

EXPLORING THE CONCEPTS OF ḤUSN AND QUBḤ IN 'MAHĀSIN AL-SHARĪ'A' BY AL-QAFFĀL AL-SHĀSHĪ

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Abstract. This article offers an in-depth examination of the term "mahāsin" as utilized by al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī. It explores the nuanced implications of this term, elucidating how the scholar employs it to convey the overarching idea that all the commandments within the Sharī'a are inherently characterized by goodness and beauty.

Keywords: uṣūl al-fiqh, ḥusn wa qubḥ, Mahāsin al- Sharī'a, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī

The field of uṣūl al-fiqh, serving as an exposition of the fundamental principles of Islamic jurisprudence, encompasses its theoretical underpinnings. Uṣūl al-fiqh constitutes the systematic study of the method and methodology employed in deducing legal rulings from primary sources. While fiqh entails the comprehensive understanding of individual rights, obligations, and societal duties within Islamic law, uṣūl al-fiqh specifically elucidates the principles governing the extraction of Shariah rulings from their foundational sources [3:43]. This methodology, while enhancing comprehension of the sources, serves a dual purpose: it instructs on the extraction of legal rulings from these sources, and it delineates the core principles of jurisprudential science (qawā'id al-uṣūliyya).

Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī asserts in his work 'Mahāsin' that he undertook the task of elucidating the concept of 'al-siyāsa al-faḍīlah' (virtuous governance), which operates on the principle of introducing the beauties of Islam and simplifying its instructions. Another objective of composing the work is to render the purpose and wisdom of Sharī'a commands understandable by explaining them with the aid of reason, thereby striving to embrace the norms established by Allah and demonstrate their compatibility with common sense [5:43].

By undertaking this endeavor, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī aimed to illustrate the concordance between reason and revelation, grounded in the doctrine of the objectives and prohibitions of Sharī'a, which he termed 'al-siyāsa al-faḍīlah'. Indeed, the comprehensive addressing of Ismā'īlī inquiries in the introduction of his book elucidates this point clearly. [5:18, 5:28].

Acknowledging the pivotal role of reason in the nexus between God and humanity, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī elucidates the wisdom underlying the principal matters of fiqh, emphasizing the harmony between revelation and reason. In doing so, he highlights the inherent limitation of the intellect to fully comprehend all the dictates of Sharī'a. For instance, considerations such as the number of rakats in prayer, the repetition of sajdah within each rakat, and the delineation of specific quantities for punishments like eighty, one hundred, or forty are cited as instances where the human mind may fall short in grasping the underlying rationale behind these prescriptions.

Allah created what His servants needed and taught them the general information they needed without going into details. He stated that although the wisdom and objectives of the Sharī‘a are clearly known in general terms and methods, it is natural that some of its narrower and more specific aspects are not known [5:40]. More precisely, their meanings are hidden from us and kept closed. The main point is that the Creator knows that everything created is for the benefit and well-being of people. Asserting that Allah created humans as rational beings, Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī emphasizes that reason is a necessary condition for identifying these beauties and beneficial things, and for implementing them in life.

Based on the aforementioned points, the following explanation can be provided regarding al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī’s jurisprudential views: According to the virtuous policy of religion, all commands and prohibitions, along with their wisdom, are for the benefit and well-being of servants, and this conclusion is not at odds with reason (logic) and tradition.

Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī’s multifaceted personality and comprehensive knowledge of Islamic sciences are evident in his utilization of various istilāhs to expound upon the subjects he addresses. For instance, in the domain of uṣūl al-fiqh, he elaborates on the sources of jurisprudence and the derivation of legal rulings from them, including Kitāb, Sunnah, Qiyās, Istiḥsān, Istishāb, Istidlāl, and Istinbāt. Moreover, in terms of stylistic approach, he extensively employs concepts such as meaning, aspect, purpose, and wisdom [8:35]. In this article, rather than delving into a comprehensive review of all concepts utilized in the work individually, it suffices to elucidate the concept of ‘mahāsin’, which is deemed of primary significance in the text. Throughout the work, the concept of ‘mahāsin’ is employed, signifying that all injunctions of the Sharī‘a are inherently good and beautiful. This term is elaborated upon in detail below.

‘Mahāsin’ is the plural form of the word ‘ḥusn’, which stands in opposition to ‘qubḥ’ (ugly), signifying beauties [1:877]. ‘Ḥusn’ denotes beauty and is employed as a term of endearment, fame, and belovedness. Its antithesis, ‘qubḥ’ signifies ugliness and warrants disdain [9:59]. Ibn Manzur states that grammarians and linguists agree that the word ‘mahāsin’ is a non-singular plural word. Furthermore, being ‘muḥsin’ in the verse "For we see that you are among the doers of good" [6:239] means helping the weak, protecting the oppressed, and caring for the sick unlike other people.

Evidently, the word ‘mahāsin’ is the antithesis of ‘qubḥ’ (ugly) and is utilized not only to denote moral beauty and goodness, such as words and behavior, but also to describe the attractive characteristics that distinguish something materially from others.

Sources state that ‘ḥusn’ and ‘qubḥ’ have three meanings, as follows:

1. In the sense of perfection and imperfection (like knowledge and ignorance);
2. Acting for worldly purposes and vice versa (such as diligence and laziness);
3. In the sense of deserving praise and reward, deserving retribution and punishment.

The first two classifications of the meanings of ‘ḥusn’ and ‘qubḥ’ are derived through intellectual reasoning. As for the third, there are differing perspectives: some assert that this meaning of ‘ḥusn’ and ‘qubḥ’ can be discerned through intellect, while others contend that it can be comprehended based on Sharī‘ah [2:96].

Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's utilization of the term 'Mahāsin' in the context of 'Mahāsin al-Sharī'a' implies that the Sharī'a embodies beauty, flawlessness, perfection, and virtue. In fact, he articulates that the primary objective behind composing his book is to enlighten individuals endowed with common sense about the exquisite aspects of the Sharī'a [5:17,43,538].

When translating 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ' as beautiful and ugly, the connotation leans towards material and aesthetic values. However, it is more suitable to convey the terms 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ' as 'good and bad, benefit and harm from the standpoint of both worldly life and the Hereafter', as they pertain to discourse, morality, and uṣūl al-fiqh [9:59].

In 'uṣūl al-fiqh' and the science of 'kalām', under the headings of 'ḥusn and qubḥ', topics such as whether it is possible to discern good and bad through reason, the attribution of these concepts to God, the commands of God, and the obligations imposed on humanity regarding good and evil are studied. These discussions typically commence with inquiries into whether 'ḥusn' denotes good/benefit and 'qubḥ' denotes bad/harm, and whether they are apprehended through rational means or through Sharī'ah.

If these concepts can be discerned through intellect, then they can be understood without the need for revelation. In such cases, for certain actions like polytheism, cruelty, injustice, unjust killing, etc., questions arise regarding the punishment for the perpetrator. It is debated whether the individual is not punished because they are considered accountable (mukallaf) according to Sharī'a, or if they are not punished because they are unaware that the act they committed is haram and prohibited.

The Mu'tazilites strongly believed in the correctness of the information revealed through revelation. However, as a general principle, they accepted that information concerning human obligations can be comprehended through reason [9:61].

Imam Juwaini, building upon Imam Ash'ari's perspectives on 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ', asserts that what the Shariah deems as good is indeed good, and what it deems as bad is likewise considered bad. He further posits that if a child is born and is not directly informed about the commands and prohibitions, either directly or through the prophets, they will not be held accountable even if they commit a sin, and accordingly, they will not face punishment. Sam'ani al-Kawati writes in his book that according to the opinion of most scholars, except for the proponents of Mu'tazilism, no one can be held accountable without knowledge of Sharī'ah.

According to the majority of Māturidi scholars, 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ' are understood partially through reason and partially through Sharī'ah. Accordingly, the intellect cannot perceive all aspects of good or bad actions entirely. In addition, people's mental capacity, experience, and knowledge lead them to interpret this topic differently. A person who is capable of making more accurate decisions as their experience and knowledge increase cannot independently acquire the concepts of 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ' regarding actions in all their details without relying on revelation. Man's capacity is limited, and he requires the guidance of revelation in those areas where he cannot attain correct knowledge independently [9:62].

According to Abu Ḥanīfā (may Allah be pleased with him), Allah sent many prophets to introduce Himself to His servants. However, even if no prophet is sent to mankind, it would still be obligatory

for them to recognize their Creator with the help of their minds and believe in Him. Therefore, it is obligatory for the people in the places where the call of Islam has not reached to recognize and believe in Allah, the Creator of the worlds and people, and they will be asked about this faith on the Day of Resurrection. However, they are not accountable for the rest of the Shariah rules such as prayer and fasting, as these are not matters that can be comprehended solely by rational means [3:174].

Based on the information provided by Ibn Asākir, it is mentioned in some *tabaqat* books that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī was initially inclined towards Mu'tazilism in his early days, but later switched to the Ash'ari sect. [4:200]. The reason for this transition is attributed to the views expressed by al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī in his youth on topics such as the application of *Qiyās* (analogical reasoning) and relying on *Āhād* (singular) messages, as well as his expressions of gratitude to God for His blessings. In the work titled '*Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyya al-Kubrā*' it is mentioned that he was influenced by Mu'tazili views in his youth. Later, after studying the science of *kalām* from ash'ari scholars, he renounced his previous views and embraced the teachings of the ash'ari school within the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* community [4:202].

He further observes that Imām al-Rāzi, who extensively drew upon the scholarly heritage of Tafsīr, adopted an interpretive approach that leaned towards Mu'tazilism in his exegesis and commentaries on the Qur'ān. However, al-Rāzi emphasizes that al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī is a staunch representative of the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* community in matters concerning *uṣūl al-fiqh*. It is inappropriate to ascertain whether al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī was a Mu'tazili solely based on theoretical viewpoints. According to him, a proper assessment of this matter requires an examination of the gradual and evolutionary stages of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's thought process [7:58,59].

Al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī's views on '*ḥusn wa qubḥ*' are in accordance with the Ash'ari school. According to al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, although there are aspects of '*ḥusn wa qubḥ*' that a person can discern through reason, the opposite can also be the case, and one requires the assistance of Allah to make the right decisions in this matter. Allah states that He has revealed these principles to His servants to maintain social order and peace, which might be disrupted by individuals' decisions regarding what is beneficial and what is harmful. At the onset of the discourse on the topic of criminality, al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī expounds upon this matter with the following words:

'Allah created man and endowed him with diverse faculties to assess which ones are superior. With such faculties, an individual possesses the capacity to discern between good and bad (*ḥusn-qubḥ*) or beneficial and harmful aspects. Consequently, man consistently makes choices weighing the positive and negative ramifications of things, whether they are detrimental, advantageous, virtuous, or beautiful. A person may act unjustly towards others in pursuit of their desires, passions, and expectations, leading to the commission of crimes and the disruption of interpersonal order through injustice. People exhibit varied inclinations, capacities, and wills in this regard. In their pursuit of sustenance and worldly desires, people may exceed the limits prescribed by Allah and succumb to the temptations of Satan. Generally, individuals may be deceived by the transient pleasures of harmful pursuits, opting for immediate gratification to appease their egos rather than striving for the greater rewards attainable through patience. He may overlook the bliss of the eternal world and

become engrossed in the fleeting desires of the temporary world. Therefore, Allah does not neglect individuals in their choices between good and evil (ḥusn wa qubḥ), and through His promises, warnings, threats, and glad tidings, He establishes boundaries around people's actions. In addition, God has bestowed upon man the willpower to safeguard himself from harmful influences and to combat them. Hence, God, through the prophets, has imparted to people knowledge of all potential consequences stemming from their choices between good and evil, enabling them to make more informed decisions in accordance with their desires' [5:539-540].

In the introduction to his book, he similarly expresses the following sentiments: 'Naturally, an individual does not seek to inflict harm upon oneself, one's family, or loved ones by engaging with evil. Similarly, in this world, designated as a realm of trial, Allah, the Exalted, imparts to people through the Shari'ah all the beneficial, commendable, and virtuous actions required to deter corruption, theft, and unjust killing among one another, safeguarding them from such harms and evils' [5:17].

Based on the analysis provided above, in the perspective of al-Qaffāl al-Shāshī, the concept of 'ḥusn' and 'qubḥ' is thoroughly addressed within the framework of Ash'ari doctrine. This substantiates that the work 'Mahāsin' was composed distinctively separate from Mu'tazili doctrine.

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