



Properly Understanding Metaphor and Ascription ¹

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Logical Metaphor and Its Use

There is no doubt that figurative speech is used in the Book and the Sunnah. From that, are the words of the Exalted:

“And when our verses are recited to them, they increase them in faith.” (al-Anfāl; 2)

Linking the increase to the verses here is figurative because (in reality), they are a cause for the increase. It is Allah alone that actually increases it (the faith).

Also, the statement of the Exalted:

“A day that shall make the young grey haired.” (al-Muzammil; 17)

Linking (the word) ‘make’ to the day is figurative because the day is the place in which they will be made grey haired. So the ‘making’ that is mentioned here occurs *on* that day, whereas the one who ‘makes’ in reality is Allah the Exalted.

Also, the statement of the Exalted:

“Nor *Yaghūth*, *Ya’ūq*, or *Nasr* for they have certainly misguided many.” (Nūḥ; 23-24)

Linking misguidance to the idols is figurative because they were simply a means for misguidance, whereas the one who guides and misguides (in reality) is Allah alone.

Also the statement of the Exalted narrating the (story) of Fir’awn:

“Oh Hamām build a tower for me.” (Ghāfir; 36)

Linking the act of building to Hamām is figurative because he was a cause (for it) in that he was the one commanding (it to be built), not that he was building it himself. The builder was the one doing the action, in this case, the workers.

As for the Ḥadīth reports (citing figurative speech), they are many. They are known to those that have come across them and those that know the difference between the

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relationship (of an act) to that which is reality and that which is figurative, so there is no need to spend a long time quoting these (reports). The scholars have said: ‘The occurrence of this linkage from a believer in the Divine oneness is sufficient in making it a figurative linkage because the correct belief is that the Creator of the servants and their actions is Allah alone, for He is the Creator of the servants and their actions. There is no independent effect for anyone besides Him—be they dead or alive. This belief is the pure Tawhīd, as opposed to one who believes other than this, thus falling into *shirk* .

**The Necessity of taking notice of the Figurative Speech
when weighing with the scales of *Imān* and *Kufr***

Certain groups of misguidance have held to the tail of a doubt based upon the outwardly apparent and literal expressions, without looking to the proper context and intentions, and without looking to reconcile and join (between the texts) in a way that does not lead to mutual contradiction, such as those who believe in the creation of the Qur’ān, holding firm to the likes of Allah’s statement:

“Indeed We have made it an Arabic Qur’ān.” (al-Zukhruf; 3)

As well as those who have innovated belief regarding the Divine Decree ², holding firm to the likes of Allah’s statement:

“With what your hands have earned.” (al-Shūrā; 30)

And:

“...and due to what you have done.” (al-Mā’idah; 105)

And like those who believed in *jabr*³ holding firm to the likes of Allah’s statement:

“And Allah created you and that which you do.” (al-Sāffāt; 96)

And:

“And you did not throw when you threw but it was Allah that threw.” (al-Anfāl; 17)

Uncovering the veils covering this, it is said: all of the Ummah, with the exception of the *Qadariyah*, believe that the actions of the slaves are created by Allah the Exalted:

“Allah created you and that which you do.”

² Here, the Shaykh is referring to the *Qadariyya* sect that went to extremes in their belief in the Divine Decree, denying that Allah created the actions of the servants.

³ *Jabr*: The belief that the servant’s actions are forced upon one and that the person is nothing more than a receiver being compelled by Allah to do the actions that he does.

And He said:

“And you did not throw when you threw but it was Allah that threw.”

This is so, even if it is allowed for the servant to be described with it in another way of relation that is expressed as ‘acquisition’ as is in the statement of the Exalted:

**“He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned,
and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned.”**
(al-Baqara; 287)

And the statement of the Exalted:

“Due to what their hands have earned.”

As well as many other verses that are explicit in attributing the acquisition to the slave. It is not necessary that the relationship between ability and the act (performed by way of that ability) be by way of independent creation only, because the power of Allah the Exalted, is attached to the creation (everything besides Him) in pre-eternity before it was created by Him, the Exalted. After His creation of it, it was related to (His power) in another type of relation.

The Reality of Ascribing Actions to the Servants

From this it becomes clear that the relation of power (*qudra*) is not restricted to the obtainment of that which is decreed. The actions of the servants are ascribed to them by way of acquisition and not that of independent creation—for Allah is the one that creates them, decrees them, and wills them. This is not to be responded to by saying: How can He desire that which He prohibits? This is because the command is distinct from the will, proven by the fact that He has commanded all of the people to have Imān while (at the same time) not willing it from the majority of them due to the statement of (Him) the Exalted:

“Most of the people will not believe even if you were covetous of that.” (Yūsuf; 103)

So ascribing the actions to the servants is from the (category of) ascribing the vehicle to the cause or intermediary and there is no contradiction in that. This is because the one who brings about the causes is the one who created the intermediary and created within it, the meaning of ‘intermediary’. If it were not for that quality that Allah has placed in it, it would not be fitting to be an intermediary—be it something that has not been given intellect such as solid objects, constellations, rain, and fire, or something that does have intellect such as an Angel, human, or Jinn.

The Differences of Meaning based on the Different Ascriptions

Perhaps you will say: Ascribing one single action to two different doers does not make sense, because it is impossible to join between two actors upon one single action. We say (in response): Yes. It is as you have said, however, that is the case if the meaning of the word ‘doer’ only has one meaning that is used. If, on the other hand, it has two meanings, then the word is general, being used to express both ascriptions. If this is the case, then it is not impossible that it may be expressed in a general context as is well known in the usage of homonyms, or in literal and figurative speech. An example of this is when it is said: ‘The Amīr (leader) killed so and so’. And as it is said: ‘The executioner killed him’. So generally expressing the word ‘kill’ with respect to the Amīr means something entirely different than expressing it with respect to the executioner. So when we say: Allah the Exalted is the Doer, it means that He is the one that creates and brings into being, and when we say: the created being is the doer, it means that it is the locus in which Allah the Exalted created the ability after having created the will (in it) and after having created the knowledge (in it). So linking the ability with the will, and the movement (action) with the will, is (what is called) the linking of the caused with the cause, and linking the created thing with the created thing.

This is if the locus is one that is living, otherwise, if it is not, then it is from the category of arrangement of causes upon their means. So, it is correct to call everything which has a link with ability a doer, in whatever way that link may be. It is also correct to call the executioner a killer in one respect, and the Amīr in another respect. This is because killing has been linked to the both of them. Even if this linkage is in two different respects, it is still allowed to call both of them ‘doers’. This is like considering the decreed matters with two abilities. The evidence for the permissibility of this ascription and its appropriateness is when Allah the Exalted ascribed the actions to the Angels on some occasions, while on other occasions, ascribing them to others among His servants, and yet on other occasions, ascribing them to Himself. The Exalted said:

“Say, the Angel of death that has been entrusted to you will cause you to perish.”
(al-Sajda; 11)

And the Exalted said:

“Allah causes the souls to perish when they die.” (al-Zumar; 42)

And the Exalted said:

“Tell Me! The seed that you sow in the ground” (al-Wāqī’ah; 63)

(He said this) ascribing it to us, then He said (in another Sūrah):

**“Indeed, We pour forth water in abundance, and We split the earth in clefts,
and We cause therein the grain to grow.”**

(‘Abasa; 25-27)

And the Exalted said:

**“Then We sent to her Our *Rūḥ* and he appeared before her
in the form of a man in all respects.”**
(Maryam; 17)

Then the Exalted said (in another Sūrah):

“Then We breathed into her from our *Rūḥ* (spirit).”
(al-Anbiyā’; 91)

Whereas the one breathing (into her) is Jibrīl (peace be upon him). The Exalted said:

“And when We have recited it to you, then follow you its (the Qur’ān’s) recital.”
(al-Qiyāma; 18)

The one whose recitation the Prophet ﷺ heard was Jibrīl عليه السلام.

The Exalted said:

“You did not kill them but it was Allah that killed them.” (al-Anfāl; 17)

And:

“You did not throw when you threw but it was Allah that threw.” (al-Anfāl; 17)

So, He negated that they themselves killed and affirmed it for Himself. He also negated throwing from him (the Prophet ﷺ) and affirmed it for Himself. What is intended here is not negating their killing of the disbelievers and his throwing dust at them from a sensory perspective, rather, what this means is that they did not kill them or throw at them in the sense that Allah killed them and threw at them—which is in the sense of creating and decreeing—for they are two different meanings. Sometimes the action is linked to both of them together as appears in the statement of Allah the Exalted:

**“If only they were pleased with that which Allah and His Messenger gave them and said:
Allah is sufficient for us. Allah will give us of His bounty as well as His Messenger.”**

(al-Tawba; 59)

It has been narrated from ‘Āisha that:

When Allah the Blessed and Exalted wishes to create a child in the womb, He dispatches an Angel that enters the womb and takes the new embryo with its hand and fashions it into a body and says: “Oh Lord, shall it be a male or a female? Shall it be straight or crooked?” So the Exalted says what He wills and the Angel creates.

In another narration it states: “So the Angel fashions (the baby) and breaths into it the spirit with either felicity or wretchedness (being decreed for it).”

So if you have understood this, it will become clear to you that an action can be used in different ways and there is no contradiction between them. It is for this reason that an action can be ascribed to a solid inanimate object sometimes as is in the statement of the Exalted:

“Giving its fruit at all times, by the Leave of its Lord.” (Ibrāhīm; 25)

So, the tree does not literally give its fruits, as is also in the statement (of the Prophet ﷺ) to the man to whom he gave a date : “Take it. If you do not come to it, it will come to you”, as appears in (the collection of) al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Ḥibbān. Hence, the ascription of ‘coming’ differs from a man to a date. So the coming of the date is different from the coming of a man. Coming (from both of these) is figurative and different in their ascriptions. The figurative expression for coming with respect to a man means that Allah created within him the ability and will to come.

The coming of the fruit means that Allah places someone—as a means—who brings it, whereas in reality, in both cases, ‘coming’ is ascribed to Allah. Due in part to the different ways considering the intermediaries, sometimes looking to intermediaries in actions is disbelief, as is found in the response of Qārūn to Mūsā when he said:

“I was only given this due to knowledge that I have.” (al-Qaṣaṣ; 78)

And as appears in the Ḥadīth:

Some of my servants have awoken as believers in Me, and disbelievers in Me. As for the one who says: Rain came to us due to the bounty of Allah and His mercy, that is a believer in Me and disbeliever in the stars. As for the one who says: We were sent rain due to such and such star, that is a disbeliever in Me and believer in the star.

This is disbelief considering that the intermediary (the star) is independent (in causation) and creating. al-Nawawī said:

The scholars have differed—having two different views regarding the disbelief of one who says: We were sent rain due to such and such a star:

One: It is unbelief in Allah the Exalted that removes the root of faith and expels one from the religion of Islām. They said: This is regarding the one who says that while believing that the star is in itself, a doer that manages and spreads the rain, as was claimed by some of some of the people from the period of ignorance. Whoever believes this, then there is no doubt concerning his unbelief. This view is the one upheld by the majority of the scholars, and al-Shāfi‘ī is from them and (it is) the apparent (meaning) of the Ḥadīth. They (the scholars) said: Based upon this, if someone said: We were given rain by such and such a star—while believing that it is from Allah and His mercy and that the star is a sign and time post for it customarily, then it is as if he said: ‘Rain came to us at such and such a time.’ This one has not disbelieved. They (the scholars) differed concerning it being detested (or not), however it is preferably (detested by way of *tanzīh*) without there being in sin therein. The reason for it being detested is that it is a word that hangs in the balance between disbelief and other than that, so perhaps it is so that (one) might think bad about this person because it is a saying of pre-Islamic times and those who traverse their way.

Two: Regarding the interpretation of the Ḥadīth, the second opinion states: What is intended is denial of the blessings of Allah the Exalted due to ascribing the rain to the star only. This is with respect to the one that does not believe in the independent control of the star. This interpretation is supported by the last narration in this section: ‘Some of the people have awoken believers and disbelievers.’ And in another narration it states: ‘Allah does not send down anything of blessings from the heavens except that a group of people wake up as ungrateful (*kāfirūn*) for them.’ So his statement: ‘for them’, proves that it is rejection of blessings, and Allah knows best.⁴

So you see here that he mentioned the agreement of the scholars that whoever ascribes the action to an intermediary, then he has not disbelieved unless he believes that it is the doer, manager, and creator. If the attention given to the intermediary is not in this manner—such that the intermediary is seen as a sign or a place in which the created thing is decreed—then in this case it is not disbelief. Rather, sometimes, the Law Giver encourages taking notice of it (the intermediary), such as in his statement ﷺ: “Whoever goes out of there way to do good for you, then reciprocate. If you are unable, then supplicate for him until you know that you have reciprocated.” And his statement ﷺ: “Whoever does not thank the people has not thanked Allah.”

⁴ Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Imām al-Nawawī

This is because taking notice of the intermediary in this manner does not negate seeing the bounty of Allah ﷻ . Allah ﷻ has praised His servants in some places (in the Qur’ān) due to their actions, nay, even rewarding them for it, and He is the cause for them to possess the will to do them, and the One who creates their ability as well. He said:

“How excellent a slave! Verily, he was ever oft-returning in repentance.” (Şād; 30)

And He said:

“For those who do good there will be goodness and more.”

And He said:

“Successful indeed is he who purifies it (i.e. his heart).” (al-Shams; 9)

So when it becomes clear to you that a verb may be used in various ways (you will see) these meanings are not contradictory. This is (of course) if you understand with a correct and sound understanding.

This is because the meanings are more expansive than the mere outward expressions, and the chests (of men) are more expansive than the books and (other) written materials. If we were to deal with just the literal expression without the figurative (meaning), we would not find it permissible to join or separate between the (primary) texts. Have you not seen what Allah informed us of regarding Ibrāhīm when He said:

“My Lord, indeed they have led astray many among mankind.” (Ibrāhīm; 36)

Do you believe that Ibrāhīm associated partners with Allah the Exalted by way of solid inanimate objects while he is the one who (also) said:

**“Do you all worship that which you carve while Allah created you
and that which you do?”** (al-Şāffāt; 95-96)

The unifying matter regarding this is that whoever associates partners with Allah the Exalted in (independent) creation and cause, then he is a polytheist, regardless (if the thing) associated was a solid inanimate object, or a human Prophet or other than that. Whoever believes that any of that is a means—be it demonstrated or not, believing that Allah the Exalted made it a means for obtaining other things and that the doer is Allah Alone with no partner, then he is a believer—even if he was mistaken in what he thought to be a means that was (in fact) not a means. This is because his mistake was in the

means, not in the One who facilitates the means, the Creator and Manager, the Glorified and Exalted of Lofty stature.

