

An Examination of the Principle of Rational Goodness and Badness from the Perspective of the Shī‘a Imāms’s Narratives

Mohammad Farzipoorean¹ 

1. Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic Studies, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran. Email: m.farzi@razi.ac.ir

Abstract

One of the most important principles in theology, laying the foundation for many rules and issues in this field, is the principle of "rational goodness and badness." Acceptance of this principle significantly influences our perspective on the world, theology, and other crucial theological matters. Muslim theologians have two perspectives on this principle. The Adliyah (including Mu'tazilites and Imamis) accept it, believing that the goodness and badness of actions are intrinsic, and human reason and nature comprehend them without considering anything else. On the other hand, the Ash'aris deny its rational nature, asserting that the divine law specifies the goodness and badness. In this paper, we aim to analyze and explore this principle from the perspective of the narratives of the Imāms (peace be upon them) using an analytical-descriptive and library-based approach. We seek to clarify whether the principle itself or its substance is mentioned in the narratives. According to the findings of this research, the Imāms have addressed this issue, and the narratives sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly indicate the rational goodness and badness. This article will elaborate on the explanation of these narratives.

Keywords: Rational Goodness and Badness, Shī‘a Imāms’s Narratives, Divine justice, Adliyah.

Introduction

One of the most important and foundational principles in the science of theology, laying the groundwork for many theological discussions, is the rule of "excellence and deficiency of reason." This rule not only has a significant impact on theological discussions but is also considered a cornerstone of ethical knowledge. The content of the rule of excellence and deficiency of reason has been a subject of attention and debate among theologians since the early formation of theological schools, and with the spread of the Ismaili sect, this rule gains more prominence among theologians. This discussion became one of the most important topics in the science of theology in the third and fourth centuries and has retained its importance to this day.

In most theological books, this matter is examined based on the criterion of reason, and the arguments of both sides have rational and argumentative aspects, while its textual and divine aspects remain implicit. Therefore, one of the questions raised in this discussion is whether the rule of excellence and deficiency of reason is solely a construct and consideration of the minds of Islamic theologians or if it has been referenced in verses and traditions. Have Muslim theologians utilized verses and traditions in interpreting their

views on this rule or not? In this paper, through an analytical-descriptive and library-based method, we seek to answer these two questions.

Research Findings

By examining the narratives of Shī'a Imāms (peace be upon them), it is concluded that the rule of "excellence and deficiency of reason" has its roots in these traditions. Some traditions explicitly refer to the principle of this rule, while others discuss topics that are based on this rule and accepting them relies on accepting the excellence and deficiency of reason. For example, in a letter to his son Imām Hasan al-Mujtaba (peace be upon him), Imām Ali (peace be upon him) states, "Such a Lord has not commanded you except goodness, and He has not forbidden you except ugliness." This portion of the narration clearly and explicitly articulates the rule of "excellence and deficiency of reason" because Imam Ali mentions that God Almighty does not command except for good deeds and does not forbid except for evil deeds. If there were no excellence or deficiency for actions before the expression of the divine law (Shari'a), commanding or forbidding them would be meaningless. In other words, first, there must be excellence and deficiency for established actions so that God Almighty can forbid evil actions and command good ones. This statement by Imām Ali can be expressed as an exceptional analogy: if there were no excellence or deficiency for actions, commanding good deeds and forbidding evil deeds would be meaningless. However, since excellence and deficiency exist, commanding and forbidding them is valid.

Therefore, from such traditions discussed in the article, it can be inferred that: firstly, excellent and deficient actions exist before the expression of the Shari'a; secondly, human reason and nature have the ability to recognize them and are inherent within human beings; thirdly, God Almighty also regards evil actions as evil and good actions as good, and His command and prohibition are based on this excellence and deficiency. Thus, the content of the rule of excellence and deficiency of reason is also present in the traditions, and the Infallible Imāms (peace be upon them) have referred to it with various expressions.

Another finding of this research is that, in addition to explicit references to "excellence and deficiency of reason" in the traditions, principles and rules based on this rule have also been stated. Acceptance of these principles is only valid by accepting the excellence and deficiency of reason. Examples include the divine wisdom, divine justice, negation of injustice by God, the assignment of tasks according to capability, etc. These principles are only acceptable by accepting the rule of excellence and deficiency of reason.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this research, both the rule of "excellence and deficiency of reason" itself, its content, and matters based on this rule exist in the sayings of the Infallible Imāms. Even if someone claims that this rule was first articulated by those noble figures and then Shia scholars discussed this topic following them, this claim is not groundless and baseless. Therefore, "excellence and deficiency of reason" is explicitly and analytically present in the sayings of the Imāms, and these noble figures truthfully stated this rule, acknowledging excellence and deficiency as rational concepts.

References

Abū Zaid Abdul Raḥmān. (2004). *The Main Chapter on the Fundamentals of Religion by Ibn Khaldun*. Beirut: Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah. (in Arabic)

Amīdī, Saif al-Dīn. (1958). *The Most Intelligent Thoughts on the Principles of Religion (Abkār al-Afkār fī Usūl al-Dīn)*. 5th edition. Cairo: Dar Al-Kutub. (in Arabic)

‘Alī bin Ḥussein Sharīf Murtadā (1984). *Messages of Sharif Al-Murtada*. 4th edition. Qom: House of the Noble Qur’an. (in Arabic)

Ibn Bābawayh, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī (1978). *Al-Tawḥīd (Monotheism)*. First edition. Qom: The Community of Scholars in the Seminary of Qom. (in Arabic)

Ibn Maitham Bahrānī (1952). *Translation of the Explanation of Nahj al-Balagha*. translated by Muhammadi, Muqaddam & Nawayi. Mashhad: Islamic Research Academy. (in Arabic)

Hilli, Ḥassan ibn Yūsuf ibn ‘Alī ibn Muṭahhar (2003). *Revealing What Is Meant in Explaining the Abstraction of Belief*. Qom: Imam Sadiq Foundation. (in Arabic)

Cite this article: Farzipoorean, M. (2024). An Examination of the Principle of Rational Goodness and Badness from the Perspective of the Shī’a Imāms’s Narratives. *Philosophy and Kalam*, 56 (2), 273-291. (in Persian)

Publisher: University of Tehran Press.

© The Author(s).

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22059/jstp.2023.359823.523412>



Article Type: Research Paper

Received: 31-May-2023

Received in revised form: 17-Aug-2023

Accepted: 12-Dec-2023

Published online: 10-Mar-2024