the clearly plausible basis of their position is denied all recognition, this constitutes an attempt to dominate. So is it the case when historically and geographically bound scriptural extrapolations are reified and passed off as objective truths that are binding on all generations to come. Or, where clearly subjective biases are disguised, defended and imposed as rational, as, for example, in the ban on polygyny in the United States (see R. A. Posner, Sex and Reason [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992], 253–60, esp. 259 n. 40, where, following a list of ostensibly “rational” critiques of the institution, the subjective basis of the ban is admitted: “but the taboo against polygamy runs too deep to make the suggestion to permit it a feasible one in any state of the U.S.”). In short, domination as I use it refers to the unjustified denial to members within an interpretive community of the right to believe in their own minds, their own senses, and their own experiences. Its instruments can range anywhere from reason to tradition to the imposition of false criteria (e.g., the claim that a man must be an M.D. in order to know that he has a fever).

3Hobbes was by no means the originator of the idea. As far back as ancient Greece, the post-Socratic thinker Aristippus (before Plato) claimed (following Protagorus) that we can know nothing of things without us except their impressions on us. See H. Sidgwick, Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1939), 32. It was Hobbes, however, and the responses he elicited that rendered this the dominant perspective from which modern thinkers have yet to retreat.

4Unger, Knowledge, 32.

5Ibid., 43.

6See, for example, G. Hourani, “Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam,” The Muslim World 50 (1960): 269.


8Ibid.

9Hourani, “Two Theories,” 269. Among the ancillary conclusions to be drawn from all of this is that, despite the view of those who seem to imply that the survival of Mu‘tazilism would have provided for a more satisfactory Muslim political thought (see, e.g., M. Kerr, Islamic Political Reform: The Political Theories of ʿAbduh and Rashid Rıdā [Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1966], 58 ff.), Ash‘arism can no more be said to have stifled the development of political thinking in Islam than Hobbes and his successors stifled political thought in the West.

10Reinhart has suggested that the Ash‘arite response was informed by the fact that by the 11th century, Muslims had become the majority in their societies, by virtue of which fact they outgrew the minoritarian missionary perspective of the Mu‘tazilites. See his Before Revelation, 180, 183, and passim.

11Throughout this essay, I translate al-ṭabb as “appetitive self,” as opposed to “human nature” or “human disposition,” because in most instances it is used in such a way that any universal dimension is weak or absent. In most instances, what is referred to is not a general proclivity in human beings, but rather the particular idiosyncrasies and predilections we possess as individuals. See, however, the exception with al-Razi’s use of the term (see n. 37).

12See, for example, S. A. Jackson, Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 63, where, in defense of the principle of maslahah, al-Qarafi points out that everyone who practices qiyds inevitably indulges subjective judgments, because the ratio essendi (‘ilah) underlying scriptural rulings is more often than not a matter of conjecture based on what is perceived to promote personal or group interest.

13Reinhart points out that al-Ghazali focused seemingly exclusively on Baghdadi Mu‘tazilism, ignoring the more subtle and less objectivist arguments of later Basrans such as ʿAbd al-Jabbar; see Reinhart, Before Revelation, 161.


15al-Mustaṣfā, 1:56.
Al-Ghazali seems to ignore, however, the doctrine of the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbar, who holds that blame or praise is earned by such actions only on the assumption that there are no extraneous impediments (mâni') to such. See al-Muqtim fi 'abwâb at-tawhîd wa al-`adl, ed. A. al-Ahwâni, I. Madkûr, and T. Hûsaîn, 16 vols. (Cairo: al-Mu'assasat al-Misriyah li al-Tahfîd al-Yâdâl wa al-Tarjamah wa al-Tibîf, wa al-Nashr, 1960–68), 6:19. Al-Razi, however, provides a would-be response, noting that if the possibility of impediments is admitted, then the most one could ever achieve would be the possibility (or likelihood) of a thing being hasan or qabîh, which could be confirmed only by the subsequent establishment of the absence of would-be impediments. This, however, would undermine the claimed inherrence of the husn or qubbh in question. See al-Ma’âsul fi ‘ilm usûl al-fiqh, ed. T. J. F. al-'Alîdî (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risâlîh, 1312/1992), 1:138.

He notes in this regard that were it not for revelation asserting the impossibility of the Muslim Community unanimously agreeing on an error, the hallowed ijmâ‘ would not constitute any proof. See ibid., 1:58.

These include: (1) the mixing of subjective with objective judgments, whereby a person projects personal interests onto objects in the world and then attributes these to the objects in question as intrinsic attributes; (2) failure to note exceptions to what is commonly preferred, whereby just because a person prefers a thing most of the time, he fails to note those instances in which that thing would not be preferable (which would undermine the notion of the positive attribute being intrinsic); (3) identification of things that are preferred or disliked with other things that are associated with them—for example, a beautiful woman might be judged to be ugly simply because she has a Jewish name. See ibid., 1:58–60.

Al-Ghazali's position is echoed in Sidgwick's anticipation of the rationalist reaction to Hobbes's psychological egoism: "Let us grant that there is as much intellectual absurdity in acting unjustly as in denying that two and two make four; still, if a man has to choose between absurdity and unhappiness, he will naturally prefer the former"; Sidgwick, Outlines, 184.

Thoughts are to the Desires as Scouts, and Spies, to range abroad, and find the way to things desired: All Stedines of the mind's motion, and all quickness of the same, proceeding from thence': from Hobbes' Leviathan, cited in Unger, Knowledge, 38.

Al-Razi states that the veracity of his argument is clear, "assuming (that we proceed on the basis of) our position," which, again, I take to be an allusion to the Ash'arite doctrine of kasb. On the other hand, he states, it is also clear assuming the Mu'tazilite rejection of taklîf mâ là yuţâq—that is, "placing upon humans a responsibility they cannot fulfill"; see ibid., 1:127.

Although al-Razi does not make the connection, his “group ethics” would appear to comport with the situation in Arabia at the time of the Prophet, as portrayed and at least tacitly endorsed by the Qurʾan. In many instances, the Qurʾan refers to or commands action in accordance with “al-maṣraḥ,” by which it appears to refer to what the community—including the jāhiliyah community—universally “knows” and accepts to be fair, right, good, or just. See, for example, II:180, 228, 231, 232, 233, 234, 236, 240, 241; III:104, 110, 114; IV:6, 19, 114; VII:157; IX:67, 71, 112; XXII:41; LX:12. It is verses such as these that the great traditionalist Ibn Taymiyah, who on the one hand disparages the nominalism of the Muʿtazilites, criticizes the Ashʿarites for overlooking. See, for example, Majmaʿ al-fatawā, ed. ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Muḥammad Qāsim al-ʿAṣimī al-Naǧī al-Ḥanbalī, 37 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-ʿArabiyah, 1398/1977), 8:431–36. I should add that this is an instance wherein al-ṭabīʿ, given its group affiliation, might be translated as “human nature.”

38 al-Maḥṣūl, 1:129.
39 Ibid., 1:139.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 1:131.
42 Ibid.
43 I have been unable to procure a copy of this manuscript. Sh. Ṭāhā Ṣābir al-ʿAlwānī, whose edition of al-Razi’s al-Maḥṣūl includes several quotes from al-Qaṭafi’s Nafāʾis, informs me that it is currently being edited for publication in Saudi Arabia by ʿIyād al-Sulami.

44 Sharḥ, 88.
45 Ibid., 89.
46 See n. 13.
47 See Sharḥ, 90.
48 The phrase “Clash of Civilizations” was actually coined by Bernard Lewis in his 1989 Jefferson Lecture, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and later published in the Atlantic Monthly (September 1990) under the title “The Roots of Muslim Rage.” It was Samuel P. Huntington’s essay, however, that transformed the phrase into an intellectually grounded tool for analyzing the world.
49 The Qurʾan itself appears to allude to this at 5:101: “O you who believe; do not ask about things which if made known to you will cause you difficulty.” Right down to modern times, this view has found its way into popular works on Islamic law, based on a hadith attributed to the Prophet: “God has imposed certain duties upon you, so do not be remiss about fulfilling them; and He has prescribed limits for you, so do not violate them; and He has remained silent about certain matters out of mercy for you, not out of forgetfulness, so do not ask about them”; see, for example, Sayyid Sābiq, Fiṣḥ al-Sunnah, 3 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Rayyān li al-Turāth, 1411/1990), 1:12.
50 Reinhart has pointed out that a number of early thinkers recognized that the legal category mubah (neutral), under which an activity such as wearing a wristwatch would fall, can either refer to things that fall outside the scope of revelation or to things that occupy a medial position (between forbidden and obligatory) within the scope of revelation. In other words, mubah can refer either to acts in which revelation is disinterested or to acts that are without consequence but regarding whose performance revelation grants positive permission; see Reinhart, Before Revelation, 128 ff.
51 Ibid., 16.
52 Ibid. Reinhart concludes that the Muʿtazilites also indulged a view of revelation that restricted its scope; ibid., 173.
53 Ibid., 16.
54 Ibid., 131. The whole question of the moral value of the mubah was debated among the jurists. The answers given, however, were not always based on a purely “objective” approach. Rather, jurists approached the question with specific conclusions in mind. Al-Shatibi, for example, insisted that the mubah was medial and that mubah acts were actually commanded by the Lawgiver. This had little to do, however, with the expandability of scripture. Rather, his aim was to refute the claims of certain Sufis who argued that it was an absolute virtue to avoid all mubah acts absolutely. See ʿIbrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, al-Muwaffaqāt, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Drāz, 4 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijārīyah al-Kubrā), 1:109 ff. Ibn Rushd (the Grandson), on the other hand, flatly rejected the notion that the mubah was medial and within the scope of commanded acts. This seems not to have been unrelated, however, to the fact that al-Ghazali, of

55 Cf. Jackson, *State*, 24–26, where I give the impression that scholars such as Hourani and Kerr falsely attributed this type of scriptural determinism to the Ashʿarites. While their characterization was over-inclusive, I see now that probably up to the time of al-Qarafi, mainstream Ashʿarism did support this type of scriptural determinism and that it was precisely this to which al-Qarafi was reacting.

56 See 185–86.

57 See, for example, Hourani, “Two Theories,” 273.


59 See ibid., 113–41. It will be noticed that al-Qarafi devotes a very short portion of *Sharḥ* to the issue at hand. This raises the question of whether I have misrepresented him by giving the false impression that his redefinition of ḥasan and gabīḥ played a major role in his thought. My point in the present essay, however, is not that this issue per se played a major role in al-Qarafi’s thought but that al-Qarafi was concerned about the issue of domination (which my *Islamic Law and the State* deals with in detail), and that his approach to the question of ḥasan and gabīḥ is consistent with such a concern.

60 *Sharḥ*, 90.

61 Ibid.

62 The Muʿtazilite ʿAbd al-Jabbar, for example, was known to have put forth the same thesis, at least in form—that is, that everything the law did not prohibit was good. See, for example, G. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 101 ff.; M. Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 35. But, as I have shown, the substance of this definition in al-Qarafi is fundamentally different.

63 Al-Qarafi had in fact noted a theological advantage to his definition. On the traditional view (that ḥasan was what God commanded and gabīḥ what he forbade), the actions of God could not be deemed ḥasan, because God could not be subject to any command. According to al-Qarafi’s definition, meanwhile, all divine actions are rendered ḥasan by virtue of their not being prohibited: see *Sharḥ*, 90.

64 Ibid.