Between Coercion and Compassion: A Comparative Analysis of '*Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* in Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's Rationalism and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Sufi Ethics

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Abstract

This article explores the concept of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (enjoining righteousness and forbidding evil) in Islamic theology through a comparative analysis of two influential thinkers: Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (*Mu'tazilī* rationalist) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī (*Asy'arī*-Sufi scholar). Modern religious violence frequently arises from stringent interpretations of these teachings, highlighting the necessity to examine how classical scholars reconciled ethical imperatives with humanistic principles. The study analyzes primary texts using hermeneutic and comparative methods, including Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, to illustrate differing approaches. While Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār focused on rational-legal criteria for intervention, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī emphasized spiritual intention and social harmony. Key findings show (1) the *Mu'tazilī* prioritization of systemic justice and epistemic clarity versus the Sufi focus on moral self-reformation and gradualism; (2) the role of humanism (e.g., reducing harm, maintaining dignity) across both frameworks despite theological differences; and (3) their relevance to modern debates on religious authority and pluralism. The study concludes that these classical models offer nuanced alternatives to coercive enforcement of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, promoting a compassion-driven ethics adaptable to diverse socioreligious contexts. Therefore, this article is intended to introduce a novel conceptual framework by bridging *Mu'tazilī* rationalism and Sufi ethics in understanding the doctrine of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, integrating rational-legal principles with spiritual compassion to reinterpret this duty beyond a coercive paradigm. Furthermore, underscores the urgent need to safeguard human dignity and the common good within diverse, multicultural societies.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the instrumentalization of religious doctrine—particularly the misinterpretation of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM)—has precipitated a multidimensional crisis. This phenomenon manifests in forms ranging from the global stigmatization of Islam as a coercive religion to societal fragmentation in religiously plural nations such as Indonesia (Burhani, 2021; Sebastian & Othman Alkaff, 2024). The Global Terrorism Index (2023) documents a rise in religiously motivated violence, though theological motivations remain underexplored in the report (Peace, 2023). Empirical studies on organizations like the Islamic Defenders Front (Front Pembela Islam/FPI) reveal that extremist groups weaponize AMNM doctrine, specifically its violent interpretations of *Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (forbidding wrong), to legitimize attacks on religious sites and hate speech (Anwar, 2014; Fealy & Ricci, 2019; Sila & Fealy, 2022). Research indicates this narrative has consistently served as a justification mechanism over the past decade (Basit, 2016; Irawan, 2018; Sazali et al., 2022).

Within Indonesia's heterogeneous social fabric, religious identity frequently fuels conflict, with the erroneous interpretation and coercive application of AMNM exacerbating intolerance (Menchik, 2015; Alvian & Ardhani, 2023). Central to this tension is the erroneous interpretation

and coercive application of AMNM, exacerbating intolerance (Afandi, 2024). Paradoxically, such violence contradicts classical Islamic scholarship, which emphasizes humanistic principles within AMNM, as demonstrated by Arkoun's analysis of 10th-century texts (Arkoun, 2019, pp. 106–109). This theory-practice divergence reveals three fundamental deficiencies: (1) Theological Reductionism: A fragmented focus on AMNM's legal dimensions (*fiqh*) at the expense of ethical considerations, which is known as *akhlāq* (Jackson, 2010). (2) Identity Politics: The exploitation of AMNM for power consolidation, exemplified by vigilante groups in West Java (Wilson, 2014; Van Bruinessen, 2015; Idris et al., 2025). (3) Hermeneutic Failure: Literalist textual interpretations devoid of historical contextualization (Jazuli Afandi, 2025).

Existing scholarship exhibits persistent methodological and conceptual limitations that this study seeks to address. Theological-normative approaches neglect integrating humanist ethics; contemporary studies limit humanistic analysis to modern thinkers, such as Hanafi, while overlooking classical roots; and empirical research disproportionately focuses on violent manifestations (Zamzami, 2015; Hakim et al., 2023). Compounding these gaps is the absence of comparative studies examining the Muʿtazilah-Ashʿariyyah dialectic, which represents Islam's legal rationalism versus spiritual ethics (Jazuli Afandi, 2014; Shihadeh, 2021). While emerging research partially addresses these deficiencies—such as Dinata's Salafî-focused analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah, Kadir's comparative framework of Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd, and Muradi's social-tafsir examination of AMNM in Buya Hamka's work—no existing study systematically reconciles classical AMNM paradigms with contemporary radicalization processes through a comparative humanist lens (Murodi, 2007; Dinata et al., 2022; Kadir, 2024).

Recent scholarship continues to privilege either theological abstraction or empirical observation without establishing the necessary hermeneutical bridge between classical Islamic ethics and modern religious violence. This investigation addresses this lacuna by conducting the first in-depth comparative analysis of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's Muʿtazilî rational-legalism and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Asyʿarī-Ṣūfī transformative ethics, contextualizing their thought within modern religious intolerance while proposing a humanistic synthesis capable of informing contemporary deradicalization strategies.

Given this scholarly landscape, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī emerge as optimal subjects for comparative investigation due to comprehensive epistemological, historical, and contextual factors. As representatives of Islam's two principal theological schools—Mu'tazilah and Asy'ariyah—these figures offer complementary yet fundamentally divergent conceptual frameworks for AMNM. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (935-1025 CE), through his magnum opus *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, developed a rational-legalistic approach emphasizing objective criteria in assessing wrongdoing, including empirical verification and consideration of social consequences (Peters, 1976). Conversely, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī (1058-1111 CE) articulated an ethical-spiritual paradigm in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, prioritizing personal transformation *(tazkiyat al-nafs)* as a prerequisite to external moral intervention (Arifin et al., 2022). Their historical influence remains demonstrably relevant: recent research indicates that 63% of *pesantren* educational materials in Indonesia continue referencing Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's works, while Mu'tazilah thought undergoes resurgence among progressive Muslim intellectuals (Hildebrandt, 2007; Hefner, 2020). Moreover, contemporary debates surrounding religious authority, legal pluralism, and ethical intervention in Muslim-majority societies directly invoke tensions between rationalist and spiritualist interpretive traditions that these figures historically embodied.

Preliminary textual analysis reveals a compelling dialectic between Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's rational-legalistic approach and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's ethico-spiritual paradigm—a tension with profound implications for contemporary deradicalization discourse. A critical examination of *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* demonstrates that Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār constructed the AMNM framework upon five foundational Mu'tazilah principles (*al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*), establishing three operational criteria that challenge literalist applications: First, a verificative epistemology demanding empirical evidence *(ḥujjah bayyina)* prior to determining wrongdoing's status (Peters, 1976). Second,

proportionality in intervention, whereby corrective action must correspond to the severity of transgression (Auda, 2008). Third, strict adherence to *maṣlaḥah* (public interest) principles to prevent unintended harmful consequences (Hourani, 1971). This rationalist framework implicitly contests coercive religious enforcement by subordinating intervention to evidentiary standards and consequentialist calculation.

Conversely, in-depth reading of *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* reveals that Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī reconstructed AMNM as integral to spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) through four hierarchical stages: practitioners must undergo self-transformation (*islāḥ al-nafs*) as a moral prerequisite; intervention progresses from subtle counsel (*al-mauʾiẓah al-ḥasanah*) to compassionate firmness (*al-raḥma*), consistently prioritizing reconciliation over punishment. Whereas Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's approach emphasizes legal-rational constraints on coercion, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's paradigm reframes AMNM as primarily inward ethical cultivation. This conceptual reconfiguration delegitimizes vigilante violence by relocating moral authority from external enforcement to internal transformation (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

This comparative study also found significant points of convergence between the two thinkers: first, the rejection of mob justice and vigilantism that ignores legal procedures; Second, the emphasis on progressive education as a long-term solution. Third, a vision of civil society (*al-mujtamaʾ al-madani*) based on social justice. So, the explanation above reinforces the research's central argument that contemporary AMNM implementation requires a creative synthesis between a clear legal structure (Mu'tazilah legacy) and transformative ethics (Sufi heritage).

The argumentation above also reveals three main dimensions in the implementation of AMNM according to Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī. First, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār in *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* establishes strict rational principles before implementing AMNM, particularly the requirements of *al-ʿilm bi al-munkar* (objective knowledge of the evil) and *al-iqtidar* (capacity to change) as limitations to coercive action (Al-Jabbâr, 2009). This approach aligns with modern conflict theory, which emphasizes *conflict prevention* through fact verification. Second, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī in *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* created a system for ethical and spiritual actions that ranks different ways to respond: starting with *al-tagyīr bi al-qalb* (changing the heart) as a way to resist without action, then *al-mauʾiẓah al-ḥasanah* (good advice) through conversation, and finally *al-tagyīr bi al-yad* (taking action), which should only be done by those in power. This model reflects the concept of conflict transformation in contemporary peace studies, which emphasizes non-violent resolution (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Third, the common ground between the two figures lies in the principle of *maṣlaḥah*, which Auda explores in depth in his work on *Maqāṣid al-Syarīʿah* within the Philosophy of Islamic Law. Here, the assessment of AMNM should focus on its social impact, emphasizing consequence-based ethics rather than solely normative compliance (Auda, 2008).

Building on established scholarship, this article advances the study of *Amr bi al-Maʿrūf wa Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* (AMNM) by moving beyond broad historical surveys toward a sustained comparative analysis of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ghazālī. Cook's (2009) influential study offers a wide-ranging historical–theological account of AMNM across Islamic schools, providing an essential point of departure. Rather than surveying multiple traditions at a general level, however, the present study narrows its focus to close textual engagement with two representative thinkers in order to examine how AMNM is normatively structured within distinct yet intersecting ethical frameworks. In this respect, it builds on Peters's comprehensive analysis of ʿAbd al-Jabbār's rationalist theology by extending his insights specifically to AMNM and situating them alongside Sufi-inflected ethical concerns. Similarly, while Hourani's seminal work elucidates ʿAbd al-Jabbār's broader moral philosophy, this article applies those rationalist principles directly to AMNM, highlighting the epistemic verification requirements that function to limit coercion and prevent abuse.

A parallel contribution is made with respect to al-Ghazālī. Drawing on Ormsby's (2008, 2014) and Griffel's (2009) analyses of al-Ghazālī's integration of philosophy, theology, and

spirituality, the article reconsiders his approach to AMNM not as anti-rational, but as a morally disciplined practice that combines rational accountability with spiritual transformation. Particular attention is given to the role of intention, ethical self-cultivation, and graduated intervention in shaping a compassionate model of moral exhortation. To clarify the shared normative orientation of both thinkers, the study employs Auda's (2008) maqāṣid-based framework as an analytical lens, demonstrating that ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ghazālī implicitly operated within an ethical logic that prioritizes *maṣlaḥah* and harm prevention, anticipating principles later systematized in contemporary Islamic legal theory.

These classical insights are then brought into dialogue with contemporary Indonesian debates, where AMNM has been implicated in religious violence and exclusion. Burhani's (2021) empirical study documents how AMNM has been invoked to justify violence against religious minorities, while Fealy and Ricci's (2019) analysis traces the broader mobilization of intolerance through distorted religious narratives. Rather than merely diagnosing these developments, the present article responds by recovering historical–theological constraints embedded within classical thought that explicitly reject vigilantism and unregulated coercion. In conversation with Hefner's (2020) account of "covenantal pluralism," the study provides a deeper normative grounding for pluralistic frameworks by anchoring them in premodern Islamic ethics. Finally, building on Shihadeh's (2021) examination of Ashʿarī–Muʿtazilī debates over moral epistemology, the article demonstrates that despite enduring disagreements over the nature of moral truth, both ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ghazālī converge on practical limits to the enforcement of AMNM. This convergence, the article argues, opens space for a synthetic and theologically grounded model capable of addressing contemporary challenges without severing ties to the classical tradition.

This article offers the first systematic and in-depth comparative analysis of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ghazālī on *amr al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar*, integrating bodies of scholarship that have previously examined their thought separately, treated AMNM across traditions in broad terms, or focused on its contemporary misuse. By placing Muʿtazilite rationalism and Ashʿarī–Sufi ethics into direct philosophical dialogue on AMNM, the study demonstrates that, despite significant theoretical divergences, both traditions converge on practical ethical constraints that limit coercion and abuse.

This article also explicitly bridges medieval Islamic theology and contemporary deradicalization discourse by linking Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's epistemic requirements for moral action to modern conflict-prevention theory and al-Ghazālī's graded model of moral intervention to frameworks of conflict transformation and nonviolent communication. By situating present-day religious extremism in Indonesia within a historically grounded theological analysis, the study demonstrates how classical Islamic thought provides normative resources for addressing twenty-first-century challenges, thereby integrating domains that previous scholarship has largely treated in isolation.

Thus, this article makes an original contribution by systematically integrating Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's rational limits on coercive AMNM, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's tiered spiritual–ethical model of intervention, and their shared *maṣlaḥah* orientation into a unified, consequence-sensitive framework for de-radicalisation and interfaith dialogue in contemporary post-truth societies.

METHODS

Methodologically, this study is qualitative (Syalabi, 1997), employs methodological triangulation by integrating three complementary approaches. First, it conducts a philological analysis of primary Arabic texts (Ghali, 2023), including textual criticism, to trace the conceptual development of *Amr bi al-Maʿrūf wa Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* (AMNM). Second, it applies philosophical hermeneutics, drawing on Gadamer's framework of horizons of meaning, to interpret the thought of the two figures (Palmer, 2005). Third, it undertakes a critical comparative analysis that situates their discourses within the socio-historical context of the 10th–12th centuries CE (Lange, 2013).

In doing so, the study also engages the recent findings of the Mapping Islamic Theological Traditions project, which indicate that the apparent polarization between Muʿtazilī and Asyʿari positions on AMNM rests on shared commitments to safeguarding human dignity and the public good (Baidhawy, 2016).

The primary data for this study consists of close readings of two major classical works in their original Arabic, treated both as theological arguments and as historically situated artefacts. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, composed in the 10th century, is consulted in the critical edition prepared by ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān (Maktabah Usrah, 2009), with explicit awareness that the printed text rests on a Cairo manuscript held at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya and on a superior Istanbul copy that preserves an advanced redaction of his Muʿtazilite system. This treatise provides the doctrinal and epistemological framework within which *amr bi al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* is embedded as one of the five principles of Muʿtazilite theology.

Complementing this rationalist perspective, the study also engages Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* in modern critical editions, focusing in particular on the books devoted to *amr al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* and *al-ḥisbah*, in which al-Ghazālī integrates "outer" juridical regulation and "inner" spiritual discipline into a single account of moral oversight in society. The primary data are further enriched through supporting classical texts, later commentaries and explications of these foundational works, related Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarī theological discussions. And also, the data from a broad corpus of scholarly secondary literature on these traditions, and contemporary empirical studies that document the misuse and reformulation of *amr bi al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* in present-day contexts.

The data analysis follows a three-stage hermeneutical-comparative process that begins with textual exegesis and philological analysis through close reading of the primary Arabic texts, contextual interpretation of key doctrinal categories, and systematic comparative mapping of each thinker's conceptual structure. The second stage undertakes hermeneutical interpretation by historically contextualizing both authors in the 10th–12th century theological landscape, reconstructing their underlying philosophical premises, and fusing these historical meanings with contemporary concerns about religious violence and pluralism. The final stage conducts a critical comparative synthesis that identifies and explains points of divergence and convergence between Muʿtazilite rationalism and Ashʿarī–Sufi ethics, and then develops an integrated synthetic framework that combines rational verification, spiritual transformation, and harm-preventive constraints as a coherent model for rethinking *amr bi al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* today.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's View on *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*: An Analysis of Mu'tazilite Rationalism

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's conception of *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) in his foundational works *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* and *al-Mugnī* operates simultaneously as normative theology and ethical-rational doctrine—a distinction critical to understanding his thought within contemporary pluralistic contexts (Vasalou, 2008). More precisely, his rationalist framework positions AMNM as the enforcement pole within a broader dialectic with Sufi moral philosophy, specifically Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's ethics of internal transformation (E. Ormsby, 2008), clarifying the "coercive" side of the comparative framework.

Where Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī emphasizes spiritual rectification of the self, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār grounds moral obligation in epistemic verification through reason (*'aql*) and scriptural evidence (*naql*), establishing the "coercive" counterweight to Sufi voluntarism. This structural comparison—between rational-legal enforcement and spiritual internalization—will illuminate how *Muʿtazilī* thought addresses modern ethical challenges that neither framework alone can resolve (Al-Jabbâr, 2009).

'Abd al-Jabbār emerged as the paramount systematizer of Mu'tazilite theology, a movement that pioneered systematic rational philosophy within Islamic thought. As Nasution interprets, the

Mu'tazilite tes responded to external philosophical challenges by constructing a coherent theological edifice grounded in five cardinal principles—*al-Uṣûl al-Khamsah* or known as the Mu'tazilah's *Pancasila*—which adherents regarded as an indivisible doctrinal unit (Nasution, 1995). This comprehensiveness distinguished Mu'tazilite rationalism from mere ad hoc apologetics; instead, it represented a totalizing philosophical method where each principle reinforced the others.

'Abd al-Jabbār's systematization of these principles in *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* became the definitive textual anchor for Mu'tazilite orthodoxy. As Ahmad Amin recognized, the work succeeded in making explicit the underlying logical structure of Mu'tazilite thought, rendering it accessible for both internal debate and external critique (Al-Jabbār, 2009). The five principles—*al-Tauhīd* (divine unity), *al-'Adl* (divine justice), *al-Wa'd wa al-Wa'īd* (promise and threat), *al-Manzilat bayna al-Manzilatayn* (the intermediate position), and *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (commanding right and forbidding wrong)—formed an interconnected system where theological commitments necessarily entailed ethical obligations.

The recovery and transmission of *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* itself bears on the accessibility of Mu'tazilite thought today. The original manuscript, preserved at Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah in Cairo, had remained in deteriorated condition for centuries until a superior copy emerged in Istanbul, enabling contemporary scholars to produce reliable editions. This textual history matters because the comprehensiveness of 'Abd al-Jabbār's exposition would remain obscured without legible sources (Peters, 1976).

The Rationalist Epistemology Underlying *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*

'Abd al-Jabbār's treatment of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) must be read first as a statement about moral epistemology—that is, how we know what constitutes right and wrong. In *Syarḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, he defines *'amr* (command) and *nahy* (prohibition) as hierarchical speech acts issuing from superior to subordinate authority, grounding their intelligibility in a pre-existing framework of rational and scriptural knowledge (Nicholson, 2013). Critically, *al-ma'rūf* and *al-munkar* do not refer to actions whose moral status is ontologically given or divinely determined in isolation; instead, they denote actions whose goodness or badness is epistemically accessible through either rational cognition (*'aqlî*) or scriptural evidence (*syar'î*) (Nasution, 1995).

A more detailed explanation of the concept of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* is found in the book *Syarh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah.* Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār begins with an explanation of the meaning (definition) of the words *al-Amr, al-Nahy, al-Ma'ruf,* and *al-Munkar*. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār states (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009):

نحن أولا نبين حقيقة الأمر، والنهي، والمعروف، والمنكر. أما الأمر، فهو قول القائل لمن دونه في الرتبة إفعل والنهي هو قول القائل لمن دونه لا تفعل. وأما المعروف، فهو كل فعل عرف فاعله حسنه او دل عليه، ولهذا لا يقال في أفعاله القديم بعالي معروف، لما لم يعرف حسنها ولا دل عليه. وأما المنكر، فهو كل فعل عرف فاعله قبحه او دل عليه، ولو وقع من الله تعالي القبيح لا يقال انه منكر، لما لم يعرف قبحه ولا دل عليه.

First, we will explain the truth of al-amr, al-nahy, al-Ma'ruf, and al-munkar. As for al-amr, it is what the one who is higher in rank says to the one below him, "Do this," while al-Nahy is what the one who is higher in rank says to the one below him, "Do not do this". As for al-Ma'ruf, every action whose doer knows its goodness or for which there is evidence that shows its goodness, so the good deeds of Allah SWT are not said to be al-Ma'ruf because there is no evidence that states it. While al-munkar is all the evil actions whose doer knows its evilness, or there is evidence that states its evilness, so the calamity sent down by Allah SWT. It cannot be said to be al-munkar, as no evidence supports it.

Etymologically, *al-'amr* means a request to act in a top-down manner, such as a command "do it!" Moreover, *al-nahy* means the opposite: a request that comes from the top down, for

example, a command "do not do it!"

As for the term *al-ma'rūf,* according to Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, it is an action that the doer knows is good and praiseworthy, or there is a hint that explains that the action is good. So, the goodness that comes from Allah cannot be said to be *al-ma'rūf*, because it is not known, and there is no shar'ī guidance that leads to it. The first foundation is reason, while the second is shara', i.e., the Qur'an and Sunnah.

This distinction signals a fundamental Mu'tazilite commitment: the obligation to perform AMNM derives not from blind obedience to divine command, but from rational recognition of moral truths that reason and revelation jointly establish (Attahiru et al., 2016). As 'Abd al-Jabbār states, the goodness of acts performed by Allah—such as divine justice—cannot be classified as *al-ma'rūf* precisely because humans lack epistemic access to their rational basis; the category requires that the goodness be known or evidenced, not merely asserted (Burlian, 2017). This epistemic requirement transforms AMNM from a crude coercive mechanism into a refined doctrine tied to theories of human knowledge and moral development—a sophistication often missed in treatments that reduce Mu'tazilite ethics to "rationalism" without specifying its epistemological architecture.

The Categorical Distinction between Rational and Scriptural Munkar

'Abd al-Jabbār's second significant contribution involves disaggregating the concept of *al-Munkar* into two irreducible categories: *Munkar' Aqlī* (rationally condemned evils) and *Munkar Shar'ī* (scripturally condemned evils), with the latter subdivided into *Qat'ī* (definite) and *Ijtihadī* (interpretative) subcategories (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009). This taxonomy reveals a sophisticated moral philosophy, far removed from monolithic divine-command theory. 'Abd al-Jabbār divides *al-Munkar* into two main categories: (a) *Munkar 'Aqlī* (which is rejected by reason), such as injustice and lies. Its prevention is obligatory regardless of context. (b) *Munkar Shar'ī* (those rejected by the Sharī'ah), further divided into: (1) *Qat'ī* (definite), such as adultery and theft, which must be prevented without tolerance. (2) *Ijtihadī* (interpretative), such as *furu' fiqhiyah* issues that scholars still debate.

Munkar' Aqlī—encompassing injustice, deception, and incitement—are condemned by reason itself, independent of revelation. The obligation to prevent such acts applies categorically, without contextual qualification, because their wrongness is grounded in rational agency itself. By contrast, *Munkar Syar'ī* subdivides further: acts like theft and adultery constitute *Qat'ī* violations because they possess unambiguous scriptural prohibition, whereas *Ijtihadī* matters—points of *fiqhī* dispute where scholars legitimately disagree—permit no obligation to intervene through coercion, since their very status as *munkar* remains contested.

'Abd al-Jabbār discusses this in detail about *al-Munkar* in *Sharh al-Ushûl Khamsah*. He explains:

واعلم أن المناكير على ضربين: عقلية وشرعية. فالعقليات منها، نحو الظلم والكذب وما يجرى مجراها، والنهى عنها كلها واجب، لا يختلف الحال فيه بحسب اختلاف المقدم عليه بعد التكليف. والشرعيات على ضربين: أحدهما، ما للاجتهاد فيه مجال، والآخر لا مجال للاجتهاد فيه. أما ما لا مجال للاجتهاد في كونه منكرا كالسرقة والزنا وشرب الخمر وما يجرى هذا المجرى، والنهى عن كل ذلك واجب ولا يختلف الحال فيه بحسب اختلاف المقدم عليه. وأما ما للاجتهاد فيه مجال....

For your information, there are two kinds of *al-Munkar*: those that are based on reason and those that are based on *sharī'ah*. The one that is based on reasons, such as injustice, lying, and their equivalents, it is obligatory to forbid all of them, and there is no difference of opinion concerning it after he is a *mukallaf*. As for the *al-Munkar* that are based on sharī'ah, they are divided into two. The first is not amenable to *ijtihad*, whereas the second is. The *al-munkar* that are not amenable to *ijtihad* are, for example, stealing, adultery, drinking alcohol, and so on. There is no difference of opinion about the obligation to prevent them.

Al-Munkar (evils) that fall under *al-'Aqliyat* are acts of oppression (injustice), lying, incitement, envy, jealousy, disobedience, wickedness, hypocrisy, and k*ufr*. The implementation of *Nahy 'an al-Munkar* against this first category is mandatory without exception.

Meanwhile, the evil that falls under al-Shar'iyat is further divided into two categories: the first is a matter that does not allow *ijtihad*, and the second is a matter that can accept ijtihad. As for *al-munkar*, in cases that cannot accept *ijtihad* are stealing, adultery, drinking alcohol, and the like, which are *Qath'i* prohibited by religion. The example for *al-Munkar* in matters that are amenable to *ijtihad* is doing an act whose *sharî'*ah ruling is still debated among scholars, because no *Qat'ī* evidence is found in the Qur'an and al-Sunnah (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009).

This framework aligns 'Abd al-Jabbār's AMNM doctrine with what contemporary moral theory recognizes as a distinction between deontological prohibitions (grounded in rational principles about human dignity and social order) and positivist legal restrictions (grounded in canonical legislation). More significantly, it forestalls absolutism: the doctrine does not mandate intervention in all cases where some actor judges an action morally suspect, but instead restricts coercive AMNM to matters where rational principle or definitive scriptural consensus establishes the wrongness. This proportionalism directly addresses the modern concern that overzealous moral policing becomes tyrannical; 'Abd al-Jabbār's system constrains the license of moral enforcers through epistemic and textual rigor.

The Rejection of Coercive Uniformitarianism

The distinction between rational and scriptural evils, combined with the subdivision of scriptural evils, articulates' Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's fundamental rejection of what might be termed "coercive uniformitarianism"—the assumption that all moral knowledge should be enforced with equal vigor regardless of its epistemic or textual basis. Embedded within this rejection is a theory of legitimate authority: one possessing superior rank (knowledge, position, or mandate) may issue commands or prohibitions to subordinates only where the matter admits of specific knowledge, whether rational or scriptural.

This constraint on authority becomes analytically rich when compared to Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Sufi ethics, which emphasizes internal spiritual purification and moral cultivation through habituation and mystical insight rather than external regulation. Where Sufi thought privileges the transformation of inner intention (*niyyah*) and the refinement of the soul (*nafs*) (Al-Ghazali, 2011). 'Abd al-Jabbār's Mu'tazilite framework establishes objective criteria—rational principles and textual evidence—by which external actors may legitimately intervene. However, both frameworks share a concern with preventing the conflation of externally enforced conformity with genuine moral development. (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009). For Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, coercion risks ossifying the soul; for 'Abd al-Jabbār, unjustified coercion violates rational authority and epistemic integrity. The tension between these poles—coercive rationalism and voluntary spiritualism—constitutes the essential dialectic through which Islamic moral thought navigates the relationship between law and transformation.

Contemporary conflict moderation theory recognizes this insight: moral interventions prove compelling and legitimate precisely when they address *evidenced* harms through proportional, transparent mechanisms, rather than through expansive claims to correct belief or enforce contested interpretations. 'Abd al-Jabbār's categorical framework operationalizes this principle within medieval Islamic theology, demonstrating that rationalist ethics need not collapse into authoritarian imposition.

'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar as *Farḍu Kifāyah* and the Epistemological Debate

From various literatures, *Jumhūr al-'Ulamā'* has reached *ijma'* (agreement) that the ruling of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* is *farḍu kifāyah*. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār agrees with the *Jumhūr al-'Ulamā'* above, then he adds the information that there is an exception of a small part of the *Imāmiyyah* group that does not agree with the *ijma'*. Nevertheless, the existence of this small

group does not reduce the legitimacy of the *ijma'* of *the Jumhūr al-'Ulamā'*, because their number is small, so it is not so calculated. In *Syarh al-Uşūl al-Khamsah,* Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār explains (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009),

وجملة ما نقوله في هذا الموضع، أنه لا خلاف بين الأمة في وجوب الأمر بالمعروف والنهى عن المنكر، إلا ما حكى عن شرذمة من الإمامية لا يقع بهم وبكلامهم اعتداداً. والذي يدل على ذلك بعد الإجماع قوله تعالى: " كنتم خير أمة أخرجت للناس" الآية، وقوله تعالى حاكياً عن لقمان" يا بنى أقم الصلاة وأمر بالمعروف وانه عن المنكر

From the arguments that we have presented in this regard, there is no difference of opinion among the *Ummah* regarding the obligation to do good and forbid evil, except for the opinion expressed by a small minority of the *Imâmiyyah* sect, whose opinion does not count for much. The evidence that corroborates this obligation, in addition to ijma', is the words of Allah, "*Kuntum Khaira Ummat Ukhrijat li al-Nâs.*" (QS. Aly Imran: 180) and the words of Allah Swt. which tell about Lukman Hakim, "*Ya Bunayya Aqim al-Shalat wa' Mur bi al-Ma'ruf wa' Anha' an al-Munkar*".

Although Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār agreed with the majority of scholars that AMNM is *farḍu kifāyah*, he emphasized that the basis for its obligation must be clear: whether it is based on reason or *sharî'ah* (Hourani, 1971). This debate reflects the Mu'tazilah-Asy'ariyah dialectic regarding the authority of reason vs. revelation (Griffel, 2009). Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār argued that Reason can recognize the necessity of AMNM in basic cases such as justice. Alternatively, Sharia is required to determine the specific form of AMNM (Mursyid Azisi et al., 2023). This approach offers a humanist solution in preventing radicalism, as AMNM should not be implemented without rational and contextual considerations. (Jazuli Afandi, 2025).

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's focus of attention does not lie on the *farḍu kifāyah* law of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, which has become ijma' of the scholars. In his book *Syarh al-Uşūl al-Khamsah,* Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār explains that the difference in scholarly opinion does not lie in whether *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* is obligatory or not, but lies in the basis of the obligation, whether it is obligatory based on shara', or obligatory based on reason (Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009):

لا خلاف في هذه الجملة بين شيخنا أبي على وأبي هاشم، وإنما الخلاف بينهما في إن وجوب الأمر بالمعروف والنهى عن المنكر يعلم عقلا وشرعا

There is no difference of opinion in this matter between our *shaykh* Aby 'Aly and Aby Hashim, because the real difference of opinion between them is the basis for the obligation of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* itself, whether it is obligatory based on reason or obligatory based on sharî'ah.

The above text illustrates that Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār agreed with the opinion of his two teachers. The main basis for the practice of *'amr al-ma'rūf nahy 'an al-munkar* lies in its foundation. Whether the obligation is based on *shara'* or based on reason. According to Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, a matter or action is categorized as ma'ruf; the basis must be from the Sharia. Likewise, in the case of munkar, the one who declares the case munkar must be based on sharia, namely the Qur'an and Al-Hadith.

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's thinking on AMNM makes three important contributions to contemporary discussions: (1) Emphasis on objective verification before intervening, preventing violence in the name of religion. (2) A hierarchy of intervention that limits the use of force to only agreed-upon offences *(Qat'î).* (3) Integration of reason and sharia as the cornerstone of AMNM, offering a balanced approach between theology and social ethics. This rationality and *maşlaḥah*-based approach, as proposed by Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, could be more effective in de-radicalization than a coercive approach. This finding reinforces the relevance of his thinking to preventing

religious extremism in the modern era.

The cumulative effect of 'Abd al-Jabbār's analysis reveals that Mu'tazilite rationalism functions not as a license for expansive moral coercion, but as an epistemic restraint on it. By grounding AMNM in prior knowledge—accessible through reason or revelation—and by subdividing evils into categories admitting different interventionist responses, 'Abd al-Jabbār constructs a doctrine that simultaneously affirms the moral obligation to oppose wrongdoing and constrains the pretensions of moral enforcers to certain knowledge and legitimate authority. This structure addresses a perennial tension in ethics: how to prevent both moral laxity (failing to oppose genuine harms) and moral tyranny (imposing contestable judgments through coercion).

Against the Sufi emphasis on internal transformation and voluntary spiritual discipline, 'Abd al-Jabbār's rationalism insists that objective moral truths exist and that communities have obligations to instantiate them through collective action when wrongdoing causes harm. However, his categorical system incorporates safeguards that prevent such action from devolving into majoritarian oppression of minorities or enforcement of interpretively contested matters. The doctrine thus occupies a third position—neither pure voluntarism nor unrestrained authoritarianism—that merits serious engagement in contemporary debates about moral pluralism, religious authority, and the legitimate scope of collective enforcement of ethics.

This framework becomes increasingly significant as modern pluralistic societies must determine which moral standards warrant legal or social enforcement and which remain matters of individual or communal conscience. 'Abd al-Jabbār's systematic analysis, recovered through careful reconstruction of medieval texts, offers a sophisticated medieval precedent for negotiating such questions: it affirms that reason and revelation establish genuine moral obligations, that communities properly enforce certain violations universally, and that contested matters warrant restraint and humility from would-be enforcers. The rationalist pole that 'Abd al-Jabbār represents, when understood adequately through categorical refinement and epistemic precision, need not conflict with spiritual ethics or moral pluralism; rather, it complements and constrains them.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's View on *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*: A Sufi Ethical Analysis

As one of the most influential thinkers in the Islamic tradition, Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī (d. 1111 CE) offers a unique approach to the concept of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) in his magnum opus, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Unlike the Mu'tazilah rationalism represented by Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī integrated spiritual dimensions, ethics of compassion, and socio-contextual considerations in the implementation of AMNM. His thinking is not only based on formal law (*fiqh*), but also emphasizes inner transformation (*tazkiyat al-nafs*) as the foundation of social change (Afandi, 2024).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī explored the meaning of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* and emphasized its centrality in religion, citing Surah Āl-'Imrān, verse 104, in the Quran. He emphasizes that achieving a balanced approach to life is essential to understanding and applying this principle. This approach prioritizes personal growth and exemplarity while considering others' needs. It is essential to address one's weaknesses before getting too involved in others' affairs to achieve self-improvement (Jusoh et al., 2021).

The obligation of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* finds its most foundational expression not in public enforcement but in the moral cultivation of the family—the primary site where commanding right and forbidding wrong operates through pedagogy rather than coercion. For both 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, despite their methodological differences, family education constitutes the essential preparatory ground where individuals develop the epistemic and spiritual capacities necessary for moral agency (Al-Ghazali, 2011; Qaḍi 'Abd Al-Jabbâr, 2009). This domestic application of AMNM reveals the doctrine's true complexity: it is not merely a license for intervention against wrongdoers, but a comprehensive framework for cultivating moral discernment across generations.

The sequential approach to religious education—beginning with memorization of the Qur'an

and its exegesis (*Tafsīr*), progressing to the study and comprehension of prophetic traditions (*Hadith*), developing reasoned conviction (*īman*) in their teachings, and culminating in the capacity to justify acquired religious knowledge through rational discourse (Al-Ghazali, 2011)—directly instantiates the epistemological structure underlying AMNM. This progression from textual foundation (*naql*) to rational comprehension (*'aql*) to justified conviction mirrors 'Abd al-Jabbār's insistence that *al-Ma'ruf* (right action) must be known or evidenced, not merely asserted by authority. Parents who guide children through this sequential development practice AMNM in its most constructive mode: they enable moral knowledge to become genuinely accessible by integrating revelation and reason, thereby equipping the next generation to recognize right and wrong independently rather than through blind conformity.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's personal practice exemplifies this pedagogical vocation extended beyond the household to encompass neighbors and fellow villagers. His emphasis on cultivating consciousness of God (*taqwa*) and pursuing human perfection (*insān kāmil*) represents AMNM operationalized as spiritual formation rather than external regulation. By teaching that happiness must be sought in both this world and the hereafter, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī framed moral education as teleological—directed toward ultimate human flourishing—rather than merely prohibitive. This orientation toward perfection distinguishes Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Sufi approach from legalistic reductions of AMNM to mere enforcement; for him, commanding the good means cultivating the conditions under which individuals voluntarily pursue virtue, having internalized its intrinsic value and its connection to divine proximity.

Scaling AMNM from the family level to the public domain introduces new complexities. While parents possess relational authority and comprehensive knowledge to address wrongdoing through patient pedagogy, public figures addressing rulers and institutional injustice operate under asymmetrical power dynamics and incomplete circumstances.

Regarding munkar actions, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī classifies them into three types. First, acts of major sin for which punishment has been prescribed in the Qur'an. Preventing or prohibiting this kind of evil action is obligatory, and the ruler must punish those who commit such (Al-Ghazali, 2011). Second, according to Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, it is important to prevent three types of sin. Concrete and firm advice, or preventive measures, should prevent the occurrence of persistent evils such as drinking wine, gambling, wearing silk, or using gold and silver vessels. Minor sins that are about to be committed, such as theft, must be controlled by making the person repent. Third, hypocrisy must be prevented because it is an evil act in the eyes of the Sharî'ah and is prohibited by religion, causes addiction, and encourages others to commit hypocrisy.

Furthermore, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī identified four conditions or reasons that require the prevention of hypocrisy. The first condition is that hypocrisy is considered an evil act in the eyes of Sharia and is prohibited by religion. The second condition is that hypocrisy must be prevented, as it causes addiction and encourages others to commit it. The third condition is that the person who wants to avoid the act should know about it and not be prejudiced, accusatory, or slanderous. The fourth condition is that the hypocrisy must be recognized and agreed upon by several scholars.

If any of these conditions are not met, then there is no *Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, which regulates minor matters from different schools. For example, one school of thought holds that specific actions, such as eating the meat of a monitor lizard, are lawful, while another holds that they are forbidden (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī articulated a doctrine of public moral witness that affirms the responsibility of Muslims in influential positions—particularly those in developed areas with access to centers of power—to undertake da'wah (moral-spiritual outreach), sustaining the mandate of commanding right and forbidding wrong, even through harsh, uncompromising speech confronting injustice. Nevertheless, this obligation is constrained by an inviolable principle: intervention must not cause collateral harm to others (Jusoh et al., 2021). This prudential limitation directly parallels 'Abd al-Jabbār's epistemological distinction between obligatory and discretionary moral interventions, revealing both philosophers' convergence on a shared principle—that moral action

requires both epistemic justification and wise assessment of consequences (Hourani, 1971).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's corollary warning deepens this framework: silence in the face of systematic oppression constitutes "a great sin." This creates a genuine moral tension between complicity through inaction and recklessness through intervention. The resolution lies in recognizing public moral witness as an educational and spiritual vocation (*da'wah*) oriented toward cultivating collective moral consciousness, rather than primarily coercive enforcement (Johns, 2013).

This integration of public witness into the broader AMNM framework reveals the doctrine operating across nested scales—intimate family pedagogy, individual spiritual cultivation, public articulation of moral truth, and institutional enforcement—with each level constrained by three unified principles: epistemic precision (we must know the wrongness of what we oppose), spiritual integrity (our motivation must serve the community's welfare, not personal righteousness), and prudential wisdom (intervention must weigh whether it prevents greater harms than it causes).

'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar as a Pillar of Social and Spiritual Ethics

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī viewed *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) as a collective obligation (*fardu kifayah*) aimed at maintaining the moral balance of society. In *Ihyā'*, he quotes Surah Āli 'Imrān verse 104 to emphasise that AMNM should be implemented with wisdom and *mau'izah hasanah* (good advice), not with violence or coercion (Al-Ghazali, 2011). This approach aligns with the theory of nonviolent communication in modern conflict resolution (Rosenberg, 2004).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī delved into the intricacies of amr ma'ruf *Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, highlighting several important components. Among these, he dedicated special attention to the discussion surrounding *Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. These components include the individual who prevents the evil, the perpetrator of the evil, ways to avoid the evil, and ways to avoid hypocrisy. Each element has its terms and conditions that must be carefully considered (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

According to Islamic teachings, there are specific requirements for individuals who aim to prevent evil, who are called *"muhtasib"* and are required to enforce *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. The main requirement is that they be believers who have reached puberty. In addition, they must possess wisdom, good judgment, and the physical strength and ability to carry out this duty. Those who do not qualify for this position are non-believers, mentally unstable individuals, minors, and those who lack the strength and ability to enforce *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. They are not responsible for this obligation (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

Even those who are in the position of enslaved people or considered weaker members of society are still responsible for encouraging good and preventing wrong, known as *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. However, they need to seek permission from those who hold power over them; for example, an enslaved person would need permission from his master, while a wife may need permission from her husband. This obligation applies to any qualified citizen of a country and does not require the ruler's consent.

If a child who has not yet entered a particular belief system can distinguish between right and wrong and encourage virtuous behaviour and discourage unwholesome behaviour, then they will be rewarded. To fulfil the duty of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, one must reach the age of puberty and possess wisdom and reason. In addition, they must believe in the relevant faith, as non-believers are not expected to fulfil this obligation. A person who is considered a *fāsiq* -someone who cannot prevent wrongdoing in their own life- can command virtue even if he is not able to carry it out himself. At least he or she has a sense of justice (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's *Al-Ḥisbah* Framework: Integrating *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah* and Safeguards against Vigilantism

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī divides the stages of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) into five progressive levels. The first stage is giving straightforward advice. The second stage is

giving teaching or advice with gentle words. The third stage is to advise with firm, direct words. The fourth stage is by direct action to prevent disobedience and evil, using force if necessary. For example, destroying gambling equipment, breaking bottles, liquor, etc. The fifth and final stage is to scold, beat, or threaten the person committing the evil to stop him. Except for the fifth stage, no permission from the ruler is needed to do *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (Al-Ghazali, 2011).

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's five-stage framework presents *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* as an escalating progression of intervention methods, each progressively more forceful. The stages move from advice to instruction with gentle words to firm, direct admonition, to physical prevention (including the destruction of forbidden objects), and finally to scolding, beating, or threatening the wrongdoer. Notably, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī permits Muslims to use physical force without the ruler's permission, except at the fifth stage.

While Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī articulates a pragmatic and graduated model of intervention, a markedly different emphasis emerges in the Muʿtazilite tradition, particularly in the thought of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, drawing from Mu'tazilite principles, frames *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* within a more structured legal and rational framework. While both scholars recognize it as *farḍu kifāyah* (a collective obligation), 'Abd al-Jabbār's approach emphasizes epistemic verification—that is, the rational verification and understanding of what constitutes good and evil before implementing any corrective measure. This reflects the Mu'tazilite concern with justice (*'adl*) and divine justice, which requires that individuals possess rational knowledge of the moral nature of their actions.

Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī uses the term *Al-Ḥisbah* to refer to those involved in *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. According to him, *Al-Ḥisbah* has four pillars (Al-Ghazali, 2011): (1) *Al-Muhtasib* (Subjects who do *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*). In Islamic ethics, the principle of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* requires the person known as *al-muḥtasib* to ensure its enforcement. *Al-Muḥtasib* is required to fulfil specific criteria, including being a convert who is qualified to fulfil the role. However, it is important to note that children who have not reached the age of toddlers, persons of unsound mind, and infidels are exempted from this duty. We aim to clarify the criteria for whom we accept and whom we do not. (2) *Al-Muḥtasab fih* (the evil). One important component of *ḥisbah* is *al-muḥtasab fih*, a type of hypocrisy. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī defined *al-muḥtasab fih* as encompassing all forms of hypocrisy apparent to the *muḥtasib*, without the need for fault-finding (*tajassus*) or *ijtihad*. This type of hypocrisy has four requirements: a) It involves unacceptable actions; b) The hypocrisy is present at the time; c) The action is visible to the muhtasib without prior investigation; and d) The issue at hand is a known possibility that does not require further analysis. (3) *Al-Muḥtasab alaih* (The doer of evil deeds). *Al-Muḥtasab alaih* is the one who commits evil. Evil can come from anyone. (4) *Nafsul Iḥtisab* (the process of implementing *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*). *Nafsul Iḥtisab* is the process of implementing the principle of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*. According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, this process has several stages, namely: Telling, Forbidding with advice, Reproaching harshly, Changing by hand, Threatening and frightening, Using hands or feet to hit someone or taking weapons to enforce it.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's concept of *Al-Ḥisbah* (market inspection and moral oversight) rests on four foundational pillars: the *muḥtasib* (the qualified official), the *muḥtasab fih* (the subject matter—the visible vice), the *muḥtasab alaih* (the wrongdoer), and the *nafsul iḥtisab* (the corrective process). This framework is critically anchored within the broader *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* (objectives of Sharia), which Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī himself systematized around five essential principles (*al-kulliyat al-khamsah*): the preservation of religion (*al-dīn*), life (*al-nafs*), intellect (*'aql*), lineage (*nasl*), and property (*māl*) (Yusuf, 2025).

Importantly, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's entire conception of *maṣlaḥah* (public interest) is inseparable from *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*. As he stated, *"Al-maslaḥa hiya al-maqsūdah fi al-syar'i, wa la yu'tabar minha illa ma yata'allaqu bi taḥqīq maqāṣid al-syar'i"* '*Maṣlaḥah* is what is intended by Shariah, and only what relates to realizing the objectives of Shariah is considered valid' (Yusuf, 2025). This means that any action undertaken in *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, particularly

through *Al-Ḥisbah*, must demonstrably serve to protect one or more of these five foundational principles rather than advance private agendas or personal interpretations.

A critical distinction Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī makes in his *ḥisbah* framework is the requirement for qualified authority and the ruler's authorization. The four-stage process he outlines—advice, teaching with gentle words, firm direct words, and physical intervention—is structured precisely to prevent the indiscriminate harm *(ḍarar)* that vigilantism generates (Jusoh et al., 2021).

The principle of preventing harm is articulated in Islamic legal maxims as *"al-darar yuzāl"* (injury should be removed) and its corollary *"la darar wa la dirār"* (neither injury nor reciprocal injury). Significantly, Islamic jurisprudence has established that "preventing harm takes priority over securing a benefit," which means that even when *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* would theoretically promote good, if its implementation causes greater harm through unqualified enforcement, it must be modulated or withheld. This principle of proportionality—balancing benefits (*maṣlaḥah*) against harms *(ḍarar)*—is the epistemic foundation that distinguishes legitimate *ḥisbah* from mob justice.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's insistence that only the fifth stage (beating, threatening, or using weapons) requires explicit authorization from the ruler reflects a sophisticated understanding of *ḍarar* prevention. Crucially, all five stages presuppose that the *muḥtasib* possesses specific qualifications, including knowledge of Islamic law, moral integrity, prudential wisdom, and being a free Muslim. These are not trivial requirements—they function as institutional gatekeepers preventing untrained, emotionally-driven, or biased individuals from unilaterally determining what constitutes evil and how to remedy it.

These restrictions are fundamentally about preventing the investigatory overreach and presumption that characterizes vigilantism. By limiting oversight to manifest violations of clear Sharia principles, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's framework guards against the scenario where unqualified individuals begin conducting inquiries, forming suspicions, or acting on hearsay—a classic gateway to communal violence.

As mentioned above, the paper's findings highlight the importance of Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's understanding of *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* in establishing a religion. This is because religion cannot develop if individuals commit many immoral acts and ignore the right things. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī explored amr ma'ruf *Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* from four different perspectives: (1) preventing the occurrence of immoral acts, (2) responding to individuals who commit immoral acts, (3) preventing the occurrence of immoral acts, and (4) how to prevent immorality itself. Each of these issues has its own rules and prerequisites, all of which are geared towards preventing immoral acts in society at large.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī offers a balanced model of AMNM, combining the authority of sharia with the ethics of compassion. His approach is relevant for multicultural societies, where violence in the name of religion is often counterproductive. By emphasizing moral transformation and collective responsibility, his thought provides a humanist alternative to radical narratives in the name of AMNM.

Comparative Analysis of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Thoughts on *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy ʿan al-Munkar*: Dialectics of Rationality and Spirituality

This article emphasises the polarity and the meeting point between the two models of classical Islamic thought in understanding *'Amr al-Maʿrūf Nahy ʿan al-Munkar* (AMNM). Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, as a representation of Mu'tazilah rationalism, emphasizes objective verification and legal structure, while Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, as an exponent of Sufi-Asy'ari ethics, puts forward a transformative-spiritual approach. However, both agree that AMNM should be oriented towards the public good (*maṣlaḥah*) and avoiding harm (*ḍarar)*. This synthesis is not only theologically relevant but also provides a solution framework for the problem of coercive religion in the contemporary era.

Point of Divergence: Rationality versus Moral Transformation

Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's approach to AMNM is rooted in Mu'tazilah rational epistemology, which emphasizes objective and verifiable legal structures. In Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's thinking, the implementation of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) should not be done haphazardly but must go through a strict epistemic framework and consideration of capabilities. The three main principles can be explained as follows: First, Objective Verification (*al-'ilm bi al-munkar*). Before reprimanding or preventing an evil, AMNM actors must first ensure that the intervening action is truly classified as *munkar* in a shar'i or rational manner. This principle prevents subjectivity and arbitrariness in moral judgment. For example, one should not simply judge others as "sinners" based on prejudice or differences of *fiqhiyah* opinion. Verification must involve: Proof through evidence (for *munkar shar'i*) and Consideration of common sense (for *munkar 'aqli*), as injustice is universally recognized as evil. Without this verification process, the AMNM risks becoming a repressive tool that is counterproductive.

Second, Capacity to Intervene (*al-iktidar*). Even if an act has been verified as a *munkar*, intervention is only mandatory if the perpetrator of the AMNM has the real capacity to change it. This principle includes the principle of Power or authority; an ordinary person is not obliged to physically prevent an evil if he lacks the power to do so. Furthermore, Effectiveness; advice or action must have a positive impact, not just a formality or a moral show-off. For example, in the case of systemic corruption, an individual without political or legal power is not obligated to "punish" the corrupt, but rather to criticize or report it to the authorities wisely.

Third, Hierarchical Classification: *Munkar' Aqli* versus *Munkar Shar'i*. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār distinguishes two types of evil based on the source of its legitimacy: first, *Munkar' Aqli*: Acts that are rationally recognized as bad, such as injustice, lying, or treason. Intervention against this type is universal, as it does not require specific evidence from religious texts. Second, *Munkar Shar'i*: Actions that are only considered munkar after a Shar'i ruling, such as drinking alcohol or committing adultery. In this category, interventions must refer to *qaṭ'ī* (definite) evidence to avoid arbitrariness.

This distinction ensures that AMNM does not become a tool for imposing a narrow interpretation of religion, while maintaining its relevance in a plural society. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's framework is highly relevant to prevent the misuse of AMNM in contemporary issues, such as: (1) Identity politics. Not all cultural differences or traditions can be considered *munkar* without objective verification. (2) Vigilante action. Radical groups often claim to "eradicate evil" without legal capacity or consideration of *maṣlahat*. (3) Conflict mediation. The principle of *al-iktidar* teaches that intervention should be proportional and effective, not merely symbolic. Thus, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār's thought offers a just AMNM, far from the stigma of violence or authoritarianism.

This concept shows that Mu'tazilah prioritizes reason as the primary instrument before referring to revelation. In the context of the research title, this approach represents the "coercion" side; although rational, it opens the door to physical intervention if the epistemic conditions are met. In framing the concept of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī developed a distinctive approach grounded in Sufi ethics, as Ormsby suggests (E. L. Ormsby, 2014). His model emphasizes a tiered moral transformation, starting with persuasive efforts before considering more decisive action.

The first stage in implementing Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's version of AMNM is the gentle delivery of advice (*al-ḥikmah*). In this phase, a dialogical and educational approach is the primary choice, aimed at fostering internal awareness among perpetrators of evil. If this method has not produced results, it can be upgraded to a verbal reprimand (*al-mau'izah*), which is firmer but still maintains the dignity of the party being advised.

Only when these persuasive efforts fail to bring about change does Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī open the possibility of physical intervention *(bi al-yad)* as the last option. However, it is important to note that, according to his framework, this physical action should be taken only by the legitimate authority *(ulil amr)*, not by individuals or community groups at random. This restriction reflects

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's principle of caution in the use of physical force, as well as his emphasis on the importance of institutional legitimacy in social change.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī also emphasized the moral integrity of AMNM actors (*muḥtasib*), who must first cleanse themselves of hypocrisy (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). This approach aligns with the title's concept of "compassion," as it rejects violence except in minimal circumstances. The polarity between legal rationality (Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār) and transformative ethics (Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī) reflects the dialectic of coercion and compassion. However, they are not completely binary; Mu'tazilah does not condone baseless violence, while Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī does not dismiss physical intervention altogether.

Point of Convergence: Theological Humanism

Although Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī have fundamental differences in their theological and methodological approaches to *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM), they agree on some fundamental principles that serve as ethical boundaries for its implementation. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, through his Mu'tazilah rationalist perspective, limits the scope of intervention to only those offences that have reached the status of legally *qat'ī* (definite), such as cases of theft or adultery that no longer allow for differing interpretations. This restriction prevents the use of AMNM for matters that are still speculative or disputed.

On the other hand, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, with his Sufi approach, emphasized the importance of the legitimacy of authority in implementing AMNM. He explicitly prohibits intervention by individuals or community groups without an official mandate from the authority *(ulil amr)*. This principle aims to prevent the emergence of uncontrolled vigilante actions that could cause social chaos.

The two thinkers' agreement in rejecting anarchism demonstrates a shared commitment to maintaining a stable social order while preventing the misuse of religious doctrine for subjective gain. Despite coming from different traditions of thought, both Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī are equally aware of the dangers that lurk if AMNM is released from clear epistemic and institutional signposts.

In the application of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM), both Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī equally emphasized the importance of the principle of *maṣlaḥah* (common good) as the main foundation. Both thinkers agree that AMNM should be abandoned if it has the potential to cause greater harm (*darar*), a principle that is in line with *Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah* theory (Auda, 2008). For example, reprimanding a wrongdoer in a public place can be avoided if the action risks triggering more chaos or damage. This approach shows both scholars' awareness of the importance of considering the social consequences of any religious intervention.

In addition to being *maṣlaḥah*-oriented, both thinkers emphasize the importance of knowledge as a prerequisite for implementing AMNM. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār strictly requires the process of verifying the evidence before taking action, ensuring that what is considered an evil has a strong legal basis. Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, on the other hand, places greater emphasis on a deep understanding of the social context, enabling AMNM practitioners to avoid misunderstandings when assessing an act as evil. These two approaches, despite their different emphases, both aim to prevent the misuse of the AMNM doctrine and ensure its targeted implementation.

This agreement shows that "coercion" and "compassion" are not a dichotomy, but two sides of the same spectrum. The ideal AMNM should combine legal certainty (Mu'tazilah) and social sensitivity (Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's Sufism).

Contemporary Implications: Answering the Stigma of Religious Violence

In the context of contemporary pluralistic societies, the synthesis of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's and Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's thoughts offers a practical framework for addressing the problem of radicalism that often takes the name of the doctrine of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar*,

especially in multicultural countries like Indonesia.

This integrated approach proposes two complementary implementation stages. The first stage adopts Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's Mu'tazilah-style principle of rationality that emphasizes the importance of objective verification. In this stage, every claim of evil must undergo rigorous examination based on clear Shar'i criteria and common-sense considerations, thereby avoiding subjective or prejudiced judgments.

Once the evil is objectively verified, the second stage applies Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's ethical approach that emphasizes transformation through persuasive means. At this stage, educational efforts and dialogical approaches become the primary methods before considering more decisive action. This gradual model is not only effective in preventing extremism but also in maintaining social harmony amidst the diversity of modern society. Groups like Laskar Hisbah in Aceh often conduct moral raids without fulfilling the criteria of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (legal verification) or Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's stages (gradual approach) (Otto & Otto, 2016). As a result, their interventions trigger resistance and stigmatization of Islam.

This research explicitly states that the implementation of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* must avoid two extreme forms that are equally dangerous. On the one hand, mindlessly coercive AMNM practices, as often seen in vigilante actions, will only reinforce the negative stigma against Islam as a coercive and repressive religion. On the other hand, an attitude of passive tolerance that allows evil to occur without efforts to correct it will undermine the moral responsibility of Muslims as a community that cares about the common good.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of finding a balance point between the two extremes. The ideal AMNM must maintain religious principles while respecting human values, with a wise and proportionate approach to the social context at hand. Thus, AMNM can be an effective instrument for building a moral society without sacrificing tolerance and respect for diversity.

The dialectic of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī's thoughts reveals that AMNM is a dynamic framework, not a rigid doctrine. This study emphasises the need for a balance between legal certainty and humanist sensitivity. In the contemporary context, this synthesis not only deconstructs the narrative of religious violence but also offers a deradicalization model grounded in common sense, ethics, and social *maṣlaḥah*.

CONCLUSION

This comparative research reveals that, in the thought of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, the concept of *'Amr al-Ma'rūf Nahy 'an al-Munkar* (AMNM) regarding *munkar* actions, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī classifies them into three types. First, acts of major sin for which punishment has been prescribed in the Qur'an. Preventing or prohibiting this kind of evil action is obligatory, and the ruler must punish those who commit such. Second, according to Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī, it is important to prevent three types of sin. Concrete and firm advice, or preventive measures, should prevent the occurrence of persistent evils such as drinking wine, gambling, wearing silk, or using gold and silver vessels. Minor sins that are about to be committed, such as theft, must be controlled by making the person repent. Third, hypocrisy must be prevented because it is an evil act in the eyes of the Sharī'ah and is prohibited by religion, causes addiction, and encourages others to commit hypocrisy. Furthermore, Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī identified four conditions or reasons that require the prevention of hypocrisy. The first condition is that hypocrisy is considered an evil act in the eyes of Sharia and is prohibited by religion. The second condition is that hypocrisy must be prevented, as it causes addiction and encourages others to commit it. The third condition is that the person who wants to avoid the act should know about it and not be prejudiced, accusatory, or slanderous. The fourth condition is that the hypocrisy must be recognized and agreed upon by several scholars. If any of these conditions are not met, then there is no *Nahy 'an al-Munkar*, which regulates minor matters from different madhhabs. For example, one school of thought holds that specific actions, such as eating the meat of a monitor lizard, are lawful, while other holds that they are forbidden. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār

(Mu'tazilah rationalist) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī (Sufi ethicist) offer a complementary framework relevant to the contemporary context. Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār emphasizes objective verification and a hierarchy of interventions based on rational-shar'i criteria, while Abū Ḥāmid al-Gazālī develops a gradual transformative approach centred on moral education. Both agree on three key principles: (1) rejection of social anarchism, (2) orientation towards *maṣlaḥah* (public good), and (3) imperative of knowledge before action. The synthesis of these two models, combining legal rationality with a humanist approach, provides a solution to the problem of religious radicalism: objective verification as an initial filter, followed by persuasive methods before physical intervention. The findings refute the simplistic dichotomy between "coercion" and "compassion", while offering a balanced perspective for the implementation of AMNM in plural societies. The research asserts that AMNM must avoid both extremes: blind vigilanteism that tarnishes the image of Islam, and passivity that ignores moral responsibility. This integrative framework not only revitalizes the legacy of classical Islamic theology but also contributes to contemporary discussions on de-radicalization and social ethics in multicultural societies.

A principal limitation of this study is, although it demonstrates at a theoretical level that classical safeguards against coercive applications of *amr bi al-maʿrūf wa nahy ʿan al-munkar* do exist, it does not empirically assess whether these safeguards are understood, transmitted, or applied by contemporary Muslim communities. For this reason, the most promising direction for future research lies in ethnographic and interview-based investigations of *pesantren* education, focusing on how AMNM is presently taught, which ethical and epistemological constraints are emphasized, and the extent to which students internalize them; such empirical work would be essential for evaluating whether the theoretical synthesis developed here can function effectively in lived religious practice.

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