

Dhāhir, Ḥaḳīqah and Majāz

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The claim that there is majāz (allegory) in the Arabic language was made by Ahl al-Kalām, the Mu'tazilah, as part of their attempts to validate their misguidance in the subject of Allāh's attributes, upon influence from Greek philosophy. They tried to divide words into two usages:

- ḥaḳīqah**, indicative of what is real, true, actual and
- majāz**, alluding to allegory, what is symbolic, figurative, metaphorical.

After introducing this **convention (iṣṭilāḥ)** into the Arabic language, they claimed that the texts of the attributes are to be carried upon allegory and metaphor. However, this issue was unknown to the Companions of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) and this division cannot be found in revelation, nor in reason and nor within language itself. None of the foremost experts in the Arabic language divided words into the two usages of ḥaḳīqah and majāz.

The foremost experts of the Arabic language include Abu 'Amr bin al-'Alā' al-Baṣrī (d. 154H), al-Khalīl bin Aḥmad (d. 170H), Sībawaih (d. 180H), Yūnus bin Ḥabīb (d. 182H) and al-Aṣma'ī (d. 216H).

This mechanism allowed them to support their innovation of negating Allāh's attributes, leaving them to play with the texts of the attributes through linguistic devices and interpretations foreign to the Arabic language. Thus, care must be taken with respect to this issue.

Even scholars from Ahl al-Sunnah were affected by this issue of ḥaḳīqah and majāz in the Arabic language. The Mu'tazilah were skilled in the Arabic language and authored much with respect to it, and some scholars after the era of the Salaf were not astute enough to see that the foundation upon which the notion of metaphor in the Arabic language was built was baseless, nor did they fathom the false necessities that followed on from this notion. In other words, they considered this a matter purely to do with language and did not have knowledge of its historical origin and its intended purpose.

The Mu'tazilī Majāzites claim that the Arabs came together to designate certain words for a certain meaning, and after this designation they began to use it for that meaning, such as the word (أسد) for a lion. Thereafter, as they claim, the Arabs

designated a secondary meaning for that word, an allegorical meaning, and began to use it for that purpose, such as when it is said, “So and so is a lion”, with the meaning of brave, fierce. However, no evidence exists to show that this was how word meanings were designated. This has never been known for any language, that a people sat together and decided that this combination of letters or sounds (a word) should be designated for this particular object or meaning.

Language is inspired and taught (Ādam was taught the names of all things) and usage (isti‘māl) of words for objects and meanings was passed on generation from generation. Allāh said: (وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ) “**And He taught Ādam all of the names (of things) and then He presented them to the Angels**” (2:31). And Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid and Qatādah said: “He taught Ādam the name of everything, even the large and small bowl.”

Words take on meanings indicated by the speaker’s intent which is indicated through the grammatical construction, and a word can have different meanings in different sentences. The context in which each word is used is what gives that word its reality.

Thus when it is said: “**Khālid fought like a lion**”, there is no majāz (metaphor) here, there is only a reality being indicated through a particular choice of words. That reality is that Khālid fought with the attributes of a lion, which are bravery, ferociousness, fierceness.

So here, this sentence, “Khālid fought like a lion” is not metaphorical but indicative of a reality that the speaker desired to express and make known. It is this contextual use that allows the speaker to make known the reality he desires to express through a particular word.

This is how the Arabs made use of language. They never divided words into ḥaqīqah and majāz, this is foreign to their language. Whatever reality they wanted to describe and express, they would make contextual use of words for it. Thus, when we see Khālid fighting with bravery and ferociousness, we say, “He fought like a lion”, or, “He is a lion”, with the meaning “he fought with the attributes of a lion”, and this a reality that is being expressed through speech.

This highlights one of the fundamental errors of the Majāzites in that they think words are isolated on their own and are divided into **a primary designation**, a ḥaqīqah (indicative of a reality) and **various other designations** which are majāz, metaphorical (indicative of concepts only) and secondary. But words are always

used in combination with other words, they are used in grammatical construction allowing the speaker to express whatever he desires to express and make known through a particular word.

They claim that the intent to use the word with its first, original designated meaning is known when the word is employed devoid of any indicators or contextual clues. However, this is baseless and futile speech because words are never used completely on their own, outside of grammatical construction in a sentence. No one says, (أسد) “lion”, or (جناح) “wing”, or (قرية) “city” and then remains silent, such that all contextual indicators are absent and thus—according to them—the original and very first designated meaning of these words is what is intended.

On the contrary, what happens is that the speaker expresses himself by using words within sentences and the grammatical constructions he uses makes clear the reality that he is expressing. Thus, when someone says “The lion killed the deer”, the reality he is expressing is understood, and when someone says, “Khalid fought like a lion”, the reality he is expressing is understood, which is that as a lion fights (with bravery and ferociousness), so did Khālid.

Thus, what enters the mind of a person upon hearing these sentences is what is indicated by the grammatical construction, and that always indicates a reality, there is no metaphor or allegory, and this is what we call the dhāhir, that which is apparent. Thus, when it is said, “Khālid fought like a lion”, then what enters the mind of a person is that just as lions possess bravery and ferociousness, then so did Khālid as he fought, and this is a reality (ḥaqīqah). There is no allegory or metaphor here, the word lion has been placed in a sentence so that this reality can be expressed.

Let us compare the two approaches so we can notice the subtle difference between the two:

The Mu‘tazilī Majāzite way of thinking is as follows: The Arabs got together and decided to use the word (أسد) for a lion, and this was its first designation. Then they also got together and said it can be used for other secondary meanings when indicators (qarā’in) are present. Then they applied the word on its own, for a lion, and also applied the word for allegory and metaphor through indicators which they refer back to their own reason. This then allows them to play with any text among the texts of the attributes and explain away the attribute through reason. Thus, they can say, that the “dhāhir” (apparent) of this word necessitates **tashbīh**,

or **tamthīl**, or **tajsīm** (resemblance, likeness, embodiment), and thus we must divert the word from its primary meaning to its secondary, allegorical meaning.

Whereas in the language of the Arabs: words take on meanings based on the grammatical construction, after composition in a sentence (and not words on their own), and thus whenever the speaker wants to express a reality, he uses words with a particular construction. That grammatical construction reveals the intent of the speaker (through his choice of words), as in what particular reality he is conveying, and this is immediately understood by the listener, through the grammatical construction.

So what these people, the Mu‘tazilah, have done is to make up conventions (iṣṭilāḥāt) of their own and apply them to the Arabic language so that it enables them to use their reason driven by desire, hawā, with the motivation to support their innovation of negating Allāh’s attributes.

The indication of words to their meanings is looked at by trying to understand the intent of the speaker, not by applying innovated conventions through one’s subjective reason.

So they are the ones who brought these claims:

—that there is a first convention, which is the word stripped of all context

—that there is a second convention

—that one can decipher the meaning indicated by a word through rational analysis of contextual indicators

Note: Some scholars have used the word (مجاز) “majāz” to refer to what is permitted in the Arabic language (in terms of grammatical construction), and this is other than the “majāz” intended by the Mu‘tazilah and others from Ahl al-Kalām, this is with the meaning of permitted (جائز) So you may see one of the Qur’ān commentators say for example: “This is majāz”, meaning this is a permitted grammatical construction or usage in the Arabic language ز

Abu ‘Iyaḍ

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